Chopin and Genre

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INTRODUCTION: THEORY AND REPERTORY

Genres might be compared with stylistic norms or formal schemata.* All three are abstractions – 'ideal types' – but abstractions whose basic principles flow from actual musical works. All three are based on repetition, codifying past repetitions and inviting future repetitions. Because of this all three can help to regulate the area between content and expression within an individual work, while at the same time mediating between the individual work and music as a whole. Given these parallels and given too the obvious importance of the concepts as agents of communication, it seems worth exploring a little more closely the relationship between genre, style and form, and in particular the differences in their mechanisms.

In its widest sense, especially as presented in some popular music theory,¹ genre is a more permeable concept than either style or form, because a social element participates in its definition, and not just in its determination. In this broad understanding of the term the repetition units that define a genre, as opposed to a stylistic norm or a formal schema, extend beyond musical materials into the social domain so that a genre is dependent for its definition on context, function and community validation and not simply on formal and technical regulations. Thus a genre can change when the validating community changes, even where the notes remain the same. The social dimension can extend, moreover, to the function of genre within the validating community. As several authors have noted in literary and musical theory, a genre behaves rather like a contract between author and reader, composer and listener, a contract which may of course be broken.² It is above all in the incorporation of this social element as to definition and function that genre theory in literary and musical studies has developed beyond its presentation in early twentieth-century poetics, notably in Russian Formalism.

The Formalist concept of genre is altogether narrower, but we may value it as

* A shorter version of this study was delivered at the Oxford University Music Analysis Conference 1988.
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an attempt to examine the subject with some rigour. It will be discussed in more detail later, but for now I will refer only to the Formalist view of generic evolution, part of a general theory of literary history proposed by Schklovsky and Tynyanov in the early 1920s and given a specific application to genre by Boris Tomaschevskiy. In Formalist theory literary evolution is governed by a principle of ‘struggle and succession’, to use Schklovsky’s phrase. It is presented as a dialectical process, internal to the art, in which the dominant or canonised line comes into conflict with coexisting minor lines and is eventually overthrown by these minor lines, now duly canonised. Generic evolution is tied to this process. New genres emerge, then, as accumulating minor devices acquire a focus and challenge the major line.

As a general theory this has been widely criticised, notably by Bahktin and Medvedev, but it will have applications in this paper. So, too, will the very different, and more authentically dialectical, sequence identified by Theodor W. Adorno on the immanent analytical level of his Aesthetic Theory. Here the dialectic is not between major and minor lines but between Universal and Particular, where deviations from a schema in turn generate new schemata. Moreover the deviations are seen as indispensable to the function and value of the schema in the first place. Adorno expressed it as follows: ‘Universals such as genres . . . are true to the extent that they are subject to a countervailing dynamic.’

The dialectic of Universal and Particular may operate within genres, styles and forms, but we might note again some distinctions in familiar usage. And here genre emerges not as a more permeable but as a more rigid concept than style or form. This is because the terms style and form can accommodate, and are indeed used to describe, both poles of the dialectical process – universal-particular, collective-unique, schema-deviation. There is no such dual usage for genre, which signifies and labels only the general level, the category, the class. Depending on context, therefore, the theoretical relation of genre to style and form may be either an inclusion relation, where style systems, understood as notional unities, include genres which include formal schemata, or a dialectical relation, where generic constraints oppose stylistic diversity and formal independence.

