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LATENT DEPTHS Meanings and Values in the Etude in F minor from Fryderyk Chopin's *Trois Nouvelles Études*

The intrinsic repetitiveness of the Etude in F minor evokes a profound exploration of existential duality, reflecting the worldview in which the composer lived. This duality emerges through frequent contrasts in the context of metonymy and estrangement—a hallmark of Chopin's epistolary expression. It is most vividly expressed through ironic, melancholic tones and pairs of opposing concepts, among which are: interiority versus exteriority, reality versus imagination or appearance, day versus night, homeland versus foreign land, body versus soul, heaven versus earth, life versus death, sacred versus profane, and defeat versus victory.

For in the language of wordless music,
true existence is brought to life.¹

Bohdan Pociąg

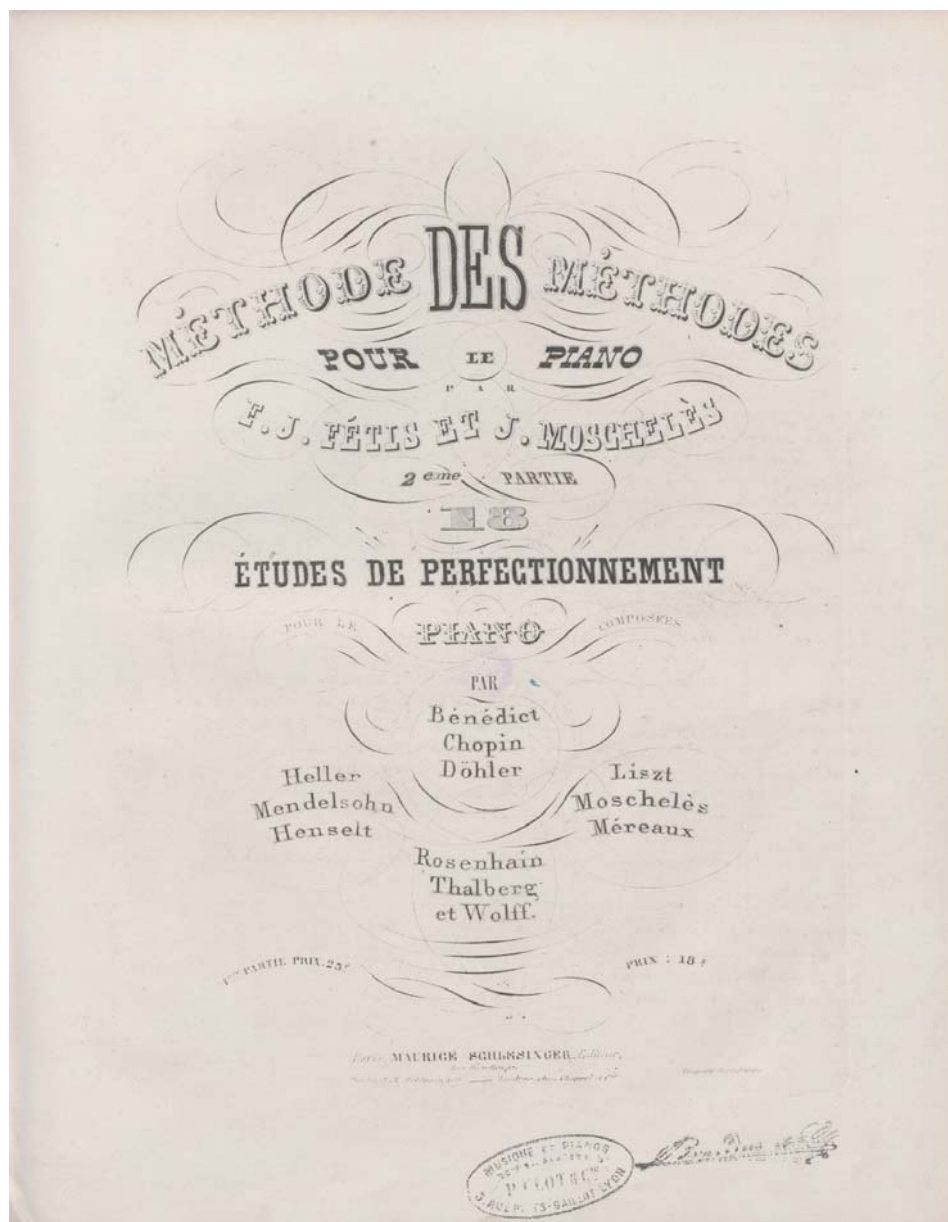
In 1839, Chopin took on the task of composing three Etudes for a didactic collection curated by François Joseph Fétis and Ignaz Moscheles, who were preparing a piano method, published by Maurice Schlesinger in Paris in January 1840² under the title *Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano*. These Etudes were included in the second section of the method—titled “Progressive Etudes”—as numbers 3, 4, and 5. They were later published separately, for the first time, at the end of 1840 by Schlesinger under the title *3 Études pour le Piano*.³

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¹ “Albowiem w mowie bezsłownej muzyki istnienie prawdziwe się istoczy.” Bohdan Pociąg, “Romantyzm bez muzyki?” (Romanticism without music?) in Pociąg, *Z perspektywy muzyki: Wybór szkiców* (From a musical Perspective: A selection of sketches) (Warszawa: Biblioteka “Więzi”, 2005), 193. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

² See *Annotated Catalogue of Chopin's First Editions*, eds. John Rink and Christophe Grabowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 559. See also *Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano*, edited by François Joseph Fétis and Ignaz Moscheles, <https://chopin.nifc.pl/pl/chopin/pierwodruk/523>.

