THE BASILISK AND ITS ANTIDOTE:
A STUDY OF THE CHANGING IMAGE OF CHOPIN IN LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

One area related to Fryderyk Chopin which has received little attention is his influence upon literature. In order to develop two aspects of this theme a key word "basilisk" has been introduced which Robert Schumann as music critic used in explaining the unusual impression that Chopin's music first presented on the printed page. This word, with its overtones both magical and ominous, suggests the symbol for the growing wave of aestheticism with which the cult of Chopin came to be associated. Translated into literature the expression of the Chopin cult found its way into the early writings of Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, and John Galsworthy.

Later, as the twentieth century progressed and the pendulum swung in a new direction for the arts and for literature, a suitable antidote to the basilisk was to be found in the parody of the Chopin cult offered by T. S. Eliot in his "Portrait of a Lady" and in "Chopin" by Gottfried Benn, which explores the use of biography in a poem, and moves away from the extreme subjectivity of many nineteenth-century portrayals of the Polish composer. It is the purpose of this study to trace the changing image of Chopin in a selection of literary works which belong to the period between 1890 and 1950.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION LEADING TO THE THEME OF THE BASILISK

As recently as 1967, Arthur Hedley referred to Fryderyk Chopin as the subject of "a surprising volume of writing both specialist and miscellaneous . . . in many languages" amounting to a bibliography of "about ten thousand items."¹ This survey would appear to discourage additions to the existing accumulation of material, if it were not for the words "specialist and miscellaneous" which suggest a division in scope and quality. Much has been written but not all areas relating to the composer have been explored, or they may have been approached eulogistically rather than critically. One area, for instance, which remains relatively unexplored is Chopin's influence upon literature, and this, in turn, places it within the range of comparative studies.

During the nineteenth century, the influence of composers on literature was a continuation of the romantic attitude which regarded music as the supreme art. Because of its infinite reach, its power to express the inexpressible, its immediacy and its universality of language, music appealed to a movement which aimed at destroying restrictions imposed by the Age of Rationalism. Even more were these characteristics to appeal to the Age of
Industrialization as a compensation for the aesthetic and spiritual vacuum left by scientific progress and Darwin's theory of evolution. At first, the impact of Wagner's music both upon content and form in late nineteenth-century literature tended to overshadow that of his less flamboyant predecessor; nevertheless, the music of Chopin was producing its own impact, psychologically, on a group of writers whose early output reflected the mood of the fin-de-siècle in Europe. It is one of the aims of this particular study to show that the choice of Chopin's music at that time reflected a spiritual malaise less characteristic of the composer, perhaps, than of those who made use of his music in their writings.

The selection of the Chopin repertoire tuned to one predominant mood, namely its langour, melancholy and ceaseless yearning, mirrored the growing disintegration of a culture whose over-refinement was lapsing into decadence. In the twentieth century, however, parody and reassessment provided the necessary antidote to an exacerbated aestheticism. As a result, a different image of Chopin emerged from that depicted by his romantic admirers but, viewed in perspective, he and his music have not suffered in the process of changing evaluations. A starting point in tracing the course of Chopin's image in literature, however, will be reference to portrayals of him in works by those who were closest to him historically.
Chopin's influence upon literature began when his contemporaries, who included many of the most gifted and multi-talented representatives of the romantic movement, were sufficiently attracted to the personality of the Polish composer to seek to recreate his image in music criticism, biography, the novel, the journal, and letters. Schumann's articles on Chopin in Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker, Liszt's Life of Chopin, George Sand's Lucrezia Floriani, Delacroix' Journal, and Heine's Über die französische Bühne provide the first sources for a study of Chopin in literature. Collectively these works present a complex picture of the composer since the point of view adopted varied from that of admirer to friend to lover to confidant to fellow exile. Involuntarily, Chopin had become a subject for writers who were confronted by the paradoxical figure his letters clearly reveal him to be. A passage from them set beside another description of Chopin by Liszt reveals considerable diversity of approach. The tone and the imagery of Chopin's description of himself tempers the idealism of his friend Liszt, a pattern which exemplifies the twentieth-century approach to the composer in contrast to that of the nineteenth century.

Liszt: He constantly reminded us of a convolvulus balancing its heaven-coloured cup upon an incredibly slight stem, the tissue of which
is so like vapour that the slightest
contact wounds and tears the misty
corolla.  

Chopin: It is not my fault if I am like a
mushroom which seems edible but
which poisons you if you pick it
and taste it, taking it to be
something else.

Chopin's own clue contained in the latter passage helps
to explain one of the paradoxes long associated with the composer:
although interpreted as a leading representative of Romanticism,
he nevertheless shared few of the features common to the move­
ment as a whole, the foremost being an involvement with lite­
rature. In contrast to his contemporaries notably Schumann,
Liszt, Berlioz and others who drew inspiration for many of their
works from literature, Chopin preferred to be less programmatic,
using generalized titles and refusing to discuss the sources of
his compositions. His inner life did not require added stimulus
from reading, and his artistic development remained unaffected
by literature. At the same time, this distinguishing character­
istic in no way alienated him from those musicians of the romantic
movement with literary abilities. Foremost among these was
Robert Schumann.

Schumann has often been considered the prototype of the
German romantic. His love of reading, developed from the hours
spent in his father's bookshop at Zwickau, forged an indissoluble
link between literature and music. In addition, Schumann learned
practical skills associated with the publishing business. During his early life, he witnessed the low standards of musical taste in Germany, the preference for mediocre composers, the neglect of the former great ones as well as of the new men of genius such as Chopin. Accordingly, Schumann was aroused to spend much valuable time away from composing in order to direct music criticism along new paths, and to alert a torpid public to what was happening artistically. Schumann's first contribution to the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung was an article in 1831 introducing Chopin with the now classic clarion call "Hut ab, ihr Herren, ein Genie." For his temerity in the face of the Establishment, Schumann was rewarded by elisions to his article and not being asked to write for the paper again. There was no recourse for him but to start afresh with the demanding task of editing his own paper, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.

The Chopin article is a landmark in music criticism because of Schumann's individualistic treatment of his material. In German romantic literature, Wackenroder had already attempted to express the impact of a musical experience through words but in an effort to make beautiful prose his musical judgement frequently became blurred. This was mainly owing to the fact that Wackenroder was writing as a gifted amateur rather than a practicing composer. E.T.A. Hoffmann's advantage in this respect is indisputable.
In Hoffmann, Schumann found the model for his particular type of music criticism, for Hoffmann was the first critic who spoke of music as a writer as well as a musician. Many of Hoffmann's descriptions of Mozart's and Beethoven's works, while precise and analytical in content, were, in form, narrative prose. Schumann adopted the same method.

By employing the form of dialogues through which his characters could criticize art and literature, Schumann was able to counteract much of the pedantry in musical scholarship without compromising his acute critical sense. He could instruct while entertaining his readers. In the Chopin article he features two characters who were to reappear on many occasions: the lyrical Eusebius and the tempestuous Florestan, the two halves of the whole Schumann. It is Eusebius, however, who alerts Florestan to the genius of Chopin as the latter's opus 2 is placed on the piano for perusal. Unaccustomed to this novel presentation of music criticism, Chopin was to dismiss Schumann's article as "nonsense and gibberish." Even if the authenticity of this reference (from what is believed to be a spurious letter to Delfina Potocka) remains in doubt, it is generally accepted that Chopin had little affinity with the traits of German Romanticism expressed in Schumann's prose as well as in his ardent personality.

Whatever Chopin's opinion, it cannot alter the fact that whether instinctively or knowingly, Schumann had written with
prophetic insight into the direction that Chopin's music would lead later nineteenth-century writers. Explaining the unusual impression that Chopin's music presented on the printed page, Schumann elaborated:

\[
\ldots \text{dies verhüllte Genießen der Musik ohne Töne hat etwas Zauberisches. Überdies scheint mir, hat jeder Componist seine eigenthümlichen Notengestaltungen für das Auge: Beethoven sieht anders auf dem Papier, als Mozart, etwa wie Jean Paul'sche Prosa anders, als Göthe'sche. Hier aber war mir's, als blickten mich lauter fremde Augen, Blumenaugen, Basiliskenaugen, Pfauenaugen, Mädchenaugen wundersam an.} \ldots\]

The key word here is basilisk,\(^8\) with its overtones both magical and ominous, suggesting the unhealthy symbol for the growing wave of aestheticism, the 'fleurs du mal' with which the cult of Chopin came to be associated. By mingling the eyes of the legendary adder with those of flowers, peacocks and maidens, Schumann has deftly couched the incipient danger in a deceptive bower; in this form it is not so easily perceived. Only after looking at some examples of Chopin in literature can the full implications of Schumann's apt metaphor become readily assimilated.
CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY OF CHOPIN IN LITERATURE OF THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

With Chopin's death in 1849, the first half of the nineteenth century was nearly over. The second half was to see changes, political, religious and social which would reduce the world of the composer to a nostalgic memory. Socially, the main changes were the result of the ever-increasing industrialization which was to provide wealth and a new class of financiers to spend it. The aristocrats by birth, for whom Chopin had performed, that select group upon whom he had lavished so much of his creative energy were now being replaced by a new ruling class: the men of property. Chopin's music was to fill the same emotional need for the latter as it had for the former.