The piano piece of the early nineteenth century is a useful repertory through which to explore these issues. It is a repertory in which new modes of expression struggled to break free of the old, as musical composition responded to rapid changes in the infrastructure of musical life and in the climate of ideas. The impulses which shaped the repertory were of many kinds, some new, some newly significant. They include the demands of specific taste-publics in the benefit concert and the middle-class salon; they include technological change; they include influences from vocal music and from contemporary literature, both signalling an expressive aesthetic. Not surprisingly, then, the repertory is highly diversified stylistically. Indeed its identity on this level is perhaps best defined in negative terms as an accumulating challenge to the sonata, embracing both the bravura pieces of the so-called ‘brilliant’ style and the lyric or
If we understand the term ‘genre’ in the wider sense as defined by Fabbri, we might regard this repertory as generically undivided, its profile well-defined against a Classical background. We would then locate repetition units in social, behavioural and even ideological domains, as well as identifying ‘dominants’ or genre ‘markers’ in the musical material itself. If, however, we adopt a narrower, Formalist concept of genre we immediately confront problems of definition, due to the complexity inherent in a period of change, where the old seeks to adapt to the new, while the new absorbs what it can from the old. The attempt to register this complexity in detailed generic terms is far from easy. And it is entirely in line with our earlier theoretical observations that we can register it in stylistic or formal terms. To generalise: with style and form a transitional moment may be characterised as an interpenetration of old and new. With genre, which seeks by definition to categorise musical experience, to close or finalise it, there will be no such interpenetration of old and new, but rather a choice to be made between them. Moreover the ‘new’ (generically speaking) will tend to remain weakly defined until accumulating changes in style and form are ready to be validated by genre. Hence the generic permissiveness of much early nineteenth-century piano music, evident in the remarkable profusion of genre titles, often used casually and even interchangeably, and at times emanating from the publisher rather than the composer. A study of early nineteenth-century lexicographers is enough to confirm that for this repertory titles alone do not signify genres.

PART I

FORMALISM: GENERIC CLASSIFICATION

It is clear, then, that any project which sets out to reduce the empirical variety of early nineteenth-century piano music to some semblance of generic order would be an ambitious one. Formalist genre theory will be at the very least a useful starting-point. In the Formalist analysis certain primary causes generate a repertory of free-ranging devices. As these accumulate (often losing touch with the original cause) they acquire a focus which in turn concentrates and unites them into a system. This system may then be characterised as a hierarchical grouping of devices governed by a dominant. There is no single principle of classification (a genre may well combine several), and configurations of devices will frequently overlap several genres.

Now although their description of generic evolution smacks of an impersonal, inexorable historical process, the Formalists were well aware that individual authors make the process happen. Their writings do not theorise precisely the conjunction of individual creativity and collective historical forces, but in practice they often suggest that newly created devices will crystallise in the work of a major author such that an accumulation of minor changes becomes in that work a single qualitative change. A good example would be Eikhenbaum’s
study of Lermontov. Success will then breed imitation, and the private generic definition will become a conventional one.

This brings me to Chopin. I hope it is more than a kind of Chopin fetishism to see in his mature music a rather specific crystallisation of many of the devices associated with the ‘pianists’ music’ (to use Fétis’s term) of the early nineteenth century. The key moment in this crystallisation was the transformation which took place in his music around 1830, a transformation of elements not only from his own earlier music but also from the wider repertory of a minor line. The entire process maps well against some aspects of Formalist theory; indeed Eikhenbaum’s account of Lermontov’s transformation of Russian poetry of the 1820s might be applied rather neatly to Chopin’s transformation of elements of the ‘brilliant’ style at precisely the same time. Stylistically the major changes brought about by Chopin were in the nature and above all the role of bravura figuration and of ornamental melody. Bravura figuration of conventional origin became dense with information, its formal status aspiring to that of melodic line and harmonic progression, its very identity at times deliberately blurred with theirs. Ornamental figures, also of conventional origin, were similarly transformed from inessential elements to essence. The qualitative change here – the point at which the devices of a minor line acquired a focus – occurred in the Op. 10 Études and the early nocturnes.