³ See Zofia Chęchlińska, *Etude in F minor from Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano*, source commentary, Facsimile Edition (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2018), 14. A letter from Chopin's student, Friederike Müller, dated November 21, 1839, confirms that three of the Etudes had been published shortly before that date. Chopin sent her the printed edition so she could review it for errors prior to their lesson on November 18. During that lesson, Chopin personally played through



Example 1. *Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano. P. 2 / 18 Études de perfectionnement pour le piano composées par Bénédicte, Chopin, Döhler, Heller, Mendels[s]ohn, Henselt, Liszt, Moschelès, Méreaux, Rosenhain, Thalberg et Wolff* (Paris: n.d., [1840]), title page. Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa, Mus.III.78.692/1 Cim.



Example 2. *Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano. P. 2 / 18 Études de perfectionnement pour le piano composées par Bénédic, Chopin, Döhler, Heller, Mendels[s]ohn, Henselt, Liszt, Moscheles, Méreaux, Rosenhain, Thalberg et Wolff* (Paris: n.d., [1840]), p. 10. Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa, Mus. III.78.692/1 Cim.

Example 3. *Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano. P. 2 / 18 Études de perfectionnement pour le piano composées par Bénédic, Chopin, Döhler, Heller, Mendels[s]ohn, Henselt, Liszt, Moscheles, Méreaux, Rosenhain, Thalberg et Wolff* (Paris: n.d., [1840]), p. 11. Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa, Mus. III.78.692/1 Cim.

Two excerpts from the letters of Friederike Müller, who became Chopin's student on October 30, 1839, offer insight into a broader range of pianistic challenges that Chopin addressed while composing the three Etudes discussed here. These include not only the primary issue of hand independence, but also the nuanced shading of timbre with the pedal, the use of more natural fingering, and the prevention of rigidity and stiffness of the hands. At the same time, Chopin sought to distance himself from the prevailing trends in contemporary pedagogical piano literature, which often focused on embellishing themes with ornamental, virtuosic figures, and he wished to avoid the artificiality and superficiality of expression that characterized much of the music of his time. Friederike recalled the moment in January 1841 when she showed Chopin a copy of the *Méthode des Méthodes*...: "I showed him the Etudes from the *Méthode des Méthodes*...—he hadn't seen it [the method] yet. We went through it together and had a good laugh, because Moscheles, Mendelssohn, Thalberg, Benedict, Döhler, Mereaux, Rosenhain, and Heller all wrote etudes based on the theme 'Knöpfel wart ein Bißel' [little button, wait a little]. In contrast, Henselt and Wolff did better and came quite close to copying Chopin's style. 'These Etudes are just like our century, Monsieur,' I said, 'there's only you; the rest are nothing.' And indeed, his three Etudes are marvelous—new, original, and instructive."⁴

One hundred and eighty-five years have passed since their composition, yet Gastone Belotti's observation remains relevant: these "three jewels, seemingly light and naive, but utterly difficult to perform with due precision,"⁵ are still rarely seen on stage. The relegation of *Trois Nouvelles Études* to the periphery of Chopin's performing repertoire can likely be traced to their initial presentation in a collective edition under the names of the method's authors, as well as the low regard in which they were generally held in Chopin's reception. A notable example of such assessments comes from the first Italian biographer of Fryderyk Chopin, Ippolito Valetta, who claimed that their importance was limited, stating that "poetry does not rise above technical concerns."⁶ However,

the Etudes, meticulously checking for errors: "There were quite a few, and he corrected them." Uta Goebel-Streicher, *Friederike Müller: Listy z Paryża 1839-1845; Nauczanie i otoczenie Fryderyka Chopina w świetle korespondencji jego ulubionej uczennicy* (Friederike Müller: Letters from Paris 1839–1845; Fryderyk Chopin's teaching and surroundings in the light of his favorite student's correspondence), trans. Barbara Świderska (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2022), 454. See also *Annotated Catalogue of Chopin's First Editions*, 561.

⁴ Friederike Müller to Caroline Müller, Paris, Sunday–Monday, January 17–18, 1841, in: Goebel-Streicher, *Friederike Müller: Listy z Paryża 1839-1845*, 511.

⁵ Gastone Belotti, *Chopin* (Torino: EDT, 1984), 325. See also Silvia Bruni, *Recepcja Fryderyka Chopina we Włoszech* (The reception of Fryderyk Chopin in Italy), (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2023), 185.

⁶ Ippolito Valetta, *Fryderyk Chopin* (Genova: Edizioni Dioscuri, 1990), 355.

the views of early scholars who wrote monographs on the life and works of the Polish composer warrant particular attention. Although Niecks considers them inferior to Chopin's earlier Etudes, he acknowledges that "they are quite engaging and undoubtedly very characteristic."⁷ Hoesick, however, writes: "These Etudes are by no means inferior to the previous ones, but rather completely different—more subtle and refined, more sophisticated, and in terms of their conciseness and artistry, akin to preludes.... These are Etudes that demand not so much a perfected mechanical technique, although it is indispensable, as they require care and delicacy in shading and modulations. Technically intriguing and unparalleled in their texture, which they fully express, they are musically beautiful: rich with true Chopinian poetry and charm. Thus, Leichtentritt is correct in asserting that they contain *durchaus vorzügliche Musik*."⁸ Mieczysław Tomaszewski observes: "[These] subtle and refined miniatures ... were written by a master at the height of his powers, in the immediate vicinity of the Sonata in B-flat minor. They show how a task of a functional nature can be realized while still respecting the demands of an artistic work."⁹

However, despite their warm reception, evident from the earliest recorded responses, *Trois Nouvelles Études* were destined to remain in the shadow of the two major collections of etudes, op. 10 and op. 25. In this context, the remarks of Friederike Müller are worth noting: "The three Etudes are wonderful, and I would be very happy if I could play them,"¹⁰ and "I played the first of the beautiful Etudes that Chopin wrote for this *Method*."¹¹

The first etude, in F minor, is generally regarded as the most beautiful, captivating listeners with its metaphorical atmosphere, derived from the internal organization of tension.¹² Its primary didactic objectives are to enhance the independence of the hands familiarizing the students with 3-on-4 polyrhythms.

