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Ernest Newman, Mildred Bliss and the Roman noir of
Liszt’s Letters to Marie von Hohenlohe (1931-2011)**

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“Schelling died and Hitler cast a shadow over the world”: Ernst Newman, Mildred Bliss and the *Roman noir* of Liszt’s letters to Marie von Hohenlohe (1931-2011)¹

by Nicolas Dufetel (*Institut für Musikwissenschaft Weimar/Jena*)

1953. One of the most roundly criticized contributions to Liszt scholarship ever to appear in print was published: Howard E. Hugo’s edition of *The Letters of Franz Liszt to Marie zu Sayn-Wittgenstein*.² In a review which, however acerbic in tone, was nonetheless supported by concrete examples, Jacques Barzun provided a detailed list of the reasons why the volume was a disaster. At the head of his list were the problems raised by the translation itself, which contained numerous errors of one kind and another. Second, there were mistakes in the annotations, which were not only full of factual errors but made no attempt to address the social, artistic or political context within which these extremely interesting letters were written.³ Fully conscious of the importance of this correspondence, Barzun ended his review by arguing that a new edition of these “good letters”⁴ was indispensably necessary and by asking specifically how someone so manifestly incapable of carrying out this task had been entrusted with such an enterprise:

To cut short a painful inventory, one must come to a question that involves other persons than the unfortunate editor: how was he chosen, what scholarly aid did he actually receive from the friends cited in the acknowledgments, who edited the manuscript, teeming as it does with blunders, solecisms, and infelicities?⁵

In a word, what was the history of this edition?

In fact, the plan to publish the letters from Liszt to Princess Marie von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst née von Sayn-Wittgenstein goes back to the early 1930s, shortly after the original letters left Europe and found a new home in the United States of America. The correspondence covers the relationship between Liszt and the Princess from 1847 to 1886, save for the years 1860 to 1869, a period corresponding to Liszt’s Roman sojourn and the first years of Princess Marie in Vienna after her marriage to Prince Constantin von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst in Weimar in 1859.⁶ In 1957, Hubert von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Marie’s grandson, wrote that no other Liszt letters were kept by his family, and that his grandmother had certainly burnt some of them.⁷ Before the letters were taken to the USA, they had been part of Robert Bory’s Collection in Switzerland. They are now lodged in the Houghton Library at Harvard University, where numerous accompanying documents allow us to retrace the various stages of the translation project

in a fairly accurate manner. The present article is an attempt to re-examine this long, complex and polemical tale, and to put it in the context of Liszt historiography in the 1930s. This publication initiative, as well as many others of the same period, was prompted by the approaching 50th anniversary of Liszt's death in 1936.⁸ The story contains many twists and turns and involves a large cast of actors from both Europe and North America: collectors, librarians, university teachers, diplomats and editors. Work on the first edition of these letters took place against a background that was increasingly dark and difficult, characterized, as it was, by mounting dangers and finally overshadowed by the Second World War.

Ernst Newman and the Search for a New Liszt Representation

While this initial attempt was being made in North America to publish Liszt's letters to Marie von Hohenlohe, another project was under way on the other side of the Atlantic. This was not in fact an edition of Liszt's letters but an essay in analytical biography that was itself the subject of much debate at the time. Even today, three-quarters of a century later, it continues to meet with the liveliest criticism. The publication of Ernest Newman's *The Man Liszt: A Study of the Tragi-Comedy of a Soul Divided Against Itself*, provoked what was undoubtedly the most embittered and polemical reaction to any study of Liszt to that point.⁹ Reviewers were virtually unanimous in criticizing both the substance and the form of this unprecedented attack on Liszt as a person, an attack that may be said to have set the cat among the pigeons.¹⁰ In seeking to demystify the "Liszt legend," Newman started out from what was unquestionably fact, for, as he explained in his Foreword and opening chapter ("The Unreliability of the Older Liszt Biographies"), none of the studies published during the previous fifty years could be trusted. And of no biography was this more true than it was of Lina Ramann's *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* (1880-94).¹¹ Newman's work of deconstruction or, rather, reconstruction, may have been justified by an observation that musicologists continue to share to this day, inasmuch as it represents—in theory if not always in practice—the majority of critical writings on the subject. But it also opened the door to new misunderstandings: on the one hand—and in spite of his claim to be objective—Newman was highly subjective and even aggressive in his approach, showing himself to be much more of a partisan of Wagner's than of Liszt's. On the other hand, his methodology was completely unfounded. If his aim was praiseworthy—that of writing a life of Liszt based on direct sources independent of previously published interpretations—his way of proceeding was stillborn: he claimed, after all, to be basing his analyses on the numerous documents that he had amassed during his work on Wagner and on other recently published material.¹² At the start of his book we find a five-page list of "Main Sources and References" containing details of the seventy bibliographical titles that he used in writing his study, and Newman also claims that he delayed publication of his book in order to await the appearance in print of the second volume of the cor-

respondence between Liszt and Marie d'Agoult edited by their grandson Daniel Ollivier.¹³ Unfortunately, this was only half the battle: we know now that these printed sources provide a distorted view of the reality of Liszt's biography. When considered from the standpoint of metahistory, there is no doubt that they stand before us as the fruits of a quest for a "poetic" or "aesthetic" truth that is called into question ultimately by the reality of "empirical" truth, as John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus have written so eloquently about the biography of Wagner.¹⁴ In the case of Liszt, in the 1930s at more or less the same time as Newman was preparing his little book, Émile Haraszti was working on a pioneering study that involved tracing new documents in archives, something that Newman—a critic by profession about whom we learn from the rear flap of the dust jacket of the first American edition that the "personal details" about him "are few and simple," that "he is a recluse by disposition, a light drinker and a heavy cigar smoker"¹⁵—had evidently failed to do.¹⁶