That focus was achieved partly because of parallel changes in the formal organisation of Chopin’s music around 1830. On the surface the main point here is his rejection of the characteristic variation sets and rondos of the ‘brilliant’ style in favour of a diversity of miniature designs and single-movement extended structures. But at a deeper level the real change once more involved transformation rather than rejection. At base Chopin remained faithful to the formal methods of the ‘brilliant’ style, but his achievement was to absorb their juxtaposed lyrical and figurative paragraphs into tonally regulated organic wholes, which provide incidentally new contexts for the sonata-form archetype. In doing so he transformed the meaning of existing devices. And that transformation set the compass-reading not only for his own mature music but for a major line within nineteenth-century piano music.

It is my contention that this renovative approach to stylistic and formal devices extended equally to the genres which mediate between them within that inclusion relation outlined in my introduction. Chopin did not select genre titles arbitrarily or use them loosely in his mature music. They had specific, though not necessarily conventional, generic meanings, established through an internal consistency in their application. In seeking to clarify his approach to titles and their generic definitions I propose the following categories: conventional titles, conventionally defined – the Sonata (I refer to the genre, not the formal archetype); conventional titles, conventionally defined, but with a new status – the Étude; conventional titles, newly defined – the Scherzo, the Prelude and the three principal dance pieces; conventional titles defined clearly for the first time – the Nocturne and the Impromptu; new titles – the Ballade. In most cases the connotative values of the titles echo familiar themes in the wider repertory of
early nineteenth-century piano music, themes which are at once transcended and remembered: improvisation in the Prelude, Impromptu and Fantasy; vocal transcription and imitation in the Nocturne; literary inspiration in the Ballade.

Chopin’s project and achievement was to give generic authority to the free-ranging devices of an emergent repertory, crystallising the meanings of some existing titles, transforming the meanings of others and devising new titles to meet new generic requirements. In each case there is a measure of consistency in the semiotic relation of the title to the formal and stylistic features of the piece. As we know, the ‘sign’ is bipartite, and both parts are essential. The title is integral to the piece and partly conditions our response to its stylistic and formal content, but it does not create a genre. Equally a taxonomy of formal and stylistic devices will not of itself establish a consistent basis for generic differentiation. It is enough to consider the substantial overlaps between Chopin’s genres in this respect. Without the title we might have difficulty classifying even some of the nocturnes. It is the interaction of title and content which is important.

It is worth stressing the word ‘interaction’, because of course the content may subvert the expectations created by the title. It can only do so, however, where a sufficient correspondence of title and content has been established. Indeed the subversion of expectations actually helps to strengthen a generic definition, clarifying its terms through their temporary falsification. Paradoxically a genre title will be all the more integral to a work where its role is to promote ambiguity. This ‘complex of meaning’ will be fully active where a generic norm is conventional, validated by consensus. But it may operate within the work of a single composer, provided that there is some measure of stability in signification. This is the narrowest framework within which the concept of genre – as a class with exemplars – may be invoked. It represents the other extreme to the wider social definition proposed at the outset of this article.

To establish whether a genre has this stability in Chopin’s mature music we would proceed by examining each genre as a closed system. This is easiest, of course, where the sample is large, as with the Étude, Nocturne, Prelude and dance piece. It is perhaps more challenging with the three genres that comprise four pieces each, the Scherzo, Ballade and Impromptu. My intention is to examine just one of these – the Impromptu – as a case-study of generic stability in Chopin; on the face of it, it is the least promising candidate. The analysis should be viewed as a modest contribution to a larger investigation of Chopin’s genres which has already resulted in valuable studies by Jeffrey Kallberg and Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger.12

Case-Study: The Impromptus

Chopin wrote his first Impromptu, the C# minor, Op. 66, in 1834.13 Before that date the term was in use, but carried very little generic meaning, as a study of contemporary dictionaries and music lexicons indicates.14 A taxonomy of pieces actually called ‘impromptu’ between 1817 (its first appearance) and 1834
(Chopin’s Op. 66) will at most differentiate between two very broad classes. The first comprises works based on an existing source — operatic and folk melodies were popular — usually presented as ornamental variation sets or potpourris. There are examples by Czerny, Kalkbrenner, Liszt, Moscheles and Schumann. The second comprises short character pieces where the original association of the title may have been with a lack of pretension, as of a piece composed casually and spontaneously. There are examples by Voišek, Marschner, Schubert and Moscheles.

