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“Mon triste voyage”: Sentimentality and Autobiography in Gottschalk’s *The Dying Poet*

LAURA MOORE PRUETT

The terms “sentimentalism” and “sensibility” play a central role in contemporary scholarly discourse on literature and intellectual theory in the nineteenth century.¹ Often used interchangeably, these words identify simultaneous eighteenth-century developments in popular culture and philosophy that were centered in England but far-reaching in their influence. The “cult of sentiment”² was a phenomenon in which emotions and feelings, as opposed to reason and logic, were seen as the routes to moral and social improvement. This movement and its ideals were manifested in writings by

authors as diverse as Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), Charles Dickens (1812–70), and, later, D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930). Visual and literary artworks explored the various facets of the sentimental movement. Among its primary characteristics was a preoccupation with death that characterized both the European and American sensibilities of the time. Spiritualism, or the belief in communication with dead souls, began to grow in popularity in the years before the Civil War, continuing into the early twentieth century.³ And often, the emphasis on feeling was directly connected to the feminine experience, as in Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748), the tragic story of a woman’s moral virtue and her eventual ruin.

However, a parallel movement in literature

¹See Michael Bell, *Sentimentalism, Ethics, and the Culture of Feeling* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993).

²See, for example, Michael Bell, “The Cult of Sentiment and the Culture of Feeling,” in *Representations of Emotions*, ed. Jürgen Schlaeger and Gesa Stedman (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1999), pp. 87–98.

³Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

and the visual arts explored a male archetype of the sentimental protagonist. British author Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, first published in 1751, provided inspiration for a long line of literary and poetic works on the theme of death and mortality. The "Epitaph" that concludes Gray's ode confirms that the primary subject is a young unknown poet, over whose grave the narrator is meditating:

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.
.....
No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)
The bosom of his Father and his God.⁴

Perhaps one of the most famous examples featuring the dying male protagonist was Johann Wilhelm von Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774, revised 1787), in which young Werther, a passionate and sensitive artist, suffers such great emotional turmoil over his beloved Lotte that he is eventually compelled to take his own life. Werther therefore can be viewed as a template for the "dying poet," an image that was realized repeatedly throughout the long nineteenth century. British poet Thomas Chatterton was famously immortalized in the 1856 painting "The Death of Chatterton" by Henry Wallis, which depicts the seventeen-year-old writer after his suicide by arsenic. This male archetype was marked by several common elements: great creativity, high levels of sensitivity, physical and emotional fragility, significant moments of disappointment, and early (and often self-inflicted) death. Two French poems, both titled "Le Poète mourant" and first published in 1823, explicitly sustained the dying poet trope and simultaneously inspired musicians to explore the same in their compositions. These poems will be discussed in more detail below.

Musical allusions were often incorporated into sentimental literary works, beginning with

⁴Thomas Gray, *An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (London: Dodsley, 1751), p. 11, lines 117–20, 125–28.

Goethe's *Werther*. The young poet wrote his 16 July diary entry about his beloved Charlotte's "melody which she plays on the piano with angelic skill, so simple and so spiritual!"⁵ Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) featured two characters who play the piano, one female and one male. The parlor pieces enjoyed by youngest sister Beth, who was reticent to play for an audience and preferred the shadow of twilight, contrast with the more serious Mozart and Beethoven works, such as the "Pathétique" Sonata, played by neighbor boy Laurie, who in the eyes of his grandfather "was getting too fond of it."⁶ Alcott reinforced gender distinctions in multiple ways. Beth assumed a modest and retiring character and played "pretty, easy music," songs, and hymns that contrasted with Laurie's choice of the presumably more powerful compositions of Beethoven; also, Laurie's grandfather made it clear that while music is quite acceptable as a pastime for a woman, it should not play too important a role in a man's life.⁷

A later literary work successfully connected the disparate elements of the sentimentalist movement so popular during the long nineteenth century. James Joyce's 1914 short story "The Dead" features many references to music over the course of an evening party: waltzes, quadrilles, and art songs are all performed by the guests of a musical family. After the party, a married couple, retiring to a hotel room for the snowy night, holds a conversation about how the song *The Lass of Aughrim* triggers the wife's memories of a young love, a boy who died after spending a rainy night waiting under her window. In this way Joyce skillfully connects music and emotion in his story with the

⁵"Sie hat eine Melodie, die sie auf dem Klaviere spielet mit der Kraft eines Engels, so simpel und so geistvoll!" Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (Leipzig: Göschen, 1787), p. 87.