More recently, in 2006, Paul Watt devoted an article to Newman's monograph in which he attempts a new reading of the text and tries to justify Newman's extreme position by arguing that the English critic was an advocate of freethinking.¹⁷ Watt writes that *freethought* ideology is the "key aspect of his life that explains his *modus operandi* in *The Man Liszt*": "Nigel Scaife has suggested that Newman's biography of Liszt failed principally because Newman could not accept, or refused to accept, Liszt's religiosity—a worldview that was anathema to the freethinker who was also an atheist or agnostic. It was in the 1890s that Newman's freethought ideology was most pronounced, though he was a staunch freethinker all his life."¹⁸ His 1897 book *Pseudo-philosophy at the End of the Nineteenth Century (Volume 1, An Irrationalist Trio—Kidd, Drummond, Balfour)*, written under the pseudonym Hugh Mortimer Cecil and dedicated to the memory of Charles Darwin, is an acerbic critique of some conservative religious worldviews against the idea of progress and evolution theory. Watt also stresses that Newman wanted to redefine the genre of biography in a fundamental way in keeping with the theories of André Maurois.¹⁹ Newman writes in his foreword that:

As M. André Maurois has pointed out in his thoughtful book, *Aspects de la biographie*, the modern literary world is in revolt against the complacent type of biography associated with the nineteenth century, in which the subject was conceived centrally as the representative of this or that virtue, and everything in his life that seemed to clash with that conception was either dwelt lightly upon or suppressed. "The modern biographer", says M. Maurois, "if he is honest, refuses to say, 'Here is a great king, a great minister, a great writer. About his name a legend has been constructed; and it is legend, and this alone, that I intend to set forth.' No: what he says is: 'Here is a man. I possess a certain number of documents and testimonies concerning him. I am going to try to paint a true

portrait of him. What will this portrait be? I do not know: I do not wish to know until it is finished. I am ready to paint my model just as a long contemplation of him has made me see him, and to retouch the portrait in accordance with any new facts about him that I may discover".²⁰

These explanations may enlighten Newman's stimulating goal and they may even be plausible on one level, but they cannot begin to apply to his work and his method; still less can they serve to rehabilitate it. Newman's methodology strikes us as fundamentally flawed, for no one wanting to form a truthful picture of Liszt on the basis of documentary evidence should ever rely on printed sources that are now known to be problematic. We could argue that Newman was certainly not aware of this problem of authenticity, but is it really possible to think that he was persuaded that these sources were *undoubtedly* reliable Gospel truth? However practical they may be for an initial approach, we cannot be satisfied with them today but must have recourse to publications edited according to modern critical standards or, even better, to manuscript sources. It is only on the basis of this preferred epistemological and methodological approach that a new portrait of Liszt and his works will emerge.

It is very much this need to rely on new sources that establishes a direct link between Howard E. Hugo's edition of Liszt's letters to Marie von Hohenlohe and Newman's book. As Amalya Prendergast, one of the protagonists of the American edition of the correspondence wrote at the time, if these "good letters" had appeared sooner—namely, before or soon after Newman's blistering attack, they would have offered an ideal counterpoint to it, demonstrating beyond doubt that many of the positions adopted by Newman were untenable. Newman wrote:

We have seen Bernhardt noting that Liszt "is not a man of great intelligence, but he has a certain worldly wisdom, and he possesses in a high degree the tact that goes along with this. It is a settled system with him never to express an opinion upon anything, however, unimportant it may be, so as not to compromise himself or offend anyone." We may reasonably ask ourselves whether Liszt did not carry out these principles of "tact" and "worldly wisdom" in his correspondence also—whether his scrupulous abstention from dispraise of his contemporaries is always a trustworthy guide to his real opinion of them, or just of the legend of himself as a man above all consideration of ill-will.²¹

Here we can argue that in some letters, Liszt did say somewhat bad things about some of his contemporaries, but these passages were censored by the editor of his correspondence, Ida Marie Lipsius (La Mara), something that Newman never checked.²² Newman continues,

[Some writers] have not perceived that, he being the actor he was, his letters are not always to be taken at their face value. The early correspondence with Marie d'Agoult is unconstrained: at that time Liszt had not yet realised the possibility of his letters being some day laid open to the world's inspection. In later life, when he had begun to dramatise himself and to labour at the creation of his own legend, he probably wrote many of his letters with a diplomatist's eye to the future, asking himself how they would look in the eyes of posterity. It is the business of the modern biographer to try to get behind the mask he persistently wore in his middle and last periods — to discover to what extent his letters correspond to the realities of this situation or that, and to his contemporary reaction to them.²³

Would the publication of Liszt's letters to Marie von Hohenlohe in the 1930s, letters that paint a portrait of him as anything else but "constructed," have changed the course of historiography in the years following? As far as Newman is concerned, he probably would have said that Liszt was also "playing a role" with the little Princess

