

Willy Bettoni

# Franz Liszt under the Light of Progress

The Idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit*  
as Aesthetic Paradigm in the  
Piano Compositions between  
the *B minor Sonata* and the  
*Bagatelle sans tonalité*

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## Abstract in German

Fortschritt ist sicherlich einer der wichtigsten Begriffe des 19. Jahrhunderts. Philosophen, Historiker, Schriftsteller und Künstler von dieser Zeit haben versucht, mit tausenden Worte und Schriften diesen Konzept festzulegen. Das Fortschritt-Paradigma war auch die Grundlage der künstlerischen Freundschaft zwischen den zwei Hauptfiguren der sogenannten *Neudeutsche Schule*: Richard Wagner und Franz Liszt. Beide Komponisten wirkten an der Entwicklung der Reflexion über das Begriffspaar „Musik“ und „Fortschritt“ durch ihrer Arbeit stark mit. Wagner hat sich mit klaren Worten über diese besondere Beziehung ausgedrückt und seinen Gedanke in einem System dargestellt. Im Gegensatz zu ihm hat Liszt keineswegs seine Ideen deutlich zusammengefasst. Das bedeutet aber nicht, dass ihm diese Debatte bedeutungslos war, sondern nur, dass er seine Idee seinem musikalischen Corpus übergeben hat und, dass man nach einer alternativen Systematisierung des Gedankens suchen muss. Das Ziel der vorliegenden Forschung ist die Dimension dieses Paradigma in Klavierwerken Franz Liszts darzustellen und die verschiedenen Formen und Wegen die er übernimmt zu folgen, so dass man von diverse Begriffe von Fortschritt – von Fortschritte – schließlich sprechen kann. Aus diesem Grund ist der erste Teil dieser Schrift der Analyse dieses Begriffs gewidmet. Die Idee von Fortschritt war zu dieser Zeit so wichtig, dass sie die Macht hatte, die gesellschaftliche Weltanschauung zu ändern. Unter der Wirkung dieser neuen Bewegung erschien ein neues Verständnis von Zukunft und Vergangenheit. Diese bidirektionale Entfaltung, die durch den Begriff von *Symbol* erklärt wird, ermöglichte die Geburt von verschiedene Fortschritts-theorien, auf der die Idee von *Mehrdeutigkeit* gegründet ist. Diese Ideen – und zwar die Ideen von der Mehrheit der Romantik-Generation – sind in den Schriften von Liszt deutlich zu erkennen. Die Gesamtheit der Denker, welche ihn am meistens beeinflussten, sind unter dem sogenannten *Liszt's Pantheon* wiederzufinden. Außerdem war die Entwicklung seiner persönlichen Idee von Fortschritt stark an die Gebote des Christentums gebunden. Aus dem ersten Teil gehen zwei Hauptelemente hervor: die kulturelle Ausbildung Liszts und die Änderung der gesellschaftlichen Weltanschauung. Diese zwei Elemente kommen in dem Essay *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie* zusammen. Eine Analyse dieser Schrift zeigt wie die Programmmusik nur der Vordergrund ist, hinten dem Liszt seine ästhetischen Ideen (Musikkritik, Geschichte, Fortschritt, Gesellschaft) ausdrückt. Diese Schrift ist genau für seine historische Position und seine inhaltliche Re-

levanz wie eine Brücke zwischen die Musiktheorie und die kompositorische Praxis zu betrachten.

Im zweiten Teil ist eine Auswahl von Klavierkompositionen Liszts analysiert, die eine Hauptrolle in der Definition der Idee von Mehrdeutigkeit spielen. Die musikalische Analyse fängt mit der *b-Moll Sonate* und endet mit der *Bagatelle sans tonalité*. Diese zwei Stücke grenzen diverse Phasen des Lebens des Komponisten und seiner Musik ein. Von der Virtuosität und vom Getöse der *Sonate* erreicht Liszt Schritt für Schritt den schmucklosen *punctum contra punctum* der Spätwerke. Die Mehrheit von seiner letzten Kompositionen sind von einer eher musikalischen als gesellschaftlichen Einsamkeit geprägt, die aber keinesfalls das theoretische Substrat bildet. Folgt man jedoch Liszts künstlerischem Weg chronologisch aus der Retrospektive, liegt der Gedanke nahe, seine Werke als Einheit zu betrachten. In diesem Moment merkt man, dass Liszts *Corpus*, die von weit entfernt nur wie eine chaotische und ungeordnete Reihenfolge erscheinen, einem präzisen Prinzip folgen und zwar dem von Mehrdeutigkeit. Diese Idee ist schon seit der 1830er Jahren und immer mehr ab der 1850er den theoretischen Grund auf dem Liszt sein musikalisches Werk baute. Aus diesem Gesichtspunkt heraus erwirbt sein *Corpus* die Merkmale eines (musikalischen) Systems. Liszt, der entweder als ein mittelmäßiger Komponist oder als ein Visionär erachtet wurde, ist schlussendlich einer der Komponisten, der am besten den Zeitgeist des 19. Jahrhunderts verkörpert und ausdrückte.

# I Introduction

How could Goethe live in this dull, lifeless village?<sup>1</sup>

Weimar hat die Fehler und Schattenseiten des Menschlichen, – kleinstädtischer Menschlichkeit vor allem. Borniert und höfisch verklatscht möchte das Nest wohl sein, dünnkelhaft oben und dumpfsinnig unten.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Haight, Gordon, *George Elliot, a Biography*, Oxford, 1968, p. 153.

2 Mann, Thomas, *Lotte in Weimar*, Stockholm, Bernann-Fischer, 1939, p. 60.





## The problem Liszt<sup>3</sup>

### About Liszt's biography and the state of research

Franz Liszt, as a topic of debate, has generated a huge amount of literature, even when he was still alive. Among them, the richest category is that of biographies. In 1835, when Liszt was twenty-four, Joseph d'Ortigue wrote the first work of this genre, which was published on the *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* in the same year. Many biographies are very precious, because on one side they give us an account of the perception that the early biographers had of Liszt when he was still alive, and conversely, they provide us with many anecdotes about his life and personality, even if they are not completely true or trustworthy. The most famous work in this field is doubtless that of Lina Ramann<sup>4</sup>. The writer tried to give us the most objective account of Liszt's life and achievements. She even tried to follow scientific method to collect information, however she had to deal with a great deal of interference. Firstly, Liszt himself, whose mountebank character could not be taken as a fully trustworthy source and who had some interest in preserving this aura of mystery around his figure; secondly Ramann had to deal with a lot of legends, tales, and anecdotes which were not easy to prove. Thirdly, the princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, who tried to protect Liszt from the attacks of his opponents and in doing that, censored some aspects of his life. Nevertheless, the work of Ramann still remains a priceless source, at least for the vivid image of Liszt's real life that she provides. After this first biographical work and with the discovery of Liszt's diaries, sketchbooks, letters and other literary and musical material, a great number of musicologists tried to dissipate the mists which surrounded the figure of the Hungarian composer. After more than one hundred years the aura of mystery is still there, but it is now recognised as a peculiar aspect of Liszt's character. All the biographers and scholars, from Emile Haraszti to Alan Walker, from Detlef Altenburg to Serge Gut, they all have to refer to Ramann's work and they all give us some account of several of "Liszt's legends". Nevertheless, it is not an aim of this

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3 The title is a clear reference to the essay *Le problème Liszt* of Emile Haraszti (Haraszti, Emile, *Le problème Liszt*, in *Acta Musicologica*, Vol. 9, Fasc. 3/4, 1937, pp. 123–136). But if Haraszti sees Liszt as the *genie de l'instinct*, the present work tries to overturn this view in favour of an interpretation of the figure of Liszt as a composer with a very specific aesthetic programme.

4 Ramann, Lina, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1880–1894.

dissertation to make further inquiries into Liszt's life. The main biographical source of information is Alan Walker's fundamental work published in three volumes<sup>5</sup>. The truthfulness of this information is not a matter of debate here; furthermore, the aura of mystery that surround Liszt has the right to survive, because it is inseparable from his figure as a musician, and consequently, ignoring this aspect makes it impossible to provide a complete account of the Romantic composer *par excellence*. The aim of this dissertation is to give an account of the works, both musical and literary, from the beginning of the so called *Weimar Period* to the end of Liszt's life, in order to create a chronological sequence of achievements, from which clearly appears a precise aesthetic thought, which is strictly related to the idea of progress – an idea which lies at the basis of what will be defined as a change of paradigm in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the symbol), and which creates the possibility of the emergence of the idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit*<sup>6</sup>. The focus here is primarily placed on the piano works – of course just a selection of compositions, probably the most representative –, as the piano was Liszt's favourite means of expression and a sort of filter through which he re-elaborated his life and his whole experience, both as man and as musician. It is completely useless to reiterate how wide and deep Liszt's contribution was to the development of both piano technique and the figure of the performer, and how deep his relationship was with this instrument.

It is exactly for this reason, that it is necessary to make brief digressions on some biographical aspects. A first problem arises when one looks to the division of Liszt's life into three periods. This division is widely accepted, and it is clearly based on the three stages of Beethoven's life. From a distance, this approach appears practical, efficacious, and above all clear:

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<sup>5</sup> Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1987–1997.

<sup>6</sup> The term *Mehrdeutigkeit* has more than just one translation, and that is the reason why during the present dissertation it was translated sometimes with ambiguity, and other times with multiplicity, or polysemy. This last term seems to be the most appropriate for the present work, but through it does not emerge the idea of ambiguity, which is an intrinsic feature of what is polysemic. The German word *Mehrdeutigkeit* is even preferred to almost synonymous *Vieldeutigkeit*, since the first term involves the possibility of misunderstandings, which are again at the basis of something ambiguous. For this reason the three terms *Mehrdeutigkeit* (and his adjective *mehrdeutig*), ambiguity, and multiplicity are during the present work preferred to other expressions and used (quite) as synonymous. It could be said that the three English concepts of ambiguity, multiplicity, and polysemy, with their differences of significance, are condensed in the German *Mehrdeutigkeit*. The relationship between this concept and the emergence of a “symbol paradigm” will be clarified during the following chapters.

- 1811–1847 *The Virtuoso Years*
- 1848–1861 *The Weimar Years*
- 1861–1886 *The Final Years*<sup>7</sup>

This division has the advantage of being very clear-cut. However, this structure is only possible thanks to the transparency of the middle period, where the beginning and end are proved by unquestionable facts: the move to, and the departure from Weimar. Yet, if the latter is a clear moment in Liszt's life – in fact «On Saturday, August 17, 1861, Liszt checked out of the Erbprinz Hotel and set out on foot for the Weimar railway station»<sup>7</sup> –, the former has a less clear boarder – even if the year 1848, when Liszt settled down in Weimar, is generally taken as the beginning of this middle phase. What makes the definition of this second period more complicated is the agreement between Liszt and the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach Carl Friederich, which could even be considered as the beginning of a new era:

Wir Carl Friedrich etc.

