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Between the Work and the Source. The Theoretical and Practical Aspects of the Editing of the Urtext

Various aspects of the editing of musical texts have already been addressed many times. The bibliography given in the most recent monograph by James Grier *The Critical Editing of Music*¹ lists several hundred items. Some of the problems discussed here today were presented by myself at last year's conference organised by The Fryderyk Chopin Institute². At the same conference, Dr. Krzysztof Grabowski³ presented the principles behind the new Peters urtext of Chopin (in preparation), counterposing it against the editorial methods applied by the redactors of the National Edition⁴. As these principles were accepted by the international group of leading Chopinologists preparing the Peters edition, I considered it appropriate to re-analyse the points of contention. Thus, I would like to discuss briefly, yet thoroughly, the editing process of the Chopin urtext, dwelling at somewhat greater length on those questions which may be considered most controversial.

Let us begin by examining what kind of information is transmitted by the 'source material', i.e. above all the extant copies of musical works (our deliberations here relate directly to the music of Chopin, although they may be applied to the whole of the classical repertoire, at least from the Baroque to the mid twentieth century). One may distinguish three main areas.

1. The text of a work in all its comprehensible versions.
2. Documentation of the creative process; in other words, evidence of the changes made by the composer to the work. This evidence may be direct, such as visible corrections in the composer's hand made to manuscripts or written into copies of the first edition available to the composer, or indirect, arising from the comparison of various sources and the critical and stylistic analysis of any noted differences.
3. Documentation of modifications to the text, connected with the actual process of its writing out and copying. Only indirect evidence exists in this area.

Before discussing these three areas of information, I would like to draw attention to a certain feature of musical notation of crucial importance to the editors of musical texts.

The significance of many important elements of this notation depends to a great extent on both the graphical and the musical context. Slurs, dots, marks of dynamics or for pedalling are in essence non-independent signs: their sense is only defined in relation to notes and to other elements of notation. These relations are neither precisely specified nor constant, even within the music of particular composers or eras. Several examples will follow, beginning with slurring.

The convention accepted by most publishers is to place the beginning of a slur above or after the first note which it encompasses; similarly, the end of the slur comes before or above the final note. In practice, the slur appears to rise from the first note and fall onto the last. In Chopin's autographs we find a considerable amount of examples of the beginnings and ends of slurs marked in this way, yet it is a different convention (adopted by the National Edition) which predominates; here, the slur encompasses a motif or phrase in such a manner that the beginning of the slur falls before the first note and its end after the last. Since Chopin did not always take great care over the marking of slurs, it is not uncommon to find that a slur begins between two notes, and there is no way of determining which of the two delimits its beginning.

One very common problem is that of slurs running up to the end of the system (the ‘line’ of text) and from the beginning of the system. As a rule, the drawing of a slur to the bar line or, even more so, its extension beyond the line at the end of a system signifies that the slur is to be continued. Symmetrically, at the beginning of the system, the beginning of a slur between the clef and the first note indicates a continuation of the previous slur. Once more, we very often encounter a situation which is irresolvable in the light of the rules expressed above, when, for example, the slur at the end of a system is clearly extended, and the next, in the new system, begins from the note or – as does occur – is completely absent.

The issues presented here can be illustrated by an autograph of the *Prelude in B minor* Op. 28 No. 6. The end of the first slur of the left hand may be located on the last note of bar 2 or the first note of bar 3, whilst the second slur begins from the first or the second note of bar 3. This gives us four combinations, of which only one – that in which the first note of bar 3 is not encompassed by any of the slurs – can be immediately eliminated. Looking at the ends and beginnings of the systems, meanwhile, we can state that, in spite of the clearly extended slurs ending the first, second and fourth systems, only the slur opening the third system is unquestionably a continuation of its predecessor.



Example 1: *Prelude in B minor*, Op. 28 No. 6. Autograph Stichvorlage.

Now let us look at a certain ambiguity concerning dynamic marks. Changing dynamics are indicated by ‘hairpins’. One end of the mark is defined by its point, the other by the ends of the forked arms. So how does one reproduce a sign in which the two arms are of different lengths, as very frequently occurs in Chopin’s autographs?