To record the life style of the men of property a new type of novel came into being. In the hands of John Galsworthy and Thomas Mann, for instance, it borrowed techniques from Zola's naturalism. Its carefully amassed detail was not drawn from the milieu of the oppressed proletariat, however, but rather it depicted the materialism of the age as expressed by the acquisitiveness of its ruling class. In Mann's *Buddenbrooks*
the concrete is also tempered by the evanescent. As Henry Hatfield writes:

The novel, far from being naturalistic in spirit, demonstrates his [Mann's] mastery of the techniques of naturalism and impressionism: elaborate accounts of the dinners, the bank balances, and the ailments of the Buddenbrooks alternate with swift evocations of mood.

This is equally true of Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga. Impressionist techniques within both novels were a reflection of what was happening concurrently in the visual arts. What Thomas Mann and John Galsworthy depicted verbally in their drawing-room scenes, Renoir had already brought to life on canvas in his "Lady at the Piano." In this painting, Renoir produced the original for a scene recreated in so much fiction of the period, and if a sound track had been added, it would have included the shorter works of Chopin.

During the nineteenth century, a new middle-class audience came into being which could not indulge its whim for music from private orchestras. Correspondingly there arose a need for an instrument within the home and a plentiful supply of music to play on it. This was facilitated by improvements in piano building and the cheapness with which printed music could be circulated extensively. More important, composers of the receding romantic period had left a legacy of short works for the piano expressing a multiplicity of moods that were tailored to drawing-
room needs. Since the piano had also the potentialities of the orchestra and could be a spokesman for all instruments, the reproduction of orchestral music was no longer confined to the concert hall. Nietzsche, for instance, had his first experience of Wagner's music by listening to von Bülow's piano score of Tristan. Later Thomas Mann, in his Novelle of the same name, was to build up the climax of his work by Frau Klösterjahn's piano performance of the Tristan music.

Where Wagner's music may have lost something by this means of reproduction, in Chopin's case the drawing-room setting was the perfect atmosphere for the recreation of his music. The Polish composer gave only thirty concerts publicly during his entire career; the rest of his music-making took place at the soirées held in his apartments or in the homes of the élite. There, surrounded by those sympathetic to his subtle art, he could improvise at will and then, after a period of arduous polishing, his works were handed over to the publisher. Chopin evenings were a unique experience; there could be no question of recreating what he accomplished so magically. A future generation of idolaters was willing to try, as women of greater or lesser ability availed themselves of his music and, in the sedate aura of their own drawing-rooms, endeavoured to weave a similar spell over their men-folk. In some cases they succeeded. Thomas Mann, for instance, was raised in a patrician
home where his mother, Julia, played the Chopin nocturnes, leaving an indelible impression upon the future writer of Der Bajazzo and Tristan, as subsequent passages in this study will reveal.

In contrast to Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse and Gottfried Benn grew up in homes where religion was of greater importance than the social graces. Chopin's music was not introduced in the former (although Hesse engaged in some music-making with his brothers and sisters) and unknown in the latter, as Benn's poem "Teils-Teils" indicates. Through marriage, however, both writers found partners who could nurture the Chopin tradition within the home. Hesse's first wife, in particular, was an accomplished pianist and in this capacity her influence upon her husband's early poetry and prose is not unsubstantial. In English literature of almost a decade earlier, "the lady at the piano" became the man at the piano in Oscar Wilde's The Critic as Artist (1890, 1891). There, the background to a discussion of art between Ernest and Gilbert is provided by the music of Chopin. Another man at the piano was André Gide, who devoted his spare time to practising Chopin's music; this led him to write a small book entitled Notes sur Chopin. In a more detached manner, John Galsworthy and T.S. Eliot explored the Chopin cult in their works; what Galsworthy treated sympathetically and with obvious enjoyment personally, Eliot
was to use for the purposes of parodying an outmoded tradition.

The list could be extended to include many others, among them Nietzsche, Arthur Symons and Proust, who were under the Chopin influence. Since a selection must be made, however, in order to avoid a mere catalogue and render a meaningful study of the relation between Chopin and literature, it would seem preferable to base this upon the theme of the basilisk and its subsequent antidote. In less metaphorical terms, the aim would be to study first the debilitating effects of Chopin's music resulting from the inability or disinclination on the part of writers, notably Hermann Hesse, to look at more than one aspect of Chopin's work; secondly, to examine the return in the twentieth century to a more balanced attitude towards the music and its composer. To illustrate the first part, works by Mann, Galsworthy, and Hesse will be examined; for the second, those of Eliot and Benn.
CHAPTER III

AUTHORS UNDER CONSIDERATION

A. THOMAS MANN — JOHN GALSWORTHY — THE AESTHETES

Thomas Mann's first collection of Novellen, published in 1908, included Der Bajazzo which uses Chopin's music as a catalyst for setting and theme. A counterpart to the later Tonio Kröger which looks at the dilettante from the outside, Der Bajazzo portrays the dilettante from within. Yet the principal characters in both Novellen have characteristics which unite them to a central theme in Mann's work. Because of the division between burgher and artist, they are equally incapable of gaining a place in society which their upbringing would normally ensure them. Each, to some extent, is a victim of heredity. Both are products of marriages between opposite natures, one oriented to business, the other to the arts. Their home life, in above-average surroundings, is divided between the imposing efficiency of the father on the one hand and the improvisatory artistry of the mother, on the other. Tonio, with his innate longing for the stable world of his father nevertheless becomes an artist. Similarly, "der Bajazzo," after a superficial attempt to join
his father's world of business, succumbs to the temptations of his mother's taste in art. It is at this point that their paths diverge. Tonio Kröger learns the discipline and detachment necessary to becoming a writer of the first rank. From this vantage point, he can survey with condescension verging on scorn the dilettante world in which everything is lacking except fervour and enthusiasm for art. Examining the effect of Tristan and Isolde "auf einen jungen, gesunden, stark normal empfindenden Menschen" he concludes:

Sie sehen Gehobenheit, Gestärktheit, warme, rechtschaffene Begeisterung, Angeregtheit vielleicht zu eigenem künstlerischem Schaffen...
Der gute Dilettant! In uns Künstlern sieht es gründlich anders aus, als er mit seinem warmen Herzen und ehrlichen Enthusiasmus sich träumen mag.13

In Der Bajazzo, ironically, the leading character, too, is capable of arousing undisguised admiration for his facile talents used for the entertainment of his friends and acquaintances. At a social gathering he gives an exaggerated performance of a music drama à la Wagner, which draws accolades and even tears from an old gentleman in the audience. Once alone, however, "der Bajazzo" lacks any genuine creative gift which would produce an original piece of work. By the end of the story, as his confidence wanes and he self-consciously studies the course of his undistinguished and undisciplined career, there is nothing in him but disgust.
Significantly, Mann develops his story in the form of an inner monologue; without an identifying name (except that of "trickster" or "mountebank" coined by his father) "der Bajazzo" becomes a symbol for dilettantism that is debilitating and self-destructive. In his introspection, Mann's character is reminiscent of Werther whose isolation and wretchedness mirrored a distorted subjectivity; a further comparison is that both are equally helpless in the toils of love. Doomed to live rather than to die, however, "der Bajazzo" reveals the metamorphosis from "the healthy young man of normal feelings" (described by Tonio Kröger) into "eine unglückliche und lächerliche Figur" through contact with arts that he cannot fully master.

If the theme of *Der Bajazzo* is dilettantism and its consequences, it is necessary to look at some of the shaping forces in Mann's story which decided its inevitable outcome. Background and setting become most significant in establishing the prevailing mood that surrounds the young boy and influences his future course of action.

The first room described in *Der Bajazzo* is the drawing-room. In it the boy witnesses careers made or broken through interviews granted by the father; here, too, he listens to the melancholy strains of Chopin's music in the form of Nocturnes played by the mother. The furniture of massive dark mahogany mirrors the father's success; the thick, dark-red curtains exclude
the light and contribute to the nocturnal atmosphere, so compatible to the sensibilities of the mother.

Chopin's music is intensified by contact with its surroundings, as the personal rendition of the mother would seem to indicate. Her fragile bearing, as ornamental as one of "die weißen Götterfiguren der Tapete," is accompanied by her personal leitmotif, the nocturnes. They introduce the exotic within the conventional (since it will be remembered that this music was still a relatively new experience in the late nineteenth century). Their impact is no less pronounced on the one who listens to them than on the one who performs them. By their means, the young boy is made to feel the difference between the two worlds inhabited by his parents and of the necessity for a choice as to the one he will adopt.

His choice, however, understandable, is not well-founded. The exoticism of his mother's world depends for its existence upon an ordered framework. When the father's solid business structure
collapses, so does the imaginative world of his wife.