Urkunden hiermit. Nachdem Wir die gnädigste Entschließung gefasst haben, den Virtuosen Dr. Franz Liszt in Anerkennung seiner Uns zu besonderem Wohlgefallen gereichenden Kunstleistungen zu Unserm Kapellmeister zu ernenn; als ist demselben zu seiner Beglaubigung Gegenwärtiges, von Uns höchst eigenhändig unterzeichnetes, mit Unserm Ramensiegel versehenes Dekret ausgefertigt und zugestellt worden.

(L.S.) Weimar, 2. November 1842.

Carl Friedrich<sup>8</sup>

The letter, dated 1842, marks the beginning of the negotiation between Liszt and the Grand Duke, of the role of the composer at the Weimar Court. It seems that Liszt accepted the role of Kapellmeister in Extraordinary (*Hofkapellmeister im außerordentlichen Dienst*) already in that year<sup>9</sup>, still, it is even true that he

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7 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years, 1861–1886*, p. 21.

8 Ramann, Lina, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, Vol. 2, p. 198.

9 Liszt's nomination as director of the Weimar theatre was regarded as an insult to the heritage of the classical era. Detlef Altenburg reported that a correspondent of the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* commented the event with these words: «Jetzt beim Virtuosen-Hagelwetter ist diese Wurzel plötzlich aus der Erde gesprungen, und zum Nachtheile Weimar's, zum Nach-

waited till 1848 to settle down in Weimar. The first contract «[...] required him to spend three months of each year in Weimar as court conductor, a promise which he honoured in 1844 and 1846 only, [...]»<sup>10</sup>. Actually it seems that Liszt even ignored a couple of letters that the Grand Duke (Carl Alexander)<sup>11</sup> wrote to him. In 1845 Liszt was still trying to escape from his duties:

Lorsque je me décidai, l'automne dernier, à entreprendre le voyage d'Espagne, j'étais loin de prévoir qu'il devrait forcément ajourner mon retour à Weymar. Selon toute probabilité, deux mois me suffisaient pour Madrid et Lisbonne. La difficulté des communications, les exigences de la publicité impossibles à déterminer à l'avance dans ce pays, où, jusqu'à ce jour, aucun artiste de quelque valeur ne s'était aventuré – et par-dessus tout cela, l'imprescriptible puissance de l'imprévu qui règne et gouverne ici plus qu'ailleurs m'ont retardé au-delà de toute mesure [...].

Et en cela, ne croyez point, Monseigneur, qu'il y ait de ma part beaucoup de négligence, de laisser aller ou de caprice d'artiste. Assurément les merveilles de la nature et de l'art amoncelées sur ce sol exercent sur mon esprit une grande séduction ; mais en définitive trois semaines ou un mois suffiraient pour satisfaire ma conscience de voyageur, si le *pundonoroso* [...] de ma carrière n'était avant tout ma boussole aussi bien à Madrid qu'à Weymar, Paris ou Pétersbourg<sup>12</sup>.

In his letter, Liszt told the Grand Duke that he was following the artist's nature, that he had to give concerts, that he had money troubles, and other excuses not to express a clear “not yet” to his benefactor. He simply attempted to delay, as much as possible, his arrival in the city that he would try to transform into a *New Weimar*<sup>13</sup>. In 1846 Carl Alexander received a letter from Liszt:

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theile des Virtuosen, zu großer Heiterkeit Deutschlands, welches so eben zur Besinnung kommt über den künstlerischen Unfug bloßer Virtuosität, heißt diese Wurzel Franz Lißt! Der fertigste, aber dem guten musikalischen Geschmack nachtheiligste Virtuos ist als endlich unmittelbarer Nachfolger Schiller's und Goethe's geworden, [...]». Altenburg, Detlef, *Franz Liszt and the Legacy of the Classical Era*, in *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 18, No. 1, University of California Press, 1994, pp. 47–48, footnote 7.

- 10 Keiler, Allan, *Liszt and the Weimar Hoftheater*, in *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, T. 28, Fasc. 1/4, 1986, p. 432.
- 11 From now on the term “Grand Duke” is referred to Carl Alexander, whose reign begun in 1853, but who started to manage the court affairs before his official coronation.
- 12 Liszt, Franz, *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander Grossherzog von Sachsen*, pp. 1–2.
- 13 Liszt, Franz, d'Agout, Marie, *Correspondence*, Ed. Serge Gut and Jacqueline Bellas, Paris, 2001. Quoted as footnote 8 in Altenburg, Detlef, *Franz Liszt and the Legacy of the Classical Era*, p. 48. «Non pas *Delendo* [*sic*] *Carthago*, mais *Aedificanda Vimaria*. Weymar était sous le feu Grand

Monseigneur,

Une excursion en Hongrie et plusieurs journées d'indisposition ont retardé ces lignes. Veuillez donc bien me pardonner le semblant de négligence dont je me trouve coupable vis-à-vis de V.a.R.; [...]

Pour répondre aujourd'hui aux quelques questions bienveillantes que vous voulez bien m'adresser sur le développement de ma carrière, permettez-moi, Monseigneur, d'entrer sommairement dans plusieurs détails à cet égard.

Ainsi que j'ai eu l'honneur de le dire à V.a.R. en quittant Weymar, mon programme est parfaitement fixé; reste seulement à le faire accepter et sanctionner par le public, ce qui n'est pas le plus aisé de l'affaire. Le moment vient pour moi (*Nel mezzo del camin di nostra vita*) – 35 ans! de briser ma chrysalide de virtuosité et de laisser plein vol à ma pensée, [...]. Le but qui m'importe avant et par-dessus tout à cette heure, c'est de conquérir le théâtre pour ma pensée, comme je l'ai conquis pendant ces six dernières années pour ma personnalité d'artiste; et j'espère que l'année prochaine ne se passera pas sans que je sois arrivé à un résultat quasi décisif dans cette nouvelle carrière. [...]<sup>14</sup>.

From these excerpts, it already emerges that Liszt raised a lot of excuses not to go to Weimar. Fortunately, the Grand Duke was really well disposed towards him. Furthermore, Liszt tried to obtain, or maybe was offered, the place of Donizetti as *Kammer-Kapellmeister* in Vienna.

J'ignore si M. Genast aura jugé à propos d'entretenir V. a. R. des bruits qui circulent à Vienne et auxquels plusieurs feuilles allemandes ont donné de l'écho, relativement à ma prochaine nomination *als K.K. Kammer-Kapellmeister* (que de K!), en remplacement de M. Donizetti. Avant le printemps prochain, rien ne peut être décidé à ce sujet; [...] a ce propos, il me paraît superflu de protester vis-à-vis de V. a. R. contre une certaine inconvenance de forme qu'ont affectée plusieurs journaux en annonçant cette grande nouvelle, *daß Liszt sich um den Platz von Donizetti bewirbt!* – Tout Vienne sait parfaitement, *daß ich mich um nichts bewerbe, was einem Platz ähnlich sehen könnte, sondern daß ganz natürlich und einfach Liszt ein besprochener Candidat in Österreich sein muß, mit der angenommenen Vorausset-*

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Duc Charles Auguste, une nouvelle Athènes, songeons aujourd'hui à construire la nouvelle Weymar. Renouons franchement et hautement les traditions de Charles Auguste – Laissons les talents agir librement dans leur sphère – *colonisons* le plus possible».

14 Liszt, Franz, *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander Grossherzog von Sachsen*, pp. 7–9.

zung, daß er für solch einen Posten mehr Capacität und Talent anschaulich an den Tag gelegt hat als andere ...<sup>15</sup>.

Liszt did not want to admit that he had applied, or that at least he aspired to the role of Donizetti, but he did not deny the possibility of accepting the position. The letter is a clear sign that Liszt was keeping a foot in both camps. Nevertheless, there are further explanations for his behaviour. Perhaps he wanted to satisfy his thirst for fame as a piano virtuoso; or perchance he wanted to improve upon his skills as a composer in order to better fulfil his duties at the Weimar theatre; or, conceivably, he did not want to relate his name to any king or duke, and above all to a German one, during a period of political turmoil. Or quite possibly, as many scholars have pointed out<sup>16</sup>, he did not want to settle down with his lover Marie d'Agoult. In 1842 their relationship was still alive, but it was very close to having run its course. Be that as it may, the solution to this puzzle is irrelevant here. What is however relevant is that it is not possible to create a precise cut in Liszt's life. He had already started to think about a career as *Kapellmeister* in 1842, but officially he began in 1848. Therefore, it is plausible to surmise that here there is a six year transition period, and somewhat of a grey area. But, if the events of his life cannot really help in the definition of the beginning of this second period, his compositions can, to some degree, solve the matter. Liszt started to compose his first symphonic poem in 1847, but, as it is possible to evince from his letters and biographies, he was already thinking about orchestral music and a career as *Kapellmeister* during the 1830s: «Er sah daher, was er ursprünglich beabsichtigt hatte, nach Hummels Tod (1837) von der Bewerbung um die Kapellmeisterstelle in Weimar, für das er als die Stätte Schillers und Goethes von jeher Sympathie hegte, [...]»<sup>17</sup>. A precise date is necessary for historical reasons, though what is relevant and of note here is that when Liszt accepted the position in Weimar in 1842 he was already thinking differently from the virtuoso. Consequently, 1848 is regarded

15 Liszt, Franz, *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander Grossherzog von Sachsen*, letter dated 8 October 1846, pp. 9–10.

16 See for example Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Weimar Years 1848–1861*, pp. 98–99, footnote

17 Kapp, Julius, *Franz Liszt*, Schuster & Loeffler, Berlin, 1911, p. 67. Liszt confronted with orchestral composition few times before Weimar and the Symphonic Poems. Noteworthy is just his *Symphonie révolutionnaire* (1830), composed under the excitement of the July Revolution, and that will constitute the basis upon which he composed the Symphonic Poem *Héroïde funèbre*. Even if Liszt didn't compose orchestral works before the end of the 1840's, during the decade before Weimar his interest in conducting was increasing.

as the culmination point of this process rather than as the beginning, as he was already working on some of his orchestral works.

The aim here is not to deny the separation of periods in Liszt's life, above all due to the useful nature of these structures for theoretical purposes. In any case, if it is possible to identify a clear cut between the *Virtuoso Years* and the *Weimar Years*, i.e., between the years Liszt spent around Europe to show his mastery in the art of playing the piano and the years in which he conducted a more quiet life at the court of Weimar, then the cut between the *Weimar Years* and the so-called *Final Years* is less clear. Liszt had trouble with the Weimar Court since the very beginning of his stay, in the beginning because of his illegitimate relationship with the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, and later because of his musical ideas, his support of Wagner, Berlioz, and in general to all the so called "new music." This behaviour was in opposition to the more conservative spirit of the city.