From Lake Geneva to Dumbarton Oaks and Harvard

The publishing history of Liszt's letters to Princess Marie von Hohenlohe is a veritable detective story extending over almost seventy years and involving a cast of dozens of individuals in both Europe and the United States of America. These letters were owned by the well-known Swiss collector Robert Bory (1891-1960), who bought them from the Hohenlohes after Princess Marie's death in 1920. In 1931 they were acquired by the wealthy American collector and patron of the arts Mildred Woods Bliss (1879-1969), with the American pianist and composer Ernest Henry Schelling (1876-1939) acting as an intermediary (see below). In a 1950 typescript of an unpublished preface that Mildred Bliss wrote for the forthcoming edition of the correspondence, one reads that it was her mother, Anna Dorinda Blaksley Barnes Bliss (1851-1935), who actually bought the letters from Schelling in Geneva on Christmas Eve 1931.²⁴ By this time, the letters were already divided into the three separate albums, as they are now at the Houghton Library. When, in 1951, Bory decided to sell his extensive collection of Lisztiana, including photographs, drawings, paintings, autograph letters, music manuscripts and other memorabilia, the letters to Marie von Hohenlohe were no longer a part of it. From an inventory of the Bory Collection still in the Houghton Library, we learn, thanks to complementary documents scattered throughout three boxes, that in addition to the Bliss family, the Music Division of the Library of Congress had also been a potential buyer (for \$5,000).²⁵ The Assistant Chief of the Music Division at this time was Edward Waters, a musicologist and devoted Liszt scholar, and a diligent librar-

ian who was in the early 1950s intent on increasing the Library's holdings of composer manuscripts and letters.²⁶ However, this plan was never realized, and the Bory Collection stayed in Europe: it was acquired in 1956 by the then Department for the History of Music of the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (The Hague Municipal Museum). The collection is now divided between two institutions in the Dutch capital: the manuscripts and few printed publications are held at the Nederlands Muziek Instituut, and the iconographical items and a few other objects reside in the Gemeentemuseum.

Together with her husband, the diplomat Robert Woods Bliss (1875–1962), Mildred Bliss assembled a vast collection of artifacts centered on Byzantine and Pre-Columbian art. But she was also passionate about music, to which she devoted a further part of her fortune, the most famous example of her patronage being Stravinsky's *Concerto in E flat* for chamber orchestra that she and her husband commissioned from the composer, popularly known as the “Dumbarton Oaks Concerto.” This title references the property that the Blisses acquired in 1920 at Georgetown near Washington DC, a magnificent Federal-style country house dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is there where they housed their collections.

In 1940, the property of Dumbarton Oaks and its treasures were offered to Harvard University, Robert Bliss's *alma mater*. The Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection continues to be run by Harvard and is now a research centre specializing in Byzantine and Pre-Columbian art but also in gardens and landscapes. In addition it houses a number of rare books that Robert and Mildred Woods Bliss had acquired as the nucleus of a further planned collection. They did not donate the whole of their collection to Harvard at the outset but retained a number of items, including the letters from Liszt to Marie von Hohenlohe. When Mildred Bliss died in 1969, these remaining items were sent to the Houghton Library at Harvard, which had been built in 1942 to house the rare books and manuscripts that the university was rapidly acquiring, since its earlier buildings no longer had sufficient space to keep pace with the new and growing collections.

Giving parts of her collection to Harvard was not the end of Mildred Bliss's interest in Liszt memorabilia. She kept looking after the letters she loved, and researched possible new acquisitions, even after the publication of Hugo's edition. In a letter dated 10 April 1957, Mary Benjamin of Benjamin Autographs (New York), gave her some details about a few letters to Liszt by his mother, Blandine, Cosima, and Lola Montez. She also mentioned corrected proofs, dozens of first editions and, most important, a notebook for 1865, which would be, of course, very interesting. But Mary Benjamin later writes that some items have already been sold.²⁷

Today Liszt's letters to Marie von Hohenlohe have the same shelf-mark (AM16) as the other hoard of Liszt letters that had been a part of Mildred Bliss's collection: the letters to Baroness Olga von Meyendorff. The four large box files that correspond to shelf-mark AM16 contain not only the aforementioned correspondence between Liszt and Marie von Hohenlohe

and Liszt and Olga von Meyendorff, but also an extraordinary number of documents relating to the history of their acquisition and to the various plans to publish them. The present article is based on the material contained in these files, but much new information about Liszt historiography and the history of various collections would be enlightened by a study of this correspondence. Among the documents filed under shelf-mark AM16 only the two collections of letters from Liszt have been partially catalogued and are thus easy to identify within the mass of documents contained in these four box files. None of the other documents has been catalogued. They are scattered throughout box files 1, 3 and 4 and in some cases have been placed with others of unrelated content. The present article is based on these documents, which seldom bear a call number.²⁸

Mildred Bliss and Ernest Schelling: the first attempt to publish the letters

Both before and after she donated the bulk of the Dumbarton Oaks collection to Harvard University in 1940, Mildred Bliss had already taken a passionate interest in a French edition of the letters to Marie von Hohenlohe, which had remained her private property. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s she had been unsparing in her efforts to bring the editorial project to fruition, lavishing vast amounts of time and money on it: several hundred documents preserved with the letters attest to the course than these plans took, an account of which would in itself fill an entire volume, so complex and eventful were they. Ernst Schelling, the intermediary with Bory for the letters, was designated to edit them. He certainly appeared to Mildred Bliss as a perfect editor, for not only was it through his hands that the letters were given to her, but he was also a famous musical figure whose formative years and subsequent career had been split between Europe and the United States. Born in 1876 in Belvedere, New Jersey, he had been a child prodigy (he entered the Academy of Music in Philadelphia when he was only 4). He studied at the Paris Conservatoire between 1882 and 1885, then under Dionys Pruckner (a favorite Liszt pupil and copyist of the 1850s), Richard Barth, Moritz Moszkowski, Theodor Leschetizky and Ignace Paderewski; he was also the favorite pupil of the latter. At the beginning of the century, he toured Europe, South and North America, and was an active composer. At the end of World War I, he went to Poland with his friend Paderewski. In 1924, he was in New York as the first conductor of the Young People's Concerts of the New York Philharmonic. He helped many American and European musicians, and was instrumental in securing for Enrique Granados the commission for *Goyescas* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1914. He was one of the first pianists to perform Granados's music, apart from the composer himself, and he championed the Spaniard until Granados's death in 1916.²⁹ Schelling often welcomed and entertained musicians at his summer home on Lake Geneva—where he passed on the Liszt letters from Robert Bory to Mildred Bliss.³⁰