After his death

Sie spielte nicht mehr Chopin, und wenn sie hie und da leise über den Scheitel strich, so zitterte ihre blasse, zarte und müde Hand. Kaum ein halbes Jahr nach meines Vaters Tode legte sie sich nieder, und sie starb, ohne einen Wehelauf, ohne einen Kampf um ihr Leben. . . .17

Fed on a world of dreams her love of music has developed a total will-lessness in the face of external adversity. Music as a debilitating agent was again to be explored by Thomas Mann through the personality of young Hanno in the later Buddenbrooks. In both cases, death is the only resolution to the dissonance between art and life.

In Der Bajazzo, the mother's legacy to her son is the awakening of artistic longings without, however, instilling in him the need for discipline in developing his talents. Thus he explores the piano capriciously. In performance, he lacks manual dexterity and a sense of rhythm, although there is no lack of "expressiveness" in his creation of tone colour. In this he is not far removed from the ladies of Chopin's acquaintance who, according to the composer "all look at their hands and play wrong notes most soulfully." Referring to these dilettantes, Chopin was to add in a letter: "What a queer lot! God preserve them."18

It is at this point that a dual pattern of reference begins to establish itself. Chopin, the myth, the wraith
reincarnated in the person of the fragile mother as she wafts her fingers over the keys, and Chopin the reality. As the latter he reveals the truth of Mann's description of the essential nature of the artist in *Tonio Kröger*, as opposed to the image of the artist and his art built up in the mind of the dabbler.

Even without reference to the ironical Chopin who set the highest standards for himself and for those who would play his music, it is easy to understand the attractions of his music for the dilettante. A cult of sensibility could be developed around a portion of the Chopin repertoire, thus making of the composer an easy vehicle for emotions that would have filled him with disgust. It was largely on a wilful misunderstanding of the original that the large band of Chopin idolaters was formed at the turn of the century. "Der Bajazzo" is but one instance of a victim to the heady whiff of the basilisk. Others were to follow.

In 1903, a second collection of Mann's Novellen appeared. It included a new development of the Chopin-in-literature theme within the work entitled *Tristan*. It is significant that Chopin and Wagner frequently accompany each other in Mann's stories, and that his characters tend to react to both composers with equal enthusiasm. This is true of "der Bajazzo" as it is of the young wife in *Tristan*, whose musical performance begins with Chopin nocturnes and culminates in the death-inducing Tristan
music. Conversely, in English literature, a sharp distinction between Chopin and Wagner is made by Old Jolyon in the *Forsyte Saga*, with the humourous reflection that this patriarch of the family "could not bear a strong cigar or Wagner's music." For Old Jolyon, Chopin is the antithesis of Wagner, rather than a precursor of him, a view held later by Adrian Leverkühn in Mann's *Doktor Faustus* and borne out graphically in the Novelle, *Tristan*.

Although Mann's personal attitude towards Wagner remained equivocal, a mixture of love mingled with distrust, there is less evidence of a similar attitude towards Chopin. In *Der Bajazzo*, for instance, there is no overt criticism of the music played by the mother comparable to that with which the effects of Wagner are analyzed and passionately rejected (no matter how humourously) by the organist Herr Pfuhl in *Buddenbrooks*. With no powerful orchestration behind it, Chopin's music did not present a great threat. Insinuatingly nevertheless, it was unlocking recesses psychologically and preparing for the more corrosive impact of Wagner. In the words of Adrian Leverkühn:

>Aber nicht ganz weniges gibt's ja bei Chopin, was Wagner, nicht nur harmonisch, sondern im Allgemein-Seelischen, mehr als antizipiert, nämlich gleich Überholt. Nimm das cis-Moll-Notturno opus 27 No. 1 und den Zwiegesang, der angeht nach der enharmonischen Vertauschung von Cis-mit Des-Dur. Das übertrifft an desperatem Wohlklang alle Tristan-Orgien- und zwar in Klavieristischer Intimität, nicht als Hauptschlacht der Wollust und
ohne das Corridahafte einer in der Verderbtheit robusten Theatermystik.

It is not by chance, then, that in Tristan the music of Chopin is the medium used to induce Frau Klösterjahn to play the forbidden piano at the sanatorium, but the nocturnes are a stepping-stone to Wagner -- and chaos -- and death.

In Tristan, Mann works with the same forces of heredity that take their toll in Der Bajazzo, Tonio Kröger, and Buddenbrooks (although not all with the same degree of fatality). Frau Klösterjahn, "the lady at the piano" in Tristan is descended from an old line of merchants, but her father is more of an artist than a businessman. Thus, the family stock is already weakened by this man who makes music with his daughter in a manner more capable of drawing tears from her eyes than from any other experience. When she marries, however, she weds a typical "burgher" just as the mother in Der Bajazzo had done. At the same time there remains a hidden yearning for beauty, but this world of beauty which Frau Klösterjahn experienced with her father is "eine mit dem Tode verwandte Welt, begleitet von biologischer Widerstandslosigkeit gegenüber den Mächten der Auflösung." Unlike the mother in Der Bajazzo, Frau Klösterjahn already carries the seeds of a potentially fatal illness within her. At Einfried's sanatorium, where the action of Tristan takes place, a further deterioration of her health results from contact with the one art to which she
must not have access.

Between Frau Klöterjahn and her husband who accompanies her to the sanatorium intrudes the tempter, Detlev Spinell, a caricatured figure of the artist in the form of an "author." It is he who, for purposes of his own aesthetic gratification, lures Frau Klöterjahn back to the piano, and is thus indirectly responsible for her death. In a scene together, after all the others have gone for a sleigh ride, the two indulge in sharing the experience of the Tristan score, with the Chopin nocturnes as Frau Klöterjahn's initial offering.

Sie spielte das Nocturne in Es-Dur, opus 9, Nummer 2. Wenn sie wirklich einiges verlernt hatte, so mußte ihr Vortrag ehemal vollkommen künstlerisch gewesen sein. Das Piano war nur mittelmäßig, aber schon nach den ersten Griffen wußte sie es mit sicherem Geschmack zu behandeln. Sie zeigte einen nervösen Sinn für differenzierte Klangfarbe und eine Freude an rhythmischer Beweglichkeit, die bis zum Phantastischen ging. Ihr Anschlag war sowohl fest als weich. Unter ihren Händen sang die Melodie ihre letzte Süßekeit aus, und mit einer zügernnden Grazie schmiegten sich die Verzierungen um ihre Glieder.

From this description, which appears to derive from the author's omniscient point of view rather than from that of the melodramatic Spinell, there is every indication that Frau Klöterjahn is not a dilettante in her musical understanding or her technical equipment. Rhythm is inborn where it was absent in "der Bajazzo;" in addition, there is a feeling for subtle rubato without exaggeration. But this is not enough on Mann's terms for dividing the true artist from the dilettante. Because she is not a seasoned
performer able to hold something in reserve, Frau Klöterjahn oversteps her limits. And, unable to see where this is leading her, she plunges on into music demanding even greater personal involvement. In this she provides another illustration of Tonio Kröger's definition of the dilettante as opposed to the more detached artist. Frau Klöterjahn's brief brush with the basilisk has led her to something even more deadly, over which she has no power at all.

Between Der Bajazzo and Tristan appeared Thomas Mann's first major novel, Buddenbrooks. Although its main preoccupation musically is with Wagner, it is useful as a basis for comparison with that other great family chronicle: The Forsyte Saga in which the music of Chopin plays a more significant role. Both Galsworthy and Mann belonged to the class they depicted so intimately in their respective works. As such they could render a faithful portrait of the world inhabited by the men of property. Indeed, all the Mann works cited so far have a setting strikingly similar to that of Galsworthy's Saga. The drawing-room scenes, for instance, could be exchanged without noticeable violation to the different national backgrounds. The massive furniture, the pearl-grey gowns worn by the respective ladies at the piano contribute to a feeling of growing familiarity with the era. Both authors, too, are concerned with material versus artistic values, and the threat to family stability when the two worlds are united
through marriage. For Galsworthy, the Britisher, there was never the same preoccupation with the more profound themes of art in relation to disease and death, for instance, that was to haunt Mann for his entire career. The novels, although similar in their choice of milieu, reflect the differences of Weltanschauung that have always separated the mystical German mind from that of the more lucid English mentality. Old Jolyon, for instance, takes a somewhat hearty view of his initial encounter with the basilisk. In the *Indian Summer of a Forsyte*, one of the interludes of the *Saga*, he comes to terms with the art of the Aesthetic movement in its extreme contrast to that of the more ponderous Victorian taste.

Old Jolyon is helped in the developing of new sensibilities, normally outside the range of the average Forsyte, by the disturbing presence within the clan of Irene, wife to Soames Forsyte. Irene is another of Soames' acquisitions, and into the family she brings the intangible values so alien to the materialistically oriented Forsytes. In keeping with family characteristics, Soames could put a price on everything without realizing the value of anything. He collects paintings, he collects Irene, but it is left to the more discerning old patriarch to appreciate both. In the *Indian Summer of a Forsyte*, it is to Old Jolyon that Irene comes, a strange disembodied figure representing beauty that is synonymous with the nocturnes of Chopin which she interprets with such grace. Thus, through
Irene and her visits to his music room, Old Jolyon can enjoy what will form some of his last experiences and impressions.