Our final example will be the pedal marks in the autograph of the *Prelude in C* Op. 28 No. 1. The rule is simple: the pressing down and releasing of the pedal are indicated by the placing of an appropriate sign in relation to the graphical structures defining the rhythm. However, in the writing of Chopin the method whereby the pedal marks are linked to these structures is not fixed. It is not known whether these marks should be linked only to the notes, or also to the rests, or perhaps to the bar lines as well; nor do we know whether to take account of the left-hand or right-hand part (they are not always precisely aligned). Further unknown factors, in relation to the marking *Ped*, are whether one should heed the letter *P* or *d*, as it by no means infrequently occurs that these two letters appear under different notes, and what direction one should take in linking these marks with the staff: vertically upwards, somewhat obliquely (following the slant of the writing) or like a knight in the game of chess. Finally, one must also bear in mind the possibility that the asterisk indicating the release of the pedal and the *Ped* mark occurring after it often indicate together a single action, namely a change of pedal, which resulted in Chopin marking only the *Ped* sign with any degree of precision. Therefore, there can be no question of any reasonable reconstruction of the pedalling of this *Prelude* without the adoption of some far-reaching editorial principles.



Example 1: *Prelude in C* major, Op. 28 No. 1. Autograph Stichvorlage.

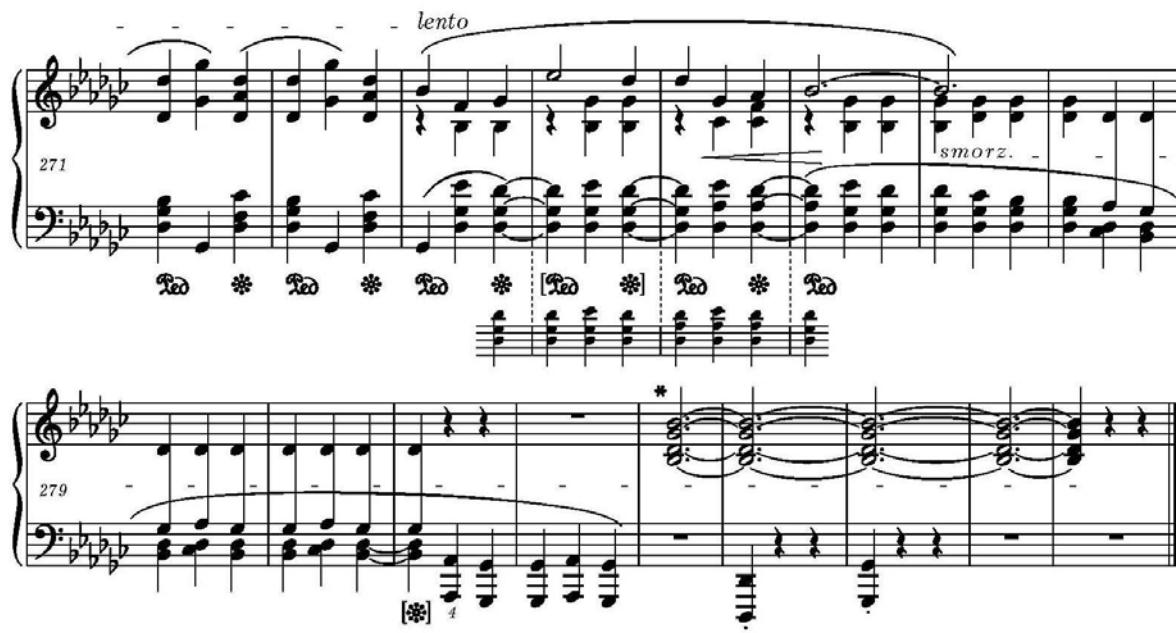
The first to wrestle with the difficulties outlined above in the recreation of Chopin autographs were the copyists and type-setters of the texts of his works. Where extant sources allow one to

compare their work with corresponding autographs, one can see what a great amount of details succumbed to more or less significant transformation. Added to this are relatively serious errors, involving such aspects as the pitch of notes, the number of notes in a chord, the notation of chromatic signs, and even the number of bars. These remarks lead us into the third of the areas of information distinguished at the beginning of this paper, relating to just such transformations to which a text is subjected during its writing out and copying. The most important types of such alterations were presented in my paper to last year's conference⁵, when I also introduced the conception of the composer's dual nature: that of composer-creator, infallible by definition, and that of composer-editor, who, in writing out the music of his 'alter ego', is wholly subject to the motto *errare humanum est*. This leads to the conclusion that **the text of every genuine copy of a work must be considered as a kind of edition of the text intended by the composer**. Consequently, **every attempt to recreate the text of a source in any form other than facsimile (thus, for example, in the form of an urtext edition) is, and must be, a thoroughgoing redaction of that text**, with all that ensues, if only to mention the subjectivity of editorial decisions – something that cannot be completely eliminated. This places the editors of musical texts in a fundamentally different situation to that in which literary textologists find themselves, demanding, in particular, great caution to be exercised in any attempts at transferring methodology elaborated for use in literary research into the musical domain. In relation to music, the historical reconstruction of the text of a single source, as is sometimes postulated, intended to lend the endeavours of editors an objective quality, is impossible to carry out.

