

**Zeitschrift:** Publikationen der Schweizerischen Musikforschenden Gesellschaft.  
Serie 2 = Publications de la Société Suisse de Musicologie. Série 2

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Musikforschende Gesellschaft

**Band:** 45 (2006)

**Artikel:** Chopin's errors

**Autor:** Kallberg, Jeffrey

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-858777>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 10.02.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## Chopin's Errors

Does any composer from the nineteenth century enjoy as scrupulous a documentary record as that amassed for Chopin? For example, thanks to the magisterial research and analysis of Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, scholars and pianists can imagine the ethos and techniques of Chopin's pianism with remarkable acuity<sup>1</sup>. And a number of investigations (often under the auspices of editions of his music) into the idiosyncratic byways of his musical manuscripts and editions enables for Chopin's music a bibliographical control that would be the envy of scholars of most other composers<sup>2</sup>.

Remarkably enough, this text-critical and bibliographical record continues to enrich itself. The ongoing new Polish national edition, under the direction of Jan Ekier, and with important assistance by Paweł Kamiński, has already advanced to cover most of the major works, in texts that take into account a richer array of sources than any edition that preceded it. Yet the national edition will before long face a significant challenge from Peters in London. Involving many of the best minds presently at work on Chopin, the Peters edition promises to outdo the Polish national edition in its control of sources, and to produce performing texts that hold more scrupulously to the readings of the « single best » source for a given work. And in what may be the most significant feat of all, Cambridge University Press will soon publish a comprehensive catalog of Chopin's first editions. Prepared by Christophe Grabowski and

- 1 I refer of course to the epochal *Chopin vu par ses élèves* (Neuchâtel : La Baconnière, 1988, 3rd ed.), and its English counterpart, *Chopin : Pianist and Teacher as Seen by his Pupils*, eng. trans. by N. Shohet, K. Osostowicz, R. Howat (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- 2 Rather than assemble a comprehensive list, let me simply mention the following marvelous catalogues of Chopin's manuscripts and editions : Krystyna Kobylańska, *Rękopisy Utworów Chopina. Katalog*, 2 vols (Kraków : Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1977) ; *idem*, *Frédéric Chopin : Thematisch-bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis* (Munich : G. Henle Verlag, 1979) ; Józef Michał Chomiński and Teresa Dalila Turło, *Katalog Dzieł Fryderyka Chopina* (Kraków : Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1990) ; and George W. Platzman, *A Catalogue of Early Printed Editions of the Works of Frédéric Chopin in the University of Chicago Library* (Chicago : University of Chicago Library, 1997).



John Rink, this catalog will for the first time document the true complexity of relationships among the multiple impressions of all editions of Chopin's music that appeared during the composer's lifetime. When it appears, this catalog could well reckon among the most important bibliographical monuments for any music written after 1700.

What then remains to be said about textual matters in Chopin? Plenty, despite – or rather thanks to – this plenitude of excellent resources. The evidence emerging about the complexities of the networks of Chopin sources compels us to rethink the printed editions of Chopin's music from perspectives other than those of composer's intentions, and for purposes other than those of establishing modern texts of his music. We might consider other sorts of signifying functions that these editions might have possessed in Chopin's day (or in other historical eras after his death, or, indeed, in the present). We have paid relatively little attention, for example, to Chopin's first editions as material objects, as items produced through a complex economy of shared labor, made using a variety of resources and techniques of production, and consumed by a range of different people for diverse purposes. That is to say, many of the questions that have animated inquiries into the history of the book or the sociology of texts, questions that might lead us to explore new and different kinds of musical knowledge, questions that expand the historical contexts in which we consider musical texts – these questions have yet to be asked of Chopin's printed editions<sup>3</sup>. What might it mean to the complicated signification of gender through piano music during Chopin's lifetime that, in Paris, female artisans did much of the engraving of music? How might different material circumstances of the printing of the same plates (as when Maurice Schlesinger printed a piece as a supplement to the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* and also issued it as a customary, separate edition) affect the meanings attributed to the text? The research required to answer such questions of materiality would be formidable, but we would have much to learn from its pursuit.

And what did Chopin's contemporaries actually do upon coming into possession of an edition of his music? The immediate response to this query – they played it, or attempted to play it, at the piano – perhaps needs to be tempered. Of course many owners of editions, then as now, would have wanted to know how this music might sound, in an ideal rendition or under their own fingers. But the presumed predominance of this interest in performance should not blind us to the possibility that

3 The inspiration for these remarks comes from Donald Francis McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London: The British Library, 1986).



editions of music might have served other functions<sup>4</sup>. Some evidence that Chopin editions could have, for some owners, served as something other than vehicles for performing might be the relatively pristine state in which many of them survive. By contrast, when we can trace the provenance of an exemplar to a performing context – say those editions once owned by the Paris Conservatoire, or those used by Chopin's students in their lessons with him – the editions show clear signs of use: penciled annotations, signs of wear from the turning of pages, and the like. While arguing from the absence of signs of use may be troubling, it is nonetheless difficult to imagine engaged performances that did not leave some physical trace in the printed text. Until scholars undertake the necessary material research, these other uses – as keepsakes, talismans, or symbols of status? – will remain obscure.

