

Correspondence of Franz Liszt and the Comtesse Marie d'Agoult. Introduced, translated, annotated, and edited by Michael Short, and based on the critical edition prepared by Serge Gut and Jacqueline Bellas. (Franz Liszt Study Series, no. 14.) Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2013. [x, 448 p. ISBN 9781576471654. \$76.] Illustrations, bibliography, index.

While it may not quite have been the “affair that held everybody shocked, spell-bound and continually seeking further vicarious excitement” (p. vii) in the nineteenth century, as Michael Short characterizes it, the topsy-turvy relationship between Franz Liszt and the (married) Countess Marie d'Agoult from about 1833 through the mid-1840s ranks as a—perhaps the—foundational component of Liszt's early career as musician, artist, thinker, and overall romantic figure. While many details of that relationship have been inevitably lost to time, it still vigorously survives thanks to a huge volume of extant correspondence that has been available to the general reader since the early 1930s, when Daniel Ollivier released two volumes of letters exchanged between his celebrated grandparents. The scholarly value of these letters was enhanced significantly in 2001, when the French musicologists Serge Gut and Jacqueline Bellas released a critical edition of the correspondence (Franz Liszt and Marie d'Agoult, *Correspondance*, eds. Serge Gut and Jacqueline Bellas [Paris: Fayard, 2001]) that augmented Ollivier's collection, corrected numerous errors in his edition, and drew on seventy years of scholarship surrounding Liszt, d'Agoult, and their variegated world. Consequently, the Gut/Bellas edition has become the definitive document on the couple, as well as an indispensable source for students of Liszt's early and virtuoso years.

Michael Short's edition of the Liszt/d'Agoult correspondence brings these letters to English readers for the first time. This material is not easy to read, even in the original French, as it includes numerous asides, insider and oblique references, and original-language citations—often quoted incorrectly—in English, Italian, and German. Yet, as translator, Short is more than up to the challenge: he has already edited and translated a large collection of Liszt's letters (Franz Liszt, *Liszt Letters in the Library of Congress*, ed. and trans. Michael Short [Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002]); and for the Liszt/d'Agoult correspondence, he was able to work closely with Gut while preparing his English readings.

While Short's edition is, as its title page indicates, “Abridged from and based on the critical edition” of Gut and Bellas, the organization of his edition follows that of its source only to a point. The French edition features an extended, multi-sectioned introduction authored by Gut, the complete correspondence chronologically arranged and grouped into fourteen chapters, eight contextual documents, and several indexes. Each chapter is preceded by a biographical summary and a detailed chronological overview of Liszt's and d'Agoult's activities during the period. Each letter is then treated as a stand-alone document, with reference given at the end of the letter's text to any earlier edition in which it might have appeared, its current whereabouts (if applicable), and commentary via footnotes that restart with the next letter.

Short, on the other hand, provides only a brief overview of the couple's life together in a succinct, new preface (pp. vii–ix) before launching into the letters. Names, compositions, and other authored products follow in a single index. Short partially dispenses with the chapter divisions in Gut/Bellas, in that he omits chapter numbers, introductions, and chronologies, but compensates by continuously numbering footnotes until a chapter in Gut/Bellas ends. For example, the footnotes in letters 45–85 of Short's edition run to 220 before resetting with the next letter, and these forty-one letters correspond to Gut's and Bellas's second chapter, which covers the period from May 1834 to June 1835—a period notable for the heavy influence of the Abbé Felicité de Lamennais on Liszt, the young composer's earliest published essays, and the experimental piano pieces like the single-movement *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*.

The differences in organizational strategies perhaps would not have been as apparent and jarring had Short produced a complete translation of the critical edition. He is only able to publish translations of 473 of the 562 letters contained in the Gut/Bellas edition, citing “reasons of space” (p. ix) for his edition's abridgment. While it is unfortunate—but unfortunately understandable—that the publication of the complete correspondence in English was not possible, perhaps more frustrating is that Short does not explain how he decided

which letters to include and which to omit. (Footnotes from the French edition are also translated but similarly truncated on an ad hoc basis.) To be sure, some omissions are arguably welcome improvements to the overall flow of the correspondence (such as Gut's and Bellas's letters 91 and 92, in which Liszt feels sorry for himself in a wholly unoriginal way), and others—such as letters 391 and 392—simply prolong a topic covered in surrounding letters without adding anything too terribly new. Yet certain omissions represent substantial loss of value to (and even potential distortion of) the letters. The English reader would not know, for instance, that Liszt asked d'Agoult as early as December 1833 (Gut/Bellas, letter 41) for a write-up on Frédéric Chopin that he could publish as his own, and in turn opened the floodgates to a literary relationship between him and his mistress that dogs Liszt to this day. And as most of the omitted letters come from the earliest part of their relationship, the frequent emotional crises that Liszt experienced in the process of wooing d'Agoult are diluted. There is, however, still plenty to learn about Liszt and his world in Short's excellent edition. The Parisian salon is routinely singled out, with Liszt acknowledging its necessity but criticizing its shallowness—a perspective that would influence his choices, both large and small, for how he would present his music well into the early 1860s. Concert life—its regional varieties, sponsors and critics, and audiences—are a frequent subject in the correspondence beginning around 1838, as is Liszt's growing frustration with trying to maintain what today would be called an ideal work-life balance. This latter topic of the correspondence also serves as an important reminder that Liszt was not always the blameless victim that he is often made out to be, and that he did at times choose to further his career at the expense of his family. These letters also document in unusual detail the emergence of ideas that are associated with nineteenth-century musical romanticism in general, and Liszt in particular. Thus in May 1834 Liszt writes to d'Agoult that “I tell myself that I must work, and I work! I have an immense need (immense is quite ambitious!) to know, to get to know, to know in depth” (p. 31; original emphasis). He goes on to explain how this “knowing” includes Pierre Bayle and Victor Hugo, Frédéric Chopin and Johann Christoph Kessler, as well as how then to translate those experiences into material that he can present before the public. About one week later, he offers a credo that would stick with him for the rest of his life: “I believe a little in my heart, and much in God and Liberty” (p. 33).

It is probably beyond the mandate of an editor to suggest how such written statements in turn materialize in the composer's music, but Short does help in this respect, as he sometimes augments (and even challenges) Gut's commentary with information that he has compiled, with Leslie Howard, for a forthcoming catalog of Liszt's work (preliminarily published in the *Quaderni dell'Istituto Liszt*, 3 [2004]). For instance, in an extended footnote to letter 52 (p. 32), Short corrects several issues of dating surrounding Liszt's *L'idée fixe*, andante amoroso that have important repercussions for the Liszt–Berlioz relationship in the 1840s. Likewise, more precise information about the numerous iterations of the “Dante” Sonata given in a footnote to letter 248 (p. 216) help clarify the relationship between it and Liszt's idea of a collection of piano music entitled *Années de pèlerinage*.

Although it includes neither the complete correspondence nor the critical apparatuses of its source, Short's edition is an important contribution to English-language scholarship on Liszt and the romantic music movement. And despite several slips of the pen (particularly acute in the earlier letters), the text is highly readable and often thought-provoking. The Franz Liszt Study Series, to which this volume belongs, is to be commended for making this rich trove of letters available.

Jonathan Gregor
University of Cincinnati
NOTES, March 2015