

the manner born. He has left unturned no stone worth turning, and not a few besides. He has researched and admirably recounted the general social and cultural climate of Paris and Warsaw, before, during, and after Chopin's lifetime, while illuminating the composer's profound ambivalence in general and the complexity of his relationship to Poland and his own Polishness in particular. He vividly and concisely depicts the historical background leading up to the crushing of Warsaw by the Russian army in 1831—a seminal event in Chopin's life, both psychological and compositional—and fascinatingly contrasts the psychology, perspectives, and perceptions of the refugee-cum-emigré community in Paris with those of the Poles who stayed behind. Indeed the best parts of the book are those that have least to do with music (including the lengthy quotations, discussions, and analyses of Mickiewicz). Much of the book is less concerned with Chopin himself than with the ways in which he and his music were perceived—by various groups whose images of him were fashioned to suit their own ends. The endless, vain pressures on Chopin to write “the great Polish opera” are tellingly related, as are his reasons for resisting them.

The author is a skillful and resourceful analyst—musical, stylistic, rhetorical, textual—whose findings are persuasively, if sometimes self-indulgently, argued. Many highly contentious claims are spared the scrutiny they deserve. Repeatedly and condescendingly, he dismisses those who may not share his beliefs or his approach (these by implication include the vast majority of great pianists in history, whose claims to artistic insight, let alone whose talent or genius, could at least be suspected of equalling his own. He is particularly and unnecessarily nasty to Murray Perahia).

What is likely to frustrate most pianist-readers is Bellman's repeated failure to relate his analyses to performance. For all his scholarship, that most essential of questions—So what?—is too often unaddressed. He seems disproportionately concerned with labeling, as when he criticizes the eminent Chopin scholar Jim Samson for referring to the “storm” sections of Op. 38 as being “étude-like”: “To call this passage ‘étude-like,’” writes Bellman, “seems to miss the mark somewhat. ‘Étude-like’ too easily becomes ‘étude’” (125). There is no reason why an étude cannot express with shattering immediacy the most tragic paroxysms of grief, anguish, or rage. Or indeed depict a storm. A perfect case in point is Chopin's famous “Revolutionary Etude” (not his title), which needs neither part of its well-worn tag to communicate either its turbulent intensity or its composer's sovereign understanding of the keyboard. Musical analysis whose fruits cannot be heard is ultimately irrelevant. As far as performance is concerned, who cares whether the Second Ballade is “really” in F major or A minor? Why, for that matter, must it be in either? Why not both? If the piece is to be played differently according to the answer, then how so? And what does this mean (in the unlikely event of its being perceptible) for more than a tiny fraction of the audience?

While the specifically Slavic elements of the book should engage most readers of this journal, the bulk of the text is mainly addressed to highly sophisticated musicians and music-lovers, comfortable both with specialized orthography and musical/musicological jargon. Even to many of these, however, much of the content may seem, ultimately, of peripheral significance.

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***Der polnische Essay und seine kulturmodellierende Funktion (Jerzy Stempowski und Czesław Miłosz).*** By Małgorzata Zemła. Slavistische Beiträge, no. 469. Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2009. 319 pp. Notes. Bibliography. €34.00, paper.

As Małgorzata Zemła indicates in her study on Jerzy Stempowski and Czesław Miłosz, contemporary Polish literature provides a remarkable example of the belated breakthrough of the essay as a literary genre (and, consequently, as an object of academic interest). The Polish counterpart of the Montaignesque *essai* came into existence only in the 1930s of the twentieth century and began to flourish after World War II, reaching its apogee in the literary output of a small number of Polish émigré writers (such as Stanisław Vincenz and the aforementioned Stempowski and Miłosz). Whereas the domestic reception of these

authors was initially hampered by political circumstances, the growing scholarly attention for the genre from the 1980s onwards eventually resulted in a number of valuable books on Polish essay writing authored by Polonists such as Marta Wyka, Stanisław Jerzy Kowalczyk, and Józef Olejniczak.

On the one hand, Zemła evidently seeks to inscribe her dissertation in the existing research on the Polish essay, which is exemplified, among other things, by her choice to focus on Miłosz and Stempowski rather than on other, less researched, territories of Polish essay writing. On the other hand, Zemła's work undoubtedly charts new directions and makes an important and refreshing contribution to the discipline. Whereas extant research on the Polish essay is characterized by a strong deductive approach and limited interest in actual textual analysis, Zemła proposes a strong induction-based approach to essay writing (in which she is partly indebted to Klaus W. Hempfer's ideas on "Rezeptionforschung"). The analytical part, which is presented in the second (Stempowski) and the third (Miłosz) chapters of the book, constitutes the strongest asset of Zemła's dissertation. Whereas the first chapter provides a historical and comparative introduction to essay writing in general and the Polish essay in particular, the two remaining chapters skillfully uncover the various literary techniques and communicative structures deployed by Stempowski and Miłosz in their essayistic output. Throughout the analysis, Zemła approaches the essay as a literary form of reflection, which—instead of unfolding a story—foregrounds the process of thinking, involving the speaking subject as the object of reflection. As the author asserts, one of the main techniques underlying the aesthetics of essay writing is a tendency toward introspection combined with dialogicity—not so much in terms of a dialogue with the reader as a dialogue with various texts and objects of culture.

In the case of Stempowski, Zemła neatly shows the evolution taking place in his essays from the 1930s through the 1950s. Whereas his writings from the interwar and war period constitute a literary counterproject against raw historical reality (which comes to the fore in Stempowski's Apollinistic idealization of his native realm, the multiethnic and multi-religious Podole region), Stempowski's second artistic phase (initiated by the well-known *Essay for Cassandra*) relies on a reconciliation of cultural memory and long-term history with historical discourse and event history (understood as a series of cyclical catastrophes). As Zemła's analysis convincingly shows, Stempowski carefully weaves various leitmotifs and literary devices such as the *conchetto* and the *oxymoron* into an integrated whole.

In the case of Miłosz, Zemła focuses on two key texts from the autobiographical collection of essays *Native Realm* (1959). The first essay, which elaborates on Miłosz's enduring friendship and intellectual engagement with the Polish philosopher Tadeusz Juliusz Kroński ("Tigre"), undoubtedly belongs to the most difficult and enigmatic parts of Miłosz's entire essayistic output. By uncovering the complicated communicative structure of the essay and its various hidden references to spiritual heterodoxy (gnosis and hermeticism), Zemła succeeds in shedding kaleidoscopic light on the intellectual and ideological trajectory of the author throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The second part of the analysis (devoted to Miłosz's essay "Russia") discloses the text's reflective structure as a psychoanalytical process in which the speaking subject attempts to come to terms with the Poles' (and his personal) traumatic obsession with Russia.

Notwithstanding the overall quality and the admirable depth of Zemła's study, the author sometimes loses hold of the topic and wanders off into areas that seem only distantly related to the main subject (which undoubtedly explains why the author herself decided to call some of these digressive parts "excursions"). As a consequence, while the second chapter provides a dynamic perspective on Stempowski's writings, the part on Miłosz would have fared better without the digressions and would have benefited from a more diachronic approach to his essayistic output, including, for example, the 1977 essay volume *The Land of Ulro*, in which his lasting fascination with heterodoxy (and Russia) gains new significance.

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