According to Walker, Liszt left Weimar on Saturday, August 17, 186<sup>118</sup> in order to reach Rome and Carolyne, even though the trip lasted two months. Walker gives us a complete account of the long journey, and it is therefore completely unnecessary to linger here on this topic. What is necessary to point out is that the so called *Vie trifurquée*, that is the main aspect of Liszt's last period, only begins in 1869. Again, we have a transition period of seven years. This is not insignificant. These observations are made in order to clarify that the division into three periods is useful if the aim is to create a scheme of Liszt's life, but that it can be dangerous if the aim is to create a scheme of Liszt's musical language and compositional technique. Above all, this division is basically based upon a travel period, a stay period, and again a travel period. However, as it emerges from a lot of different biographies, that of Walker too, Liszt never stopped to travel across Europe. It is surely true that during the Weimar period he travelled less than before or after. This was because of his duties at Court, because of the Princess's desire to have a normal life, and lastly because of the political turmoil that crossed Europe beginning in 1848. A period of reflection was needed. Consequently, a division based on the travel-stay-travel periods is not completely true. Furthermore, Liszt avoided traveling at one more time in his life, namely in 1870, when the Franco-Prussian war began. At that time, he was in Hungary and following the advice of Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, he decided to wait for quieter times. Of course, he avoided traveling to France, because of the movements of German troops. He avoided traveling to Germany, because he could not accept the violence Otto von Bismarck was perpetrating

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18 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years 1861–1886*, p. 21.



against his beloved country. Liszt thought of himself as a European and a man of peace, and when the war broke out he was sincerely disappointed with both the French and the German (Prussian) governments, even if his heart was on the side of his adoptive fatherland, France – whose Prime Minister was his son in law *Émile Ollivier*.

From this brief introduction a quite spontaneous question arises. If the historical events prevent the division of Liszt's life into three phases, can it be possible that this tripartite scheme is supported by his musical production, among which some works are to be intended as landmarks? The answer is both to the affirmative and the negative. It is possible to state that some compositions indeed work as landmarks among Liszt's production. For example, the *B minor Piano Sonata* – which is taken as the starting point of this dissertation, and which represents therefore an extremely relevant landmark –, the *Symphonic Poems*, and the sacred music, which characterized his last period. Consequently, this division creates a first phase, the *Virtuoso Years*, during which Liszt wrote music for his own concerts, the purpose of which was to amaze the public. This phase ends with the composition of the *Piano Sonata*, which somehow closes the period of the music “for the others”, and opens the period of “music for music's sake”. During this second phase, which anyway begins before the completion of the *Sonata*, Liszt abandoned the piano to devote his energies to orchestral compositions. The last period is devoted to sacred and religious music, both for piano and for orchestra. On April 25, 1865, Liszt received the tonsure and on «July 30 he entered the four minor orders of the priesthood—doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, and acolyte»<sup>19</sup>. The two Oratorios, *Christus* and *Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth* are related to this period, even if both works have their roots in the Weimar period. Following this scheme, it is somehow possible to divide Liszt's production into three periods, but, as already suggested, these landmarks are not strong enough. Or better, they are suitable only if one looks at Liszt's corpus from a distance and in its entirety. If one follows the piano production these landmarks lose most of their relevance. It is exactly for this reason, since the aim of this dissertation is to follow Liszt's path through the piano works, that the division into three periods must be partially discarded. Therefore, a different solution is proposed, a solution where the confines are more ambiguous, and which is in turn more consistent with the idea of multiplicity (*Mehrdeutigkeit*) and of progress, and with general aim of the present work, namely to demonstrate the unity of thought of Liszt, and that the different phases are actually part of the same teleological process towards the future.

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19 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years 1861–1886*, p. 88.

## Research perspectives

Here, one of the most underestimated topics about the Hungarian composer: the idea of progress enters the scene. This idea was of course extensively analysed in relation to the idea of the *Music of the future*, but completely ignored with regard to the cultural context in which this aesthetic tendency arose. It is therefore even more astonishing that a composer who is considered one of the most prominent innovators of the musical language of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a composer who spent his entire life spreading the *new* music of the *Neudeutsche Schule* (though not only theirs), whose music was often defined as *Zukunftsmusik*, someone whose political side in the war between progressives and conservatives was the *Fortschrittspartei*, and who was so curious about the theories of social evolution and science in general, who was never related to the idea of *progress* (intended as a comprehensive social phenomenon), which is a primary, if not the most relevant philosophical concept of the entire century. The *idea of progress* will be outlined in the next chapter. This concept has an immediate advantage, since it prevents thinking of Liszt's phases as three sealed boxes. Instead, it is possible to find a path, a leading idea in his works and this idea is future oriented, teleological. It is not only his letters, his theoretical works, and his evocative words «Ich kann warten»<sup>20</sup>, which express his intentions, but his piano works are an uninterrupted chain sustained by an idea, an aesthetic thought based both on his religious and his secular beliefs. According to this view it would be impossible to create separate stages in his life and throughout his production. Starting point of this dissertation is then the concept of progress as it emerged from the first strong philosophical idea which deeply influenced Liszt: Christianity. Afterwards, once he settled in Paris, Liszt developed his culture on the more laical and revolutionary ideas which were common in the Parisian salons. These ideas, which were anyway often related to religion, were imbued with the culture of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and inevitably influenced Liszt's thoughts. Herder, Schelling, Schiller, Lessing, Kant and Hegel; and then Rousseau, Diderot, and Voltaire; and the contemporaries Chateaubriand, Stendhal, Lamartine, and many others. The majority of the aforementioned authors tried to define or dealt with the idea of progress either with a philosophical approach or in a more practical, socio-political way. Liszt, who did not receive any academic education, reacted to these incentives combining all these theo-

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20 It is often reported that Liszt used this words already in response to the negative reception of his *Sonata*. See Pesce, Dolores, *Liszt's final decades*, p. 244, footnote 78, and Lachmund, Carl, *Living with Liszt. From The Diary of Carl Lachmund: An American Pupil of Liszt, 1882–1884*, p. 300.

ries with his personal views. Around 1834 his ideas were influenced through reading the works of his future friend, the abbé de Lamennais, whose religious socialism represented the perfect union between Liszt's and Saint-Simonian's ideas. The so-called great man theory – derived from the lecture of Thomas Carlyle's book *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) – did the rest. Liszt perceived himself as the saviour of the humanity, and his mission was to redeem the mankind through his music. He was the prophet, the only man who could guide the people through the suffering of this world and show them the way to their eternal salvation. This was not just his personal view on the world, but this forms an all-comprehensive *Weltanschauung* upon which Liszt based his entire life. This teleological-theological view lies at the basis of Liszt's aesthetics. Of course, since his aesthetic is based on a teleological view, this means that it is based on a linear conception of time. There is the “now”, *Der Kampf um's Dasein*, and there is the “later”, *Das zukünftige Leben*<sup>21</sup>. From this point of view, the words «Ich kann warten» become clearer. If his idea of time is linear, it quite automatically involves the idea of progress. It is undeniable that Liszt's vision was oriented towards the future. Hence, *Un continuo progresso*<sup>22</sup>, is a title that perfectly summarise Liszt's life. It is for this reason that the first chapter of this dissertation is devoted to the idea of progress, as it was developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its implication in Liszt's life and writings. This future-oriented vision of life, that is directly derived from the theories on progress, brought Liszt to take a side in a war between conservatives and progressives. A real war fought on the newspaper's battlefields, that involved the vast majority of the musicians of the German speaking countries at the time. As previously stated, this chapter will clarify Liszt's role in this war and his contribution – through the analysis of some passages of his writings – to the *Neudeutsche Schule*, the *Fortschrittspartei*, and the *Zukunftsmusik*.

This is the background that led Liszt to write his most famous article in defence of his music: [*Hector*] *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*. It appeared on the columns of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (NZfM) in 1855. It is relevant to point out that at that time, as Liszt wrote to Luis Köhler, «7 von den symphonischen Dichtungen sind gänzlich fertig und abgeschrieben»<sup>23</sup>. The title seems to clarify

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- 21 Both these titles are from Liszt's last symphonic poem *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe* S. 107 (1881–1882), and precisely from the second and the third movement.
  - 22 *A continue progress* is the title of a publication edited by György Kroó for the Italian publisher Ricordi (1987), which contains some of the theoretical writings of Liszt.
  - 23 Franz Liszt, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom, Letter dated April or May 1854*, Vol. I p. 154. It is relevant to note that Liszt uses the term Symphonic Poems first in a letter dated 2 March, 1854 to the same Luis Köhler, in which the Hungarian composer writes: «Mit Ende des

the content of the essay, i.e. the Berlioz's Symphony. However, in the article the music of the French composer, who is curiously mentioned among the group of the *Neudeutsche Schule*, is only marginally discussed. Of the five chapters which compose the writing, only the last two are actually devoted to the analysis of Berlioz's symphony, while in the others Liszt discusses many themes: from the role of the critics and of the public, to the evolution of music, etc. This essay, with the declared intention is of celebrating the genius of the French composer, turns into a sort of manifesto in defence of the programme music. However during the analysis of the essay an issue of interpretation emerges. Once it is established that the focus of Liszt's writing is the programme music, not all of said issues are resolved, as other questions arise, and namely: is Liszt speaking in defence of the programme music in general, or is he defending his own music? Is he perhaps defending Berlioz's works through his music? Closer analysis reveals that aside from these key questions, there are other coexistent matters. The programme music itself – which is of course a highly relevant topic for Liszt during the Weimar Years – is actually used by Liszt as an example to defend his poetics, namely his aesthetic view. Consequently, in order to identify Liszt's overall conception of music, it will be necessary to define the cultural background from which it arises, and to contextualise the writing into the aforementioned “war between the progressives and the conservatives”. From this critical apparatus an idea will emerge: this essay must be handled with care. Liszt was of course a great composer, but his lack of a systematic thought creates countless problems when one approaches his theoretical writings – even if one of the aims of this dissertation is to overturn the common opinion according to which Liszt lacked a systematic thought; it is anyway undeniable that his literary production has more a political than a theoretical value<sup>24</sup>. He surely lacks a systematic theoretical production, but everything he wrote, and everything he composed is perfectly consistent with his thoughts, which are strictly related to the idea of progress. That is the theoretical link with the second part of this dissertation, in which the music of Liszt is analysed through the concept of progress, to show on one

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Jahres sollen Sie von mir noch gröberes Geschütz bekommen, denn ich denke, dass bis dahin mehrere meiner Orchester-Werke (unter dem Collectiv-Titel „Symphonische Dichtungen“) erscheinen». In Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, Vol. I, p. 150. Before this date Liszt referred to them simply as *orchestral works* or as a *collection of nine ouvertures*. It is relevant to underline that his first symphonic poem *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* was entitled *Overture* (and later *Méditation-Symphonie*). See Altenburg, Detlef, *Franz Liszt and the Legacy of the Classical Era*, pp. 54–55.