⁶Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women and Good Wives: Being Stories for Girls* (London: Ward, Lock, and Tyler, 1871), p. 71.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 73. That the music Beth plays is never specifically named, unlike the Beethoven sonata Laurie performs, reinforces the disparity. See also Petra Meyer-Frazier, "Music, Novels, and Women: Nineteenth-Century Prescriptions for an Ideal Life," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 10 (2006), 45–59, for a discussion of music and gender in American sentimental literature.

sentimentalization of death, specifically that of a young man.

The sensibility movement in literature was paralleled by the composition of similarly sentimental music, both in Europe and in America. The pieces Beth and her real-life counterparts played would have included parlor songs written by American composers, like Stephen Foster's *Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair*, as well as character pieces by European artists, including Felix Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*. There existed an understood set of criteria for such music: women were the most likely performers, although men were not barred from performing it; pieces were short, diatonic, and formally straightforward; and many works had evocative titles and texts that emphasized emotional subjects like love, family, religion, and, frequently, death.⁸

Nineteenth-century musical representations of death include numerous examples of songs on the dying poet archetype as well as those perhaps better-known examples about dead or dying young women, such as Henry S. Thompson's ballad *Lilly Dale* (1852) or Stephen Foster's *Eulalie, The Bride of Death* (1853). These vocal works, performed in the context of the home parlor, naturally fulfilled a dual purpose: the consumer simultaneously was edified by and took pleasure in the corporeal experience of performing the song, yet also felt sympathetic or possibly empathetic stirrings in response to the poetic content. Solo piano compositions could also serve a similar purpose, such as funeral marches, like those by Frederic Chopin and Franz Liszt, and Mendelssohn's *Trauermarsch* (op. 62, no. 3); similarly titled works were composed by amateurs as well. Yet the subject of the dead or dying young man

⁸Of course, many pieces lie outside this general characterization; often ballads were modeled on operatic styles rather than folk ones, and some, including *Jeannie*, were written from a male perspective. Stephen Foster's *Open Thy Lattice, Love* is an example of both the influence of opera and the masculine voice. See Matthew Head, "'If the Pretty Little Hand Won't Stretch': Music for the Fair Sex in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52 (1999), 203–54; and Ruth Solie, "'Girling' at the Parlor Piano," in *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 85–117, for treatment of gender roles and their perpetuation at the piano.

assumed critical significance during the 1860s, when so many were lost during the Civil War.

In her 2008 publication *This Republic of Suffering*, Drew Gilpin Faust considers the dramatic shifts in the American understanding of death that took place with the advent of the war. According to Faust, "The war took young, healthy men and rapidly, often instantly, destroyed them with disease or injury. This marked a sharp and alarming departure from existing preconceptions about who should die."⁹ In addition, death became a universal phenomenon rather than an individual one: seemingly "every household mourns some loved one lost."¹⁰ The experience of mourning for the young men lost is memorialized in letters and journals of the time. Often the words of the bereaved echo the language of the contemporaneous sentimental literature: "I can't realize that I am never to see that dear boy again," wrote Sarah Palmer after her brother was killed at Second Bull Run.¹¹ Even the soldiers themselves contemplated how they would be remembered after death. Anticipating his imminent death, which occurred in 1861, L. L. Jones wrote to his wife, "I wish you to have my last words and thoughts. Remember me as one who . . . was perhaps better than he seemed. I shall hope to survive and meet you again . . . but it may not be so."¹² Such desire not to be forgotten was recognized and then captured by artists working to portray the experiences of war.

The war and its effects resonated in every medium of art, from literature and music to the relatively new technologies of lithography and photography.¹³ A line can be traced from the fascination in literature with fictional "dying poets" to the more immediate reality of dying sons, husbands, and brothers. Walt Whitman's poem "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest,

⁹Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008), p. xii.

¹⁰Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861–1868*, ed. John Q. Anderson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1955), p. 264.

¹¹Quoted in Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, p. 145.

¹²Quoted in Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, p. 19.