He loved Beethoven and Mozart, Handel and Gluck, and Schumann, and, for some occult reason, the operas of Meyerbeer; but of late years, he had been seduced by Chopin, just as he had succumbed to Botticelli. In yielding to these tastes he had been conscious of divergence from the standard of the Golden Age. Their poetry was not that of Milton and Byron and Tennyson; of Raphael and Titian; Mozart and Beethoven. It was, as it were behind a veil; their poetry hit no one in the face, but slipped its fingers under the ribs and turned and twisted, and melted up the heart. And, never certain that this was healthy, he did not care a rap so long as he could see the pictures of the one or hear the music of the other.24

Unmistakably, the aura of the basilisk is not unknown to this conductor of finance, but at his time of life, he can only acknowledge its presence without looking at the possible dangers it might present to the foundations of his stable world. It is a problem for the younger generation to grapple with. Irene, although married to Soames, becomes attracted to Philip Bosinney whose artistic nature is more closely related to her own. With the death of Bosinney, however, Irene is unlike her counterpart in *Tonio Kröger*, the passionate mother who is free to marry an Italian virtuoso after the death of Tonio's father. Only much later, precipitating her divorce from Soames, does Irene turn to Young Jolyon whose appreciation of her artistic nature is as acute as his father's had been.

What is significant in the portion quoted from the *Indian Summer of a Forsyte* is an awareness of the changing spirit of the
age with the intrusion of aestheticism into England towards the turn of the century. That the rest of Europe including Germany was equally affected is indicated by Mann's caricatured figure of the aesthete, Detlev Spinell, in *Tristan*.

Nur zuweilen konnte eine leutselige, liebevolle und überquellende Stimmung ihn befallen, und das geschah jedesmal, wenn Herr Spinell in ästhetischen Zustand verfiel, wenn der Anblick von irgend etwas Schönen, der Zusammenklang zweier Farben, eine Vase von edler Form, das vom Sonnenuntergang bestrahlte Gebirge ihn zu lauter Bewunderung hinreißen.

Hermann Hesse, too, in *Peter Camenzind*, directs an attack against the excesses of aestheticism as he describes the fate of one talented young man:

Auf den Villen des reichen Herrn trieb er mit dessen nervösen Damen ein fades Ästhetengeflunker, stieg in seiner Einbildung zum verkannten Heros und brachtesich, jämmerlich mißleitet, durch lauter Chopinmusik und präraffaelitische Ekstasen systematisch um den Verstand.

Here in Hesse's work is the catharsis for the writer himself who, in the manner of Goethe in *Werther*, saves himself by allowing his character to pay the full penalty for indulging his inclinations.

With reference to Pre-Raphaelitism, it had already set the fashion for women in fin-de-siècle fiction. They now began to resemble paintings, fulfilling Oscar Wilde's dictum that nature imitates art. Traces of this are to be found in Mann's description of the mother in *Der Bajazzo*.

... und wenn sie, den Kopf ein wenig zur Seite geneigt, am Klavier saß, so glich sie den kleinen, rührenden Engeln, die sich auf alten Bildern oft zu Füßen der Madonna mit der Gitarre bemühen.
Even more fragile and ethereal is Mann's first description of Frau Klöterjahn (which is similar to the one where she plays to Herr Spinell later in the Novelle):


The feeling for mixed colour and texture in this description is further enhanced tonally through the evanescent nocturnes. It would be difficult to imagine the virile Chopin of the Etudes, the Polonaises or the vitriolic Scherzi being introduced into this particular scene. The backlash caused by the excessive attention to the nocturnes descended upon the composer himself who, in the words of one disenchanted late nineteenth-century critic, was described "as flesh without bones - this morbid, womanly, womanish, slip-slop, powerless, bleached, sweet-caramel Pole."  

This preference for the nocturnes was a reflection of what was happening in the visual arts. In his painting, Whistler had taken over the musical term as it had been developed, first by John Field and then by Chopin. If nature was imitating art, all art was learning to aspire to the condition of music in accordance with the theories of Walter Pater. What the aesthetes were
looking for was the side of Chopin that "lifts the veil before impressionism." In the words of Camille Bourniquel: "he is the master of those intermediate states, those transitions, that moving subtlety, whereby there is no brutal affirmation of self but rather a magical outlining in time." This appears as applicable to Whistler's own evocative mood paintings as it does to Chopin's nocturnes. There is, in both, what Bourniquel refers to as "a new art of persuasion." Such a shadowy, twilight world of the imagination, so perfectly recreated in two art forms was largely responsible for the escape from reality encouraged by the adherents of l'art pour l'art. To live on a diet composed solely of this delicate filagree proved enervating in the extreme to sensitive natures. Yet it was this aspect of fin-de-siècle art that proved so irresistible to Hermann Hesse. In fact it was to take nearly half of his creative life to disengage himself from the toils of the basilisk. His early writing reflects the self-consciousness that developed out of late nineteenth-century Romanticism combined with the impact of impressionism, a trend which was emerging when the Chopin myth was at its peak.
Unlike Thomas Mann who first experienced the music of Chopin through his mother's sensitive performances, Hermann Hesse pursued his cult of the composer independently of his family. This is not to suggest that music was out of bounds within Hesse's early home life. In fact it was his mother who introduced him to the violin at the age of nine. Later, in reminiscences of his first musical experiences he was to write:

Ich bin nicht mit Virtuosen und in Konzertsälen aufgewachsen, sondern mit Hausmusik, und die schönste war immer die, bei der man selber mittätig sein könnte; mit der Geige und ein wenig Singen habe ich in den Knabenjahren die ersten Schritte ins Reich der Musik getan, die Schwestern und namentlich Bruder Karl spielten Klavier, Karl und Theo waren beide Sänger, und wenn ich die Beethovensonaten oder die weniger bekannten Schubertlieder in der frühen Jugend von Liebhäbern zu hören bekam, deren Leistung keine virtuose war, so war es doch auch nicht ohne Nutzen und Ergebnis, wenn ich etwa Karl lange Zeit im Nebenzimmer um eine Sonate werben und kämpfen hörte und schließlich, wenn er sie «hatte», den Triumph und Gewinn dieses Kampfes miterleben durfte.

This cozy vignette underplays the fact that Hesse remained a problem child to bewildered parents who could not keep up with the turmoil of literary and musical tastes adopted by their son. The foregoing passage does not mention the music of Chopin. It was only after taking up an apprenticeship to a book-seller in Tübingen that Hesse, then aged eighteen, could afford to decorate his room with a large reproduction of a Chopin portrait, and to pay homage to this new
and increasingly important musical idol in a series of short, rather undistinguished lyrics. At least one of them did not fail to instill considerable apprehension in his parents to whom Hesse wrote lines, during September of 1897, indicating the hold that the eyes of the basilisk now exerted over him.

Was für Nietzsche Wagner war, ist für mich Chopin — oder noch mehr. Mit diesen warmen lebendigen Melodien, mit dieser pikanten, lasciven, nervösen Harmonie, mit dieser ganzen so ungemein intimen Musik Chopins, hängt alles Wesentliche meines geistigen und seelischen Lebens zusammen. Und dann bestaune ich an Chopin eben immer wieder die Vornehmheit, die Zurückhaltung, die vollendete Souveränität seines Wesens. An ihm ist alles adlig, wenn auch manches degeneriert.\(^\text{33}\)

For Hesse, Chopin's nobility and reserve is mixed with the decadence that grew out of the late nineteenth century rather than from the original romantic movement.

The foregoing passage once again links the name of Chopin with that of Wagner. In this case, Hesse weighs his own enthusiasm for the former against that exerted by the latter over Nietzsche. Seen in perspective, however, this comment is invalidated by changing loyalties within both writers. Just as Nietzsche's affinity with Wagner was subsequently to deteriorate, so too, ironically enough, was Hesse's own feeling for Chopin. Although exerting a considerable influence upon the mood of Hesse's early output, notably \textit{Romantische Lieder} (1899), \textit{Eine Stunde hinter Mitternacht} (1899) and \textit{Hermann Lauscher} (1901), the music of Chopin appears to be of slight importance after the publication of \textit{Gertrud} in 1910.\(^\text{34}\)
The link between the early works and Getrud is Peter Camenzind (1904) which shows Hesse taking a more critical look at the cult which had held such attraction for him. His break with Chopin was, in effect, owing to a dwindling of interest; there was no outspoken condemnation of the composer which marked Nietzsche's break with Wagner. Unlike André Gide, Hesse apparently did not explore the fact that Nietzsche, too, valued Chopin's music highly.

On one occasion Nietzsche wrote:

Ich selbst bin immer Pole genug, um gegen Chopin den Rest der Musik hinzugeben.

In addition, Nietzsche was to find something in Chopin's music that apparently eluded Hesse in his early career. It appears in a passage from Der Wanderer und sein Schatten.


André Gide has interpreted the "seligen Moment" as joy.

However, interpreted, this phrase points to the antithesis of yearning and the longing for death that was the dominant mood in Hesse's early Chopin poetry and prose. It was Joseph Mileck who first suggested in his comprehensive bibliographical survey of material relating to Hesse that "since Nietzsche has undeniably been a formative figure in Hesse's life, his possible influence upon Hesse's attitude to music bears further investigation."
This in itself would require a special study, lying beyond the limits of the present material.