24 See footnote 30, p. 108.

side how it acts in his music, and, on the other, how his intellectual curiosity led him to fully appreciate some innovative musical theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This leads to the *B minor Piano Sonata*, a composition which was chosen as the starting point for this path, precisely because it is simultaneously both an arrival point and a beginning – during the analysis of the work, all the nuances of the so-called *double function* and how this idea could be expanded in order to explain other musical and extra-musical elements will emerge. Furthermore, the *Sonata* represents a *unicum* in Liszt's production. The genesis of the composition is briefly discussed in the chapter, as, even if it does not represent the main topic, it brings to light some essential elements. From this point of view the research of Winklhofer<sup>25</sup> is enlightening. However, the main focus, or rather, the background from which the analysis begins, is the fact that the *Sonata* is surrounded by a great deal of different interpretations, which create a sort of aura of confusion around it. Is it a multi-movement sonata constricted to just one movement? Is it just a sonata form? Is it both at the same time? And again, which is the best way to divide it into sections and movements? Also, where does the disagreement about it come from? After an analysis of these matters, a possible solution will be provided, naturally with the awareness that no one can speak a final word about the *Sonata*. Quite the contrary. The suggested solution can shed new light on this trouble-making composition, but at the same time it is a call for new interpretations. The *B minor Piano Sonata* was published in 1854. Nowadays the reaction of the public and of the critics to this work are well known. Clara Schumann said that it was just noise without any good musical idea<sup>26</sup>, Eduard Hanslick described it as a *Genialitäts-Dampfmaschine*<sup>27</sup>, and Johannes Brahms, who arguably heard a première of the work in advance during a visit to the Altenburg, fell asleep<sup>28</sup>. Today, no one would react so rudely to a performance of this work. However, this is not just because our ears are more evolved, or simply more used to this kind of music. It is because between us and the *Sonata* there is a temporal distance, and it is this distance that gives us the chance to analyse the work not just as a masterpiece of the Romanticism, but as a product of an epoch. This means that the artwork cannot be separated from the social and cultural context in which it was conceived – especially when one speaks of Liszt, probably the most social composer of the entire Romantic Generation. Consequently, after this

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25 Winklhofer, Sharon, *The Genesis and Evolution of Liszt's Sonata in B Minor: Studies in Autograph Sources and Documents*, Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1978.

26 Diary entry by Clara Schumann dated 25 May 1854. See footnote 14 at p. 174.

27 Hanslick, Eduard, *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuose der letzten fünfzehn Jahre. 1870–1885*, Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, Berlin, 1886, p. 317.

28 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Weimar Years 1848–1861*, p. 229.

operation the view on the *Sonata* is reversed, and it, from the bizarre invention of an instinctive genius, becomes the embodiment of a very precise aesthetic principle, it becomes a treatise written in notes instead of words.

Some objections may have arisen from the title *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*<sup>29</sup>. Why use these words to speak about the period *after* Weimar, when Liszt himself used the same expression in the aforementioned letter to the Grand Duke Carl Alexander to describe his situation *before* Weimar? To answer this question, it is necessary to briefly reconsider Walker's division of Liszt's life. After the *Virtuoso Years*, in which Liszt's compositions are concert-oriented – it is of course a generalisation because, as it will emerge, it was already during the 1830s that Liszt laid the theoretical foundations of his late music –, Liszt moved to Weimar to begin his career as a composer, a career which had, anyway, already begun during the 1840s. Hence, the years around 1860 are the middle of his life as a composer, because this represents the middle segment between his “first attempts” to compose and his late works. It is possible to state that the *B minor Piano Sonata* summarises his previous experiences as a performer, and with it began his experience as a composer who wanted to leave behind the concert halls, which were filled with masses of praising people. For that reason, Liszt's life should be reconsidered. The traditional division into three periods of his life (before Weimar; Weimar; after Weimar) is turned into a two periods division: before Weimar; from Weimar to the end. This last one should be divided into three sub-periods, which, for their relevance are in this dissertation considered as per se:

1. Weimar, the symphonic poems and the *B minor Piano Sonata*;
2. Leaving Weimar, the failed marriage with Carolyne, the subsequent depression and his isolation at the Madonna del Rosario, his coming back to the piano; at the same time the Oratorio emerges as the genre of the future. The *vie trifurquée*, symbol of a troubled soul, which will find expression in his late music;
3. The last years of his life – as Walker divided it cover the year 1861–1886. The intellectual loneliness contrasts with the hyperactivity of his public life. His musical language reaches its final stage where everything is reduced to its basic elements, but at the same time he develops a formal intricacy which projects his work into the 20th century. His elegiac compositions sound like the music of a defeated and resigned man, who no longer believes in his own motto «Ich kann warten»; by that stage his expectations were nothing more than a pile of ashes.

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29 Liszt, Franz, *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander Grossherzog von Sachsen*, letter dated 8 October 1846, p. 8. The motto comes from the first verse of the first tercet from Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

As a consequence of this quadripartition, the years which immediately follow the Weimar experience are indeed the middle of the second part of his life, and they even represent a bridge between his hopeful and his hopeless phase. It is necessary to recall that between 1859 and 1862 Liszt not only saw his marriage to Carolyne vanish, but he even lost his son Daniel, and shortly thereafter his daughter Blandine. Additionally, a series of troubles contributed to an increase in his desire for isolation. In 1863, as a consequence of this stressful situation, Liszt settled down at the monastery in Monte Mario, and there he composed religion inspired works, such as the *Deux Légendes*, which find a brief mention in *Chapter V*, since they represent an interesting step in the field of timbre research. During these sorrowful years, Liszt composed several religious and spiritual works. Among them, the *Variationen über das Motiv von Bach S. 180* representing one of the most insightful examples of the application of the variation technique in a large-form work. For that reason, it is possible to consider this work as still related to the *Sonata*. However, if in the latter the *Glanzzeit*, or the heroic Romanticism, is fully recognisable, in the *Variationen* it wanders through the work like a ghost. This work, together with *Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este (Thrénodie II) S. 163,3 (1877)*, ideally represents the link between the *Sonata* and the late works, since they are both quite large and elaborate pieces, and they both present some virtuoso passages, but their form and structure are already projected toward the simplification of the compositional process typical of the late period. Furthermore, the tonal system – intended as a complex set of rules based on the key role of the tonic and of the cadences to it – is here considerably weakened; a clear sign that Liszt's compositional process was shifting towards other functional elements which were no longer tonic-oriented. His music, which was already playing on the boarder of tonality – as a consequence of the extensive use of chromaticism and of the diminished and augmented harmonies –, begins to acquire new features here, which would lead to the late *a-tonical* compositions of the late period<sup>30</sup>. A considerable contribution comes from the church music. During the years Liszt spent in Rome his interests in 16<sup>th</sup> century church music and for the Gregorian chant increased considerably. Palestrina has a prominent role in this process. This is relevant for both the development of a conception of a non-tonal harmony, and the return to more elementary musical structures. Modal music, united with the newer harmonic

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30 The late compositions of Liszt are often defined *a-tonal*, but since the word is used to described some music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is to prefer the word *a-tonical*, concept from which clearly emerges the idea of the refusal of the tonal system intended as the “dictatorship of the tonic”. Further clarifications are to be found in *Chapter V*.



theories (augmented triads, diminished seventh), represents the basis upon which Liszt built his innovative language, which is, as it will emerge, nothing more than an attempt to realise some 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas (Fétis, Weitzmann). The French critic, who elaborated the *ordres* theory<sup>31</sup>, believed in a cumulative idea of progress, in which the highest development of music is represented by the combination of all the *ordres*. Liszt, in his late works realised this view. But before reaching this last step, he had to simplify the form too, in a process that seems to proceed backwards. Under this light, the *Sonata* and the other Weimar compositions, symphonic poems included, represent the highest point of Liszt's research on form. Once he mastered the form, he was finally able to reduce it to its basic elements. The *Fünf Klavierstücke* S. 192 (1865–1879) are highly representative of this direction, and quite a treatise on the topic. Most of them show an A-B-A form, or very simple variations of it, and they cover the space of a few bars (only the last one, *Sospiri*, is moderately more worked-out and covers the space of 86 measures). Nevertheless, they represent a necessary step towards the late compositions, because of their use of non-tonal material, tritones and augmented triads above all. Consequently, the bonds with the tonal system are completely broken, and Liszt was finally free to take a further step. The last chapter *Sint ut sunt aut non sint* is completely devoted to Liszt's late music, namely the works composed between 1881 and 1885, the darkest years of Liszt's life. The title recalls the words already used by Liszt in his *Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphony*, and they underline the theoretical continuity between the two periods (Weimar and after Weimar). The aesthetics of these last compositions does not deny the aesthetics of the 1850s, but it is a perfectly consistent continuation of it. It would therefore be a mistake to analyse and to understand these works as the result of a depressed and disturbed mind – Alan Walker reports that «in the midst of this sea of troubles, those nearest to Liszt noticed a marked increase in his drinking. [...] his consumption of wine and liquor in the course of a single day had become considerable»<sup>32</sup> –, or as the bizarre experiments of an old and solitary man. They represent the last, and the most advanced and perfect result of Liszt's path. His belief in progress radicalised during the last period. His musical isolation – it is worth remembering that his public life, in turn extremely active – was a choice: *sint ut sunt*

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31 The *ordres* are four: *unitonique*, *transitonique*, *pluritonique*, *omnitonique*, and they represent the four stages of western music evolution: from the ancient modes (*unitonique*), through the discovery of the leading note (*transitonique*), it finally reaches the ambiguity of the diminished harmonies (*pluritonique*). The last stage (*omnitonique*) is the radicalisation of this process, namely the realm of the *enharmonie transcendante*.

32 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years 1861–1886*, pp. 411–412.



*aut non sint*, or, as Schönberg would write some decades after, «if it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art»<sup>33</sup>. It is often said that a genius writes music for the listener of the future, because his ability of imagination goes beyond the boundaries of that of his contemporaries. However, this represents a problem for Liszt. The fact that it is possible to use the words of Schönberg to describe Liszt's late phase, means the failure of his idea of social art – as it emerged from his writings of the 1830s. So strong was his belief in progress, that he preferred to sacrifice his role of prophet and his social convictions rather than to renounce the advancement of his music, because that was an *innerliche Notwendigkeit* (intrinsic necessity). He could wait for his recognition as a prophet. But of course, this was a source of disappointment and it was, together with the other events of his life – from the departure from Weimar to the troubles of the revised edition of his *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie* (1881) – the main reasons for the dark and elegiac atmosphere of his late compositions. However, to identify his disappointment with the source of his late language makes works such as the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*, or the last *Mephisto Waltz No. 2* and 3, inexplicable. The events that happened to Liszt as a person are the reason for the dark atmosphere of these works – and can possibly explain their shortness –, but the harmonic innovations, as well as the brevity, are the result of a precise aesthetic process already begun in the 1830s. An analysis of his darkest composition (*Unstern!*), and some of the other elegiac pieces (*Nuages gris*, *La lugubre gondola*), point out the relationship between them and Liszt's previous achievements, and between them and some musical theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, as previously stated, if Liszt's late works can be understood as the application of the theories of François-Joseph Fétis and Carl Friedrich Weitzmann, the late works are then able to shed new light on the early works. Consequently, from this point of view the entire production of Liszt appears as a *continuous progress*, which begins with the classical era and with the lessons of the “ancient masters” Czerny and Salieri. From their teaching Liszt developed his own piano technique, and started to rework the old forms – including the harmonic rules and all the musical patterns of the past –, from which he slowly developed new forms. Driven by his philosophical masters (Lamennais, Saint-Simon, Herder, etc.), and by the innovative musical theorists

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33 Schönberg, Arnold, *Modern Music*, in *Style and Idea*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984, p. 124. «[...] no artist, no poet, no philosopher and no musician whose thinking occurs in the highest sphere would degenerate into vulgarity in order to comply with as slogan such as “Art for All”. Because if it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art».