¹³See Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861–1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

and the Road Unknown," first published in his anthology *Drum-Taps* in 1865, details his encounter with "a soldier, a mere lad, in danger of bleeding to death."¹⁴ In Whitman's first-person narrative, "I bend to the dying lad, his eyes open, a half-smile gives he me, / Then the eyes close, calmly close, and I speed forth to the darkness." Whitman's journals also include frequent mention of dead bodies and even body parts encountered during his work in army hospitals. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow first published his poem "Killed at the Ford" in 1866 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In it he relates the tale of a bullet that not only kills a "beautiful youth" but also has a second impact:

That fatal bullet went speeding forth,
Till it reached a town in the distant North,
Till it reached a house in a sunny street,
Till it reached a heart that ceased to beat
Without a murmur, without a cry;
.....
And the neighbors wondered that she should die.¹⁵

Visual artists also commemorated both the premature deaths of young soldiers and the impact their loss had on those left behind. In a famous illustration by Winslow Homer that appeared in the pages of *Harper's Weekly*, a young woman sits weeping, her head on her arm, in a panel titled "Wounded," implying both the physical wounds of her beloved and the emotional wounding she is experiencing.¹⁶ Photography, newly introduced to the United States in the 1840s, provided an even more immediate technique of capturing images of the young, battered bodies of those recently lost. While Mathew Brady conceived of the idea of documenting the war through photography, one of his employees, Alexander Gardner, published a comprehensive postbellum collection of his own images entitled *Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War* in 1866. Among his photographs are some of the most iconic images of the Civil War, including his famous

pictures of the dead at Antietam and Gettysburg. He later attained a degree of notoriety when in the twentieth century it was discovered that some of his photographs may have been staged, including "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter," a poignant portrait of a young Confederate soldier who died in the Devil's Den at Gettysburg.¹⁷ It has been noted, however, that, at the time, photography was viewed as an art form that might someday replace other forms of visual art; such manipulation therefore may have been more acceptable than it would be today.¹⁸

Music played a variety of roles throughout the Civil War. In addition to the battlefield marches and patriotic broadsides, many sentimental songs were written that looked at the war's impact either from the point of view of the doomed young soldiers or from that of those left behind. Irwin Silber's *Songs of the Civil War* features a section titled "Weeping Sad and Lonely: Sentimental War Songs of a Sentimental Age."¹⁹ The subjects of the songs range from lonely or anonymous deaths at the scene of the battle (*The Drummer Boy of Shiloh*) to the last words of dying men (*Tell Mother I Die Happy*) to home-front sorrow (*The Vacant Chair*). Frequently, responses to such songs would be penned, as was the case in the pair of songs *Do They Miss Me at Home?* and *Yes, We Think of Thee at Home*. Others gave voice to the nurses who witnessed the slow deaths of soldiers, such as *Let Me Kiss Him for His Mother*. This song, too, was answered, with words that expressed a mother's gratitude:

Bless the lips that kissed our darling,
As he lay on his death-bed,
Far from home and 'mid cold strangers
Blessings rest upon your head.²⁰

The lyrics to John H. Hewitt's 1864 song *Somebody's Darling* are particularly relevant

¹⁷Shirley Samuels, *Facing America: Iconography and the Civil War* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 70–75.

¹⁸See William A. Frassanito, *Gettysburg: A Journey In Time* (New York: Scribner, 1975).

¹⁹Irwin Silber, *Songs of the Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

²⁰J. A. C. O'Connor, *Bless the Lips That Kissed Our Darling* (H. De Marsan, 1865). Quoted in Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, p. 13.

¹⁴Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: Welsh, 1882), p. 239.

¹⁵*Atlantic Monthly*, 17:102 (April 1866), 479.

¹⁶Winslow Homer, "News from the War," *Harper's Weekly* 6:285 (14 June 1862), 376–77.

to the sentimental trope of the young dying man. Focusing on the subject's delicate appearance, they paint a mental image quite similar to the portrait of poet Thomas Chatterton.

Somebody's darling, so young and so brave,
Wearing still on his sweet yet pale face,
Soon to be hid in the dust of the grave,
The lingering light of his boyhood's grace.
Somebody's darling, somebody's pride,
Who'll tell his mother where her boy died?
Matted and damp are his tresses of gold,
Kissing the snow of that fair young brow;
Pale are the lips of most delicate mould,
Somebody's darling is dying now.
Back from his beautiful purple-veined brow,
Brush off the wandering waves of gold;
Cross his white hands on his broad bosom now,
Somebody's darling is still and cold. . . .
Somebody's watching and waiting for him,
Yearning to hold him again to her breast;
Yet there he lies with his blue eyes so dim,
And purple, child-like lips half apart.
Tenderly bury the fair, unknown dead,
Pausing to drop on his grave a tear;
Carve on the wooden slab over his head,
"Somebody's darling is slumbering here."²¹

The theme of remembrance is also present in the song. The last two verses request the listener to stop and weep at the young man's grave, carve a memorial gravestone, and even to cut off a lock of his hair. In each of these sentimental Civil War songs, the imagery and emotional impact of the subject resonates deeply with the listener.