⁷ Friedrich Niecks, *Fryderyk Chopin jako człowiek i muzyk* (Frederick Chopin, as a man and musician) (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2011), 457.

⁸ Ferdynand Hoesick, *Chopin: Życie i twórczość* (Chopin: His life and work), vol. 4 (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1966), 143.

⁹ Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Chopin: The Man, His Work and Its Resonance*, trans. John Comber (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2016), 442–43.

¹⁰ Friederike Müller to Sophie and Caroline Müller, Paris, Sunday, May 10, 1840, in Goebel-Streicher, *Friederike Müller: listy z Paryża 1839–1845*, 241. Mrs. Müller's dream came true a few months later when she received the etudes for practice at the beginning of January 1841. She likely played the Etude in F Minor for Chopin for the first time on January 13, and all three etudes on January 20, 1841: "I played him his new Etudes. He thought they were well played." Friederike Müller to Caroline Müller, Paris, Sunday, January 24, 1841, in Goebel-Streicher, *Friederike Müller: Listy z Paryża 1839–1845*, 518.

¹¹ Friederike Müller to Caroline Müller, Paris, Sunday–Monday, January 17–18, 1841, in: Goebel-Streicher, *Friederike Müller: Listy z Paryża 1839–1845*, 512.

¹² See Claudia Colombati, "La perspective esthétique-philosophique comme méthode d'analyse de l'oeuvre de Fryderyk Chopin," in *Analytical Perspectives on the Music of Chopin*, ed. Artur Szklener (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2003), 105–6.

The only mention of this piece in the available correspondence of Chopin is a declaration signed by the composer in Paris on November 19, 1839, regarding the cession of the Etude to Maurice Schlesinger for his exclusive ownership in all countries: "I, the undersigned, hereby declare that I have sold to Mr. Maurice Schlesinger, for his exclusive ownership in all countries, the Etude of my composition, intended for the *Method of the Pianists* Messrs. Moscheles and Fétis, and that I have received from him the sum of two hundred francs."¹³

The Etude in F minor was shown to Friederike Müller shortly after this date, at a time when she was beginning to grapple with the challenges of developing hand independence in performance. She recalls: "Then I had to play his two Preludes, of which the twenty-fourth is still—God, how difficult it is—but not because of the runs in the bass; I had already mastered those. Rather, it's because both hands must play completely independently, yet still harmonize with each other. He played them for me and encouraged me to practice each hand separately. 'Only in this way,' he said, 'can this method of playing be achieved. Now I have written such an etude for Schlesinger.' Then he played a marvelous exercise: six notes in the left hand and four in the right, with the left hand in distinct triplets while the right plays four calm, beautiful notes, singing the most wonderful melody, never delaying or anticipating by even a moment. 'It's a small thing,' he said, 'if you know how to do it, but very difficult to learn. But we'll see.'"¹⁴

In the history of the reception of this Etude, Zdzisław Jachimecki's remark stands out, as he regarded it as "a sort of prelude to Chopin's inspiration for the Fourth Ballade in F minor, op. 52."¹⁵ According to James Huneker, it is a masterful and truly enchanting work, far deeper than the Etude in F minor, op. 10: "Although the doors never swing quite open, we divine the tragic issues concealed."¹⁶ The Etude clearly embodies a high "degree of existential intensity"¹⁷ that, according to Bohdan Pociąg, allows a work to endure and ul-

¹³ "Je soussigné reconnais avoir vendu à Monsieur Maurice Schlesinger, en toute propriété pour tous les pays, une *Étude* de ma composition destinée à la *Méthode des Méthodes des Pianistes* pour MM. Moscheles et Fétis et avoir reçu de lui la Somme de Deux cent francs." *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina* (Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin), vol. 1, ed. Bronisław Sydow (Warszawa: Polski Instytut Wydawniczy, 1955), 368.

¹⁴ Friederike Müller to Sophie Müller, Paris, Wednesday, November 27, 1839, in Goebel-Streicher, *Friederike Müller: Listy z Paryża 1839–1845*, 85. This is the first mention of the work in question in Friederike Müller's correspondence.

¹⁵ Zdzisław Jachimecki, *Fryderyk Chopin: Rys życia i twórczości* (Fryderyk Chopin: An outline of his life and work) (Kraków: Nakładem i czczeniem Drukarni Narodowej, 1927), 83.

¹⁶ James Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 115. See Hoessick, *Chopin. Życie i twórczość*, 144.