Since the work of Willi Kahl it has been common to make a generic association between the Voišek Op. 7 set and the later sets by Schubert. Kenneth Delong has established, however, that neither the Voišek set nor the first Schubert set was so titled by its composer, while the second Schubert set was given the title purely as a matter of expediency. It seems clear that neither Voišek nor Schubert had any very clear view of the impromptu as a genre.

Chopin’s Op. 66 was not, then, an Impromptu in any generic sense commonly understood at the time. He drew its basic compositional technique from the recently completed Op. 10 Études and modelled some details of its phraseology and texture on at least one and possibly two specific Impromptus by other composers. When he returned to the same title three years later, however, he demonstrated that he had a rather specific private definition of the genre. In his second Impromptu, in A♭ major, Op. 29, Chopin rebuilt to the specifications of Op. 66; we might almost say that he derived the second from the first. There are precise parallels of formal design, proportion, detailed phrase structure, texture and contour. And the links are strengthened by motivic parallels. This may be demonstrated informally by presenting for inspection the openings of the two figurations and the two melodies (see Ex. 1).

The third and fourth Impromptus were composed at a time of imminent stylistic change in Chopin’s music, in 1839 and 1842 respectively, and offer an interesting model of the second relation between genre and style mentioned in my introduction — the dialectical rather than the inclusion relation. In the fourth, the G♯ major, Op. 53, generic constraints act as a force for inertia and stability at a time of stylistic change. In formal type, texture and phraseology there is a clear association with the first two impromptus. Indeed it seems likely that Chopin actually modelled his G♯ major Impromptu on the A♭ major, composed some five years earlier. The construction of the outer figuration seems to have been derived from the earlier piece, as Ex. 2 indicates. And the parallels extend beyond contour, rhythm and phrasing into the precise relationship between the two hands, including the placing of dissonant notes.

In the third Impromptu, Op. 36, on the other hand, generic stability is undermined by stylistic change. I have argued elsewhere that this F♯ major Impromptu was the single most important harbinger of a major stylistic change in Chopin’s music. Several novel stylistic features appear here for the first time, to be more fully realised only in some of the larger works of the early 1840s. Specifically the ostinato-variations of its opening section look to the Berceuse; the strident march of the middle section looks to the F minor Fantasy;
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Ex. 1

a) Op.66

b) Op.66

Op.29

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and the variations of the reprise, culminating in non-thematic figuration, look to the F minor Nocturne, Op. 55, No. 1. Now all these features represent departures from the generic norm established in the first two Impromptus and confirmed by the fourth. Yet at the same time Chopin was at pains to demonstrate that he thought of the F# Impromptu as belonging to the same world as the others, so that its unique formal and stylistic features might indeed be perceived as deviations from a norm. Again there is an obvious derivation
As Ex. 3 suggests, the main theme derives from the central melodies of the first and second Impromptus. Formally, too, the Impromptu follows the others, though its ternary structure builds into the reprise a variation sequence such that the figuration is not present at the outset but arrives as part of the variation process. The figuration when it does come, however, exhibits close associations with the other Impromptus, as Ex. 4 demonstrates. We may now present a summary of the derivations and interrelationships among all four Impromptus in diagrammatic form (see Fig. 1).

For Chopin, then, the Impromptu was a genre, such that the individual piece exemplifies as well as making its own statement. The genre is stable enough, moreover, to accommodate and contain significant deviation. On one level normative elements – embracing dimensions, formal design, phraseology, texture and a repertory of specific gestures – interlock across all four pieces in a manner which strongly suggests a derivation chain. On another level norms are established by three of the four pieces, while the fourth deviates from these norms within certain limits. The four Impromptus offer, in short, a small-scale model of the larger workings of a conventional genre. And it is a model to which Adorno’s dialectic of Universal and Particular is peculiarly relevant. An awareness of that dialectic will discourage us from any prescriptive identification of the work with an abstract schema. At the same time it will discourage us from the more seductive opposing tendency – to examine the work as a unique event without reference to compositional norms, including generic norms.