The combination of the popular sentimental style, the subject of the dying young man, and the effects of the Civil War inspired many composers, even those who wrote predominantly nonvocal music. New Orleans-born pianist and composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–69) frequently explored the concepts of death and reminiscence in both his compositions and writings. Around December 1862, Gottschalk wrote

a short philosophy of music in the pages of his journal; it was later published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1865). Among his points was that music can function as an agent of reminiscence. He explains: "*Music is a moral agent. Through the medium of the nervous system it brings the superior faculties into play; its language is that of sentiment. Moreover, the ideas that have presided over the combinations of musical art establish relations between its composers and the soul. . . . Music awakens in us reminiscences, memories, associations.*"²² Gottschalk's language here echoes that of the writers of fiction and poetry discussed earlier. He emphasizes the power of music to inspire deeply felt sensations and memories. Acknowledgment and application of his theory are central to the search for meaning in his sentimental compositions.

Gottschalk wrote a number of sentimental works throughout his career.²³ One of his most popular and enduring was a *Meditation* for solo piano entitled *The Dying Poet*. Possessing no opus number and first published during the Civil War in Boston by Ditson in 1864, the piece was dedicated to Mrs. George Henriques, the matron of a New York family that had given Gottschalk assistance and housed him at various times. At the time of its composition, Gottschalk had just ended an extended stay in Cuba, where he had composed without the stress of performing, a welcome change from his first American performing circuits from 1853 to 1857. After his father Edward's untimely death in October 1853, Gottschalk assumed the considerable outstanding debts and began a lifelong self-charged mission to support his mother and seven siblings. His primary financial goal in performing from that point on was to make enough money to send to his family, then living in Paris, and perhaps have a little left over for his own expenses. In Cuba,

²¹John H. Hewitt, *Somebody's Darling* (Macon, GA: J. C. Schreiner & Son, 1864). Available at the Historic American Sheet Music collection at the American Memory project of the Library of Congress [<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award97/ncdhtml/hasmhome.html>], accessed 7 September 2012.

²²Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), pp. 108–09.

²³Perhaps his most famous was *The Last Hope*, op. 16 (1854), but others include a solo piano *Berceuse*, op. 47 (ca. 1860), and a vocal berceuse with text by H. C. Watson, "Slumber On, Baby Dear," ca. 1861. Also published under his pseudonym Seven Octaves were *Le Chant du Martyr*, *The Maiden's Blush*, and *Radieuse*, all ca. 1859–63.

Gottschalk was able to take a break from his worries and simply relax. He wrote:

Seized with a profound disgust of the world and of myself, tired, discouraged, suspecting men (and women), I hastened to hide in the wilds on the extinguished volcano of N—, where I lived for many months like a cenobite. . . .

Perched upon the edge of the crater, on the very top of the mountain, my cabin overlooked the whole country. . . . Every evening I moved my piano out upon the terrace, and there, in view of the most beautiful scenery in the world, which was bathed by the serene and limpid atmosphere of the tropics, I played, *for myself alone*, everything that the scene opened up before me inspired—and what a scene! . . .

It was at this period that Strakosch wrote, offering me an engagement for a round of concerts in the United States. I hesitated an instant, cast a last glance at the past, gave a sigh, and signed. The dream was finished.²⁴

His new tour, managed and often accompanied by impresario Max Strakosch, had him traveling across the Civil War-torn United States. By his own account, he traveled over one hundred thousand miles by train over the next three years. In his *Notes* he recorded feeling “whirled in space. This agitated life is a distressing monotony. . . . *Pianistomonambulist!*” He also noted in December 1862 that he had given eighty-five concerts and traveled fifteen thousand miles in fewer than five months. He described his routine: “Eighteen hours a day on the railroad! Arrive at seven o’clock in the evening, eat with all speed, appear at eight o’clock before the public. The last note finished, rush quickly for my luggage, and en route until next day, always to the same thing! I have become stupid with it. . . . The sight of a piano sets my hair on end.”²⁵ The concerts succeeded one another at breakneck speed; sometimes he performed in two different cities in one day. Gottschalk encountered hospitable cities with grand halls and comfortable hotels, but he also endured execrable quarters, miserable storms, and legions of unruly

soldiers. Entries in his *Notes of a Pianist* illuminate the conditions:

We are again pursuing our journey. It continues to snow, and from certain signs the farmers say it will have drifted, and will certainly have obstructed the road. Here we are stopped. . . . The thermometer has gone down to twenty-five degrees below zero. . . . I have the sad perspective of passing the night on the floor (31 December 1863).