¹⁷ "Stopień egzystencjalnej intensywności." Bohdan Pociąg, *Idea, dźwięk, forma: Szkice o muzyce* (Idea, sound, form: Sketches on music) (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1972), 22.

timately determines its place in the history of the world. This Etude was featured, alongside other works by Chopin, in the 1991 film *Impromptu*,¹⁸ directed by James Lapine, with Hugh Grant and Judy Davis portraying Chopin and George Sand. Additionally, the Etude in F minor was given special recognition as one of the first Chopin works published by the Fryderyk Chopin National Institute in a facsimile edition, accompanied by a source commentary by Zofia Chechlińska.¹⁹

FORMA SPIRITI

The Etude in F minor is a 67-bar piece with an exceptionally thin texture, at times subtly polyphonic²⁰, and set in an andantino tempo. It is structured like a rondo, with couplets built around two themes: the first, a melancholic and restless motif resembling a mirror image of the refrain; the second, characterized by a two-note falling second, imbued with a nostalgic undertone.

Each hand plays a distinct melodic line: the right hand delivers a richly chromatic, undulating melody filled with close intervals, evoking the introspective, wandering quality of Chopin's late works, such as the melody of the Nocturne in E-flat Major, op. 55, no. 2. Meanwhile, the left hand weaves a harmonic line of spread chords covering a 12th.

The refrain, introduced at the beginning of the piece as a chromatic line in the dominant area, appears without accompaniment. It comprises two motifs: the first, short and repeated twice, fulfills the function of an antecedent, while the second, longer motif functions as a consequent. This enigmatic, mysterious melodic material hints at the opening of a strict formal structure. A somewhat distant parallel can be found in the Barcarolle, in the transition between its first and second themes.

The Etude showcases an extraordinary range of expression and serves as a prime example of Chopin's unparalleled ability to craft melodies with remarkable continuity (as seen in the Prelude in E-flat Minor, op. 28, no. 14, and the Etude in F Minor, op. 25, no. 2). This narrative continuity is established

This edition is a reproduction of an unpublished autograph from the collection of the Fryderyk Chopin Museum in Warsaw, signature MC/188.

¹⁸ *Impromptu*. Directed by James Lapine. United Kingdom and United States, 1991.

¹⁹ Frédéric Chopin, *Étude in F minor from Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano* (Warszawa: Fryderyk Chopin National Institute, 2018). This edition is a reproduction of an unpublished autograph from the collection of the Fryderyk Chopin Museum in Warsaw, signature MC/188.

²⁰ Chopin does not accentuate individual notes; instead, the material for both hands can be interpreted as polyphonic: sometimes two voices are discernible. Examples of this can be found in measures 14–17 and 30–32 (the higher note of each extended chord), 34–37 (the penultimate note of the measure and the first note of next), and 57–60 (once again, the higher note of each arpeggio in the accompaniment).

through the direct derivation of the refrain from the main theme and the intense modulation work that drives the piece toward its climax. The dynamic markings consist almost entirely of crescendo and diminuendo signs, with a crescendo spanning even 18 bars—a remarkable feature on a miniature scale—stabilizing briefly at a forte dynamic in the middle. Phrasing is closely intertwined with the dynamic structure, distinguished by its continuous, arching flow, which individually encompasses the introduction (refrain), the first episode and the second episode; the third episode and coda. The fact that the unpublished autograph MC/188 includes phrasing as the sole notation may highlight the exceptional importance of this expressive device in the context of this Etude.

A key aspect of the narrative in this piece is the subtle agogic flexibility that emerges organically from its expressive depth and profound content. Notably, Chopin's own guidance in a sketch of his method emphasizes this nuance: "the wrist: breathing in the voice."²¹ Belotti's advice further illuminates this approach: "If the performance is continually enriched with appropriate nuances—some even tinged with sadness or nostalgia, provided the accompaniment remains light, serving as a subtle background realized with great naturalness and flexibility—then we can uncover the priceless treasure of expression hidden within."²²

To fully appreciate the aesthetic significance of the Etude in F Minor, it is essential to consider it within the broader context of Chopin's life and work. The year 1839 is pivotal, marked by transformative experiences: his stay in Majorca, Marseille, and Genoa (May 5–16²³), his first summer at Nohant, and the beginning of his teaching relationship with Friederike Müller (the first lesson took place on October 30, 1839).

This period followed the completion and publication of the Preludes op. 28 and saw the creation of significant works, including Ballade in F Major, op. 38, the Polonaises op. 40, and the Scherzo in C-sharp Minor op. 39. During the summer at Nohant, Chopin developed the Sonata in B-flat minor around the Funeral March. Other compositions from this time include the Nocturne in G Major, op. 37, no. 2, the four Mazurkas op. 41, and the Impromptu in F-sharp Major op. 36.

The evolution of Chopin's creative imagination into what Marcellini Antoni Szulc described as "the milky way in the sky"²⁴—an era marked exclusively

²¹ "Le poignet [...] la respiration dans la voix." Frédéric Chopin, *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano*, ed. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 76.

²² Belotti, *Chopin*, 325.

²³ See Zbigniew Skowron, "Pobyty Fryderyka Chopina i George Sand w Genui w maju 1839 roku w świetle nowo odkrytych źródeł" (Fryderyk Chopin and George Sand's stay in Genoa in May 1839 in the light of newly discovered documents), *Rocznik Chopinowski* 28 (2020): 42.