Analysis of the third area of source information allows us to gather substantial knowledge of the characteristic traits of Chopin's hand, the types and frequency of mistakes and inaccuracies to which Chopin, his copyists and his type-setters were prone, and the typical mannerisms of the copyists, type-setters and proof-readers of editions. The systemisation of this knowledge leads to the formulation of a number of **source factors**, constituting an essential tool of editors in their efforts to 'cleanse' the text of a work of all kinds of modifications. The brief characteristics of Chopin's way of tracing his slurs, dynamic marks and pedal marks that were given at the beginning are examples of just such source factors.

Let us dwell for a moment on the question of removing the transformations in a text. Everyone agrees that obvious errors should be corrected, but where does one draw the line between an obvious and a non-obvious error? The subjectivity of this type of judgement is impossible to eliminate completely, yet one can rationally **estimate the relative probability** of the occurrence of the possibilities considered here. The essential material for such estimations are both the above-mentioned source factors and also the second type of critical tool – **stylistic factors**. These result from the analysis of those places in the work being studied (as well as in other works by the same composer), whose record raises no doubts, and which display crucial features in common with the place under analysis.

One may follow how this mechanism works in practice in the example of the final chord of the *Scherzo* from the *Sonata in B flat minor*, Op. 35.



* W jednym ze źródeł ostatni akord prawdopodobnie błędnie brzmi:
In one of the sources, probably erroneously, the final chord reads:



Patrz Komentarz źródłowy.
Vide Source Commentary.

Example 3. *Sonata in B flat minor*, Op. 35, the end of *Scherzo*. National Edition.

The point of departure is constituted by two versions of absolutely equal value in musical terms – the tenth chord *g flat-d flat'-g flat'-b flat'* in the Gutmann copy and the octave chord *b flat-d flat'-g flat'-b flat'* in the French edition. Both sources were based on the same (lost) Chopin autograph, and although both were corrected by him, the lack of any traces of corrections practically precludes the possibility of intervention by Chopin in this particular place. Thus, an initial analysis leads one to the conclusion that most probably one of the versions is simply erroneous. The arguments set forth in the critical commentary to the National Edition⁶ take account both of source factors (the features of Chopin's hand, the characteristics of Gutmann as a copyist, the fact that both sources were corrected by Chopin) and stylistic factors (the logical leading of voices, the frequency of the appearance in the conclusions of Chopin's works of chords of a specific structure). This allowed the scales of probability to be tipped decidedly in favour of the octave version.

The unquestionable errors and inaccuracies occurring in all the sources enable one to approach them all from a single perspective – in each of the sources our task is to distinguish those elements which accord with the intentions of the composer, accepting at the same time that in many places several different texts can pretend to the designation of the version intended by the composer. From this perspective, **none of the sources is particularly distinguished, since none is the one-hundred-percent reflection of the composer's intentions.**

After discarding that which, in each of the extant copies of a work, certainly or very probably does not correspond to the intentions of the composer (regardless of the possible difficulties that this entails), we generally find that the individual authentic texts of particular sources differ from one another. The mutual relations between these versions constitute the second of the areas of information outlined at the beginning, documenting the creative process of the composer. One fundamental issue

here is to establish the chronology of the versions of particular parts of the text, which obviously is not always possible. Another problem is determining whether a change introduced by the composer was to his mind a distinct improvement or else of more or less equal worth. In other words, did the composer wish to reject a given version, replacing it with another, in his opinion better version, was he unable to decide on any one version, or did he consciously wish to offer performers and audiences more than one version? It goes without saying that the answers to these questions should be sought in the sources themselves, taking into account all the possible factors, such as the following:

- the presence or lack of visible signs of change,
- the moment in time when the changes appeared (a change during the initial phase in the shaping of the work, e.g. in a sketch, carries a different significance to an amendment made during the final phase and different again from a change added many years after the main process of creating the work has ended),
- the technical possibilities of introducing corrections (a change introduced in the first edition in the place of another, properly type-set, version, which requires the type-setter to make burdensome corrections on the metal plates and which is consequently frowned upon by publishers, must be assessed differently than, for example, a correction made to a working autograph),
- the intended use of particular sources (personal, such as a sketch; private, for example touches to reading copies or presentation manuscripts; or – most importantly – public),
- the extent to which the musical text has been polished up.