En route to Baltimore. Our car is filled with very noisy soldiers who sing songs, smelling also of the eternal whisky. At first we do not pay any attention to it, but they begin to be very disagreeable. One begins to smoke, then a second—a third imitates him (21 March 1864).

Cleveland is devoted to bad hotels, the bill of fare ostentatiously containing an interminable list of dishes, not one of which is eatable. The fish is not fresh, the soup greasy water, the butter rancid, the turkey tough. . . . The tea tastes of chamomile and hay. Everything is so dirty—so badly prepared! (8 December 1864).²⁶

He was, by his own admission, living the life of a “carpetbag.”²⁷ Throughout these unfortunate experiences, however, Gottschalk always kept his audience and its desires foremost in mind. His compositions continued to reflect contemporary tastes while highlighting his virtuosic talent. *The Dying Poet* was among them. It was immensely popular both during Gottschalk’s lifetime and for many years afterward, appearing in numerous publications and used as music for silent films through the 1920s.²⁸ It was originally published under a pseudonym with the cover reading: “Performed by Gottschalk at his concerts with immense success. Composed by Seven Octaves.” Later editions did away with this pretense.

The Dying Poet presents a particular challenge to scholars. Gottschalk never mentions the piece in his *Notes*, aside from a cryptic reference on 1 November 1864 to “five new contraband pieces that are to be published under the aegis of a borrowed paternity,” e.g.,

²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 150–52, 168, 238.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 120.

²⁸S. Frederick Starr, *Bamboula!: The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 444–45.

²⁴Gottschalk, *Notes*, p. 43.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 116, 102.

Seven Octaves.²⁹ Because it lacks the distinctive Latin American syncopations and quotations of Creole or minstrel tunes found in his other works, musical analysis and interpretation rely on the unequivocal relationship of the piece to the sentimental parlor song tradition and its use of the dying poet trope to illuminate Gottschalk's artistic goals.

The composition is organized as variations on two themes, with a transitional section at the midpoint and an extended coda. The repetition inherent in the formal structure becomes the medium through which the power of reminiscence and mourning finds its agency. An eight-measure introduction, with a rapid chromatic flourish, allowed the composer to establish the key while adding dramatic excitement to the piece. Gottschalk would often take improvisational liberties in his performances, which added an element of suspense for the audience, who was usually familiar with the published version of the piece.³⁰

The primary eight-measure melody is simple, yet has a large range developed through an expanding wavelike shape (ex. 1). Three ascending arpeggiated figures in mm. 9–13 are answered by a descent in mm. 14–16 (ex. 2). The theme is first heard in the low-middle range of the keyboard, unusual for Gottschalk, who tends to favor the high registers. Taking the context of the piece into consideration, this

can be construed as a tenor voice, evoking the male “dying poet” of the title. The placement of the melody also adds to its plaintive quality and assures it is in a comfortable range for listeners to hum on the way home after the concert. The ornamental inverted mordent in m. 10 momentarily quickens the predominantly eighth-note rhythm, but the overall impression of the melody is straightforward and sweet.

The secondary tune enters in m. 25, providing contrast to the first theme. The three repeated eighth notes that announce the theme, the more frequent use of ornaments, and the chromatic lines in mm. 27 and 31 all complement the simple triadic movement of the primary melody (ex. 3). In total, there are six recollections of the primary theme and three of the secondary theme. These varied repetitions of the two melodies provide increasingly florid ornamentation and expand the emotional range of the piece. For example, in m. 49, the primary melody is heard in the right hand in arpeggiated chords marked “celeste.” Measures 57–64 contain agitated transitional material that modulates briefly into G minor and leads finally to the sixteenth-note, right-hand motion, which continues to the end. From m. 72 to the end, the right hand never reaches below B \flat in the middle of the treble staff and keeps primarily above that staff (ex. 4). The sixteenth-note rhythm in the right hand is also constant to the end of the piece; this popular “nickelodeon” style was especially effective later during the silent movie era. The left hand, meanwhile, accompanies with a wavelike pattern that is quite peaceful, especially following the turbulent transition.