Before 1931, while Bory was still in possession of the letters, he had already undertaken some preliminary work on the materials which remained with the collection. Then Schelling began to index it for Mrs. Bliss and to draw up an initial set of notes. It is no surprise that Schelling was entrusted with the publication of the letters: a two-volume album presently in the Bliss papers testifies to his having begun his work early in 1931.³¹ In 1934, Schirmer was asked by Dumbarton Oaks to complete a transcription of the manuscripts of the letters,³² but they declined. Then a series of individuals was charged with the task of preparing the letters for publication on various levels: photostatting the manuscripts, transcribing the texts, checking the transcriptions, providing scholarly annotation, and so on. Despite this flurry of activity the project languished. Several versions of an introduction prepared by Schelling are scattered throughout box files 1, 3 and 4.³³ In this he was aided by several assistants from whom Mildred Bliss had sought advice and help: Ethel Clark, the curator at Dumbarton Oaks, who kept an eye on the material from an administrative point of view; and Amalya Prendergast, who from 1938 dealt with the Herculean task of checking the transcriptions of the French originals and completing the notes.

By the end of the 1930s and after various vicissitudes that included the letters travelling in 1938 between France and the United States in the diplomatic bag of one of these two countries (or both),³⁴ all the editorial matter was more or less complete. It is not clear why and exactly how the letters were included in a diplomatic exchange, but perhaps they had been sent to France for some linguistic or editorial expertise, and were shown to publishing houses. One has to remember that Robert Woods Bliss was a diplomat: he completed his career as US Ambassador to Argentina in Buenos Aires (1927-1933), and he had been Secretary of the Embassy in Paris during World War I (1912-1916). From 1921 to 1933, he maintained an apartment in the rue Henri Moisson in Paris, and in 1933 he retired from the Foreign Service and settled at Dumbarton Oaks.

By 1938, Schelling had written an introduction in which he noted the extent to which he had been helped by his contacts with the late Duchess Elisabeth of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (1854–1908), who had witnessed for herself Liszt's life in Weimar. She was the daughter of Liszt's patron in the town, the Grand-Duke Carl Alexander of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, and had married Duke Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg in 1886. Schelling recalled how between 1901 and 1905 she had recounted her memoirs to him on the banks of Lake Schwerin. He thanked both Bory for helping him with his research and Mildred Bliss, whom he called "the gracious châtelaine of Dumbarton Oaks," for making the letters available. He worked on the project until the end of his life. In fact, a letter from Bory to him, dated 17 November 1939, responds to questions he had sent to the Swiss collector regarding portraits (Bory mentions a "book which [he is] preparing"³⁵). Sadly, Schelling died suddenly in December 1939, before the letters could be published. However this was not the end of the project, and the ladies at Dum-

barton Oaks remained fixed on the work. In a letter dated 14 November 1940, Amalya Prendergast explains that she is correcting everything and creating an index,³⁶ and Prendergast and Ethel Clark solicited advice from Edward Waters on various points, notably the legal situation vis-à-vis Liszt's heirs. In a 1942 letter to Ethel Clark, Waters pointed out the danger of publishing Liszt's letters while some heirs were still alive.³⁷ The problem was, of course, that the Liszt heirs in France were living in an occupied country, while the remaining heirs were the Wagner family, now enemies in war. Waters was then asked to secure the possibility of publishing without facing copyright problems, which apparently came to nothing for the remainder of the war.³⁸ The next activity on this front only came in 1951—a letter from Winifred Wagner, the widow of Siegfried, testifying that she is not against the publication of Liszt's letters (it is unclear whether the letters referenced are those to Olga von Meyendorff or Marie von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst).³⁹ In truth, Mildred Bliss wanted to be sure she could publish the two sets of letters without any problem, anticipating the publication of the Meyendorff ones.

Liszt's Letters Facing World War II and Newman's Assessments

It was now a question of finding a publisher, a quest reflected in a vast correspondence on the subject.⁴⁰ In 1938 Mildred Bliss had been drawn to the idea of entrusting the letters' publication to the Belles Lettres editing house in Paris, but since she wanted the book to reach the widest possible audience rather than a small, if erudite, readership, this route soon proved a dead end with the advent of war.⁴¹ In the early 1940s Alfred J. Knopf, W.W. Norton and the University of North Carolina Press were all contacted. The first two turned down the proposal on the grounds that as long as Europe was at war, or later, when they worried that the situation on the continent was not fully reconstructed after peace in 1945, the market hardly favored such an enterprise: unfortunately, it was in Europe that the book would normally have had the greatest chance of selling well.⁴² On 19 Jan. 1943, the famous translator Lewis Galantière, a personal friend to Mildred Bliss, wrote that "Paper is rationed. So the faster you go, the better,"⁴³ which seems more a warning to speed things up than one about the impossibility of the publication. Knopf mentioned both the exorbitant cost and the wartime restrictions on paper,⁴⁴ while The University of North Carolina seemed interested. But all of these plans nonetheless failed to materialize.⁴⁵