By way of a first step toward an expanded textual scholarship, I want in this essay to explore one way that the musical texts of Chopin first editions might reveal something of their understanding by performers in Chopin's day. In particular, I wish to examine how early users might have reacted to the manifold readings that present-day editors routinely label as « errors ». I am not concerned with the ramifications of viewing these « errors » text-critically as blemishes to be eugenically removed<sup>5</sup>. Instead I want to inquire whether « errors » might serve as a kind of index to musicality in Chopin's day, and to ponder whether they might reveal something about the nature of early aesthetic responses to Chopin's music, and about contemporary understandings of the role of performers in the concept of the musical « work ». What I propose here differs from the standard musicological engagements with misprints, which tend to argue for one or another « correct » reading – we can all probably muster examples of debates on how to resolve possible wrong notes (for example, *a* natural versus *a* sharp in the development of the « Hammerklavier » Sonata). Rather I have in mind a more detailed and historically informed inquiry along the lines of the first chapter in Charles Rosen's

4 My thoughts on this issue are much informed by the work of Emma Dillon, whose investigation into a manuscript of the *Roman de Fauvel* has exposed an array of symbolic, visual, material, and textual meanings not related to the actual sound of the notated music; see her *Medieval Music-Making and the Roman de Fauvel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

5 On this point, I am indebted to Joseph Grigely's stimulating investigation into the relationship between the language of textual criticism and the rhetoric of eugenics in the mid twentieth century; see his *Textuality: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).



*The Frontiers of Meaning*, which explores how misprints contribute to and shed light on the idea of musical meaning<sup>6</sup>.

I define « error » both pragmatically and heuristically. In its pragmatic sense, « error » refers to a reading in a first edition that modern text-critical scholarship suspects not to reflect Chopin's intentions. (For the sake of convenience, I have drawn most of my examples from the source commentaries to the new Polish national edition). Thus the cause of the errant reading is largely irrelevant to my purposes, although at times it will be interesting to speculate how the misprint (or supposed misprint) occurred. In its heuristic sense, the errant status of any « error » might be called into question as a result of closer examination of the historical or material circumstances of its reception.

In order to grasp the diverse historical meanings of the « errors » that appear in Chopin's first editions, it will help to classify them by notational type. My necessarily partial sampling suggests that the most important categories include errors in accidentals, in level of pitch (independent of any accidental), in rhythm, in performing directions, and in what I will term « morphology », or formal shape.

« Perhaps there are still flats and sharps missing » – the studied nonchalance of these few words that Chopin penned as a postscript to a letter concerning the manuscript of the Nocturnes op. 48, scarcely does justice to the sheer frequency of the problem in Chopin's printed music<sup>7</sup>. Mistaken accidentals (or apparently mistaken accidentals) count as by far the most common sort of misprint that anyone would encounter in editions printed during Chopin's lifetime. While the insouciant tone behind the words of Chopin's letter doubtless did little to help matters (it would seem to open the door to non-authorial solutions to missing accidentals), the composer cannot be blamed for all or even most of the mistakes (not that a nineteenth-century user of his editions would have cared about responsibility of this sort). In the world of publishing in the 1830s and 1840s, it was apparently very simple for accidents to happen with accidentals.

Let us try to gain a sense of the range of the problem by considering several examples. The first instance, drawn from the Mazurka in A minor op. 59 n° 1 (examples 1a and 1b), presents us with a situation where the level of ambiguity is relatively low.

6 Charles Rosen, *The Frontiers of Meaning: Three Informal Lectures on Music* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), pp. 3-36.

7 Letter to Julian Fontana, 1 November 1841; Chopin, *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina*, ed. B. E. Sydow, 2 vols (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1955), vol. ii, p. 48.