Example 4 also provides an illustration of the proto-ragtime harmonic motion Gottschalk often employed in works like his *Souvenir de Porto Rico*. In the last three beats of m. 95 leading to m. 96, the cadential progression of V–iv^{o6}–vii^o–I folds in onto itself chromatically. This sound is both distinctive and fresh and was used regularly in ragtime composition.

The increasingly expressive repetitions of the melody provide insight into the impetus behind the composition of this piece. Gottschalk's philosophy of music quoted earlier emphasized the power of reminiscence. In discussing Gottschalk's sentimental works, his biographer

²⁹Gottschalk, *Notes*, p. 230. The works Gottschalk published under his nom de plume were in general less technically challenging than his “legitimate” works. His reference to the compositions as “contraband” along with their pseudonymous publication indicates that they were intended to make money (which they did) rather than to elevate the moral compass of the consumers. Once *The Dying Poet* became famous, however, he was quick to admit to its composition.

³⁰Starr, *Bamboula!*, pp. 233–34: “Moreau Gottschalk was an inveterate and inspired improviser. As a Chicago reviewer observed: ‘The charm of Gottschalk's playing is, that he rarely interprets the same piece twice in precisely the same manner. The main features, of course, are there; but the finer shades of sentiment and feeling depend upon the mood of the composer. We have often heard the same piece rendered by Gottschalk a second time with far more delicate tints and exquisite coloring than upon the first occasion.’ . . . That he wrote down his compositions at all speaks more to the profitability of sheet music sales in that era than to any preference he had for formal composition over improvisation.” The review is from an unidentified Chicago newspaper, 13(?) December 1864, Scrapbook no. 4, Gottschalk Collection, NYPL.

Example 1: *The Dying Poet*, mm. 1–8.

Example 2: *The Dying Poet*, mm. 9–16.

Example 3: *The Dying Poet*, mm. 25–32.

Example 5: *The Dying Poet*, mm. 125–28.

Gottschalk's composition, each variation of the melody has its own meaning, a different light to cast on the subject of the dying poet.

The most significant repetition of the primary theme in *The Dying Poet* occurs in the coda. At m. 125, it appears in the left hand, under *celeste* chords high above the staff in the right hand. This last repetition of the main melody, marked *p*, appears in the left hand very simply—triads and seventh chords, without arpeggiation, under a static right-hand accompaniment (ex. 5). The “Lento” marking calls for a slowing of the tempo. After the exciting harmonic movements and various embellishments of the previous recollections, this occurrence sounds almost removed and distant. The high register of the right-hand chords adds to the far-away impression, and in the antepenultimate measure, Gottschalk includes the marking “perdendosi,” or dying away. Perhaps this is his musical gesture of farewell to the poet of the title. Or perhaps it is a sign of regret at his decision to return to concertizing in the United States, having to say goodbye to his years of rest and productivity.

Two nineteenth-century French poems, both entitled “Le Poète mourant,” may provide a glimpse of programmatic illumination of the piece, as it is likely that Gottschalk knew at least one of them before writing his piano solo. The first was written by Charles-Hubert de Millevoye (1782–1816) and published in a col-

lection of 1823 in Paris.³⁴ A section of the text and my translation follow:

Compagnons dispersés de mon triste voyage,
O mes amis! O vous qui me fûtes si chers!
De mes chants imparfaits recueillez l'héritage,
Et sauvez de l'oubli quelques-uns de mes vers.

(Scattered companions from my sorrowful
voyage,
O my friends! O you who were so dear to me,
Give shelter to the legacy of my flawed songs,
And rescue from oblivion a few of my verses.)³⁵

The poem has been set as a song text by at least two composers; Giacomo Meyerbeer subtitled his 1836 song *Élégie*, and Swiss composer Louis Niedermeyer likely set the text around the same time.³⁶ Gottschalk was almost certainly familiar with Millevoye's work, as the posthumous compilation also includes both “Le Mancenillier” and “La Chute des feuilles,” poems on which he had based earlier composi-

³⁴*Oeuvres Posthumes de Millevoye*, vol. IV (Paris: Ladvocat, 1823), pp. 122–24. The poem was quoted earlier in 1816 by Étienne de Jouy in *L'Hermite de la Guiane, ou observations sur les moeurs et les usages français au Commencement du dix-neuvième siècle*, vol. 2 (Paris: Pilet, 1816), p. 276.