While some observers thought that the publication of letters by a great nineteenth-century composer such as Liszt would always be an event of the first order, others adopted a more condescending approach to Liszt and refused to believe in the commercial success of the venture, especially if it was undertaken in French by an American publisher and, moreover, in wartime: the war years and the international—and especially European—situation at this time undeniably worked against the publication of these letters to Marie von Hohenlohe.⁴⁶

And yet their appearance in print would have been of the greatest interest at this time, for in 1934 Ernest Newman's *The Man Liszt: A Study of the Tragi-Comedy of a Soul Divided Against Itself* had caused, as written above, a furore by painting a negative and polemical portrait of the composer. He promulgated the idea that Liszt had been an "actor" all of his life, and that every decision he made, every declaration, was done in order to correspond to the character he had decided to leave to posterity. In short: one cannot believe Liszt, even in his private correspondence. As early as 1911, in the Liszt centenary year, Newman had published a series of articles in *The Musical Times* in which he used the term "Liszt's typical failings."

Yet the songs, early works as they are for the most part, and full as they are of Liszt's typical failings, - excess of statement, a too anxious and too obvious search for drastic expression, inability to achieve a rapid and concentrated flight, - are an epitome not only of the whole Liszt but of the entire movement towards freedom that has alternately tempted and decoyed and racked and delighted the music of the last two or three generations.⁴⁷

At this time, Newman was more concentrated on writing about the music than about Liszt's personality, but one could already feel his animosity toward Liszt, whom he recognised, however, as an important composer. In his book, he further emphasizes these ideas and developed an analysis of his personality and social behavior which lead to the idea that Liszt was nothing else but a "poseur," and that therefore, no insight to the truth is possible. Five years after the publication of his attack, just after having read Newman's book, Amalya Prendergast wrote that the publication of what Ethel Clark would later call "our beloved Liszt letters"⁴⁸ could help to reveal a Liszt of whom many people were ignorant, for here was an intimate portrait of a tender, paternal figure: one cannot know Liszt "tender and fatherly," she wrote, without reading his letters to the little princess.⁴⁹ Of course, this was Newman's bone to pick: Liszt had lavished these tender feelings upon the wrong child, not the children of his loins but the child of his companion, and the inference was therefore that it had been Richard Wagner who had picked up the slack—with Cosima. Unfortunately, it is doubtful that these letters would have changed Newman's mind in his analysis of Liszt's personality, even if he had known them before completing his book. For Newman, the question would have been "Was Liszt playing a 'role'" even in these private, tender, and sweet letters to the young princess? Whatever we project Newman's response to be, they would have been *a posteriori* a wonderful way for readers to discover an unknown part of Liszt's life and his personality, an intimate one, one which would have undoubtedly given many counter arguments to Newman's negative views.

The war, the death of several of the people involved in the project and the problems of the market—which were bound up, in turn, with the eco-

conomic situation of the time—prevented Mildred Bliss’s dream from coming true. It is also interesting to read of the timidity of publishers who were discouraged by Liszt’s reputation in America as a composer, and whose name did not sell books. In the circumstances it is tempting to speak of a curse hanging over these letters.

From Dissertation to Book: Hugo’s Edition, a Race Against Time

Two years after the end of the war, Macmillan planned several interesting projects, among them a bilingual deluxe edition of the Liszt materials with the letters reproduced in facsimile.⁵¹ At this point Mildred Bliss thought of inviting Edward N. Waters to write an introduction for a bilingual edition,⁵² but this plan, too, came to nothing. In 1948, however, events took a new turn. A student at Harvard, Howard E. Hugo, decided to edit Liszt’s letters in an American translation and to submit the result as his doctoral dissertation for the Department of Comparative Literature at Harvard University. In this he had the full support of his teachers, including Jean Seznec,⁵³ and, initially, Mrs. Bliss.

The result was a new chapter in our detective story. In February 1948, Hugo received transcriptions of the letters prepared by Schelling and Amalya Prendergast more than fifteen years earlier. Hugo also benefited from access to all the documentation that had been amassed at Dumbarton Oaks in the course of earlier plans to publish the letters. He officially began his thesis in May 1948, and by June 1949 he was in a position to submit it. Equally precipitate was the decision to publish the dissertation, and for this Hugo obtained the consent of Harvard University Press. With this, a veritable race against time began. Starting in the summer of 1949, several individuals were now asked to check the text and notes.⁵⁴ Dumbarton Oaks and Mildred Bliss were alerted by the American musicologist Joseph Braunstein⁵⁵ to problems posed by Hugo’s manuscript, which was judged unpublishable in its present form in terms of both the translation and the annotation. In July 1950 Braunstein submitted a report on the typescript, which he had spent several months perusing.⁵⁶ At the same time he added a long list of corrections. Eugene H. Bland, a Byzantine scholar from Dumbarton Oaks, also edited the text, which was again a lengthy process, and improvements were made to Hugo’s translations. The division of labour is reflected in a typewritten preliminary title-page: Hugo is named as the translator and also given credit for the annotations, while Eugene Bland is named as editor, and Jean Seznec as the scholarly “authority” who also provided a “postlude” to the volume. The name of Dumbarton Oaks appears on the cover.⁵⁷ In the introduction that she wrote in 1950, Mildred Bliss tells the story of these letters from their acquisition in 1931, explaining the delay to the edition by adding bitterly that in 1939 “Schelling died and Hitler cast a shadow over the world.”⁵⁸ She dedicated the volume to Schelling’s memory.