²⁴ "Jak mleczna droga na niebie." Marcellini Antoni Szulc, "Fryderyk Chopin i utwory jego muzyczne" (Poznań: Nakładem Księgarni Jana Konstantego Żupańskiego, 1873), 185, in: Hoessick, *Chopin: Życie i twórczość*, 171.

by masterpieces—or Mieczysław Tomaszewski defined as of “Romantic dynamic synthesis”²⁵—of his creative apex (1835–1841)—was both captured and celebrated by Astolphe de Custine. In November 1839, the day after Chopin performed at de Custine’s estate in Saint-Gratien, in the commune of Montmorency, he addressed the following words to the composer: “Dear Chopin, although you are accustomed to my praises, which are the voice of truth, I cannot rise after a sleepless night without expressing the intoxicating memory left by yesterday evening. I found you whole and even more perfect, greater; time, aided by the influence of genius, has brought you to the fullness of your possibilities. This maturity in youth is sublime; this is art in its highest perfection. ... A thousand greetings. See you on Thursday.”²⁶

The works from this period reveal an “apriority of pure expression and imagination,”²⁷ characterized, as Tomaszewski describes it, by the “supremacy of *novum* over *datum*.”²⁸ They achieve heightened intensity through features such as “irregularity of construction, nebulousness, ambiguity, the merging of elements previously clearly separated.”²⁹ As Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger notes, “the interplay between Eros and Thanatos during this phase of Chopin’s life is particularly striking and worthy of attention.”³⁰

²⁵ Mieczysław Tomaszewski, “Chopin’s Stylistic Idiom: Between Datum and Novum; From External Inspirations to a Personal Style,” in *The Sources of Chopin’s Style: Inspirations and Contexts*, ed. Artur Szklener (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2005), 237.

²⁶ “Cher Chopin, quoique vous soyez habitué à mes éloges, qui sont le cri de la vérité, je ne puis me lever après une nuit d’insomnie sans vous dire le souvenir passionné que me laissera la soirée d’hier. Je vous ai retrouvé tout entier, et encore perfectionné, agrandi le temps, aidé de l’influence du génie, a fait de vous tout ce que vous pouvez être; cette maturité dans la jeunesse est sublime: c’est l’art dans sa perfection;.... Mille amitiés! À jeudi.” Astolphe de Custine to Fryderyk Chopin, Paris, November 1839, in *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina*, vol. 2, 368.

²⁷ Tomaszewski, *Chopin’s Stylistic Idiom Between Datum and Novum: From External Inspirations to a Personal Style*, 234.

²⁸ Ibidem, 233. This phenomenon was already recognized in the early reception of Chopin’s work. For instance, Nikolai Christianovich observed in 1857: “In the works of imitators, form is everything; in Chopin’s works, form is the expression of an inner state. Within this inner essence of his music lies that ‘something’ known only to him. It was born with him and died with him.” Nikolaï Chriстіanowicz, “Chopin: Listy z prowincji” (Chopin: Letters from the provinces), *Russkij Westnik*, nos. 11, 12, 19 (1857), in *Chopin w krytyce muzycznej (do I wojny światowej): Antologia* (Chopin and his Critics (up to World War I): An Anthology), ed. Irena Poniatowska (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2011), 161–62.

²⁹ Zofia Chęcińska, “Chopin’s Works of the Forties and the Phenomenon of Late Work,” in *Chopin’s Musical Worlds: The 1840’s* (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2007), 357.

³⁰ Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Fryderyk Chopin*, trans. Joanna Żurowska (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2011), 92.

TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

The Etude in F minor embodies the essential qualities of every masterpiece: profound beauty, which, as Jan Kleczyński observes, not only speaks to us directly but also conceals “a deeper symbolism, drawn from life’s analogies”³¹; aesthetic qualities—the work oscillates between nostalgia, anxiety, a tragic premonition of loss, and a sense of threat, a feverish search for joy, constancy, and the luminous vitality of life; metaphysical qualities, thanks to which we feel—as Stróżewski stated—that the masterpiece allows us to experience not only the work itself but also the world it evokes. The “multicolored stream of experiences”³² it offers resonates deeply within us, flawlessly aligning with the possible sequences of our own most profound emotions, “connecting us to the very essence of reality and its ultimate meaning.”³³ This circumstance is undoubtedly tied to Chopin’s approach to the miniature, which he regarded as the most fitting scale to convey his unique understanding of the world while striving to embody absolute values.³⁴

The intrinsic repetitiveness of the Etude in F minor evokes a profound exploration of existential duality, reflecting the worldview in which the composer lived. This duality emerges through frequent contrasts in the context of metonymy and estrangement—a hallmark of Chopin’s epistolary expression.³⁵ It is most vividly expressed through ironic, melancholic tones and pairs of opposing concepts, among which are: interiority versus exteriority, reality versus imagination or appearance, day versus night, homeland versus foreign land, body versus soul, heaven versus earth, life versus death, sacred versus profane, and defeat versus victory.

This existential duality was beautifully captured by Józef Sikorski in 1865: “Chopin’s thoughts are grounded in two contrasting backgrounds. One is bright and joyous, like springtime nature, imbued with love, tenderness,

³¹ “Głębsza symbolika, z życiowych analogii zaczerpnięta.” H o e s i e k, *Chopin: Życie i twórczość*, 207.

³² Władysław S t r ó ż e w s k i, *Wokół piękna: Szkice z estetyki* (Around beauty: Sketches on aesthetics] (Kraków: Universitas, 2002), 296.

³³ Tamże, 300.

³⁴ See Irena P o n i a t o w s k a, “Chopin’s Nocturne Opuses”, in: *Siudmak: Chopin*, ed. Sylwia Zabieglńska, trans. John Comber (Poznań: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina and Rebis, 2021), 173.