³⁵*Oeuvres Posthumes de Millevoye*, IV, 123.

³⁶Meyerbeer, *Le Poète mourant* (Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, 1836). *Poète mourant; élégie de Millevoye; musique de L. Niedermeyer* (Paris: Pacini, n.d.).

tions. The complex imagery of “Le Poète mourant” contains potentially significant connections to Gottschalk’s music. Narrated from the first-person perspective of the dying poet himself, Millevoye’s text is addressed to those “scattered companions” who will be left behind—perhaps fellow poets who can indeed “rescue from oblivion” his poems. The phrases not only evoke a bittersweet recollection of the past but draw attention to the wistful melancholy that accompanies this farewell. While Gottschalk himself left no indication of the poetic meaning of *The Dying Poet*, the time of its composition corresponds with entries in his *Notes* that express dissatisfaction with the path his life had taken. The overall spirit of the journal is despondent, focusing on the unpleasant and reminiscing upon happier times. The following excerpt from Gottschalk’s *Notes* contains one of his unhappier reflections:

I live on the railroad—my home is somewhere between the baggage car and the last car of the train. . . . All notions of time and space are effaced from my mind. Just like the drunkard who, when asked the distance between the Chaussee-d’Antin and the Porte St.-Denis, replied, “ten small glasses.” If you ask me what time it is, I will reply, “It is time to close my trunk” or “It is time to play *The Banjo*” or “It is time to put on my black coat.” These three events are very nearly the most memorable of my daily existence. I console myself by thinking that I am not the only one of my species (15 December 1862).³⁷

The last sentence of this entry in particular parallels the Millevoye poem’s “scattered companions”; Gottschalk too feels alone and unhappy, but finds solace in the thought of others suffering a similar experience.

The second poem, written by Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), was included in his 1823 collection *Nouvelle Méditations poétiques*. A poetic English translation appeared in *Knickerbocker*, or *New-York Monthly Magazine* in May 1836.³⁸ The Lamartine verses ex-

plore the image of the wandering poet, never staying in one place. This evokes Gottschalk’s own lifestyle during his touring years: always traveling, leaving only his music behind. In addition, Lamartine’s poet, in reflecting on his life, recognizes the ennui that comes with the day-to-day human existence:

Qu’est-ce donc que des jours pour valoir qu’on
les pleure?
Un soleil, un soleil; une heure, et puis une
heure;
Celle qui vient ressemble à celle qui s’enfuit;
Ce qu’une nous apporte, une autre nous l’enlève:
Travail, repos, douleur, et quelquefois un rêve,
Voilà le jour, puis vient la nuit. . . .
Le poète est semblable aux oiseaux de passage
Qui ne bâtissent point leurs nids sur le rivage,
Qui ne se posent point sur les rameaux des bois;
Nonchalamment bercés sur le courant de l’onde,
Ils passent en chantant loin des bords; et le
monde
Ne connaît rien d’eux, que leur voix.

(What are these days, to be worthy of mourning?
A sun, a sun, an hour, and then another hour;
Each one that arrives echoing the one that just
fled;
When one is given to us, another is taken away.
Labor, repose, sorrow, and occasionally a dream
This is the day, then comes the night. . . .
The poet is like the birds of passage
That do not build their nests on the shore,
Or settle on twigs of wood.
Unheeding, cradled on the current of the waves,
They pass, while singing, far from the shore, and
the world
Knows nothing of them, other than their
voices.)³⁹

The repetition of words to suggest the tedium of life—“a sun, a sun, an hour, and another hour”—calls to mind Gottschalk’s remark about the three most memorable events of his daily existence. Furthermore, the striking image of

³⁷Gottschalk, *Notes*, p. 99.

³⁸M.S., “The Dying Poet,” *The Knickerbocker*, or *New-York Monthly Magazine* 7 (May 1836), 466–68. An endnote following the translation suggests that it may have originally appeared in *La Tonnelle* in April 1836. It was also translated by Henry P. H. Bromwell (1823–1903), a judge

and congressman from Illinois, and published in a posthumous collection, *The Dying Poet*, in 1918. Gottschalk biographer Starr speculates on the possibility that Bromwell could have given the translation to Gottschalk during his tour around 1862, before the piano piece was composed. Starr, *Bamboula!*, p. 350.