But a new *coup de théâtre* followed. As a result of the arguments that had taken place and, it appears, Hugo’s reluctance to agree to the suggested

corrections and to share the title-page with others,⁵⁹ Mildred Bliss and Dumbarton Oaks decided to withdraw their support: the name of Dumbarton Oaks appears nowhere in the volume, which from now on was backed only by Harvard University Press.⁶⁰ The withdrawal of permission from Dumbarton Oaks also stipulated that Hugo was to be prevented from publishing the letters in French. This represented a complete turnaround, for the version published in 1953—and the butt of so many serious criticisms—corresponded completely to Hugo's dissertation and took no account of the huge amount of work that had been undertaken by others seeking to improve it. In the end, Hugo's name alone appeared on the cover.

Encouraged by his teachers, Hugo had been convinced, unfortunately, that Liszt's French was deficient and that it could be treated with cavalier condescension. As a result, the translation was limited to providing only the general sense of the original. In spite of her friendship with Hugo, Mildred Bliss acted on the advice of the scholars with whom she surrounded herself, among them Edward Waters and Josef Braunstein, who contended that Hugo's work was full of gaps, and it was presumably this circumstance that persuaded her to remove her patronage from the edition. She could not put her name to a project that traduced the "beloved Liszt letters" that she had promised Schelling she would publish as long ago as 1931. Waters himself reviewed the 1953 book for the Music Library Association *NOTES*, disassociating himself in no uncertain terms with the publication: "I must point out, however, that I myself never did any scholarly work on these letters (as stated in the foreword), and my only casual acquaintance with them occurred years after Ernest Schelling's death... Hugo and Harvard together have really compounded a felony!"⁶¹

* * *

80 years after that foundational meeting on lake Geneva between Mrs. Bliss and Ernest Schelling, as the world celebrates Liszt's 200th birthday, in a common effort to bring new light on the composer's career, on his oeuvre but also on his personality—thanks to new source research and philological progress—one might actually think that the *Roman noir* of such an historiographical intrigue has come to its end. As Jacques Barzun wrote in 1954 in his review of Hugo's book, a new edition of these "good letters" by Liszt was a necessity. It will be a tribute to Pauline Pocknell's memory that she was aware of the important problems which the lack of historiographic reach had caused in our knowledge of Liszt, and that she took the initiative to start a new edition of the Harvard letters which could result in the dissemination of a new and truer image of the composer. I will always remember that while working in Spring 2006 at the Beinecke Library (Yale University) on the edition of Liszt's letters and other documents, which appeared in a previous issue of this journal,⁶² Pauline Pocknell told me that I *had* to go to the Houghton Library, not only to see the letters, but the other documents the she was sure something could be made with.

Notes

¹ This article is dedicated to Malou Haine, who asked for my assistance in 2007 to complete the edition of Liszt's letters to Marie von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, which Pauline Pocknell left unfinished after she died in August 2006. Without Malou Haine's invitation, I would have never been involved in the archival research on the history of the Houghton Library, Harvard University collections, which generated this article. I am grateful to her for having me taken into this adventure. Parts of the research, precisely the history of Howard E. Hugo's edition of Liszt's letters, have been integrated in French in the introduction to *Lettres de Franz Liszt à Marie de Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, née de Sayn-Wittgenstein*, ed. Pauline Pocknell, Malou Haine, and Nicolas Dufetel (Vrin: Paris, 2010), pp. 31–35. The research carried out in the Houghton Library at Harvard University was made possible for the present writer thanks to the award of the 2010 Joan Nordell Fellowship. Thanks also to Juliette de Gardony Gilman (Cambridge, MA) for her insight on Liszt, France, Hungary and Hugo's edition while I was studying the material at the Houghton Library. Her detailed inquiry into the archives and familial records of the Hugo affair will bring new light and much more detail to the case of which this paper aims at being a first approach.

² Howard E. Hugo (ed.), *The Letters of Franz Liszt to Marie zu Sayn-Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953 [reprint Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1971]).

³ Jacques Barzun, "The Letters of Franz Liszt to Marie zu Sayn-Wittgenstein." Translated and Edited by Howard E. Hugo. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953, in *The Musical Quarterly*, x/1 (1954), 110–15.

⁴ Barzun, "The Letters of Franz Liszt" (note 2), 115.

⁵ Barzun, "The Letters of Franz Liszt" (note 2), 115. Pauline Pocknell started work on a new edition of the French originals of these letters, but unfortunately it was still incomplete at the time of her death in 2006. The task was completed by Malou Haine and the present writer (see above).

⁶ Constantin Victor Prince Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (1828-96) was one of six brothers of the princely family, and became the husband of Princess Marie von Sayn-Wittgenstein on 15 October 1859. Two of his elder brothers figured prominently in Liszt's life: Chlodwig Carl Prince Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (1819-1901), who was the German *Reichskanzler* 1894-1900; and Gustav Adolf Cardinal Prince Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (1823-96), whose position in Liszt's biography is now coming under much closer scrutiny than ever before (see Cannata, "Liszt & Minor Orders," this volume, 190-231; and "Liszt's *Missa Pro Organo*: and his *Requiem for Wagner*?" forthcoming). See also Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt. The Weimar Years*.

⁷ US-CAh, AM16 (1), file 1 (hereafter quoted AM16).