(Fétis, Weitzmann), he brought the music to the boarder of expressionism. The 19<sup>th</sup> century is the century of progress, and Liszt, who was the embodiment of the *Zeitgeist*, with his œuvre covered the entirety of the “Long 19<sup>th</sup> century”, ideally creating a bridge between Beethoven and Schönberg. Of course, the path described here is just one among many. Liszt’s production possesses the quality of being *mehrdeutig* – because, as it will emerge, Liszt’s corpus can be approached in many different ways (and each way leads to an alternate conclusion), for example as a unity, or as an amalgamation or as a sum of many small pieces, which are anyway interconnected. The same *Mehrdeutigkeit* is the reason why Liszt’s music influenced many different composers, who gave his music many different interpretations –, and it can therefore be efficaciously used to historically justify both Schönberg, Debussy, Scriabin, Bartók, etc. He was not a juggler, as Marie d’Agoult said<sup>34</sup>, but an Ianus Bifrons.

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34 Haraszti, Émile, *Franz Liszt, écrivain et penseur. Histoire d’une mystification*, p. 19. «De même, la comtesse d’Agoult écrivait à Georg Herwegh (28 mai 1844) qu’il était “moitié saltimbanque, moitié escamoteur qui fait disparaître dans sa manche les idées et les sentiments”».



# **PART I**

## **THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**



## II On the idea of progress

Man verlangt ein Stück von der Menschengeschichte, und zwar nicht das von der vergangenen, sonder der künftigen Zeit, [...]. Übrigens ist es auch hier nicht um die Naturgeschichte des Menschen (ob etwa künftig neue Racen derselben entstehen möchten), sondern um die Sittengeschichte, und zwar nicht nach dem Gattungsbegriffe (*singulorum*), sondern dem Ganzen der gesellschaftliche auf Erden vereinigten, in Völkerschaften vertheilten Menschen (*universorum*) zu thun, wenn gefragt wird: ob das menschliche Geschlecht (im Grossen) zum Besseren beständig fortschreite?<sup>1</sup>

Dicebat Bernardus Carnotensis nos esse quasi nanos gigantium humeris insidentes, ut possimus plura eis et remotiora videre, non utique proprii visus acumine, aut eminentia corporis, sed quia in altum subvehimur et extollimur magnitudine gigantea<sup>2</sup>.

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1 Kant, Immanuel, *Der Streit der Facultäten*, in *Immanuel Kant's Sämtliche Werke*, Leopold Voss, Leipzig, 1838, p. 339.

2 John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon, a Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and logical Arts of the Trivium*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1955, p. 167. «Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to [puny] dwarfs perched on the shoulder of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature».



## Introduction

L'imagination des poètes a placé l'âge d'or au berceau de l'espèce humaine, parmi l'ignorance et la grossièreté des premiers temps; c'était bien plutôt l'âge de fer qu'il fallait y reléguer. L'âge d'or du genre humain n'est point derrière nous, il est au-devant; il est dans la perfection de l'ordre social: nos pères ne l'ont point vu, nos enfants y arriveront un jour: c'est à nous de leur en frayer la route<sup>3</sup>.

This quotation from Saint-Simon is relevant for at least three reasons: 1) it clearly illustrates the typical belief in progress of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; 2) the thought of Saint-Simon deeply influenced Liszt<sup>4</sup>; 3) since Liszt was influenced by Saint-Simon, and since the belief in progress was a common sentiment in the Europe of that era, it is possible to argue that the idea of progress influenced the musician, too. And, when an idea influences an artist, the production of this artist is somehow transformed by it, at least because ideas change one's perception of reality, which was the source of inspiration for artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the present chapter does not focus solely on the figure of Saint-Simon, as Liszt was a curious reader and his interests ranged from music to religion, from philosophy to science. For this reason, a résumé of the main theories on progress, developed both by the German and the French reflection, works in parallel with the discussion of Liszt's reception of these works, and of his own writings.

It could be objected that the previously established scheme is a sort of speculative game, and that the most important thing concerning music is its analysis. How relevant is it whether Liszt really read this or that book? And, above all – and this is a matter of crucial relevance when one speaks of Liszt – how can we be sure that Liszt really read them? Are the quotations he made in his letters and writings an adequate source to support this statement? First of all, it is relevant to point out that it is not the aim of this dissertation to establish if Liszt read and understood the lectures he made. The point here is to outline the cultural background in which Liszt's mind was formed, and, consequently, to outline the atmosphere from which his music took form. Certainly, Liszt

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3 Saint-Simon, *De la réorganisation de la société européenne*, p. 111.

4 During the 1830s Liszt attended for sure to many meetings of the Saint-Simonians circle in Paris, and there he met many artists and intellectuals, including Berlioz, Heine, Sand, etc. On the other side it is to remember that Liszt, already in the mid 1830s, denied any relation with this group, but, as reported by Locke, «This period of reaction, or apparent reaction, did not last; in his later years Liszt felt freer to admit again, at least privately, how significant the ideas of the Saint-Simonians had been and still were for him». See Locke, Ralph, *Liszt's Saint-Simonian Adventure*, p. 211.



was a “social animal”, and one cannot avoid taking into account the impact that society had on his mind. If one focuses on his music alone, what one creates is just a lesson on the history of music, a great one for sure, but a lesson in which Liszt would be separated from his environment and from history, making of him a “mere composer”. On the contrary, and since Liszt is the author of a certain number of writings, and since these concerned a great variety of arguments, we have to consider Liszt not only as a composer, but also as a writer, and what he read are doubtless fundamental to understand his own writings. The theories and ideas of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century must be taken into account if one aims to give a complete depiction of the Hungarian composer. One of the most relevant ideas which was circulating among European’s salons during that time was the idea progress. The belief in the amelioration of the human condition was so strong that «the historian F.S. Marvin has somewhere referred to the nineteenth century as the Century of Great Hope»<sup>5</sup>. It is a word that needs a philosophical, historical, and sociological approach, and it brings with it several and unsolvable issues. However, since this is not a philosophical disquisition on the idea of progress during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the focus will only be on the authors who belong to what it is here dubbed “the Lisztian pantheon”. But this discussion cannot be avoided, as the term *progress* occurs several times in his writings. Furthermore, and as already pointed out, dealing with Liszt means dealing with expressions like *Fortschrittsparthei*, *Zukunftsmusik*, and even “war between progressives and conservatives”. Moreover, his conception of the musician as a prophet means that art is able to guide the masses towards the better and to relieve their suffering – the artist assumes thaumaturgical powers from this perspective. Music entered the fields of philosophy and history, and vice versa. Exactly for this reason a survey of this *Weltanschauung* appears to be mandatory.

### Progress, a possible definition

The topic of the following section is not, for the reasons already explained, a complete comprehensive history of the concept of progress – since an entire life would not be enough to attain this goal –, but it is a brief summary of what the philosophical reflection produced on it. For the same reason the theories elaborated by those who denied any progress concerning the human condition

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5 Nisbet, Robert A., *Social Change and History*, p. 125.

are here intentionally ignored, since Liszt was one of the most devoted persons to this concept. The use of the term “devoted” is not accidental, because, citing the historian Bury, «[...] the progress of humanity belongs to the same ideas as Providence or personal immortality. It is true or false, and like them it cannot be proved either it is true or it is false. Belief in it is an act of faith»<sup>6</sup>. Of course, it is quite an old interpretation of the idea of progress, and some scholars state that the theories of Bury are nowadays probably outdated, but they are surely closer to the 19<sup>th</sup> century sensitivity, and therefore they are to be considered more trustworthy than the more modern ones, at least for the purposes of the this work. For example, the connection that Bury creates between the term *providence* and that of *progress*, is an extremely fruitful perspective to explain Liszt’s own idea of progress. Moreover, Bury’s words perfectly define the core of the idea of progress which was common during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a medley of scientific knowledge and of personal belief, and almost everyone during that time was a believer, both in scientific and in a spiritual meaning. Therefore, this chapter is focused on the idea of progress as it was intended during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and on the authors, who may have influenced Liszt and his conception of this process, with a brief historical excursus on the most relevant thinkers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The most suitable starting point is a definition of *Progress* as it is provided by two modern dictionaries:

1. movement to an improved or more developed state, or to a forward position<sup>7</sup>;
2. development towards an improved or more advanced condition<sup>8</sup>.

Aside from what these two dictionaries present, nowadays we have a clear, simple and widely accepted definition of what progress is. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that there is a high level of agreement among the scientific community about the definition of this term, a position which is possible to summarize as follows:

Le progrès peut se définir comme un processus accumulant des étapes, dont la plus récente est toujours jugée préférable et meilleure, c’est-à-dire qualitativement supérieure à celle qui l’a précédée. Cette définition comprend un élément descriptif (un changement intervient dans une direction donnée) et un élément axiologique (cette progression est interprétée comme une amélioration). Il s’agit

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6 Bury, John Bagnell, *The idea of Progress, An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, p. 4.

7 Cambridge online dictionary, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/progress>.

8 Oxford online dictionary, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/progress>.

## II On the idea of progress

donc d'un changement orienté, et orienté vers le mieux, à la fois nécessaire (on n'arrête pas le progrès) et irréversible (il n'y a pas globalement de retour en arrière possible). L'amélioration étant inéluctable, il s'en déduit que demain sera toujours meilleur<sup>9</sup>.

It is probable that the Liszt of the 1880s disagreed with the statement “tomorrow is always better than today”, but the preposition “improvement is inescapable” (*L'amélioration étant inéluctable*) is the core of the problem, and, as it will emerge, it is exactly what Liszt felt, and the reason for his musical isolation during his later years. Anyway, this matter will be further explored in the final two chapters. What is relevant to underline here is that this definition perfectly fits with the idea of progress of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as it is possible to see from the subsequent quotation, taken from Herbert Spencer's *Progress, its law and cause*:

It is settled beyond dispute that organic progress consists in a change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. Now, we propose in the first place to show, that this law of organic progress is the law of all progress. Whether it be in the development of the Earth, in the development of Life upon its surface, in the development of Society, of Government, of Manufactures, of Commerce, of Language, Literature, Science, Art, this same evolution of the simple into the complex, through successive differentiations, holds throughout. From the earliest traceable cosmical changes down to the latest results of civilization, we shall find that the transformation of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous, is that in which Progress essentially consists<sup>10</sup>.