13

18

Rea \* Rea \* Rea \* Rea \* Rea \*

Rea \* Rea \* Rea \* Rea \*

Example 1 : Mazurka in A minor op. 59 n° 1, bars 13-22

1a) German edition

13

18

Rea \* Rea \* Rea \* Rea \* Rea \*

Rea \* Rea \* Rea \* Rea \*

1b) other editions

Purchasers of the Stern edition, released in Berlin in 1845, would have encountered in measure 20 no printed accidentals whatsoever (see example 1a). While a literal reading of the measure is at least plausible – a D minor resolution of the preceding A dominant seventh would raise no hackles – presumably the context of the surrounding measures, where every other *f* bears a sharp, would have clued a pianist to the correct



reading here. And even had this pianist prospectively plowed through with a literal reading, when encountering the same passage in measure 98 of the reprise, she would have seen sharps printed before the *fs* (although the naturals are not printed before the *ds*, the rest of the edition plainly adheres to the convention whereby accidentals revert to their natural state after a barline, unless otherwise indicated). Hence to correct this error would have required the application of logic about the short-term context – the notion that, in seven measures where the local tonic otherwise always appears in the major, it would be unlikely for one measure to shift suddenly to the minor. We can be safe in assuming that most owners in Chopin's day could reason thusly – and indeed I know of at least one copy of the Stern edition in which penciled sharps have been added in this measure<sup>8</sup>.

Quite often, though, we cannot be so confident about how or whether users in Chopin's day would have reasoned that an accidental was omitted or misplaced. We may better understand the complexity of the situation by considering a group of « errors » involving missing accidentals that relate in various ways to Chopin's penchant for « modally » inflected melodies (examples 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b).



Example 2 : Mazurka in C sharp minor op. 41 n° 4, bars 116-126

2a) all first editions

8 See the reproduction in Jeffrey Kallberg, « Hearing Poland: Chopin and Nationalism », *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. R. Larry Todd (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), p. 225.



116

121

Leo. \* Leo. \* Leo. \*

2b) second impression, French edition

Vivace

f

Leo. \* Leo. \* Leo. \* Leo. \* Leo. \* Leo. \*

Example 3 : Mazurka in F sharp minor op. 59 n° 3, bars 1-11

3a) German and English editions



Vivace

### 3b) French edition

In example 2a, at the climactic restatement of the main theme in the coda of the Mazurka in C sharp minor op. 41 n° 4, none of the « simultaneous » first editions (in other words, those first released in Paris, Leipzig, and London) add naturals to any of the *d* s. Only in the second impression of the French edition (probably dating from February-March 1841) did Chopin (apparently) add naturals to this passage (see example 2b)<sup>9</sup>. Before this statement, every other version of the principal, minor-mode version of this theme presents it with the lowered second. Would pianists who owned the earlier French impressions, or who performed from the Breitkopf or Wessel editions, likely have intuited an error in this passage? Most of the first editions for the Mazurka in F sharp minor op. 59 n° 3, present a similar conundrum in two statements of the principal theme (examples 3a and 3b). In measure 9 of the German and English editions, and in measure 105 in all editions, the melodic fourth, raised elsewhere, appears with no sharp in front of it (see example 3a). What would users reactions have been to these measures? Finally, when read literally, a passage from a nocturne presented contemporary users with melodic augmented seconds. In the French edition of the F sharp minor Nocturne op. 48 n° 2 (examples 4a and 4b), both iterations of the two-measure lead-in to the main theme twice lack sharps before the *d* s (measures 1 and 29).

9 I am grateful to Christophe Grabowski for clarifying the date and status of the second state of the Troupenas edition.



Andantino

*p*

Lea \* Lea \* Lea \* Lea \*

Example 4 : Nocturne in F sharp minor op. 48 n° 2, bars 1-4 and 29-32

4a) French edition, bars 1-4

29

Lea \*

Lea \* Lea \* Lea \* Lea \*

4b) French edition, bars 29-32

Andantino

*p*

Lea \* Lea \* Lea \* Lea \*

4c) German and English editions, bars 1-4

29

Lea \*

Lea \* Lea \* Lea \* Lea \*

4d) German and English editions, bars 29-32



Now the point in raising these examples is not to discuss how a modern edition might render these accidentals (even in cases like the F sharp minor Nocturne, where text-critical analysis can easily demonstrate that an « error » took place – quite contrary to what Chopin wrote in his letter, here it seems to have been Fontana, in the manuscript that served as the basis for the French edition, who let the sharps go « missing »). Rather, we are trying to grasp how contemporary users might have dealt with absent accidentals. Since none of the passages sounds decidedly « wrong » in its immediate context in the same sense as we discussed in the Mazurka in A minor, there is first of all the question of how many users might have raised suspicions about accidentals. Some owners certainly might have questioned the missing sharps in the Mazurka in F sharp minor: the piquancy of the raised melodic fourth seems part of the basic identity of the principal theme of the piece. In the Mazurka in C sharp minor, that the « diatonic » version of the main theme, absent its *d* naturals, thunders out near the end of the piece after the sound of the flattened second has been well-ingrained under the fingers and in the ears, might also have inclined users to question the accuracy of the edition. And ironically, given that it is the only reading that is demonstrably « wrong » from the standpoint of Chopin's intentions, very few owners of the Schlesinger edition of the F sharp minor Nocturne would have been likely to think anything was amiss. Why should a work in F sharp minor begin with an inflection on *d* sharp? Why think the lead-in did anything but sound the most diatonic version of the minor scale?