³⁵ See Karol S a m s e l, “Wyobraźnia metonimiczna Chopina: Próba charakterystyki na przykładzie korespondencji” (Chopin’s metonymic imagination: A characterization through his correspondence), in *Chopin (nie)wysłowny: Wokół listów Chopina... Korespondencja kompozytora jako dzieło i zadanie badawcze* (Chopin (not)rendered in words: On Chopin’s letters... The composer’s correspondence as an oeuvre and an object of study), ed. Ewa Hoffmann-Piotrowska, Urszula Kowalczyk, and Kamila Stępień-Kutera (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2024), 57–66.

hope, ... sometimes the impatience of expectation.... The other is dark and stormy, like a summer day on the brink of a tempest, where one dreads the storm's ominous descent.... Neither background dominates entirely; they intermingle throughout his works, producing a shimmering interplay of emotions. Yet, occasionally, one overtakes the other, giving rise to two distinct worlds."³⁶ According to Boris Asafiev, the most significant antinomy in Chopin's work lies in the tension between two opposing forces: the emotional element, which strives with great effort for liberation, and the composer's will, which imposes classical order on the raw impulses of consciousness, shaping and disciplining the musical material.³⁷

The Etude in F minor also embodies a significant dichotomy—closed versus open—within its very form. It combines the characteristics of a romantic miniature, which, as Pocij suggests, represents a “condensed time, an intensive unfolding of events within the narrow confines of clock time,”³⁸ where moments of profound significance seem to occur, with those of an etude. The etude, by necessitating repeated performance and practice, conveys the notion of “art as infinite,”³⁹ offering its metaphorical musical content to endless reinterpretation and exploration.

In the time-space continuum of the Etude in F minor, the dichotomy of eternity and transience emerges powerfully. The musical content appears to strive for liberation from the constraints of form and physicality, yet remains bound by them, evoking an inescapable confrontation with the essence of human existence—what Martin Heidegger describes as “Being-towards-death.”⁴⁰ Pocij further reflects on this inevitability, noting that “the romantic journey in music—regardless of how carefree it begins or the emotional states it tra-

³⁶ “Tło myśli Chopina jest dwojakie. Jedno jasne, śmiejące się jak natura na wiosnę, wszędzie prawie lubość, pieszczota, nadzieja ... czasem niecierpliwość oczekiwania.... Drugie tło chmurne, jak dzień skwarne lata burzą zagrożony;... lęka się strasznego jej zstąpienia... Ani jedno, ani drugie tło nie odziewa wyłącznie myśli Chopina. Są one wszędzie niemal u niego pomieszane ze sobą i dwojaką tworzą barwę, mieniając się na przemian. Ale często bardziej jedno lub drugie przeważa i to stanowi dwa odrębne światy.” Józef Sikorski, “Przegląd muzyczny” (Music review), *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 325 (1865), 254, in *Chopin w krytyce muzycznej (do I wojny światowej)*, 69–70.

³⁷ See Boris Asafiev, “Szopen (1810-1849),” in *Chopin w krytyce muzycznej (do I wojny światowej)*, 214.

³⁸ “Czasu zagęszczonego, intensywnego dziania się w szczupłych ramach czasu zegarowego.” Pocij, *Idea, dźwięk, forma*, 203–4.

³⁹ “L’art ... comme infini.” An expression that appears in Chopin’s first statement contained in the autograph of his sketches for a piano method (f. 7a r): “L’art étant infini dans ses moyens limités, il faut que son enseignement soit limité par ces mêmes moyens pour être exercé comme infini.” Chopin, *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano*, 40.

⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), 277. See Pocij, *Idea, dźwięk, forma*, 97.

verses—always carries a sense of finality; it is ultimately a journey toward the end.”⁴¹

In light of the Etude’s expressive tone, one cannot help but recall Chopin’s sober and pragmatic approach to life, lending the work an added depth of existential resonance. In analyzing the expressive depth of Chopin’s works, Konstantin Igumnov stated with emphasis: “Chopin possessed a rare ability to harmoniously blend personal experiences with universal human emotions. In this sense, despite his pronounced individualism, he ranks among the most remarkable composers in the universal human dimension that history has ever known.... His artistic imagery resonates more with emotions than with abstract thoughts—emotions that belong to a real, living person.... There is nothing unearthly or fantastical in his works, despite his extraordinarily vivid and rich imagination. Among the romantic composers, Chopin, in my view, stands out as the most realistic.”⁴² James Huneker echoed this sentiment, remarking that “Chopin, like Flaubert, was the last of the idealists and the first of the realists.”⁴³

The incessant, undulating melodic motion of the right hand seems disrupted by the inexorable presence of the principle of transience—an indifferent force observed from a distance, perhaps by the God evoked in Chopin’s Stuttgart diary or the “famous lutenist, some Straduari sui generis ... who is no longer here to repair us.”⁴⁴ This principle asserts itself subtly yet powerfully, evident in moments such as the instruction to use the thumb on the black keys for the three descending notes (D_♭, –B_♭, –A_♭) repeated twice just before the climax, within the span of three bars (bars 40–41 and 42–43), and in the concise, resolute final chords. A comparison of the editing autograph with the MC/188 autograph⁴⁵ reveals that, in completing the piece, Chopin intended to abruptly interrupt the accompaniment before the fourth quarter note of bar 62, leaving the melody unsupported—just as it was at the beginning—and to conclude with a closing chord repeated three times. Do these moments not echo the profound loneliness of human existence in the face of absolute fate, in the face of noth-

⁴¹ “Romantyczna wędrówka w muzyce—jakby się beztrósco zaczynała i przez jakie by stany uczuciowe nie przechodziła—ma zawsze w perspektywie sprawy ostateczne, jest wędrówką finalną.” Ibidem.