The genre markers of the Impromptu do of course overlap with those of other Chopin genres, but its avoidance of virtuosic and affective extremes helps to differentiate it from its nearest neighbours – the Étude, for example. In any case what is at issue here is not the demarcation lines between different genres but
Ex. 4

Op. 29

Op. 51

Op. 36
the internal consistency in the correspondence between title and content within a single genre. Chopin’s consistency in this regard is all the more striking in the case of the Impromptu, because the title not only lacked any conventional generic definition in the early nineteenth century; it actually signified if anything a sort of ‘anti-genre’. And this is the real significance of the explicit motivic links between all four pieces. It is surely no coincidence that the only other genres in which Chopin employs motivic as well as generic links are the Prelude and the Fantasy. In all three cases he was spelling out his rejection, or rather transcendence, of the obvious associations with improvisation. The mature Chopin was defiantly a composer, not a pianist-composer.

PART II

POST-STRUCTURALISM: GENERIC CODES

Placed alongside other recent studies, this examination of the Impromptus confirms the importance of genre as a compositional control in Chopin’s music. It is clear from these studies that he valued genre as a force for conformity, stability and closure, a channel through which the work might seek a fixed and final meaning. Genre is in this sense one of the most powerful codes linking the composer and his audience.
At the same time the work in its uniqueness will resist any such finalisation of meaning and the unity which that implies. The listener is naturally free to import any number of alternative codes to the work, profitable or unprofitable. But, more importantly, the composer may collude in this pluralism, deflecting the listener from the principal generic code in the interests of an enriching ambiguity of interpretation. And in this connection it is worth considering again the issue of norms and deviations. As well as temporary negations of a prevailing norm, deviations from that norm may be partial affirmations of alternative norms, particles which signify absent wholes. This leads to a second and very different aspect of genre study in Chopin, his persistent allusion to genres outside the main controlling genre of a work.

We may note in the first place that the referents are usually distanced from the instrumental traditions of high art music. They are either vocal genres, especially from opera, or, and more commonly, popular genres – march, funeral march, waltz, mazurka, barcarolle, chorale. The infusion of such popular genres into Chopin’s music scarcely needs exemplification. The most common are the waltz and the mazurka, which constantly slide in and out of more ambitious contexts. But we might also note some rather specific associations between ‘host’ and ‘guest’ genres: chorale elements in the Nocturne, for example, or barcarolle elements in the Ballade. The latter are of particular interest as the only case in Chopin where a generic referent is itself one of the ‘markers’ of a controlling genre.

It will be clear from this that certain genres play a dual role in Chopin, and especially those popular genres which he himself elevated to a new status. The waltz is a case in point. We might examine all the waltzes of Chopin as structured wholes with their own generic identity. At the same time we might examine all the waltz elements in Chopin as constituents of a referential code which cuts across generic boundaries, prising open the closed meanings of the host or controlling genres to forge links with other moments in Chopin and beyond. There is a similar dual role for the Mazurka, the Nocturne and even the Prelude. Thus the A minor Mazurka, Op. 17, No. 4, plays host to the nocturne, while the G minor Nocturne, Op. 15, No. 3, plays host to the mazurka. Perhaps it is not far-fetched to claim that in this sense the C major Prelude from Op. 28 plays host to the prelude.