As with the evaluation of errors, one must not reject stylistic factors documented in sources. The effect of analysis organised in such a manner is that each version is treated in terms of its role in the process through which the composer created the work, with the proviso that in certain situations the assessment of this role can only be made within a scale of probability.

What might be the results of this procedure in respect to the work and to particular copies of the work?

With regard to the work, there are two main possibilities.

- The author had one single conception of the work, as the number of places containing significant variants of the text represent only a very small part of the whole, and the process of composition essentially ended with the first publication (or else can be otherwise established with no greater controversy). In such cases one can speak meaningfully, supported by critical evidence, of the final version of a work. It is to this category that the vast majority of Chopin's works belong. Divergent versions of particular moments can be divided into two groups. The first comprises versions irredeemably rejected by the composer at a certain point in the process of perfecting the particular fragments. To present pianists with such versions would be tantamount to violating the intentions of the composer to the same degree as would the publication of certain or highly probable errors. The second group consists of versions from various sources, among which the selection of a single version cannot be convincingly

justified in the light of available source material. Only the choice between versions belonging to the second group should be left to performers.

- The composer recorded two or more conceptions of a work, and the source documentation does not permit one to clearly single out any particular version. In such instances, each conception ought to be treated essentially as a separate work, and the way in which they are presented in a given edition depends upon their number and the degree of differentiation. In the oeuvre of Chopin, such a situation is rather rare; of all the works which he prepared for print, barely three – although even here the evidence is not incontrovertible – may qualify for this category (in the *Nocturne* in E flat op. 9 no. 2, the later variants added for pupils form a layer so ample that it is difficult to accord with the original, printed, conception of the work; the *Etudes* for “Méthode des Méthodes” were prepared by Chopin for print on two occasions, several years apart, thus the introduction of certain changes in the second edition cannot be treated as the rejection of the version of the first edition; in the *Polonaise* in A op. 40 no. 1 the numerous differences occurring in the density of chords, harmony, articulation and dynamics between the two versions scrupulously elaborated by Chopin – the Fontana copy and the first French edition – authorise one, despite the exact preservation of the melodic-rhythmic structure, to deem the texts of these sources to be somewhat divergent conceptions of the work as a whole).

The specification of the place and the role of particular copies in the process of the shaping and perfecting of a work by the composer leads to the conclusion that – leaving aside the rather exceptional situation in the Chopin oeuvre where all the elements of the text that are in accordance with the composer’s intentions come from a single copy – **there are no grounds for rationally placing any one of the sources above the others**. In such a situation, the choice of a ‘basic source’ may only constitute a convenient starting point for editorial intervention, and not a dogma hindering or rendering impossible the reconstruction of those elements of the composer’s intentions to be found in other sources. In the oeuvre of Chopin, we are frequently faced with a *Stichvorlage* and a first French edition, based directly or indirectly thereon, in which the composer made a series of changes at the stage of correction. As a rule, none of these sources reveals the intentions of the composer to a satisfactory or complete extent:

- the *Stichvorlage* enables the credible reconstruction of many details of notation, yet contains certain versions removed by the composer in edition;
- the edition presents certain fragments in a final version as edited by the composer, yet contains numerous deformations of the text and errors.

By way of example⁷, let us take the *Mazurka* in C Op. 24 No. 2. The *Stichvorlage* (an autograph fair copy) includes bars 98 and 102-103 in their original versions, identical with the analogous bars 14 and 18-19 (see Example 4); the edition, meanwhile, contains a series of errors in the reproduction of slurs, dots, wedges, accents and above all the metronome tempo (108 instead of 192 – see Example 5).



Example 4: *Mazurka in C major*, Op. 24 No. 2, bars 1-8 & 93-110. Autograph *Stichvorlage*.

There is no doubt that the modern-day performer of the *Mazurka* must be presented with both the version of bars 98 and 102-103 altered by the composer (this sort of varying of repeated phrases is one of the essential features of Chopin's compositional *métier*) and also the correct metronome value, which determines the true character of the work. There is no way of doing this other than compiling the versions of both sources (the erroneous metronome value is not, in this instance, such an obvious error as to justify its alteration – to what value? – without reference to the *Stichvorlage*.⁸

The image shows a printed score of the Mazurka. The title 'N°2 MAZURKA.' is at the top left. The tempo is 'Allegro non troppo' and the metronome value is '♩ = 168'. The first staff starts with a basso continuo line with 'sotto voce' dynamics and a treble line with 'legato' and 'sotto voce' dynamics. The second staff begins with a dynamic 'ff' and a basso continuo line with 'sotto voce' dynamics. The third staff begins with a dynamic 'più f' and a basso continuo line with 'sotto voce' dynamics. The fourth staff begins with a dynamic 'ff' and a basso continuo line with 'sotto voce' dynamics. The page number 'M. S. 1070.' is at the bottom right.