³⁹Translation mine.

homeless birds rocking on ocean waves can be seen as a metaphor for Gottschalk's self-portrait in his journal: perpetually in motion, never settling in one place, they, as he, are heard by everyone yet truly known by nobody.

Aside from these specific instances of evocative phrasings that are then in turn evoked in Gottschalk's reminiscing composition, the two poems also share other telling traits. Both are written from the first-person point of view of the dying poet himself (aside from a short introduction and epilogue by an observing narrator in the Millevoye poem), and both also include references to a specific musical instrument—the lyre—simultaneously creating both a conspicuous connection to music and a nostalgia for times long past (i.e., when poets played lyres). In Millevoye the poet speaks directly to his instrument:

Brise-toi, lyre tant aimée!
Tu ne survivras point à mon dernier sommeil;
Et tes hymnes sans renommée
Sous la tombe avec moi dormiront sans réveil.

(Shatter thyself, my beloved lyre;
You will not survive my last sleep.
And your unknown hymns
Will sleep with me under the tombstone
without waking.)

The image of the lyre is evoked frequently throughout Lamartine's poem, along with the harp and the lute, again implying the ancient past. The last few lines speak, as in Millevoye, of a silenced instrument:

Mon luth glacé se tait. . . . Amis, prenez le vôtre;
Et que mon âme encor passe d'un monde à
l'autre
Au bruit de vos sacrés concerts!

(My frozen lute is silent. . . . My friends, take
yours up;
So that my soul may yet pass from one world to
another
To the sound of your sacred melodies!)

The silenced instrument is also, somewhat paradoxically, present in the piano piece as well. As the work comes to a close, the final variation, which begins marked *piano* and "Lento," becomes even softer with the final marking of

"perdendosi." The piano itself, in effect, dies at the end of the composition along with the poet metaphorically playing it.

The concepts of reminiscence and memory pervade both French poems and cement the connections between their literary portrayals of the emotions associated with death and the musical allusions in Gottschalk's composition. Both poems have strong connections to the piano piece, in not only the shared title but imagery that has meaning in relation to Gottschalk himself. The voice of *The Dying Poet* is an artist, weary of life and recalling better times. It could even be an autobiographical reference to the composer himself. *The Dying Poet* was composed at a time when Gottschalk was afflicted with many worries—money, travel, and reception among them. The piece adheres to the then-current trend for sentimental music, calling to mind reminiscences of better, forgotten times. For Gottschalk, this especially represented his rest in South and Latin America, where he had been able to forget his worries and compose. *The Dying Poet* may reflect these sentiments and suggest his unhappiness with the monotonous existence he was enduring in the United States. Although *The Dying Poet* was one of Gottschalk's most popular and lucrative pieces, it was composed during a time of relative discontent and melancholy. It remains a poignant paradox—a simultaneous reminder of his great sensitivity to the desires of the people for whom he performed and the profound loneliness he felt while performing for them.



Abstract.

The terms "sentimentalism" and "sensibility" play a central role in contemporary scholarly discourse on literature and intellectual theory in the long nineteenth century. Often used interchangeably, these words identify developments in popular culture and philosophy in which emotions and feelings, as opposed to reason and logic, were seen as the routes to moral and social improvement. In visual, literary, and musical artworks of the era, the emphasis on feeling was frequently connected to a male archetype of the sentimental protagonist, a "dying poet," marked by several common elements: great creativity, high levels of sensitivity, physical and emotional fragility, significant moments of disappointment, and early (and often self-inflicted) death. The

subject of the dead or dying young man assumed critical significance during the 1860s, when so many soldiers were lost during the Civil War.

For his immensely popular work *The Dying Poet* (1864), composer-pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk likely drew inspiration from two French poems of the same title that employed both the dying poet trope and complex imagery of reminiscence. Although *The Dying Poet* was one of Gottschalk's most popular and lucrative pieces, it was composed

during a time of relative discontent and melancholy. In the mid-1860s, he was traveling across the Civil War-torn United States on a gruelingly unrelenting schedule. Gottschalk's composition *The Dying Poet* can be viewed as a poignant paradox—a simultaneous example of his great sensitivity to the desires of his audience and a tantalizingly autobiographical glimpse of the profound loneliness he felt while performing for them. Keywords: Gottschalk, sentimentalism, piano music, Civil War, literature and poetry