⁸ The most successful of these was the two-volume biography by Peter Raabe, *Lizsts Leben und Schaffen* (Stuttgart: Cotta Verlag) which was published in 1931 and still remains a remarkable work for the depth of its bibliographic detail and musical insight.

⁹ Ernest Newman, *The Man Liszt: A Study of the Tragi-Comedy of a Soul Divided Against Itself* (London: Cassell, 1934; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935; reprinted by Victor Gollancz in London in 1969 and again in 1970).

¹⁰ Paul Watt, "Ernest Newman's *The Man Liszt* of 1934: Reading its Freethought Agenda," *Context: Journal of Music Research* xxxi (2006), 193–205.

¹¹ Lina Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1880–94). For more on the *Fragezettel* that Ramann used in compiling her text, see Rena Charnin Mueller, "From the Biographer's Workshop: Lina Ramann's Questionnaires to Liszt," in *Franz Liszt and His World*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 361–424.

¹² Newman, *The Man Liszt* (note 6), xv.

¹³ Newman, *The Man Liszt* (note 6), xvii.

¹⁴ On these two categories of "truth" (poetic-aesthetic/empirical) about Richard Wagner, see Deathridge and Dahlhaus, *The New Grove Wagner*, p. 91 (« Letters, diaries, autobiography »): "Understanding the paths along which Wagner's imagination set off is more important than correcting conscious or unconscious inaccuracies. Yet editorial meticulousness is not to be despised: it is only against the background of empirical truth that the 'poetic truth' can be recognized for what it is—another truth and not a distortion that the exegete is at liberty to dismiss." About Liszt, see Nicolas Dufetel, "Franz Liszt et la 'propagande wagnérienne': Le projet de deux livres en français sur l'histoire de l'opéra et sur Wagner (1849–1859)," *Acta musicologica* lxxxii/2 (2010), 263–304.

¹⁵ Newman, *The Man Liszt* (note 6) (dust jacket of the 1935 American edition).

¹⁶ Regrettably, in the newest cycle of historiography, it is generally felt that Haraszti, too, did not treat his sources in an appropriately objective manner. Haraszti's principal works from this period ("Liszt à Paris," *La Revue musicale* clxv (1936), 241–58 and clxvii (1936), 5–16; "Die Autorschaft der literarischen Werke Franz Liszts," *Ungarische Jahrbücher* xxi (1940), 173–236; and "Franz Liszt écrivain et penseur: Histoire d'une mystification," *Revue de musicologie* xxii (1943), 19–28 and xxiii (1944), 12–24), have been challenged for both his musical and literary arguments. See, for example, Rena Mueller, "Liszt's *Tasso* Sketchbook: Studies in Sources and Chronology." Ph.D. diss. (1986), 48 ff. Haraszti's 1937 article, "Le Problème Liszt" (*Acta Musicologica* IX [1937], 123–36; X [1938], 32–46), which was followed by the three further publications cited above, questioned the authenticity of Liszt's literary works, declaring them to have been entirely the product of, first Marie d'Agoult, and later of Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein. His hypothesis was firmly disputed by Thérèse Marix-Spire (*Les Romantiques et la musique*. Paris: 1954), Léon Guichard ("Liszt et la littérature française." *Revue de musicologie* lvi [1970]), Edward Waters ("Sur la piste de Liszt." *Notes* XXVII [1970–71], 668 ff.), and Mária Eckhardt ("New Documents on Liszt as Author." *The New Hungarian Quarterly* XXV [1984], 181–94).

¹⁷ Watt, "Ernest Newman's *The Man Liszt* of 1934: Reading its Freethought Agenda".

¹⁸ Watt, "Ernest Newman's *The Man Liszt* of 1934: Reading its Freethought Agenda", 201. Watt uses Nigel Scaife, *British Music Criticism in a New Era: Studies in Critical Thought, 1894–1945*, Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford (1994), 169.

¹⁹ Watt, "Ernest Newman's *The Man Liszt*" (note 7); see also André Maurois, *Aspects de la biographie* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1928); trans. S. C. Roberts as *Aspects of Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929).

²⁰ Newman, *The Man Liszt*, xii–xiii.

²¹ Newman, *The Man Liszt*, 277.

²² La Mara, *Franz Liszts Briefe, herausgegeben von La Mara*. 8 vols. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1893–1905.

²³ Newman, *The Man Liszt*, 249.

²⁴ AM16 (3), bundle titled "Howard Hugo Manuscript 1" "Signed "M.B.," it is dated "Dumbarton Oaks, 1950."

²⁵ The inventory and the connected documents mention 300 iconographical items, 38 letters and 8 musical manuscripts). AM 16 (1), file 1.

²⁶ Edward Neighbor Waters (1906–91) was for 34 years the Assistant Chief of the Music Division of the Library of Congress under Otto Kinkeldey, Carl Engel, and Harold Spivacke, finally rising to Chief in 1972. He retired in 1978. As a musicologist, his principal area of investigation was Liszt and his circle, and he built the Music Division Liszt Collection into an unparalleled American resource of manuscripts, prints, and secondary literature. In the early 1950s, Waters was responsible for bringing to the Music Division a monumental series of donations from the families of major European artists, among them Koussevitsky, Kreisler, Lopatnikoff, Medtner, Moldenhauer, Rachmaninoff, Sabaneeff, Sevitky, Siloti, and Slonimsky.