Yet even had these passages raised the curiosity of users, we might still wonder whether they would have decided to emend the text. In every instance, a plausible analytical (or critical) rationale could have been construed from the context of the work in question. For the C sharp minor Mazurka, the status of the theme as a culminating statement could have been mustered on behalf of the variant reading: just as this climactic rendition of theme introduces a new, mostly unison octave texture, so too it standardizes the principal theme to a diatonic version. In the F sharp minor Mazurka, German and English users might have observed a parallel in the two diatonically-altered instances of the theme, since measures 9 and 105 represent the second full statements of the theme, at the opening of the piece and in its reprise, respectively. In instances like these, in other words, we probably need first to accept that contemporaries read these passages in both ways, and then ideally to figure this ambiguity into a historically informed understanding of the works in question.



Just how ambiguity might be factored into such « historically informed understanding » might become clearer in my last example of an « error » in accidentals (examples 5a, 5b, 6).

Example 5 : Prélude op. 28 n° 6, bars 9-18

5a) German edition

5b) French and English editions





Example 6 : Prélude op. 28 n° 2, bars 9-12

The Breitkopf & Härtel edition of the B minor Prelude from op. 28, following readings found both in Chopin's autograph manuscript and in the copy Julian Fontana prepared from this autograph, lacks the naturals that would lower all the *c*s in measures 12-14 (see example 5a). This manifestly counts as a mistake : Chopin (or Fontana or Wolff, who may have corrected proofs for Chopin) added the natural to the French edition (which then served as the basis for the English edition). Moreover, we could expect that at least some users of the German edition would have read the passage entirely locally, and, in the context of the applied dominant seventh of C that sounds in measure 11, have mentally corrected for the absent natural signs in the following measures. But if this « context » expands to include all of the Preludes, then perhaps a literal reading of the text as printed in the German edition would not have seemed entirely peculiar. Indeed (see example 6), measures 10-11 of the A minor Prelude could have been heard to prefigure the progression literally represented in the German score of the B minor Prelude. In both places, applied dominant harmony resolves deceptively to a chord that, rather than sounding the local tonic, raises the tonic pitch a half step to create a diminished triad. Here, then, a literal reading of the error might have served to reinforce one of the abiding images of Chopin as a composer who cultivated strangeness in various forms. In this light, we might recall the review of the Preludes by Schumann – working, no doubt, from this very same Breitkopf & Härtel first edition :

I would term the Preludes *merkwürdig* [a term connoting both « remarkable » and « strange »]. I confess I imagined them differently, and designed in the grandest style, like his Etudes. Almost the opposite : they are sketches, beginnings of Etudes, or, so to speak, ruins, individual eagle pinions, all disorder and wild confusion<sup>10</sup>.

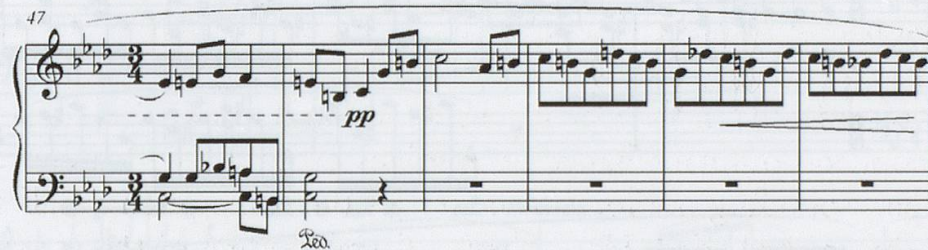
Of course, Schumann surely had the wherewithal to deduce the likelihood of missing accidentals in the B minor Prelude. But perhaps not all

10 *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 19 November 1839, p. 163 (my translation).



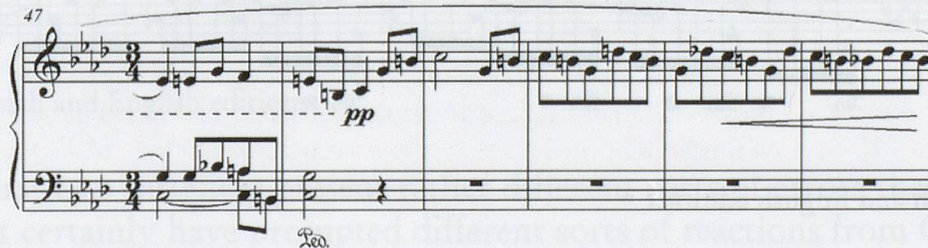
his readers did. If they instead framed their reading of the Preludes in terms of Chopin's ostensible penchant for bizarre effects, then we need to recognize that at least some measure of the public perception of Chopin's music as *merkwürdig* could have derived from mistakes in the printed texts of his music.