Nowhere is Hesse's adherence to the convention of fin-de-siècle writing more evident than in the poetry inspired by Chopin's music. In this Hesse attempts to fuse the noble and the decadent in the manner described to his parents.

**CHOPIN**

I

Schütte wieder ohne Wahl
Über mich die bleichen, großen
Lilien deiner Wiegenlieder,
Deiner Walzer rote Rosen.

Flicht darein den schweren Hauch
Deiner Liebe, die im Welken
Duft verstreut, und deines Stolzes
Schaukelschlanke Feuernelken.39

In this poem, the first of a triptych based on Chopin's music, Hesse makes his appeal to the senses, evoking both colour and perfume. Strangely, he ignores aural imagery preferring to conjure up suggestions of lullabies and dances by a comparison with flowers, deepening the colours with the intensity of the last line. Hovering over this brief lyric is the state of forgetfulness which Hesse requests from the heavily sensuous music. Overtones of the basilisk reverberate in "den schweren Hauch deiner Liebe," and as a whole the poem displays an unhealthy hothouse of emotions as artificial as the "schaukelschlanke Feuernelken."
In the second poem "Grande Valse," Hesse rallies to livelier rhythms and conjures up a scene of chivalric fervour, as he depicts the ball before the battle in the opening stanza. Just as rapidly, however, his mood of exhaltation is dispelled revealing the transience of human feelings and Hesse's own particular emotional cast which is in the minor key.

— — Juchhe, Musik!
In durstigen Zügen trinkt mein heißer Blick
Das junge, schöne, rote Leben ein,
Und trinkt sich nimmer satt an seinem Licht.
Noch einen Tanz! Wie bald! und Kerzenschein
Und Klang und Lust verlischt; der Mondschein flicht
Schwermütig seinen Kranz in Tod und Graus.

The most interesting poem in the triptych, however, is the third entitled "Berceuse." This poem reveals that Hesse's life experience had definite points of contact with that of Chopin. It will be remembered that both were to become exiles from their native land. Significant in the poem is the number of times the root "helm" occurs: "Heimatland," "heimwärts," "Heimweh." Chopin's yearning for "Heimat" was never to be subdued. It was this feature of his personality that unlocked a sympathetic response from another poet, Heinrich Heine, who wrote:

Wenn er am Klavier sitzt und improvisiert,
ist es mir, als besuche mich ein Landsmann aus
der geliebten Heimat und erzähle mir die kuriosesten
Dinge, die während meiner Abwesenheit, dort
passiert sind... 41

For Hermann Hesse, in particular, life was to become "a persistent pursuit of Einheit," frequently interpreted by him as "Heimat." 42
It is here that he remained close to the spirit of the early German romantics in their eternal quest: "Wo gehn wir denn hin?"—"Immer nach Hause." The route was to lead Hesse through the work of other composers until, it would seem, with the music of Bach in Glassperlenstück, he had actually arrived. Once there, however, the quest appears to begin all over again. After Knecht has mastered perfection in Castalia, he is willing to forfeit his earthly paradise of "Geist" in exchange for the more humdrum life that Hesse so stoutly rejects during the Chopin period of his creativity.

In the early poem "Berceuse" there is a feeling of no return; the home that the poet would come to remains inaccessible to him. There is here revealed in Hesse the same duality of art opposing life that created tension within Thomas Mann and his characters. For Hesse, at this time, one of the few remaining comforts lies in snatches of melody from his youth. This is also reminiscent of Chopin who, in the midst of the turmoil of the B minor Scherzo, introduced a gentle Polish Christmas song, a lullaby to the infant Jesus. In "Berceuse," the poet and the composer become united in dreams of their homelands. Hesse here alludes to "totem Ruhm und Glück," suggesting overtones of former Polish glory which Chopin was to revive in his chivalric Polonaises. The "Heimat" that had provided Chopin with fire and energy, and is symbolized by the now faded "Rosenstrauß," however, has a converse effect on Hesse, who sinks into apathy of spirit:
This is not to suggest that Chopin did not feel similarly apathetic on occasion, but the mood never dominated his music in the way that it affected the imagery of Hesse's poetry. Taken collectively the poems of the Chopin triptych provide a variation on the familiar song form in music: an ABA pattern in which the rhythms of the waltz provide a contrast to the enervating mood of the first and third poems.

Similarly in his prose the same characteristics are again a clear indication of Hesse's state of mind at the time. From the "Fiebermuse" chapter Eine Stunde hinter Mitternacht comes the following:

\[
\text{Diesen schmächtigen, kranken Chopin lockte sie von Reiz zu Reiz, sie lehrte ihn sein Herz belauschen und deuten und lehrte sein Herz in zitternd bewegten Takten schlagen, bis es in Müdigkeit und Sehnsucht vor dem treibenden Stachel erlag. Mir aber erzählte sie von ihm, ließ mein Herz in seinen müdern, stachelnden Rhythmen schlagen und lehrte mich mein Herz belauschen und deuten.}^{43}
\]

It is unlikely that Chopin would have been impressed by this description of himself in the grip of the "Fiebermuse."

Once again it is whatever appears to be "krankhaft" und "schwermütig" in the composer and his music that finds the most empathy within the poet.

Hermann Hesse, like Thomas Mann, uses the Nocturne in E flat, opus 9, No. 2, for the evocation of nostalgia. In a
poem entitled "Nocturne" qualified by "Es-Dur" in the opening line, he goes on to describe his favourite piece as "ein Lied der Lieder," a phrase which occurs in Hermann Lauscher. The special place given to this nocturne in Hesse's work was perhaps prompted by the fact that, of all the nocturnes, it is the one most adaptable to the singing tone of the violin, the instrument which Hesse learned in his youth and which appears in so much of his early poetry. This is borne out by the last passage in Hermann Lauscher. In this work Hesse combined all the Neo-Romantic clichés associated with Chopin — "eine schöne wohlbekannte Frau auf dem Veilchenstraußflügel" playing "die Nokturne in Es-Dur von Chopin, jenes Lied, das nur Heimweh- und Flügelkranke ganz verstehen, mit seinen zarten, durch ein geheimes Leiden vergeistigten Takten." Then, as in "Berceuse," memories of the poet's lost youth harmonize with violin melodies and make the perfect fade-out for the work that Hesse looked upon as being a farewell to his youth and the mood of his early poetry.

Ich holte meine vergessene und verstaubte Geige hervor und rief die zärtlich scheue Melodie mit leisem Strichewach, und aus dem alten, braunen Instrument sang meine verlorene Jugend in heimlichen Untertönen mit.

In Hermann Lauscher Hesse attempts to come to terms with his own spiritual malaise through the persona Lauscher. Of the latter, Mark Boulby writes:
As a late decadent Romantic, Hermann Lauscher suffers from the obsessive intellectualization of a mode of experiencing which is inherited from countless literary forbears; his Pre-Raphaelite posing is conducted in the full day-light of inescapable self-observation, and the mask is consciously though impulsively worn.47

The last passage in Hermann Lauscher, however, is presented without ironical comment as though Lauscher, like Hesse, were lulled by the music into a state of mind that he never really wanted to abandon.

In an effort to impose some sort of order on an increasingly restless heart and to still yearnings which the romantic irony of Lauscher could not dispel, Hesse married Maria Bernoulli in 1904. Like Thomas Mann's mother, Hesse's first wife was an accomplished pianist with a repertoire of the early romantic composers to perform for her husband. Frequently, Hesse would sit in a neighbouring room reading a book to the accompaniment of short piano pieces by Schumann followed possibly by the first or third nocturne of Chopin. A recreation of this setting occurs in the section "Wenn es Abend wird" from _Am Bodensee._

_Halt, das ist nicht Schumann mehr!_  
taumelnd, und mitten hindurch mit dünnem
Fluss eine süße, milde, kinderselig reine
Melodie. Chopin! Diese Musik voll Heimweh,
Sehnsucht und Erinnerung, und im Hintergrunde
Paris. Nicht Paris von heute, sondern ein
andres, ironischer und sentimentalier, mit
andern Tapeten und Kostümen, mit Chopin und
Heinrich Heine.48

From this reverie, however, the poet is aroused to consider the
present. The portion that follows is a reflection of the new
direction that Hesse's thoughts and emotions were taking.
Having reached the stability and security of an ordered home
life at Gaienhofen, Hesse soon retreated into even further
discontent. His musical experiences, like everything else in
his marital life, came under close scrutiny and were found want­
ting.

Es ist schön, es ist schmeichelnd und wohlig,
anseinem sicheren Tisch zu sitzen, ein sicheres
Dach über sich, einen zuverlässigen Wein in der
Kanne, eine wohlgefüllte große Lampe brennend und
nebenan bei offener Türe eine Frau am Klavier,
Chopin-Stücke und Kerzenlicht ... Plötzlich steigt
mir wie eine Seifenblase die Frage auf: Bist du
eigentlich glücklich?49

In an earlier poem entitled "Valse brillante" Hesse had
already foreshadowed the disillusionment that he was to suffer
at Gaienhofen. The musical pas-de-deux contains an atmosphere
of tension that is at variance with the poem's sprightly rhythm.