²⁷ AM 16 (1), file 1. See also Benjamin's letters to Mildred Bliss, 15 November, 9 and 16 December 1957, AM16 (1), last file (without number). The letters mention C. Bertrand Thompson, Montevideo (Uruguay), a protagonist in the history of Liszt private collections which has not yet, as far as the present author knows, called upon the attention of researchers. Mrs. Bliss's further purchases remain an open question and will need further research and special investigation in the Bliss Papers at the Harvard University Archives (HUGFP 76.xx).

²⁸ Perhaps a detailed inventory or a catalogue will be made after the completion of this article. The author will try, here, to give enough information about the quoted documents so that they can be easily traced.

²⁹ Granados had travelled to New York for the premiere of his opera in 1916. He and his wife were lost when the liner on which they were traveling back to Europe, the *Sussex*, was torpedoed by a German submarine in the English Channel. See David Cannata, "Goyescas *Tabula Rasa*: or Flattery *WILL* Get You Everywhere!" *Studi Musicali* XXXVIII (2009/1), 207–33.

³⁰ Waldo Selden Pratt and Charles N. Boyd, ed., *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians. American Supplement being the sixth volume of the complete work*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1920, 352. The Ernest Schelling Collection, including many letters and memorabilia about his activities and his relations, is held at the University of Maryland.

³¹ AM 16 (1).

- ³² US-CAh, AM 16 (4), file 6.
- ³³ See in particular AM16 (4), files 3 and 4 (working notes).
- ³⁴ AM16 (4), file 1 (letter from Mildred Bliss, 19 November 1938).
- ³⁵ AM16 (4), file 1.
- ³⁶ AM 16 (4), file 1. On Amalya Prendergast, see the other documents in AM16 (4), files 1 and 2.
- ³⁷ Letter dated 10 February 1943, AM16 (4), file 5.
- ³⁸ AM16 (4), file 5 (letter from Waters, 10 Feb. 1943).
- ³⁹ AM 15 (1), file 1.
- ⁴⁰ AM16 (4), file 5.
- ⁴¹ AM16 (4), file 1 (letter from Mildred Bliss, 19 November 1938).
- ⁴² See in particular Norton's letter (24 October 1946), AM16 (4), file 5.
- ⁴³ AM16 (4), file 5.
- ⁴⁴ AM16 (4), file 5 (letter of 23 November 1943).
- ⁴⁵ See the letter from the University of North Carolina Press, dated, 22 April 1947, AM 16 (4), file 5.
- ⁴⁶ As the Houghton papers are still not organized and catalogued, it is, unfortunately, impossible today to go into much more detail in this article and discuss all these negotiations and setbacks, however interesting they are for the light that they shed on Lisztian historiography and on the reception of his life and works in Europe and the United States during the 1930s and 1940s.
- ⁴⁷ Ernest Newman, "Franz Liszt. October 22, 1811-July 31, 1886", *The Musical Times*, 52/824 (Oct. 1, 1911), 633-39; here 637.
- ⁴⁸ Letter from Ethel Clark to Amalya Prendergast, 26 May 1941, AM16 (4), file 1.
- ⁴⁹ Letter from Amalya Prendergast to Ethel Clark, 30 August 1939, AM16 (4), file 1.
- ⁵⁰ One of Newman's main views is that Liszt played "roles" during his life.
- ⁵¹ Letter from Macmillan, dated 17 April 1947, AM16 (4), file 6. See also the Macmillan letters in the Bliss Papers (Harvard university Archives) HUGFP 76.16 Box 4.
- ⁵² AM16 (4), file 6.
- ⁵³ Jean Seznec (1905-1983) was a historian of literature. In 1941 he accepted a position in Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University, where he taught until 1949. He then returned to Europe, where he was elected Professor of French Literature at Oxford University.
- ⁵⁴ AM16 (4), file 9, unnumbered document, "Memorandum regarding the Liszt Letters" (1 Aug. 1950).
- ⁵⁵ Joseph Braunstein (1892-1984), an Austrian born musicologist, teacher and the senior program annotator for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. As a young violinist and violist he performed *Salome*, *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* with Richard Strauss conducting the Vienna State Opera. "He also performed for Mascagni and Lehar. He heard Debussy and Mahler conduct their own works. And he studied composition with Schoenberg. [...] His studies at the University of Vienna were interrupted by World War I. After the war, he joined the Vienna Symphony and the Vienna State Opera. He earned his doctorate in 1920, and seven years later he published his thesis — a study of Beethoven's "Leonore" Overtures — as his first book." Allan Kozinn, "Joseph Braunstein, New York Musicologist, 104" (Obituary), *The New York Times*, 12 March 1996. At the time of his work with the Liszt letters, Braunstein was employed by the New York Public Library Music Division, then situated in the Main Library at 42nd Street.
- ⁵⁶ AM16 (3), bundle titled "Howard Hugo Manuscript 1" (unnumbered document).
- ⁵⁷ AM16 (3).
- ⁵⁸ AM16 (3), p. 2 of preface.
- ⁵⁹ AM16 (4), file 9, unnumbered document, "Memorandum regarding the Liszt Letters" (1 Aug. 1950).
- ⁶⁰ AM16 (4), file 9.
- ⁶¹ Edward N. Waters, review of *The Letters of Franz Liszt to Marie zu Sayn-Wittgenstein*. Translated and edited by Howard E. Hugo, *NOTES* Second Series Vol. 10/4 (September 1953), 623-24.
- ⁶² Nicolas Dufetel, "Franz Liszt: Eleven Autograph Letters (1828-1886) at the Beinecke Library (Yale University)," *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 58 (2007), 4-46.