Actually, both statements contain a very old idea, which brings us back to Augustine of Hippo and his *City of God*. It is somehow embarrassing that the modern idea of progress finds its roots in the ancient thought of Augustine. It is very ironic, after all, that the most modern of the western ideas actually arose with the beginning of civilisation<sup>11</sup>. But the link to the Christian theologian is

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9 Benoist, Alain de, *Une brève histoire de l'idée de progrès*, in *Critiques théoriques*, p. 55.

10 Spencer, Herbert, *Progress, its law and cause*, p. 3.

11 The ancient Greeks already developed some theories on progress, even if they are related to a different conception of time and history. In any case, it is anyway undeniable that the idea of human advancement is a very old one: «The Greeks [...] were fascinated by change, its sources, properties, directions, and its relation to the principles of organic growth. [...] So, long before him [Aristotle], were the early physical philosophers of Miletus equally preoccupied by change. “All is change”» See Nisbet, Robert A., *Social Change and History*, p. 16. The same myth of Prometheus, so dear to Liszt for its multiple philosophical implications, involves the idea of

noteworthy for another reason, too. It is not useless to recall that Liszt, a fervent Catholic, was perfectly aware of the writings of the ancient philosopher, and undoubtedly, he was a topic of discussion with Carolynne, who was a profound connoisseur of the history of the church and of the Catholic creed – it could be useful to remember that she is the author of a monumental work in 24 volumes titled *Causes intérieures de la faiblesse extérieure de l'église en 1870*. In his *City of God*, Augustine wrote that

Sicut autem unius hominis, ita humani generis, quod ad dei populum pertinet, recta eruditio per quosdam articulos temporum tamquam aetatum profecit accessibus, ut a temporalibus ad aeterna capienda et a uisibilibus ad inuisibilia surgeretur; ita sane ut etiam illo tempore, quo uisibilia promittebantur diuinitus praemia, unus tamen colendus commendaretur deus, ne mens humana uel pro ipsis terrenis uitae transitoriae beneficiis cuiquam nisi uero animae creatori et domino subderetur<sup>12</sup>.

This quotation already contains *in nuce* all the elements upon which is based the modern idea of progress, and, above all, the main features upon which Liszt would build his own view, namely the idea of progress as a teleological process towards the city of God, i.e. the eternal life. Nothing could explain this *Weltanschauung* better, than the last symphonic poem *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*, whose subtitles are: 1) *Die Wiege* (Andante), 2) *Der Kampf um's Dasein* (Agitato rapido), and 3) *Zum Grabe: Die wiege des zukünftigen Lebens* (Moderato quasi Andante). The sweet lullaby-like motive of the first movement is used again at the beginning of the last one. But this second statement of the theme is linked to a chromatic descending scale covering an interval of a major third, which creates a link with the second movement. These two moments could be explained through a cyclical conception of life, but it must not be confused with a general idea of history. What Liszt is telling us, is that life is a circle, and

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progress, since it is the mythological description of the amelioration of human condition; the demigod brought to men the necessary knowledge to leave their ignorance and their pre-human condition behind. See Bury, John Bagnell, *The idea of Progress*, p. 8.

- 12 Augustinus, Aurelius, *De civitate dei*, Book X, ch. 14. «The education of the human race represented by the people of God, has advanced, like that of an individual, through certain epochs, or, as it were, ages, so that it might gradually rise from earthly to heavenly things, and from the visible to the invisible. This object was kept so clearly in view, that, even in the period when temporal rewards were promised, the one God was presented as the object of worship, that men might not acknowledge any other than the true Creator and Lord of the spirit, even in connection with the earthly blessing of this transitory life». *The City of God*, Hafner Publishing Company, New York, 1948, p. 402.

as it begins in a cradle surrounded by people singing a lullaby, it ends in the same way, on a bed surrounded by people singing a sad lullaby. The Christian ideal permeates the composition, and it tells us not to despair, because death is the beginning of the future life. Many interpretations could be given to this “future”<sup>13</sup>, but since the main focus here is on the idea of progress, it is necessary to state that, not surprisingly, Liszt alludes to life after death, to final peace in the eternal reign. This could be in heaven, represented by a chorale in the composition, as well as in hell, represented by a brief appearance of the theme of the second movement. The quotation from the second movement is made to remind the listener that it is exactly during the struggle for existence that one decides on one’s place in the future life. The Lisztian teleological view of life, which is perfectly consistent with his idea of progress – as both lie on the idea that our future is determined by what we do in the present –, find here a perfect musical application. This is just one, and very easy example of how artworks can rise from ideas.

Hence, progress is to be intended as something that happens in our lifetime, and there is no place for regressive theories. But other aspects of the Augustinian statement quoted above are relevant: first of all, the appearance of the terms “Education of the human race,” which immediately recalls the treatise of the same name written by Lessing in 1780 – who opened his writing, not accidentally, and not surprisingly, with a quotation from Augustine. This link is useful to show that the reasoning on the concept of progress is, in the course of history (from Christianity to the present day), strictly related to the idea of the perfectibility of the human race, which is constantly progressing towards an end, and this perfectibility is only attainable through education (in a broader sense). The “end” of this amelioration force is intended to be in a religious sense until the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when a secularisation process of society began. Of course, that does not mean that the Christian teleological view is completely erased from the reasoning on the idea of progress. Quite the opposite, religion and science very often find a most fruitful union. The quotation from Augustine is relevant for another reason, too. The same passage is quoted by Robert Nisbet in his book about the Western theory of development to underline the relevance of the metaphor in the development of these theories. One of the

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13 One meaning of the word “future” is, has already emerged, related to the sentence «Ich kann warten» spoken by Liszt on several occasions (see footnote 64 in *Chapter III* of this dissertation). In his essay on Berlioz, he wrote that Beethoven needed thirty years [after his death] to be recognised as a genius. So, Liszt, who was perfectly aware of this “sedimentation process”, refers to the future life as the period after the composer’s death, in which he will finally be recognised as a genius, and in which his musical works will finally find their place.

most successful metaphors, which has been exploited since the beginning of humanity, is the one according to which the ages of humanity are “like those of an individual”. Fontenelle elaborated one of the most beautiful and poetic depictions of this metaphor through an allegory – which contains the same concept of the metaphor of dwarfs on the shoulders of giants:

La comparaison que nous venons de faire des hommes de tous les siècles à un seul homme, peut s'étendre sur toute notre question des anciens et des modernes. Un bon esprit cultivé est, pour ainsi dire, composé de tous les esprits des siècles précédents, ce n'est qu'un même esprit qui s'est cultivé pendant tout ce temps-là. Ainsi cet homme qui a vécu depuis le commencement du monde jusqu'à présent, a eu son enfance où il ne s'est occupé que des besoins les plus pressants de la vie, sa jeunesse où il a assez bien réussi aux choses d'imagination, telles que la poésie et l'éloquence, et où même il a commencé à raisonner, mais avec moins de solidité que de feu. Il est maintenant dans l'âge de virilité, où il raisonne avec plus de force et a plus de lumières que jamais, mais il serait bien plus avancé si la passion de la guerre ne l'avait occupé longtemps, et ne lui avait donné du mépris pour les sciences, auxquelles il est enfin revenu. Il est fâcheux de ne pouvoir pas pousser jusqu'au bout une comparaison qui est en si beau train, mais je suis obligé d'avouer que cet homme-là n'aura point de vieillesse; il sera toujours également capable des choses auxquelles sa jeunesse était propre, et il le sera toujours de plus en plus de celles qui conviennent à l'âge de virilité; c'est-à-dire, pour quitter l'allégorie, que les hommes ne dégénéreront jamais, et que les vues saines de tous les bons esprits qui se succéderont, s'ajouteront toujours les unes aux autres<sup>14</sup>.

The content of this quotation is of course nothing new. Nisbet himself points out that the metaphor was already used in this way by ancient civilizations. Words like *sick*, *decadence*, *degeneration* were already used by the ancient Greek to describe the character of an epoch, as well as the ages of human beings, *childhood*, *youth*, *manhood*, *old*, were used to describe the evolutionary level of a civilisation. Even the image of the dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants is to be ascribed to the category of ancient and enlightening metaphors. Aside from that, Nisbet points out something more relevant in an inquiry on the idea of progress and its influence on Liszt. The historian states that the metaphor is «much more than a simple grammatical construction or figure of speech. Metaphor is a way of knowing [...]. It is [...] a way of proceeding from the known to the unknown. It is a way of cognition in which the identifying qualities of one

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14 Fontenelle, Bernard le Bovier de, *Poesies pastorales*, p. 156.

thing are transferred in an instantaneous, almost unconscious, flash of insight to some other thing that is, by remoteness or complexity, unknown to us»<sup>15</sup>. Here it emerges how a metaphoric way of thinking and the emergence of the idea of progress are actually related, because the second can be seen as an expansion of the first, since they both describe a process which proceeds from the known to the unknown; namely, as Bury pointed out, progress «involves a synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future. It is based on an interpretation of history which regards men as slowly advancing [...] in a definite and desirable direction, and infers that this progress will continue indefinitely. And it implies that [...] a condition of general happiness will ultimately be enjoyed [...]»<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, the words used in the metaphors give us more information: if someone, like Fontenelle in the aforementioned quotation, uses the human ages metaphor, then, one can infer that this person's view of history is linear. Furthermore, if someone, as Fontenelle did, state that men will never be old, and that humanity will constantly progress towards the better, then, not only is it possible to infer that this person's view of history is linear, but even that his view does not involve the idea of decline. Consequently, if someone uses the expression "old age", it means that his conception of history is either cyclical – this single man, intended as a precise epoch comes to an end, but new men, new epochs will begin –, or it involves the concept of degeneration and of the end of humanity. Even if the 19<sup>th</sup> century looked hopeful to the future, the theories on the end of history (History) and the related idea of the end of art (Art) were quite common among German intellectuals. Heinrich Heine wrote in 1833: «Meine alte Prophezeiung von dem Ende der Kunstperiode, die bey der Wiege Goethes anfang und bey seinem Sarge aufhören wird, scheint ihrer Erfüllung nahe zu seyn»<sup>17</sup>. This statement would be incomprehensible without Hegel's idea of the end of Art, as it is expressed in his *Ästhetik*: «Man kann wohl hoffen, daß die Kunst immer mehr steigen und sich vollenden werde, aber ihre Form hat aufgehört, das höchste Bedürfnis des Geistes zu sein»<sup>18</sup>. Here Art is intended to be as beautiful Art and, above all, as a manifestation of the Spirit – which is the real topic of the *Lessons* –, and art is as yet unable to be the highest expression of the Spirit itself, which finds its home in the philosophy: «In solcher Weise sind in der Philosophie die beide Seiten der Kunst und der Religion vereinigt: die

15 Nisbet, Robert A., *Social Change and History*, p. 4.

16 Bury, John Bagnell, *The idea of Progress*, p. 5.

17 Heine, Heinrich, *Französische Maler*, in *Heinrich Heine, Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, Hoffmann und Campe, Hamburg, 1980, p. 47.