Den Flügel du, die Geige ich,
So spielen wir und enden nicht
Und warten angstvoll, du und ich,
Wer wohl zuerst den Zauber bricht.50
Over a passage of time, the early enthusiasm for Chopin based on the excitement of something rare and touched (not unpleasantly) with danger, had become worn down in the routine of a familiar experience, now heavily interwined with connotations of the domestic; the basilisk had become a household pet. It was the signal for Hesse to reach out in a new direction. Not only was he eventually to leave his wife and growing family, his home, his comfortable existence, but also his allegiance to a former ideal: the music of Chopin. What he did not know was that the path he came to choose in search of himself was the way that Chopin had adopted at the outset of his career. This road was to lead Hesse through the realms of Mozart and then Bach as he forged a new literary style. In his early musical training, Chopin had already learned to appreciate from these composers classical restraint and lucidity that was to remain with him and to form the basis for his own art. Unfortunately, those who created the cult of Chopin never came to appreciate this; instead, they recognized in his music only harmonies that were thrilling to the ear and to the emotions. Thus, they proceeded to use Chopin's music as an outlet for their own distorted emotions. Only gradually did Hesse achieve harmony between art and life; he was never to associate any of this moderation with the composer who longed to be measured by the standards of the Golden Age.
Later, in Hesse's novel *Demian* (1919), the conflict between the respectable world of "light" inhabited by Sinclair's parents, and the sinister, yet always subconsciously attractive world of "dark" which looms at the fringes of middle-class existence mirrored the conflict Hesse was experiencing personally. What Sinclair learned from the disturbing yet revealing personality of Demian was the need for self-realization at all cost and the capacity to transcend the conventional dichotomies of good and evil. Translated in terms of Hesse's life experience, the first step for him had been to establish his independence at Tübingen where he could explore his own artistic tastes unimpeded by parental disapproval at close range. This meant indulging his taste for the music of Chopin and giving expression to it in his early poetry and prose pieces. Once, however, the forbidden fruit had been set in a new mould of domesticity, it quickly began to lose its appeal. The lady at the piano had become "eine Frau am Klavier"; "Chopin-Stücke und Kerzenlicht" had become nineteenth-century equivalent of "music to dine by." In Hesse's case there seemed to be no alternative but to reject this phase of his development and to seek new dichotomies of good and evil which he would then transcend. The Steppenwolf in Hesse had begun to growl. It was perhaps because harmony and dissonance are indistinguishable in Chopin's art, "diese Musik voll Heimweh, Sehnsucht und Erinnerung" that Hesse was led to new areas of conflict and eventual conquest.
As a contemporary romantic, Hesse survived a crucial transition from the fin-de-siècle nineteenth-century atmosphere to the modern world. More than this, he was able to adapt his writing accordingly. Unlike Gottfried Benn, however, who succeeded in bringing a nineteenth-century romantic composer into the framework of twentieth-century verse, Hesse never chose to adapt Chopin to the demands of the second stage of his writing. Unlike Mozart, in Steppenwolf, who does not appear to suffer from his encounter with the modern world, Chopin, in Hesse's writing, remains immured amid the fading perfumes of aestheticism. Thus, the basilisk who first appeared as a formidable threat has become a museum piece, a reflection of one of those myths that becomes powerless once it has been exposed. The basilisk in Chopin's music had undergone a metamorphosis similar to that of Romanticism which 'began as gunpowder, continued as magic powder and ended as sleeping powder.'

It was left to the twentieth century to awaken the Chopin cultists by using the abrasive action of parody and a new literary style, less emotional and more laconic, both notable characteristics of T.S. Eliot and Gottfried Benn.
C. T.S. ELIOT — GOTTFRIED BENN — CONCLUSION

In England, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the reaction against the ugliness of the Victorian period had stimulated the Aesthetic movement; the latter was eventually undermined by the Realist movement whose function it was to counteract conventions in art that were not so much decadent as outmoded. The type of verse written by Hesse in his early years is an instance of the need for reform in poetry if it was to speak to a new age. What came into being in Europe in the early twentieth century was poetry with greater clarity and sharpness of image and word. The leadership given to the "Imagists" in England came from the French Symbolists who had produced a poetry totally different from that of Georgian England, being at once tough to the point of cynicism and intensely sharp and delicate in its observation of humanity. It was different in its methods. Its imagery was new and startling and embraced new aspects of life, including those of the city; also this imagery worked by association, and by juxtaposition and contrast of opposites. Conventional and sanctified images were either avoided or used in such a way that they achieved contradictory effects by being placed in a ridiculous position among other completely incongruous images.55

This, then, was the model for T.S. Eliot who, in the manner of Laforgue, wrote mood poetry in reaction against romanticism.56 The early poems "Portrait of a Lady" (1910) and "Conversation Galante" (1909) make their attack upon the romantic position through the music of Chopin. By this means Eliot could parody...
the cult of the Polish composer as one of the strongest evidences of worn-out romanticism.

The Lady in Eliot's "Portrait" is no longer at the piano; she has now become a passive receptacle for recitals which mark "the season" in London. Her description of a Chopin recital has the artificial ring about it that comes from association with snobbish connoisseurs of art who employ a jargon that verges on the truth but is equally a travesty of it.

Thus, the following fragment forms part of the dialogue between the lady and her reluctant lover and sets the tone for the poem as a whole.

He: We have been, let us say, to hear the latest Pole
    Transmit the Preludes, through his hair and finger-tips.
She: 'So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul
    Should be resurrected only among friends
    Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom
    That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room."

The unconcealed irony of "the latest Pole," a slam at the number of "authentic" Chopin interpreters, is enhanced by the veiled reference to Paderewski whose halo of hair was as much a part of the legend as his nimble finger-tips. This, of course, expresses the man's point of view. The lady's lines are untouched by irony and suggest the kind of truth that Gide preached so fervently in his book *Notes sur Chopin*. In this work he encouraged Chopin playing by dedicated amateurs who would not allow concert hall tricks or the magnetism of a huge audience to sway them from the essentially improvisatory nature of the music. The preciousity
of the lady's tone, however, ridicules what otherwise could be taken quite seriously: the fact that Chopin's art in its most intimate moments belongs to the drawing-room rather than to the concert hall.

Throughout "Portrait of a Lady" the stilted conversation of the lady further alienates the man who is conscious of a divergence between his thoughts and hers.

Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own, Capricious monotone That is at least one definite 'false note.'\(^{58}\)

The 'false note' fails to pierce the lady's aesthetic cocoon, however, as her voice "returns like the insistent out-of-tune/ Of a broken violin on an August afternoon." Thus through the play of musical analogies and rhyming couplets Eliot creates the tension resulting from the man's awareness of the artificiality of the lady's world in the face of the present condition; at the same time, there is no indication that he will change the old order.

Earlier in "Conversation Galante" Eliot directed his thrust against the unrealistic picture of the world which the whole "genre" of the nocturne had fostered.

— — 'Someone frames upon the keys That exquisite nocturne, with which we explain The night and moonshine; music which we seize To body forth our own vacuity.'\(^{59}\)

Insidiously, "moonshine" holds up to ridicule all the untruths
perpetrated under the influence of a mood. In light of the number of nocturnal poems and essays written by Hermann Hesse, it might not be unfair to suggest that the vacuity Eliot refers to was largely responsible for the abandonment of Chopin by Hesse, in search of that fulness which was realized only with his later writings.

The jolt given by Eliot to the Chopin cult proved a timely antidote to what had become cloying in extreme. About the same time that Eliot was finding a new voice for English poetry, Gottfried Benn was rousing the German reading public with his first collection of poems: *Morgue* (1912). Where Eliot's voice emerged from the drawing-room, however, Benn's came from the hospital ward. Eliot's restraint was to be paralleled only much later by Benn as he reacted against the Expressionist movement of which he was initially regarded a member. More of a thinker than the Expressionist poets, he has often been compared intellectually to T.S. Eliot, but as Henry Hatfield points out Benn lacked Eliot's humanity as well as his Christianity. The two authors were to be linked only much later through literary criticism when in his *Three Voices of Poetry* Eliot referred to Benn's *Probleme der Lyrik*. Both works explore the same problems which the poet encounters in finding an appropriate "voice" for the link between poet and reader. In both cases tone became increasingly important as each writer directed his criticism against the squalor and loss of values within a changing society.
It will be remembered that Gottfried Benn worked in two spheres. Like Eliot, Benn was a literary critic and prose writer as well as a poet; his other life revolved around medicine. It was his professional duties as a doctor that provided him with material for his early collection of poetry. The realism of his approach, his fidelity to detail, even of the most unpalatable kind, links him to the Naturalists who believed in factual reportage of life as it is and introduced physiology into their writings to make their point clear. Since dermatology, venereal disease, and disintegrating bodies were the reality to Benn, he introduced them into his poems. In some cases, the hysterical giggle of the medical student exposed to his first horrors is embedded in Benn's initial "shockers". At the outset his style ignored "Visionen, Traum, Verklärung;" it sprang from a distrust of metaphors and thus stands apart from the poems of his Expressionist contemporaries, Heym, Trakl and Lasker-Schüler. It represented

der gewaltsame Versuch, die Wirklichkeit
selbst ins Gedicht einzuführen, unverändert,
ohne alle überlieferte Kunstgloriele, aber
im Pathos des Leidens, des Ekels, des
Durchhaltens.61