In their concern to stress integrative tendencies, recent Chopin analysts have paid little attention to the plurality of generic allusions which struck nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics so forcefully in Chopin. It was, of course, partly through such allusions that these critics arrived at the descriptive and even programmatic interpretations which we tend to dismiss today. Popular genres are after all grounded in social functions – dance, worship, mourning, procession – and often refer to rather specific affective states; indeed their role can be partly to socialise the more extreme affective states. The referential code created by generic allusions could therefore play an important role in any attempt at Affect Analysis in Chopin, hopefully taking us a little further than existing studies such as that of Marion M. Guck. Here again we might learn
something from the methodology used in some popular music research, where correspondences to extramusical designates are tested through interobjective comparison and intersubjective recognition. To return to the F# major Impromptu: an interobjective comparison between its central march and contemporary operatic choruses might well provide some rationale for Niecks’s ‘procession’ or even Huneker’s ‘cavalcade’.

It remains to consider some more general aspects of the relationship between popular genres and high art music. This is a complex issue, of course, and will not be explored in any depth here; but it may be worth drawing attention to certain changes in that relationship in the nineteenth century. It is a commonplace of criticism that ‘popular’ and ‘significant’ music became increasingly incompatible in nineteenth-century bourgeois-capitalist society, establishing an opposition between conventional language and an avant garde. It is less often remarked that in a substantial body of nineteenth-century music this opposition was actually embodied within the individual work, as popular genres increasingly took on a parenthetical, as distinct from a supportive or enabling, role in art music. It may be possible to identify a wider social-historical context for this in changing bourgeois perceptions of popular culture in the early nineteenth century and a wider theoretical context in Bahktin’s delightfully-named concept of ‘carnivalisation’.

These matters bear directly on Chopin, where the popular genre often functions as a parenthesis rather than a control. In such cases an ironic mode may be introduced. The work is not a march, a waltz or a mazurka but rather refers to a march, a waltz or a mazurka. The popular genre is then part of the content of the work rather than the category exemplified by the work, and its markers may well be counterpointed against those of other popular genres, as well as those of the controlling genre. More important than parallels in musical material between the Eb major waltz of the first Ballade and the E major waltz of the second Scherzo (Ex. 5) are parallels in the placing and function of these passages, serving in both cases to highlight the ‘counterpoint of genres’. There is nothing new about such a ‘counterpoint’, of course – witness The Magic Flute – but more than any earlier composer Chopin built it, albeit discreetly, into the substance of his musical thought. And it had a legacy. Much later, in Mahler and beyond, the tension between a controlling genre and the popular genres that invade it results in a kind of displacement and fragmentation of traditional generic context.
Much of the richness of Chopin’s major extended works derives from the intersection of such pluralist tendencies and the integrative tendencies which issue, at least in part, from a controlling genre. In a way it represents an intersection of the two main themes of the present article. We may illustrate it through a discussion of the introduction to the F minor Fantasy, Op. 49, examining the passage within ever widening frames of reference (by ‘introduction’ I mean both the opening march and the transition to the first cycle, i.e. bs 1-67).

One frame of reference for the analysis of this introduction would be the work itself as a unique and unified statement. Here the integrative role of the passage would be demonstrated in both tonal and motivic terms, as Carl Schachter has done in a powerful recent study. Needless to say, such an analysis remains ‘comparative’ in some degree, if only in the sense that normative categories emerge from history and are defined through conventions which exist outside the work.

A wider frame of reference would be the controlling genre. Here the passage might be compared with the introduction to the only other Fantasy of Chopin’s maturity, the Polonaise-Fantasy, Op. 61. There are important differences between the two, but there are connections too (see Ex. 6), and these would lead us to make further connections between the works as wholes, both in formal arrangement and in tonal scheme. Both works build into their reworking of sonata form a slow introduction and a ‘slow movement’, and in both cases the B major of the latter is embedded within a prevailing A-flat major tonality. These associations are strengthened by our knowledge of the genesis of Op. 61. The slow movement for that work was transposed to B major only after it had already been drafted in C major, and it is possible that generic association was a factor in
the decision to change the tonal setting. It is also worth noting that the introduction to Op. 61 was at one point planned in F minor, the opening key of the Fantasy.  