18 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 388.

*Objektivität* der Kunst, welche hier zwar die äußere Sinnlichkeit verloren, aber deshalb mit der höchsten Form des Objektiven, mit der Form des *Gedankens* vertauscht hat, und die *Subjektivität* der Religion, welche zur Subjektivität des *Denkens* gereinigt ist»<sup>19</sup>.

Hence, the metaphor has to be intended not just as a communicative strategy, but even as a cognitive process from the known to the unknown, which can lead to concrete actions. The future is for sure unknowable, but progress could be, if not controlled, at least directed by human beings, who have the great responsibility of tracing the best path possible for future generations. Furthermore, continued Nisbet, one must not forget that between the word metaphor and metamorphosis, an idea which lies at the basis of progress, is more than just an etymological relationship. At this point it emerges that the metaphor is somehow the principle of the changing itself, because,

imagination could hardly do without metaphor, for imagination, is, literally, the moving around in one's mind of images, and such images tend commonly to be metaphoric. Creative minds, as we know, are rich in images and metaphors, and this is true in science and art alike.

Metaphor allies itself well with proposals for social action. Most of the millennialist visions of revolution that we find in the Western tradition spring from diagnoses of society that are at bottom metaphoric. If one believes that the society around him is a "sick" society, dying of poisons generated in its own being [...] what else but total action can remove the alien bodies or poisons? The metaphors of sickness and health, applied to society, are doubtless responsible for as much redemptive action as the labels of evil and good<sup>20</sup>.

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19 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 392. On the other side, the idea of the end of history is probably based on a misconception of Hegel's ideas. It is true that in 1806 the philosopher saw in the victory of Napoleon the materialisation of the principles of the French Revolution and of the freedom (of thought), i.e. the victory of the Spirit, but it is even true that this thesis is just an interpretation – and a very disputed one – of Hegel's words. At the same time it is worth remembering that he used a metaphor of the sun, which rises in the east and sets in the west, to describe the process of civilisation, which rose in the east, and it is now at its setting in the west. But the Spirit is like a phoenix, and it dies several times in order to be reborn somewhere else. This is the Hegelian idea of progress. However, it is even true that in his philosophy the present is regarded as the highest point of human civilisation, and it is his own philosophical system which brought him to this solution, even if Hegel himself could not deny the possibility of a future for other philosophies.

20 Nisbet, Robert A., *Social Change and History*, pp. 5–6.



The idea that imagination calls for actions could be of Liszt's himself. But it is not the reason why these few lines are relevant in the speech on the Hungarian composer. The most relevant part is the one on the metaphor as a principle of change.

It is now necessary to digress on the main characteristics of the metaphor, to its differences with the allegory and its very close relationship with the symbol. Furthermore, since the metaphor configures itself as a fundamental aspect of the cognitive process, it would be useful to refer to some theories from cognitive psychology and to look at the theories of the *experiencing-as* elaborated by Peacocke. These theories will be useful in *Chapter III* – where the metaphor and the *experiencing-as* theory will be used to sustain what will be defined as a sort of “*Affektenlehre*”, elaborated by Liszt in his essay on Berlioz –, and in *Chapter IV* – where the symbolic conception of the form will be used to shed new light on the analysis of the *B minor Piano Sonata*.

## Changing the paradigm

### The metaphor

It is necessary to involve the metaphor here for several reasons. As already seen, it is 1) an efficient means to describe the progress, and for that reason it can be considered the 2) principle of human actions. If the world is sick one has to take action to recover it. But at the same time the metaphor is the 3) principle of innovation, because it lies at the basis of any imaginative thought, and it is at the 4) basis of our perception of some phenomena, or at least their description, music included. Finally, the metaphor could be considered as 5) the core of the symbol, intended as the result of a long sedimentary process, whose origins are lost in the mists of time, and therefore impossible to identify.

The starting point must be a definition of the term. The word *metaphor* comes from the ancient Greek μεταφορά (*metaphōra*), properly transfer, and it is commonly defined as «A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable»<sup>21</sup>. Since this dissertations aim is not to define the philosophical or linguistic implication of the metaphor, this definition can be considered adequate for the purpose,

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21 Oxford online dictionary: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/metaphor>.

namely to introduce the experiencing-as theory and thereafter its improved version, which shifts the paradigm from the metaphor to the symbol. It is undeniable that our experience of music is metaphoric. It is quite common to use specific words to describe music, such as “it sounds like”, “it seems that”, or other expressions that transfer to music some properties that music does not possess. Some composers used the metaphor to suggest to the player the effects they wanted to achieve. Just think about the beginning of the *B minor Piano Sonata* where Liszt suggested to his students, according to the Lina Ramann, that the repeated Gs have to be played as *Pauckenschläge*<sup>22</sup>, as muffled timpani-strokes. Hence, Liszt is applying to the piano a property that piano does not possess, and he suggests to the player to play “as if” the piano was a timpani. But metaphor could even be used to describe entire compositions. The so-called eschatological interpretation of Liszt’s *B minor Piano Sonata* is a perfect example of this process: it is possible to hear the work as if it was a depiction of the struggle between God and Lucifer – the interpretation is of course based on some musical symbols, and it is therefore not just to be considered a mere metaphor. This is of course a possible approach to the analysis of the work – the problem related to the eschatological interpretations of the *Sonata* will be discussed in *Chapter IV* –, but the truth is that it is a construction that happens in our mind, and not in the music itself. Moreover, the diverse suggestions somehow influenced our perception of music. As Peacocke points out, the metaphor is «exploited in the perception»<sup>23</sup> and, while it is certainly useful to describe our experience of music, it is not really helpful in describing its formal aspects. If someone asks us to describe a composition in its formal aspects, our task would be relatively easy: instruments, genre, structure, movements, harmony. But this operation could only be accomplished with the score before our eyes, and after brief analysis. Concluding, if the metaphor is very useful to describe our perception of the music, and if it could sometimes even be useful to solve some formal issues, it is at the same time a risky method, because metaphors occur in our mind, and not in music itself. The consequence of this process forces music to appear to be something that it is not.

Although Peacocke’s theory concerns music from a listener’s perspective, and even if some passages could be marked as questionable, it represents a perfect starting point for a more complicated version of the same theory, this

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22 Ramann, Lina, *Liszt-Pädagogium*, V. Serie, No. 16, p. 3. The first bar «muß wie ein dumpfer Paukenschlag erklingen: man greife die Tasten nicht, wie gewöhnlich, vorne an, sondern ganz rückwärts, damit der Hebel geringer wird und der Ton die dunkle Färbung erhält».

23 Peacocke, Christopher, *The Perception of Music: Sources of Significance*, p. 257.

time applied to the formal aspects of music. Peacocke deals with a matter that puzzled ancient philosophers as well as contemporary thinkers: the relation between music and feelings, or, more generally, the statement that in music there is something to be heard. The theory is of course very interesting, and some aspects of it will be useful during the analysis of Liszt's essay on Berlioz, to underline the meaning and the use of the programme. But now it serves first to introduce Peacocke's work, and then to explain the meaning of the metaphoric experience. In turn this constitutes the necessary premises to introduce the symbol theory, and to shift from the perception to the analysis, and from what will be defined as the "category" paradigm of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the "symbol" paradigm of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Peacocke presents his theory starting with an example from visual art. The painting *Bodegón con cacharros* of Francisco de Zurbaran (see *Annex I*) depicts four pieces of pottery which are seen as four people. The explanation is quite obvious:

This kind of experiencing-as in the visual case is seeing something metaphorically-as something else. [...] What does "seeing as" mean in this kind of case? In having this experience, it does not look to a person who enjoys it as if there are people in front of him. Nor is the painting experienced as a depiction of people. It is, and it is experienced as, a depiction of pieces of pottery. The classification that captures what is distinctive of the case is that it is a depiction of pieces of pottery that are perceived metaphorically-as people, but not as representational content, nor as what is depicted<sup>24</sup>.

The metaphor is then something cognitive which somehow involves our imaginative power, but it is not the imagination itself. In this view metaphor is something basically non-linguistic:

Metaphor can enter thought; it can enter imagination; it can enter perception. [...] We have metaphors in language only because we need a device for expressing these mental states whose content involves metaphor. Understanding a metaphor expressed in language involves thinking or imagining whose content is a metaphor. There would be no metaphorical language if there were no mental states whose content involve metaphor<sup>25</sup>.

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24 Peacocke, Christopher, *The Perception of Music: Sources of Significance*, p. 258.

25 Peacocke, Christopher, *The Perception of Music: Sources of Significance*, p. 260.

The metaphor is seen as something that comes before the language, something pre-linguistic. Music, which is the less verbal art among the arts, is then the reign of the metaphoric. This is of course at the same time the weakest and the strongest point of music. It is the strongest point because, recalling the words used by Nisbet, every creative mind is rich in images and metaphors, which are not just a state of mind, but a cognitive process from the known to the unknown, and they consequently represent the principle of innovation, the impulse of change. This feature of the metaphor is of course true if one speaks from the composer's point of view. Something very different happens on the other side of the barricade, on the listener's side. In this category every single description of music based on personal ideas, or feelings experienced while listening to music are presented. For example, Peacocke reports that the Diabelli variations of Beethoven can be described as «an expression of the dignity that can be found even in the humble»<sup>26</sup>. Everything is possible, and everyone can hear everything in music, but it does not mean that music really possesses what one proposes to perceive. This underlines here that the *experiencing-as* theory has to do (quite) exactly, with the metaphoric experience one might have during the performance of a piece of music. Namely, it has to do with the cognitive process of music, not with music itself. The explanation of this theory, as already suggested, will be more useful to defend, *a posteriori*, Liszt's ideas on the programme. Once one establishes that the metaphor can be involved in the perception of music, it appears clear that it does not constitute a valid theoretical background for a new analysis theory, precisely because it brings nothing new. We involve metaphors to explain something, but this explanation does not add anything to the subject, since it is concerned with the phenomenon and not with the source of the phenomenon itself. When we describe a piece of music to someone who has never heard it, we are used to exploiting images and metaphors, such as "in this piano passage one can hear the left hand arpeggios *as* waves", etc. This kind of approach is completely useless from the side of musical analysis.