⁴² Konstantin Igumnov, “O Chopinie z okazji 125. rocznicy urodzin” (About Chopin on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of his birth), *Sowietskoje iskusstwo* 52 (1935), in *Chopin w krytyce muzycznej (1918-1939): Antologia* (Chopin and his critics (1918–1939): An Anthology), ed. Irena Poniatowska (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 2015), 129.

⁴³ Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and his Music*, 71.

⁴⁴ “Sławny lutnista, jakiś Straduari sui generis ... którego już nie ma, żeby nas zreperował.” Fryderyk Chopin to Julian Fontana from Calder House, August 18, 1848, in *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina*, vol. 2, 259.

⁴⁵ See *Etude in F minor from Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano*, 11.

ingness? Stróżewski observed that “art that touches the mystery of nothingness is, by necessity, metaphysical art.”⁴⁶ Its foundation, he argued, is truth: “It is what truth evokes. It is the beauty of truth.”⁴⁷

A MYSTERIOUS AESTHETIC

The Etude in F minor confronts us not only with the truth of human existence but also with a further profound truth about Chopin’s work, as Irena Poniatowska aptly observed: “In every work, he [Chopin] experiences an unsatisfied desire to enter the domain of what remains unknown, undiscovered, barely hatching in his fantasy. And he is guided towards it by his divine intuition, supported by knowledge and compositional craftsmanship. Even if he refers to a familiar sound pattern, he builds upon it his own palimpsestic version, creating those *espaces imaginaires*.”⁴⁸

It is intriguing that, upon viewing Eugène Delacroix’s portrait of Chopin, Zbigniew Herbert perceived the composer as being engaged in the act of “hearing what is beyond himself, what must be brought to earth with concentrated effort.”⁴⁹

Undoubtedly, the Etude in F minor was an important work for Chopin, which he wanted to distinguish in the context of common compositions for didactic purposes, providing it with a special aesthetic value, while at the same time presenting his own poetics of creativity. A significant role in this poetics is played by the Romantic concept of time as a tension between timeless duration and infinite movement, as well as the “Bach cult,” a rational factor that sometimes transforms into an enigmatic climate.⁵⁰ We are dealing with “a mysterious, intense, and difficult-to-penetrate aesthetic”⁵¹ of an artist who

⁴⁶ “Sztuka sięgająca tajemnicy nicości jest z konieczności sztuką metafizyczną.” Stróżewski, *Wokół piękna*, 128.

⁴⁷ “Jest tym, co wywołuje prawdę. Jest pięknem prawdy,” Ibidem, 133.

⁴⁸ “W każdym dziele poświadcza [Chopin] niezaspokojone pragnienie wchodzenia w obszar tego, co jeszcze nieznanie, nieodkryte, zaledwie wykluwające się w fantazji. A kieruje go doń niebiańska intuicja, podbudowana wiedzą, rzemiosłem. Jeśli nawet nawiązuje do znanego kształtu dźwiękowego, to buduje na nim swoją palimpsestową wersję, kreuje swoje *espaces imaginaires*.” Poniatowska, “Chopin’s nocturne opuses,” 109. See ibidem, 161.

⁴⁹ “Usłyszenia tego, co jest poza nim, co trzeba w skupionym trudzie ściągnąć na ziemię.” Zbigniew Herbert, “Fryderyk Chopin,” in Herbert, *Węzeł gordyjski oraz inne pisma rozproszone 1984-1998* (The gordian knot and other scattered writings 1984-1998) (Warszawa: Więź, 2001), 184.

⁵⁰ See Pociąg, *Idea, dźwięk, forma*, 188.

⁵¹ “Une esthétique cryptique, intense, difficile à pénétrer.” Colombati, *La perspective esthétique-philosophique comme méthode d’analyse de l’oeuvre de Fryderyk Chopin*, 100–1.

is “the most arcane of musical geniuses,”⁵² a figurative realm that opens up boundless avenues for exploration and study.

The metaphysical dimension of the Etude in F minor appears to transcend especially the captivating refrain, with its persistent, obsessive question—the descending minor second—posed in subtly varied forms each time. Especially its purest form in the opening bars, with a quasi-Bachian improvisational quality, sounds almost like a key, allowing us to intuit the presence of a meta-language within the piece.



Here, the six notes that form the antecedent motif—read according to the German musical nomenclature, without alterations (B–C–D–E–F)—arranged from the highest to the lowest note, spell out the acronym F[r]ed. Ch. One might say, as Herbert did: “It seems to me that I am touching the mystery of man and his music.”⁵³

Nevertheless, despite all the insights that stem from the desire to uncover deeply hidden meanings—carried by a record that, by its very nature, remains incomplete—the Etude in F minor stands as a dramatic, universal metaphor for life, intimately connected with the composer as an expression of his spiritual space. As Krzysztof Lipka noted, “spiritual space is a metaphysical domain that only partially belongs to man, inscrutable, universally human and general, undoubtedly shared with cosmic forces and phenomena.”⁵⁴ This is why this work deserves greater attention, both in terms of performance and interpretation. In this context, it is hoped that the profound insights explored in this

⁵² “Najmistrzniejszym z geniuszów muzycznych.” The expression was used by the Polish literary, music, and theater critic, as well as a novelist and composer, Antoni Sygietyński. See Piotr Policht, *Wacław Szymanowski, Pomnik Fryderyka Chopina* (Wacław Szymanowski, Fryderyk Chopin Monument), Culture.pl, <https://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/waclaw-szymanowski-pomnik-fryderyka-chopina>.