Chopin's casual warning to Fontana about lapses in his autograph manuscripts did not mention pitches, so it is perhaps not surprising that errors in the level of pitch (independent of any accidental) crop up less frequently than errors in accidentals. A trio of examples will serve to demonstrate the nature and range of the ambiguities that characterize this type of error (examples 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b, 9a, 9b). The German edition of the Mazurka in A flat major op. 41 n° 3 (example 7a), begins with a repeated eighth-note motive starting on an *a* flat that links the middle section with the reprise (the French and English editions print a *g* here : example 7b). At the opening of the Ballade in F minor, op. 52 (examples 8a, 8b), the German edition in the first half of measure 7 repeats the second half of measure 6 (see example 8a). And in what may be the most famous « wrong note » in the Chopin first editions, the German edition of the Ballade in G minor, op. 23 (example 9a), prints the last note in the left hand of the introduction as *d'* (and gives the tempo as « Lento », whereas the French and English editions give « Largo » ; example 9b).



Example 7 : Mazurka in A flat major op. 41 n° 3, bars 47-52

7a) German edition



7b) French and English editions



Andante con moto

*p*

*Lea* \* *Lea* \* *Lea* \* *Lea* \*

*dim.* *ritenuto*

*Lea* \* *Lea* \* *Lea* \* *Lea* \*

Example 8 : Ballade in F minor op. 52, bars 1-7

8a) German edition

Andante con moto

*p*

*Lea* \* *Lea* \* *Lea* \* *Lea* \*

*dim.* *ritenuto*

*Lea* \* *Lea* \* *Lea* \* *Lea* \*

8b) French and English editions



Example 9 : Ballade in G minor op. 23, bars 1-9

9a) German edition

9b) French and English editions

The first two instances present rather different sorts of errors that would almost certainly have prompted different sorts of reactions from German contemporaries of the composer. In the case of the Mazurka, it is difficult to imagine that very many users would have viewed the *a* flat as aberrant. Since the ensuing passage seems more to prepare F minor than A flat



major, the piquant *a* flat could have been justified as participating in this false preparation, or simply as a dissonant upper neighbor to the *g*s that follow. If someone reading from the German edition did « correct » the text, then they undoubtedly did so out of discomfort with the dissonance created by the *a* flat (a discomfort born, we might imagine, out of inexperience with Chopin's general style). The passage in the F minor Ballade stood a better chance of being recognized as an error, mostly as a result of the slight surprise produced by the repeated *c*s in the bass as one moves from measure 6 to measure 7 (nowhere else in the introduction do bass notes repeat between the end of one half-measure grouping and the beginning of the next one ; see examples 8a and 8b). If pianists did recognize the problem, the question then becomes what they would have done about it. It would have required a significant leap in imagination for anyone to intuit a solution that resembled Chopin's version of the first half of measure 7, which derives its undulating pattern from only the last four sixteenth notes of measure 6. Rather more likely it would have been a gloss in measure 6 that extrapolated from the end of measure 3, where the sixteenth note rest apparently substitutes for an expected *c*, and thus avoids the repetition of two successive *c*s (if in different octaves). And « solving » the problem in this fashion (or playing the passage exactly as it stands, for that matter) would for German audiences shift the sense of key at the end of the introduction slightly more toward C as tonic rather than as dominant (rather than hearing three resolutions from C to F harmony, we hear only two).

With respect to the passage in the G minor Ballade, the French and English editions print the note in question as *e'* flat (see example 9b). In which country would owners of the print be inclined to challenge the version in front of them ? Would any of them have done so ? However much we might gainsay the vapid version of the Breitkopf edition, we must realize that this is what a number of people used to formulate their sense of what for many of them was a new genre – the « ballade without words »<sup>11</sup>. Here too, then, the recognition of the historical dimensions of the category of « error » and the consequent nature of the work as experienced by German audiences brings with it an awareness of the consequences for the kinds of nuanced differences that would have characterized the reception of Chopin in different regions during his lifetime.

Chopin's own tendency toward innumeracy probably explains the presence of many of the errors in rhythm in the first editions. His auto-

11 The term « Ballade ohne Worte » comes from G.W. Fink's review of the German publication of Chopin's first ballade ; see *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 11 January 1837, col. 25.



graph manuscripts reveal that basic counting (as in the number of notes in an ornamental group) caused him more troubles than we might suppose. But contemporary purchasers of the editions of his music would not have known this, nor would such knowledge necessarily have helped them weigh their options in the face of the rhythmic riddles. A good example of this kind of problem occurs in four measures of all the first impressions of the Nocturne in B major op. 32 n° 1 (examples 10a, 10b, 10c).