Example 5: *Mazurka in C major*, Op. 24 No. 2, bars 1-25 & 92-103. First French Edition.

Before summarising the deliberations presented up to this point in the form of a list of postulates relating to critical editions of music, we must first consider to whom such an edition is to be addressed. As classical musical notation does not specify all parameters of sound, **performers** play a key role in the existence of a work as an essential, creative link in the chain between the composer and the audience. Thus, performers constitute an exceptional group among the recipients of musical texts – a group which must consequently be deemed the natural and desirable addressee of the urtext. The existence of this distinguished group of recipients constitutes the second essential difference between musical and literary editing, since in the case of literary texts it is not possible to distinguish a group of recipients so inseparably linked to the very existence of the work⁹. Even the finest gift of interpretation is not necessarily accompanied by any textological interest in the musical text. The task of the performer is to transform the text into living music, so the text itself represents no more than a point of departure. Equipped with knowledge and, above all, intuition, the performer translates the conventional, yet ambiguous, notation into the language of specific, temporally organised, sound structures. In choosing between possible variants, he/she is guided by artistic taste; it is neither necessary nor possible to demand of the performer all the knowledge essential to a proper critical assessment of the text presented. Such knowledge is gained only through many years of painstaking study of dozens of autographs and other sources. Therefore, **the ordering of the extant versions of the text in accordance with the intentions of the composer to the extent that it is possible to define on the basis of sources must be the task of the editor.**

To summarise,

- the aim of the urtext as a critical edition intended for performers must be to recreate the intentions of the composer in relation to the text of his work; this can be more graphically defined as the creation of the **ideal fair copy** of a composition;
 - the recreation of these intentions is served by a **special method of text criticism**, taking into consideration all authentic sources and the full information which they contain in all of the three areas discussed above; this method is defined by the following editorial measures:
1. the identification and expert analysis of all possible sources of the text of a work (above all autographs, copies and prints, including any copies bearing notes or corrections made by the composer);

2. defining filiations (in some instances several are possible), i.e. a scheme of mutual relations between sources; in other words, determining which, if any, of the sources was based on the text of another;
3. evaluating the extent of their authenticity, i.e. establishing which copies the composer was involved in the production of (writing, correcting, adding his remarks) and how scrupulously he/she checked the text of a given source;
4. establishing whether the creative process documented in sources testifies to the creation by the composer of essentially one single conception of a work or a greater number;
5. the careful reproduction of the source text in cases where authentic copies display no differences and the correctness of the text raises no doubts;
6. the indication of those places which cannot be unequivocally reconstructed, together with proposals for their interpretation;
7. the indication of those places in which one may suspect that deformations or errors appear in the source text, together with proposals for their correction (conjectures);
8. in places where it is certain or highly probable that more than one authentic version exists, adopting that text which corresponds to the latest decision of the composer, if the sources testify to a process by which the composer perfected the work; providing these versions as possible variants of the text where it cannot be proved that the composer considered one version to be better than the rest;
9. the adoption of a method of presenting divergent conceptions of the work as a whole which is appropriate to a specific case;
10. the preservation, to as great an extent as is possible in print, of the characteristic traits of the composer's notation, even those which bear no direct or easily definable influence on the sound (chromatic orthography, the way notes are linked by beams, also, in piano music, the division into voices, the arrangement of the text on the staff, etc.);
11. the formulation of criteria of style, essential in decisions concerning the previous seven points, on the basis of an analysis of secure analogous fragments in the given work, in other works by the composer written at a similar time, and finally in the composer's entire oeuvre.

To close, I would like to return to the most controversial question of the compilation within a single text of versions derived from different sources. In discussing the source documentation of the creative process (the second area of information), it was shown that in many situations such a compilation is simply the natural corollary of the information contained in the sources. In such instances, the strict adherence to an a priori principle of the integrity of just a single basic source¹⁰ inevitably leads to a distortion of the composer's intentions. Let us recall the *Mazurka in C*, op. 24. If we reject the solution of combining elements of the *Stichvorlage* and the French edition corrected by Chopin, two possibilities remain.