⁵³ “Wydaje mi się, że dotykam tajemnicy człowieka i jego muzyki.” Herbert, “Mała antologia tekstów o Chopinie,” 16.

⁵⁴ “Przestrzeń duchowa jest domeną metafizyczną częściowo tylko należąca do człowieka, nieodgadnioną, ogólnoludzką i ogólną, niewątpliwie wspólną z siłami i zjawiskami kosmicznymi.” Krzysztof Lipka, *Pejzaż nadziei: Historyczny rozwój muzyki jako proces o charakterze teleologicznym* (Landscape of hope: The historical development of music as a teleological proces) (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Muzycznego Fryderyka Chopina, 2010), 150–51.

article will provide meaningful support for understanding and interpreting this piece—a work with a much more dramatic tone and a more intense sound than is generally heard in recordings.

It is worth remembering, in conclusion, what Bożena Maciejowska emphasized: “The spiritual space of Chopin’s work exists as a realm open to thought and creative interpretation guided by intuition, which pushes the boundaries of understanding the infinite impact of this music.”⁵⁵ Chopin himself, in line with his aesthetics of suggestion, is said to have told Wilhelm von Lenz: “I point out to (*J’indique*) the way, the listener must complete (*parachever*) the picture.”⁵⁶

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⁵⁵ “Duchowa przestrzeń twórczości Chopina istnieje jako sfera otwarta dla myśli i podążającej drogą intuicji interpretacji twórczej, która przesuwając granice poznania nieskończonego oddziaływania tej muzyki.” Bożena Maciejowska, *Final Sonata b-moll op. 35 Fryderyka Chopina: Analiza i interpretacja* (Finale of Fryderyk Chopin’s Sonata in B flat minor, op. 35: Analysis and interpretation) (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Muzyczny Fryderyka Chopina, 2011), 155.

⁵⁶ Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin w oczach swoich uczniów* (Chopin: Pianist and teacher, as seen by his students), trans. Zbigniew Skowron (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2000), 339. Italics in parentheses have been added by the translator.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Silvia BRUNI, Latent Depths: Meanings and Values in the Etude in F minor from Fryderyk Chopin’s *Trois Nouvelles Études*

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Although often relegated to the periphery of Chopin’s legacy, the Etude in F minor—the first of the *Trois Nouvelles Études* written for the didactic collection *Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano* by François Joseph Fétis and Ignacy Moscheles—stands out for its emotionally charged, continuous and restless, meticulously structured narrative. The analysis of this work—spanning its di-

dactic intent, its structural and expressive interdependencies within the linear, polyrhythmic texture, essential performance considerations, and its reception and interpretation in the context of Chopin's poetics—reveals a clear instance of expressive values taking precedence over its didactic function. The Etude in F minor emerges as one of the most original and intimate expressions in Chopin's compositional output. It offers a poignant, existential portrait of the composer, providing an invaluable insight into his aesthetic identity and prompting reflection on the metaphysical dimensions of music.

The study draws from a range of sources, including the correspondence, recently published in the Polish translation, of Chopin's student, Friederike Müller, documents on the reception of Chopin's works, scholarly literature on Chopin's creative poetics, aesthetic, and philosophical reflection on the ontology of musical work.

Keywords: Fryderyk Chopin, Etude in F minor, *Trois Nouvelles Études*, *Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano*, reception, interpretation, aesthetics, metaphysics

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Silvia BRUNI – Wartość nieoczekiwana. O Etiudzie f-moll z *Trois Nouvelles Études* Fryderyka Chopina

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Choć na co dzień zepchnięta na margines chopinowskiej spuścizny, *Etiuda f-moll* – pierwsza z *Trois Nouvelles Études* napisanych do zbioru dydaktycznego *Méthode des Méthodes pour le Piano* François Josepha Fétisa i Ignacego Moschelesa – to utwór, który zwraca uwagę emocjonalnie nasyconą, ciągłą, niespokojną narracją przestrzegającą strukturalnej logiki, i sięga swoją genezą okresu apogeum twórczości Fryderyka Chopina. Analiza utworu – od jego dydaktycznego przeznaczenia i uwypuklania zależności strukturalno-wyrazowych tkwiących w jego linearnej, polirytmicznej fakturze, poprzez fundamentalne aspekty wykonawcze, aż po recepcję i interpretację w świetle poetyki kompozytora – ujawnia kolejny przypadek przewagi walorów ekspresyjnych nad celem dydaktycznym. *Etiuda f-moll* należy do najoryginalniejszych i najbardziej intymnych obszarów dorobku kompozytorskiego Fryderyka Chopina. To przejmujący, egzystencjalny portret kompozytora odsłaniający nieocenioną

perspektywę na estetyczną tożsamość Chopina oraz skłaniający do namysłu nad metafizycznym wymiarem muzyki.

Zakres źródeł, na podstawie którego zostanie sformułowany nowy sposób spojrzenia na tytułowy utwór, obejmuje niedawno odkrytą i udostępnioną w języku polskim korespondencję uczennicy Chopina Friederike Müller, dokumenty recepcji twórczości polskiego kompozytora, literaturę muzykologiczną poświęconą poetyce twórczości Chopinowskiej oraz refleksję estetyczno-filozoficzną dotyczącą ontologii dzieła muzycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: Fryderyk Chopin, *Etiuda f-moll*, *Trois Nouvelles Études*, *Méthode des Méthodes pour le piano*, recepcja, interpretacja, estetyka, metafizyka

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