Example 10 : Nocturne in B major op. 32 n° 1, bars 27-31

10a) All first impressions of the first edition

10b) Second impressions of the English and German first editions



10c) Another solution, derived from the French first edition Chopin annotated for Jane Stirling

The failure to print any number at all above the groups of sixteenth notes leaves it up to the performer to decide how the melodic notes should be distributed against the accompanimental figures (example 10a). (The editions apparently reflect a lapse on Chopin's part, though in the absence of an autograph manuscript we cannot know for sure). That this lack troubled at least some users of the edition during (or shortly after) Chopin's life emerges from the second impressions of the German and English editions (the English print probably derived from the German one – see example 10b), where an in-house editor altered the initial eighth rest – grace note figure (in two of the instances) to sixteenth rest – sixteenth note, changed to thirty-second notes the five notes Chopin beamed together as sixteenths, positioned them over the second eighth note of the accompaniment, and identified them as quintuplets (as far as we know, Chopin never intervened in the texts of his German and English editions after they were printed, so we know the change cannot have come from him). This intervention provides valuable evidence of the kind of logic that might be applied in the face of an obvious error (in this case, the logic required the rhythmic count to adhere to the required number of beats for the measure), and shows that users could be willing to alter the printed text substantially in search of a logical solution. Interestingly enough (example 10c), a much less radical answer to the problem was available to the editor, who could have identified as a nine-note grouping everything from the first beamed note through the dotted pattern, and shifted the beginning of this grouping to the second eighth note



of the accompaniment. This was (in effect) the solution Chopin penciled into the French edition he used in lessons with his pupil Jane Stirling. But since Chopin's preference is not our issue, what is most intriguing about the changes made by the Breitkopf & Härtel house editor is how they might relate to Chopin's well-known and, in his life, much-discussed application of *tempo rubato* when performing. Even if the house editor arrived at the decision to alter the rhythmic profiles of the measures independent of any knowledge of Chopin's customary actions as a performer, the decision nevertheless seems to depart from similar aesthetic presuppositions where rhythm was concerned. Here again we see how textual errors might interact with broader artistic issues associated with Chopin's music.

An awareness of performing conventions – not so much Chopin's own as those generally embraced at the time – must have figured into users efforts to sort out the next category of error as well. Owners of Chopin's first editions could encounter questionable time signatures and metronome indications, any of which could have placed interpretative hurdles before the performer. Thus (see example 11a) all editions of the F sharp major Prelude commence with a possibly problematic time signature : 3/2 in place of 6/4.



Example 11 : Prélude op. 28 n° 13, bars 1-3

11a) all editions



11b) Modern editions

Chopin's autograph manuscript preserves traces of how (if not why) he arrived at the odd meter : he initially thought to write out the piece with

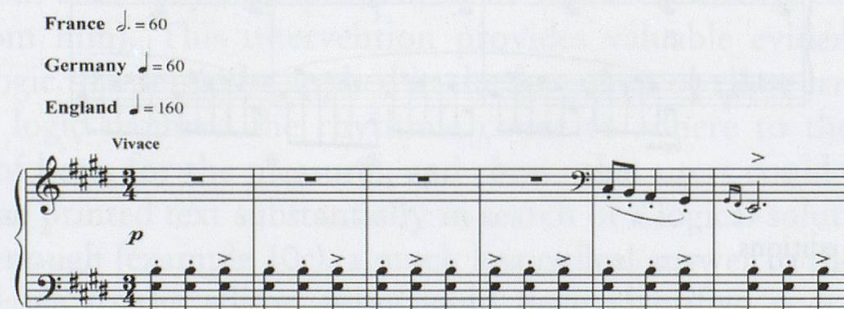


the rhythmical values halved, and in 6/8 meter. He replaced sixteenth-note beams with eighth-note beams in the left hand, dotted quarters with dotted halves in the right hand, but for some reason replaced 6/8 with 3/2 in the time signature. What Chopin probably was trying to convey through the time signature (but with numerator and denominator reversed!) was that each measure contained two beats, and that the dotted half note received the beat. But this was just as impossible to notate unambiguously as it was, with rhythmic values halved, to indicate that a dotted quarter would receive the beat. Why Chopin realized this when he first opted for 6/8, but failed to do so after his revision remains a puzzle. Equally a puzzle is that the editors of the various editions (and Chopin himself when later teaching the piece) allowed the 3/2 signature to stand – puzzling, that is, unless the incorrect signature conveyed to users at the time precisely what Chopin apparently hoped that it would.

Discrepancies in the notation of metronome markings occur often in the early works where these signs appear. All editions of the C sharp minor Mazurka, op. 6 n° 2 (example 12a), give a metronome marking of  $\text{♩} = 63$  (the editions lack any other indication of tempo). And the « Vivace » of the E major Mazurka, op. 6 n° 3 (example 12b), was accompanied by a metronome indication of  $\text{♩} = 60$  in the French edition,  $\text{♩} = 60$  in the German edition, and  $\text{♩} = 160$  in the English edition.