- reliance on the first edition, appropriately annotated and possibly illustrated with versions from the *Stichvorlage*. Such a text could be characterised as follows: "Here is a work in a version read from one of the sources and a few variants from others; some of the versions are

most probably erroneous, but this is not entirely certain; anyone wishing to find out which should read the commentary”. The editor may possibly deem some of the deficiencies in the source as ‘obvious errors’ and correct them; in this manner he will be placing his opinion above the intentions expressed in the *Stichvorlage* by the composer.

- reliance on the *Stichvorlage*, supplemented with variants introduced in the first edition. This text could be described thus: “Here is a work in a version read from one of the sources and a few variants from others; anyone wishing to find out which should read the commentary; to anyone who should be interested how the composer pictured the work when he completed it, work it out for yourself!”

Each of these editorial stances is deservedly referred to by James Grier as a “sheer dereliction of duty”¹¹, whilst the choice of one of them is the arbitrary decision of the editor.

By way of comparison, an ‘ideal fair copy’ compiled from the *Stichvorlage* and first edition may be presented as follows: “Here is a work as the composer imagined it when completing its composition; anyone interested as to why an analysis of the sources led the editor to just such a conclusion should read the commentary”.

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Paul Mies, *Textkritische Untersuchungen bei Beethoven* Beethovenhaus Bonn 1957, G. Henle Verlang, Munich-Duisburg

¹ Cambridge University Press, 1996.

² Paweł Kamiński, *Wydanie Narodowe dzieł F. Chopina (WN) jako przykład urtekstu ukierunkowanego na wykonawcę* [The National Edition of the works of F. Chopin (NE) as an example of an urtext aimed at the performer], in: *Materiały z konferencji “Chopin – w poszukiwaniu wspólnego języka”* [“Chopin – in search of a common language”. Conference material], Warszawa 2001, p. 115.

³ Krzysztof Grabowski, *Tekst Chopina w nowej edycji źródłowej Petersa* [Chopin's text in the new Peters critical edition], in: ibidem, p. 123.

⁴ Wydanie Narodowe Dzieł F. Chopina [The National Edition of the works of F. Chopin], chief editor Jan Ekier, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Kraków 1960-1992. New, revised version – PWM, Kraków 1995-1998 and Fundacja Wydania Narodowego Dzieł F. Chopina, Warszawa 1999-.

⁵ Paweł Kamiński, op. cit., p. 116.

⁶ *Sonaty* [Sonatas], ed. Jan Ekier and Paweł Kamiński, PWM, Kraków 1995, (revised 2004).

⁷ A more complex example, in which the composer's intentions are divided between three sources, is presented by the author in the above-mentioned article, pp. 118-119.

⁸ It did not arouse, for example, the suspicions of the editors of the PWM edition of the *Dzieła wszystkie* [Complete works] (Paderewski, Bronarski, Turczyński), and of several other collected editions, who did not have the autograph at their disposal.

⁹ At most, one could mention here theatre directors and actors; however, their role in relation to the stage work is decidedly lesser, as the reading of a stage play undoubtedly allows any person not an actor or director or musician an incomparably deeper contact with the work than the reading of a score.

¹⁰ As a supplement to the main idea, I would like to add a reflection on the historical status of individual sources. Materially speaking, each of them is, of course, an objective historical fact. However, the same cannot be said of the text of the work, which reaches its audience through the intermediary of this source, since those receiving the text were perfectly aware of the existence of errors of various kinds and – considering it a matter of course – altered what appeared to them to be erroneous as they saw fit. Such an ‘active’ approach on the part of performers is confirmed by research into the psychological aspects of the reading of music described by John A. Sloboda, *A Musical Mind*, chapter 3.2.2 (Warsaw 2002). Further evidence to this effect comes not only in statements made by composers themselves – Chopin: ‘some flats or sharps may still be missing there’ (letter to Julian Fontana, 25 October 1841), Liszt: ‘those stupid French editions mutilate everything, the slurs in the bass must be drawn thus...’, quoted by Wilhelm von Lenz in *Die grossen Pianoforte-Virtuosen* (Berlin 1872) – but also in changes made by some of Chopin's pupils in their editions of the maestro's works and numerous – and how often inappropriate – revisions made to first editions. Thus, the text transmitted and preserved by a given source cannot be identified with the text read on the basis thereof by performers.

¹¹ *The Critical Editing of Music*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 180.