Later as the tendency to shock mellowed, Benn adopted an understatement that is no less powerful in its impact. It is this quality that characterizes the "Chopin" poem included in *Statische Gedichte* (1948).
In this poem, initially, Benn appears to be using Chopin as a case study of the influence of tuberculosis on the creative genius. The third section of the poem emphasizes this aspect. In addition, in the manner of the Expressionists, Benn adopts an unusual "dislocated" chronology of the poet's life. At the same time, his facts are nearly always meticulous, indicating the kind of precision in treating his subject matter that was so alien to the nineteenth-century accounts of Chopin. The poem is not concerned solely with facts, however; it opens out in the last two stanzas to reveal what is of universal significance about the composer's art: the fact that it exerted an influence out of all proportion to the small hand of the one that produced it. It would seem, in retrospect, that from the literary point of view this influence has tended to be negative. Musically speaking there is scarcely a nineteenth-century composer from Wagner to Debussy who has not benefited from the harmonic inventiveness of Chopin. This influence has extended even into the twentieth century in the subtle vocal accompaniments of Benjamin Britten.

In passing it is necessary to mention that the Chopin poem of 1948 is not the only instance of Benn's use of the composer in his literary canon. In "Teils-Teils" the poet draws from his own autobiography in explaining the shaping forces upon his life and art. He begins:

In meinem Elternhaus hingen keine Gainsboroughs wurde auch kein Chopin gespielt.
The austerity of so much of Benn's writing had its origins in the home where no Gainsboroughs hung on the walls and where the music of Chopin was not played. In "Chopin", on the other hand, contact with the music comes "aus offenen Terrassentüren/ beispielsweise aus einem Sanatorium," ironically linking the doctor's rounds with the disease that was to bring about the early death of the composer. Here, too, are echoes of Mann's Tristan with Frau Klöterjahn at the piano in Einfried Sanatorium. From different points of view both Benn and Mann remind the reader of the popular fascination with lung sickness that formed a significant part of nineteenth-century literature.

Since much of the poem works on several levels it will be necessary to give a close analysis of its content before attempting a final estimate of its importance to the study of Chopin in literature. For this reason the poem is included in its entirety.
GOTTFRIED BENN

CHOPIN

Nicht sehr ergiebig im Gespräch,
Ansichten waren nicht seine Stärke,
Ansichten reden drum herum,
Wenn Delacroix Theorien entwickelte,
wurde er unruhig, er seinerseits konnte
die Notturnos nicht begründen.

Schwacher Liebhaber;
Schatten in Nohant,
wo George Sands Kinder
keine erzieherischen Ratschläge
von ihm annahmen.

Brustkrank in jener Form
mit Blutungen und Narbenbildung,
die sich lange hinzieht;
stiller Tod
im Gegensatz zu einem
mit Schmerzparoxysmen
oder durch Gewehrsalven:
man rückte den Flügel (Erard) an die Tür
und Delphine Potocka
sang ihm in der letzten Stunde
ein Veilchenlied.

Nach England reiste er mit drei Flügeln:
Pleyel, Erard, Broadwood,
spielte für 20 Guineen abends
eine Viertelstunde
bei Rothschilds, Wellingtons, im Strafford House
und vor zahllosen Hosenbändern;
verdunkelt von Müdigkeit und Todesnähe
kehrte er heim
auf den Square d'Orleans.

Dann verbrennt er seine Skizzen
und Manuskripte,
nur keine Restbestände, Fragmente, Notizen,
diese verräterischen Einblicke —,
sagte zum Schluß:
>>Meine Versuche sind nach Maßgabe dessen vollendet,
was mir zu erreichen möglich war <<.
Spielen sollte jeder Finger
mit der seinem Bau entsprechenden Kraft
der vierte ist der schwächste
(nur siamesisch zum Mittelfinger).
Wenn er begann, lagen sie
auf e, fis, gis, h, c.

Wer je bestimmte Präludien
von ihm hörte,
sei es in Landhäusern oder
in einem Höhengelände
oder aus offenen Terrassentüren
beispielsweise aus einem Sanatorium,
wird es schwer vergessen.

Nie eine Oper komponiert,
keine Symphonie,
nur diese tragischen Progressionen
aus artistischer Überzeugung
und mit einer kleinen Hand.53

The first line, an almost throw-away, sets the tone for the understatement that is an essential element of the poem's total impact. With justification Benn notes the reticence of the composer within a social milieu. Although Chopin was invariably treated "en prince" (to use Liszt's description) as a result of his aristocratic bearing and impeccable manners, there was also within him the desire to hold something in reserve, and he never committed himself to deep discussions within the glittering but sometimes superficial aura of the salon.
In comparison to Liszt who had a penchant for drawing-room mysticism, Chopin had little interest in philosophizing for the benefit of his friends. This extended also to revelations concerning the nature of his own creative process. The irony of the last lines of the first stanza in the Benn poem are a reflection of this attitude: how could Chopin "account for" his nocturnes? Extensive research about the composer reveals that there is very little evidence to support any theory or theories he may have had about the genesis of his compositions. Neither was he concerned with philosophical discussions of music. Yet, if one examines a journal entry of Eugène Delacroix dated April 7, 1849, shortly before Chopin's death, it would appear that the veil of reticence had been temporarily drawn aside in the presence of a close friend and fellow artist.

Dans la journée, il m'a parlé musique, et cela l'a ranimé. Je lui demandais ce qui établissait la logique en musique. Il m'a fait sentir ce que c'est qu'harmonie et contrepoint; comme quoi la fugue est comme la logique pure en musique, et qu'être savant dans la fugue, c'est connaître l'élément de toute raison et de toute conséquence en musique. J'ai pensé combien j'aurais été heureux de m'instruire en tout cela qui désole les musiciens vulgaires. Ce sentiment m'a donné une idée du plaisir que les savants, dignes de l'être, trouvent dans la science. C'est que la vraie science n'est pas ce que l'on entend ordinairement par ce mot, c'est-à-dire une partie de la connaissance différente de l'art; non! La science envisagée ainsi, démontrée par un homme comme Chopin, est l'art lui-même, et par contre l'art n'est plus alors ce que le croit le vulgaire, c'est-à-dire une sorte d'inspiration qui vient de je ne sais où, qui
marche au hasard, et ne présente que l'extérieur pittoresque des choses. C'est la raison elle-même ornée par le génie, mais suivant une marche nécessaire et contenue par des lois supérieures.

Thus, Benn in the opening stanza of his poem on Chopin appears to contradict the core of Delacroix' impressive statement. Was the painter, in effect, so carried away by his own eloquence that he attributed to Chopin what were actually Delacroix' own thoughts on music? The implication from Benn's poem is that Chopin became restless when the painter developed theories. Either Benn did not read Delacroix' *Journal*, which seems unlikely in light of his otherwise thorough research of his subject, or he is suggesting a new and interesting possibility in the Chopin–Delacroix relationship.

In the second stanza of "Chopin," Benn appears to move from the social to the sexual sphere. Although there has been considerable disagreement concerning the active role played by Chopin in his relations with the insatiable Madame Sand, one thing emerges clearly; Chopin was an incongruous figure in the Sand ménage. Although later he attempted to assume a quasi-father role which mainly consisted in siding with George Sand's daughter, Solange, against her mother, basically Chopin only sought a place in which to continue the painstaking work of putting his compositions on paper. Perhaps Chopin's position in the Sand family is best summed up by the identification papers required for the trip to Majorca.
Mme. Dudevant, married; Maurice, her son, minor; Solange, her daughter, minor; M. Frederic Chopin, artist. The order in this instance is not without symbolic significance in the light of Chopin's later break with George Sand. Prior to this, after the exhausting Majorca débacle, Chopin returned with the family to George Sand's country estate. There, the "shadow in Nohant" enjoyed a productive period in which the bucolic atmosphere played no small part. Such intervals of contentment were infrequent, however. Benn, in the third protracted stanza of the poem analyzes the course of Chopin's illness in clinical detail. The "quiet death" is so only by comparison with the countless anonymous twentieth century deaths "durch Gewehrsalven." Shifting between a past era and the present which provides a sudden shock to the reader, Benn again reverts to the "romantic" circumstances of Chopin's death which have been repeatedly recorded in accounts of the composer. Benn's "Veilchenlied" sets the tone for the Age of Sensibility and leaves open the possibility that this might also be one of the legends around the composer's final hour. Considerable variation of opinion exists as to what Delfina actually sang, but it is generally agreed that the beautiful Polish countess to whom Chopin was especially attracted chose Stradella's "Hymn to the Virgin" and Marcello's "Psalm." Benn's reference to the Erard piano, pedantically set in brackets, is ironic and further points up the artificiality of the setting.
Stanza four, in flash-back, returns to the time shortly before Chopin's death, when, in an effort to fill his depleted coffers, he embarked on a tour of England and Scotland that was to precipitate his death. Speaking of this 'Strapaze,' Arthur Hedley in his recent and valuable study of the composer writes:

And one must admire the courage of a man who, within a year of his death, could face up to the terrors of a London 'season' with all its fatigues, disappointments and demands on nervous resistance.66

Both Benn and Hedley by revealing the reality expose the superficial façade conjured up by the glib tongue of Eliot's "Lady." More than ever the reader is made aware of the gruelling tax on a frail mechanism, which could in turn produce the diaphanous illusion around which so many myths were to be spun in the name of Chopin.