Example 12 : All editions of Mazurkas op. 6 n° 2 and 3  
12a) Mazurka in C sharp minor op. 6 n° 2, bars 1-5



12b) Mazurka in E major op. 6 n° 3, bars 1-6



The point about these metronome indications is that they are all at least plausible. Nobody outside of Poland had very clear ideas about the proper tempi for mazurkas: surely few players, in the absence of even a qualitative direction and confronting Chopin's first published set of mazurkas, would have challenged the reading of the C sharp minor Mazurka (presumably the composer intended something like  $\text{♩} = 63$ ). Surely, then, performances of many of Chopin's works would likely have taken place at tempos that would surprise us today.

Like such mistakes in performing directions, morphological errors also would likely have escaped detection from Chopin's first publics. Occasionally, formal misprints went calamitously wrong (as in the version of the French first edition of the Impromptu in G flat major, op. 51, published serially in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, where the third and fifth pages of the text were reversed, an error that, as Chopin politely wrote to the editor, « renders my music incomprehensible »<sup>12</sup>). But, more often, reading the same piece from the diverse simultaneous editions could credibly result in significantly different-sounding works. Some of these examples are very well known, as in the issue of the repeat of the exposition in the first movement of the B flat minor Sonata, op. 35, located by an in-house editor at Breitkopf & Härtel at the start of the « Doppio movimento » rather than the « Grave ». And we can easily muster other similar instances. Performances in England of the A flat major Mazurka, op. 50 n° 2, would have been twenty-four measures shorter than those on the Continent, since Wessel's edition lacked the repeat signs around both halves of the middle section (mm. 60-83), and performances from the Stern edition of the A minor Mazurka, op. 59 n° 1, lacked twelve measures present in those from French and English editions, since the German text omitted the repeat dots covering the opening of the piece (mm. 1-12). Now in the first instance – as Charles Rosen has vigorously argued – we might hope that owners of the German edition of the Sonata (and the countless later editions derived from it) would have noticed the multiple errors of sense and logic that result when the repeat returns to the « Doppio movimento »<sup>13</sup>. But, as we have seen throughout all of our examples, if

12 Letter of 22 July 1843 to Maurice Schlesinger; F. Chopin, *Korespondencja*, vol. ii, p. 359.

13 Rosen thrice makes his claim about the proper location for the commencement of the repeat of the exposition, first in « The First Movement of Chopin's Sonata in B-Flat Minor, Op. 35 », *19th-Century Music*, 14 (1990), pp. 60-66; second in *The Frontiers of Meaning*, pp. 22-32; and third in *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 279-284. Recently, Anatole Leikin has challenged Rosen's interpretation; see « Repeat with Caution: A Dilemma of the First Movement of Chopin's Sonata, op. 35 », *Musical Quarterly*, 85 (2001), pp. 568-582. Leikin stakes the major part of his case on a different reading of the musical logics of both the repeat of



some kind of logic could be invoked to account for a literal reading, it probably would be that users of these editions generally followed a path of least resistance – this is true even when we might view the logic as debased, such as taking the « Grave » to be a slow introduction, rather than part of the principal theme. In the cases of the repeats in the Mazurkas, performers would have been even less likely to question the text as written (though owners of the Stern edition of the A minor Mazurka might have had cause to wonder why a double bar appears between measures 12 and 13).

\*

the exposition itself and the possible historical contexts for Chopin's gesture. Whatever one makes of Leikin's claims (I remain more persuaded by Rosen's readings), the interesting point for our discussion here is that « musical logic » remains as highly malleable a concept now as it presumably was in Chopin's day. Performances of the Sonata today still display the same morphological variety that they did in the 1840s.

A smaller portion of Leikin's argument depends on text-critical reasoning, and here his conclusions are dubious. Leikin would have us believe that the Breitkopf & Härtel got the matter right by adding repeat dots to the double barline at the « Doppio movimento ». He claims that the French and English editions similarly « separated » through tempo and character markings the « slow introduction » (the « Grave ») from the « exposition proper » (the « Doppio movimento » – see pp. 574-575 of his article). But he fails to note the crucial point : that in the French and English editions, there is a single, not double, barline at the change of tempo. I find it impossible to believe that anyone in Chopin's day (or ours) would have understood the repeat of the exposition to return to an internal division marked with only a single barline. Surely performers in France and England, if they took the repeat of the exposition at all, returned to the very beginning of the movement.