Ex. 6

Another frame of reference, wider still, would be the entire Chopin canon. Here the infusion of popular genres into both the introduction and the transition would lead us beyond the Fantasies and encourage us to make connections with the march of the F# major Impromptu and the improvisatory prelude of Op. 28, No. 3 (Ex. 7). Ultimately these connections would lead us beyond Chopin to (respectively) the choruses of French Grand Opera and the common practice of contemporary improvisation. It is from this base that an additional layer of meaning – one which involves some reference to extramusical designates – might be adduced in an interpretation of the Fantasy.
Ex. 7

a)

Op.49 21

Op.36 39

b)

Op.49 43

Op.28, No.3 1
CONCLUSION

In these concluding remarks I shall suggest that by examining three different aspects of genre in Chopin’s music we highlight in turn its special relevance to his own age, its respect for the past and its telling glimpses of the future.

Within a broad definition of genre, we would regard Chopin as the most valuable case-study of an emerging genre, the lyric piano piece of the early nineteenth century. Such a study, which I have not attempted in this article, would concern itself with the primary causes of a genre. Its approach would be contextual, and its ultimate aim would be to theorise the relationship between the social and stylistic histories of early nineteenth-century piano music. Here Chopin would emerge, I believe, as the most persuasive advocate of a contemporary genre.

Taking a narrower definition, we would value his achievement in creating generic order amidst the devices of this emergent repertory. This was the thrust of Part I of this article. The next stage would be to study the reception of Chopin’s genres by later composers. Such a study would reveal, I suspect, that Chopin’s rigorous, self-consistent generic order was only partially validated by convention. And this might be viewed as supporting evidence for Dahlhaus’s claim that from the early nineteenth century onwards genres rapidly lost substance. Adorno makes a similar point in his remarks on ‘nominalism and the demise of artistic genres’. This view is undoubtedly in search of qualification, but at its heart lies a genuine insight: that old genres survived and were recontextualised in the later nineteenth century, but tended ultimately towards fragmentation; that new genres emerged but remained fragile, the consensus about them often tentative. In relation to this tendency Chopin’s commitment to generic renovation appears conservative, even Classical in impulse.

That commitment was in no sense undermined by the play of popular genres in his music. In Part II of this article I suggested that through that play genre could become part of, rather than in control of, the content of a work. A further effect of this was to isolate the popular genre, with its specific residue of social function – to give it boundaries and place it in a dialogue with an autonomous art music. Chopin’s practice here was in a sense ambivalent. Having admitted elements from different genres into a single work, he carefully blurred their edges, allowing them to blend and interpenetrate. And having proposed a separation of popular genres and art music, he proceeded to mediate constantly between the two. His was still an art of synthesis and integration. Nevertheless the seeds were sown. In its discreet counterpoint of genres – its tendency to frame, and therefore to distance, the popular genre – Chopin’s music looks to a much later dislocation and splintering of compositional norms. And it is perhaps here, as much as in its harmonic adventure, that it is a music of the future.
NOTES


5. I gladly acknowledge an intellectual debt to Max Paddison in respect of the Adorno references in the present article.


8. See note 1.


14. The earliest entries I have found where ‘impromptu’ refers to a manner of piece as opposed to a manner of playing are K. Gollmick, *Kritische Terminologie für Musiker* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1833), and A. Gathy, *Musikalisches Conversations – Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1835).


18. ‘Chopin’s F♯ major Impromptu: Genre, Style and Structure’, *Chopin and Romanticism* (Warsaw, in press).

19. See note 12.


26. Chopin used the title ‘Fantasy’ only three times (see note 13). The early *Fantasy on Polish Themes*, Op.13, is a potpourri of a kind common (and commonly termed ‘Fantasy’) within the ‘brilliant’ style of early nineteenth-century piano music.


30. It is challenged by Kallberg in ‘The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin’s Nocturne in G minor’. 