Benn is nowhere more precise than when recounting the facts of the English expedition in which three pianos rather than three ships were in tow. At the same time some poetic licence is in evidence since the pianos were made available to Chopin only after his arrival in London. In addition to the number Benn lists the make of the grand pianos, conjuring up past glories through the magic of names. This applies even more to the distinguished families for whom Chopin performed. The "Hosenbänder" is a gentle jeer at the aristocracy with whom Benn, unlike Chopin, would have felt extremely remote. Equally precise
is the time and the amount given and received for the priceless experience of hearing Chopin "der Unnachahmliche." For the composer, the necessity of doling out his strength was emphasized by George Sand who maintained that "avec sa faible santé, il faut qu'il gagne assez d'argent pour travailler peu." But mankind has a way of exacting its revenge in due course. At Chopin's funeral, the singers of Mozart's Requiem were providing their services for a fee of 2,000 francs, much to the disillusionment and dismay of Chopin's friend Albert Grzymała who felt that "their self respect ought to have impelled them to offer and not to sell to his memory."

Benn's account of the aftermath of the expedition to England is factually true, and Stanza 5 points to the high standards that remained inviolate in the composer to the end. George Sand has left an account of the terrible birth pangs Chopin underwent before even a single page of manuscript was completed.

Mais alors commençait le labeur le plus navrant auquel j'aie jamais assisté. C'était une suite d'efforts, d'irrésolutions et d'impatiences pour ressaisir certains détails du thème de son audition: ce qu'il avait conçu tout d'une pièce, il l'analysait trop en voulant l'écrire, et son regret de ne pas le retrouver net, selon lui, le jetait dans une sorte de désespoir. Il s'enfermait dans sa chambre des journées entières, pleurant, marchant, brisant ses plumes, répétant et changeant cent fois une mesure, l'écrivant et l'effaçant autant de fois, et recommençant le lendemain avec une persévérance minutieuse et désespérée. Il passait six semaines sur une page pour en revenir à l'écrire telle qu'il l'avait tracée du premier jet.
In a similar fashion Chopin was equally anxious to leave no "treacherous betrayals" of the effort it cost him to produce, which accounts for the proportion of "perfect" works that have been left to posterity.

Another legacy which remained unfinished, however, was the "method" Chopin had planned to benefit future piano students, in addition to providing him with another source of income. Chopin was an excellent teacher who recognized the value of a practical manual that would incorporate those exercises and ideas he had found of most value in directing his pupils towards piano playing in the Chopin manner. His ideas were always of the most sensible kind: "Never practise more than three hours" - "The hand should not strain in unnatural positions." In Stanza 6, Benn has incorporated Chopin's analysis of the construction of the hand in addition to the simple exercise for the correct position of the hand - all matters of interest to a medical man as well as to a performing musician and composer. In addition, they show that Chopin was far in advance of his time, and that his ideas were only to be thoroughly appreciated in the twentieth century.

Finally, Benn, in the midst of revealing technicalities does not fail to recognize the unforgettable experience that belongs to a hearing of the Preludes, no matter what the locale. This leads him to the fact that Chopin's limitations of range
Nie eine Oper komponiert,  
keine Symphonie...  

enabled him to concentrate where he was artistically at home.

As Hedley maintains:

In limiting himself to the piano he in no way crippled or tied down his genius, for by his natural affinity with his instrument he was provided with a sufficient outlet for the wealth of sensibility which his double inheritance [French and Polish] had endowed him ... Chopin is indeed the complete illustration of Goethe's dictum: 'It is when working within limits that mastery reveals itself.'

Undoubtedly Benn's last image "einer kleinen Hand" is the master stroke of the poem. On one level it means just what it says: an examination of the cast taken of Chopin's hand the morning after his death reveals that it was indeed small. It has been pointed out, however, by those who saw Chopin perform that the hand was extremely elastic between the fingers, that it could stretch like "the mouth of a serpent about to devour a rabbit whole" enabling the composer to cover a third of the keyboard. Metaphorically, this is also true of Chopin's influence which gradually increased after his death out of all proportion to the hand that composed the music. Poetically this strange and brutal image alerts the reader to a different kind of Chopin; the serpent in this instance is not to be confused with the earlier basilisk, which represented the fatal fascination upon fin-de-siecle writers. Rather the new metaphor reveals the aspect of Chopin's music that the aesthetes chose largely to ignore: that possessed of fire, strength, and even ferocity which emanates from the music inspired by his Polish heritage.
Thus Chopin in Benn's account of him is revealed as a man whose "unadventurous flavour of being" is in marked contrast to his strength and originality as an artist. The small hand "had a grip which gave the lie to its fragile look." Although Benn's poem appears disjointed and disproportionately factual, he has, it would seem, helped to dispel the sentimentality without losing the pathos of this man who in Carlyle's words was a 'noble and much suffering human being.' The sense of tragic progression is there in Chopin's life, if not on a vast scale, and it is through each stanza, complete in itself like a Prelude, that Benn creates the formal vehicle for arriving at his ultimate conclusion concerning the composer. In addition, Benn does not alienate sympathy by the irony of the poem's opening stanzas, since much of Chopin's own self-estimation was based on a profound sense of his inadequacy in coping with everyday realities. That he once described himself as 'a donkey at a fancy-dress ball — a violin E-string on a double-bass' should discourage any biographer from approaching the composer without a strong sense of the ironic.

In summary, it may be maintained that the history of Chopin in literature has been a tortuous one. Benn's poem, although the final work under consideration in this study, actually marks the beginning of a more sincere attempt on the part of writers to discover behind the man and his music much that the myth
has obliterated. One of the descriptions of Chopin that has been in constant currency is that of Moscheles who when asked what Chopin was like replied: "His music." It follows then that if such interdependence exists the man or his music will suffer if there is misinterpretation on either side. The aesthetes perpetrated a one-sided picture of the music in their writings because they misunderstood the man. Benn has, in turn, provided a less distorted picture of the man which also speaks for the quality of the music. The fact that his poem encourages frequent comparisons with the assessment of a contemporary Chopin authority suggests a new trend in literary-musical studies. It would seem that, having survived the cult of the basilisk, Chopin and his music will continue to exist in literature only if there are writers prepared to add to the store of truths about him and a reading public prepared to accept these truths.
FOOTNOTES

1 Adam Harasowski, The Skein of Legends around Chopin (Glasgow, 1967), p. 15.


6 Selected Correspondence, p. 386.

7 Robert Schumann, "Ein Opus II," Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung, XLIX (December, 1831), 806.

8 basilisk - "a mythical reptile hatched by a serpent from the egg of a cock and whose breath, or, in other versions, look would kill, or blast."

This note, quoted from Harasowski, p. 253, is intended to provide more substantial proof for the correctness of the reading of 'basilisk' rather than 'basil' as it was translated from Schumann's article. Camille Bourniquel had made the error in what is otherwise a perceptive study of Chopin.


11 Alfred Cortot, In Search of Chopin (London, 1951), p. 84.

12 Klaus Schröter, Thomas Mann (Hamburg, 1964), p. 16.

15. Ibid., p. 84.
16. Ibid., p. 85.
17. Ibid., p. 91.
18. Selected Correspondence, p. 348.
27. "Der Bajazzo," p. 84.
31. Ibid.
35. Friedrich Nietzsche, Werke in drei Bänden, II (München, 1960), 1092.
36. Ibid., p. 937.


40 Ibid., 379.


42 Mileck, p. 91. (Mileck corroborates the position taken by Edmund Gnefkow in the latter's Hermann Hesse. Eine Biographie (1952).)

43 Quoted from Novalis' Heinrich von Ofterdingen.

44 Hesse, G.D., V, 380.

45 G.D., I, 31.

46 Ibid., 215.

47 Boulby, p. 4.

48 Hesse, G.D., III, 743.

49 Ibid., 744.

50 G.D., V, 440.


52 Hesse, G.D., III, 743.

53 Freedman, p. 49.

54 Quoted by James Lyons, Editor, The American Record Guide, in programme notes on Chopin's Preludes performed in their entirety by pianist Jeanne-Marie Darre.


56 Ibid.


58 Ibid., p. 19.
69 Selected Correspondence, p. 375.
70 George Sand, Histoire de ma Vie, IV (Paris, [1928]), 471.
71 Hedley, p. 12.
72 Hadden, p. 192.
73 Doktor Faustus, p. 144.
74 Hedley, p. 13.
75 Ibid., p. 11.
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