If one intends to edit a « single best text » of this movement (as is Leikin's apparent charge as editor of the Sonatas volume for the new Peters edition), then the task is to determine whether Chopin's preferred reading lies in the single or double barline at the « Doppio movimento ». And here the French branch of the stemma must take precedence over the German : plainly Chopin was much more involved in the production of the French edition than the German. At least four separate states of the French edition appeared during the composer's life, with Chopin making substantial changes in each of them – but never altering the single barline at the « Doppio movimento ». As regards the double barline in the German manuscript, the absence of Chopin's autograph manuscript for the first movement prevents us from sorting out its provenance for certain. But my feeling is that the double barline in the German manuscript probably was the addition of the copyist (evidently Chopin's pupil Adolph Gutmann), following the notational convention whereby changes of tempo require graphical reinforcement from double barlines, but not thereby assuming that the repeat of the exposition should return to this double barline – hence the absence of the repeat dots. (Even if the double barlines in the copyist's manuscript reflect the state of Chopin's lost original manuscript, we might view the single barlines in the French and English editions as his effort to clarify his intentions : in other words, « change tempo at the « Doppio movimento », but begin the repeat of the exposition at the « Grave » »).



What conclusions follow from this initial foray into « errors » in printed editions of Chopin's music ? When we consider the errant readings from the standpoints of the likelihood of their being recognized as such and of the ease with which a reader might resolve them, then they fit into three categories : 1) errors that would have been easy to spot and easy to remedy ; 2) errors that some might have identified and some remedied ; and 3) errors that few, if any, would have identified and hence remedied. (Although I focused more on the latter two kinds of errors, I would not want yet to claim from my relatively small sample that they number proportionally more than the first category.) Clearly the last two groups of errors provoke the most reflection. What they together suggest is that the determination of details – sometimes significant details – within any given work fell to the owners or users of the printed editions. Thus if these users performed from the editions, they unknowingly produced sounding forms that contradicted Chopin's own conceptions or preferences. Yet in many instances, the errors survived unscathed precisely because of perceptions of the peculiarities and sheer difference of Chopin's musical style. Indeed, the errors often reinforced these perceptions. In some senses, then, the term « error » anachronistically preserves a composer-centered view of the « musical work ».

These conclusions in turn force us to rethink once again the idea of « the Chopin problem » – the question of how to deal with the raft of variants that emerges from the comparison of the manuscript and printed sources for any of his works<sup>14</sup>. For, quite clearly, « the Chopin problem » did not exist during his lifetime. Indeed it could not have : this « problem » presumes a model of philological thinking that the first consumers of Chopin's music could not have applied, since they were oblivious of the variants that lurked in editions sold in foreign countries. Instead, Chopin's contemporaries doubtless read his editions very much like they read those of other composers, though with allowances for the idiosyncrasies of his style. When they judged the accuracy of printed musical texts, they drew on commonly held notions of the grammar of music, on general ideas about Chopin's style (which may well have conflicted with standards of musical grammar), and on beliefs about the accuracy of his editions (the musical press contained few complaints about printed « errors » of the sort that are common in reviews of Schubert and John Field from the 1810s and 1820s). And they applied these standards internally to the edition at hand, on the basis of perceptions about con-

14 For a further challenge to the notion that « the Chopin problem » truly constitutes a « problem », see the last chapter of my book, *Chopin at the Boundaries : Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 215-228.



textual appropriateness. Though the example dates from well after Chopin's death, we can witness Liszt applying just these sorts of logical processes when, in connection with his duties as an editor of the forthcoming Breitkopf & Härtel complete edition of Chopin's works, he irritably « corrected » the text of the second state of the French edition of the Prelude in C sharp minor op. 45<sup>15</sup>. Above the title of the work, he wrote « Voyez l'autre édition de Vienne, parue avant celle-ci, de Paris, et certainement beaucoup plus correcte » [« See the other edition from Vienna, appeared before this one from Paris, and certainly much more correct »] and, on page 4, and in bar 43 correcting the right hand *c* naturals to *c* flats, he wrote « Pour une édition prétendant à être « la seule authentique » de telles fautes me paraissent inconvenables » [« For an edition claiming to be « the only authentic » such errors appear unseemly to me »].

Liszt remained unaware of the many variants that would have emerged from a comparison of sources ; instead he corrected « obvious » misprints in the edition at hand. And back in Chopin's lifetime, we can draw further evidence for this procedure from the composer himself, who probably read proofs for the French first editions in precisely this « contextual » way, and not against any manuscript exemplar. « Reading for errors » in other words, would appear to have come naturally to composers, copy editors, and consumers in the 1830s and 1840s. In this way, then, an exploration of the historical construction of error in Chopin's music begins to suggest how the consideration of material conditions can help us situate printed music in an expanded historical context.

15 See the reproduction of two pages from this edition in Ernst Burger, *Frédéric Chopin : Eine Lebenschronik in Bildern und Dokumenten* (Munich : Hirmer Verlag, 1990), p. 234.