The long 19<sup>th</sup> century was an epoch of profound change. It opens with the French Revolution and the first fifty years are a quite uninterrupted sequence of political turmoil, which culminates with the Revolution of 1848. The violent insurrections which characterised that time were a clear sign that society was changing. It was not just the beginning of the decay of the bourgeoisie,

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26 Peacocke, Christopher, *The Perception of Music: Sources of Significance*, p. 263. Peacocke refers here to Maynard Solomon, *Late Beethoven: Music, Thought, Imagination*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003, and particularly to the first chapter.

but it also marked a change in the conception of history and time (and not only thanks to scientific progress). People started to believe that they have the power to act *in* history, and consequently to have the power to change their faith. Briefly, the social paradigm was changing. The role of music, of musicians and of composers was changing too, since they are all related to or a product of society. To underline how deep and how relevant this shift of paradigm was in the music field, it can be useful to recall the words Adorno used to describe the role of Beethoven as composer:

Reflektiert sei [...] auf Beethoven. Ist er schon der musikalische Prototyp des revolutionären Bürgertums, so ist er zugleich der einer ihrer gesellschaftlichen Bevormundung entronnenen, ästhetisch voll autonomen, nicht länger bedienten Musik. Sein Werk sprengt das Schema willfähriger Adäquanz von Musik und Gesellschaft. In ihm wird, bei allem Idealismus von Ton und Haltung, das Wesen der Gesellschaft, die aus ihm als dem Statthalter des Gesamtsubjekts spricht, zum Wesen von Musik selbst. Beides ist bloß im Innern der Werke zu begreifen, nicht in bloßer Abbildlichkeit<sup>27</sup>.

According to this view Beethoven is the composer of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, but at the same time his music was working against bourgeois society, because, as Adorno writes, music is not subdued any more. Namely, Beethoven's works destroy the quiet and sure relationship between music and society, working against hierarchy and slavery, and, consequently, freeing it. The musical genre which represents bourgeois society the most is the sonata form<sup>28</sup> – which was, since the beginning, the most beloved form of the amateurs –, as in 1793 Heinrich Christoph Koch already noted:

[...] allein bey Sonaten, die für das Publikum bestimmt sind, sollte man billig mehr auf allgemeine Brauchbarkeit sehen, denn nicht allein dem Dilettanten, sondern auch den mehreren Künstler selbst, ist mehr an ausdrucksvollen, als an schweren Tonstücken dieser Art gelegen. Einen Beweis hiervon geben z.B. die Claviersonaten von Türk, die deswegen *allgemein beliebt sind*, weil sie nebst der

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27 Adorno, Theodor W., *Beethoven, Philosophie der Musik*, p. 74.

28 The term "sonata form" is at this point to be intended as a «zwey-, drey-, oder mehrstimmigen Instrumentalstück» (Koch, Heinrich Christoph, *Musikalisches Lexikon*, § *Sonate*, p. 1415), and not as a bithematic form as described by Marx.

treffenden Darstellung angenehmer Empfindungen den *Liebhaber* nicht durch allzugroße Schwierigkeiten abschrecken, [...]<sup>29</sup>

Of course, to become the beloved form of the upper classes, namely the amateurs (*Liebhaber*), the sonata form needed to be easy to identify. For these reasons – namely a social one (the demand of the amateurs of sonatas increased) and a musical one (for the theory, it was impossible to avoid a confrontation with this form) – the theoreticians began to deal with the sonata, to describe its parts and to organise its material, which was therefore both aesthetically and hierarchically organised: keys, modulations, developments, everything responds to precise laws. Among them the most important, the centrifugal and centripetal motion, i.e., moving away from the tonic and coming back to it. One of the first theoreticians, who described this movement is the previously quoted Koch, who tried to solidify on paper the rules of phrase construction. Even if he did not deeply analyse the sonata as a form of musical expression – this was not his aim –, his reflections on musical syntax laid the basis for all future analysis of this genre. Of course, he did not speak of centrifugal and centripetal movements, but he defined the character of the sonata – «Dem ersten Allegro ist mehrentheils der Charakter der Pracht und des Erhabenen [...] eigen»<sup>30</sup> – and he organised its form in very well defined segments:

Die äußerliche Einrichtung der Sonate, [...] haben wir nicht nöthig hier besonders durchzugehen, denn die Sonate nimmt alle die Formen an, die schon vorhin bey der Sinfonie beschreiben worden sind. So hat z.B. das erste Allegro derselben zwey Theile, die gewöhnlich wiederholt werden. Der erste dieser Theile enthält einen, der zweyte Theil aber zwey Hauptperioden, welche den nemlichen Gang der Modulation beobachten, wie die Hauptperioden der Sinfonie.<sup>31</sup>

This quotation needs elucidation, above all the term *Hauptperiode*, since it is the key concept which theoreticians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century used to define the rules of the sonata form:

Der „Hauptperiode“ besteht aus einer Folge von Phrasen („Absätze“), die ein „Schlußsatz“ mit einer Vollkadenz beschließt. Unter diese Definition fällt auch die schulmäßige 8-taktige Periode, die etwa aus einem 4-taktigen „Absatz“ und

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29 Koch, Heinrich Christoph, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition*, III, p. 318. Cursive is mine.

30 Koch, Heinrich Christoph, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition*, III, pp. 301–302.

31 Koch, Heinrich Christoph, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition*, III, pp. 318–319

einem 4-taktigen „Schlußsatz“ besthet. Koch nennt daneben aber auch die Hauptformteile der Sonatenform, soweit sie sich durch speziellen Ausprägung der harmonischen Führung unterscheiden, „Hauptperioden“, d.h. die in der späteren pragmatischen Sonatendefinition mit Exposition, Durchführung und Reprise bezeichneten Teile, obwohl diese sich in der Praxis oft aus mehreren „Perioden“ zusammensetzen<sup>32</sup>.

Through this process, which in the beginning was merely an attempt at codification, the sonata form was forced into a very strict formal scheme, which after many adventures finds its first formulation with Adolf Bernhard Marx in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a formulation which betrays the influence of Hegel: the composer starts with the tonic (exposition); then, through a centrifugal motion, he moves away from it (development), and finally he comes back to the tonic (recapitulation), in which the dialectical relationship between exposition – and the first and second theme – and development is quietly resolved. This fixed process – fixed only for the theory, because the compositional practice followed other paths – responds to the precepts of a static society in which everything is categorised. The first theme, with its male/strong character is opposed to the second theme, with its female/weak character, and they are followed by a development, which represents an unstable and tense moment – it is tempting to infer here that the development is the moment in which the composer can express himself and his freedom in a very controlled manner<sup>33</sup> –, that the composer must lead back to order. This process can be successfully described through the use of metaphors, and among the theorists who involved this communicative strategy to describe the sonata form, the description provided by Marx is particularly relevant:

In diesem Paar von Sätzen ist [...] der Hauptsatz das zuerst, also in erster Friche und Energie bestimmte, mithin das energischer, markiger, absoluter Gebildete, das Herrschende und bestimmende. Der Seitensatz dagegen ist das nach

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32 Ritzel, Fred, *Die Entwicklung der »Sonatenform« im musiktheoretischen Schrifttums des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden, 1974, p. 175.

33 Wrote Marx about this section: «Ferner wird man sich eher zu den nächstverwandten und nächstnöthigen, als zu entfernten Tonarten hinwenden. Allein hiervon sind im Bewegungstheile mehr als irgendwo sonst zahlreiche – und die freiesten Abweichungen möglich und statthaft, *sobald sie in dem Gang und Inhalt des Ganzen ihren Grund haben*» (Marx, Adolf Bernhard, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch theoretisch*, Vol. III, p. 297, *italic is mine*). So, the development shows the musical freedom at its highest degree, but it must well accorded with what precedes and follows, then a very controlled freedom.

der ersten energischen Feststellung Nachgeschaffen, zum Gegensatz Dienende, von jenem Vorangehenden Bedingte und Bestimmte, mithin seinem Wesen nach nothwendig das Mildere, mehr schmiegsam als markig Gebildete, das Weibliche gleichsam zu jenem vorangehenden Männlichen. Eben in solchem Sinn ist jeder der beiden Sätzen ein Andres und erst beide mit einander ein Höheres, Vollkommneres<sup>34</sup>.

It is not the aim of this dissertation to trace the history of the evolution of the sonata form in theoretical discourse. So, returning to metaphor topic, the quotation from Marx is exactly what Peacocke calls the experiencing-as. In this case, Marx sees the two themes which compose the exposition of a sonata form as a male and a female character. However, it is worth stating again that the metaphor is not in music, but it enters our perception of it, as Peacocke state:

Thinkers about music are sometimes puzzled as to what it is that is really sad when we apparently truly describe the music as sad. The music itself is not literally sad (it is not a mind); the composer need not have been sad when writing it, nor need it have been an expression of his or anyone else's imagined sadness; the performer need not be sad; the listener need not be sad. The notion of sadness enters only as an essential element of the intentional content, more specifically the metaphorical intentional content, of the perception of the music<sup>35</sup>.

The quotation from Marx is useful in demonstrating the typical mentality of the theorists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose inclination was to categorize everything, and, subsequently, to force music into these categories. The problem of this operation is quite obvious: if the sonatas composed by Beethoven, even the ones of the first period, were not easy to place inside these categories, how could the sonatas composed some decades after them adhere to these rules? They do not. This incoherence gives rise to a theoretical and a terminological problem, which will be discussed in the following chapters – it is possible to state that the matter of the form and of its description is the background issue of this dissertation. What it is relevant to point out here is that the paradigm, both social and musical, changed between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>36</sup>, as

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34 Marx, Adolf Bernhard, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch theoretisch*, Vol. III, p. 282.

35 Peacocke, Christopher, *The Perception of Music: Sources of Significance*, p. 263.

36 See, for example, Carl Dahlhaus, *Absolute Musik*, in *Europäische Musikgeschichte*, Vol. 2, pp. 679. «Paradigmenwechsel darf man sich also nicht als eine abstrakte Angelegenheit für Theoretiker vorstellen [...]. Im Gegenteil. Man muß sich klarmachen, daß der unbewußte,



proved by the French Revolution and the following uprisings throughout Europe<sup>37</sup>. As a consequence, musical genres, styles, forms, etc. were no longer closed boxes in which the composer places his creations – genres were never closed boxes, and, as Rosen writes «[...] it is wrong to think of fixed models of sonata form for the eighteenth-century composer: useful stereotypes that could be employed or abandoned at will are what he probably worked with»<sup>38</sup>. Conversely it is undeniable that the composers worked with stereotypes and models, because, if the sonata form did not have its theoretical foundation at that time, it already had a model, or better, several models (stereotypes). Genres are drafts that the composer is free to use and to modify. But when the theorists fix a form on paper, then this form ceases to exist, because once the form crystallises in a description, it loses its evolutionary possibilities through time, and it finally becomes meta-historical. This happens on the theory side, while on the practical side a form continues to live. Consequently, when it is said that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century genres and forms were falling, giving the beginning to the so-called decline of the tonal system, it is worth remembering that it is true from a theoretical point of view, because from the side of the composers one can speak of progress. Nevertheless, according to the 19<sup>th</sup> century view, it is said that during that time, not just the genres as categories were falling, but even all the structures related to them. Categories such as “theme”, “harmonic relationships”, “melody”, etc., were all subjected to a revision process, even the most stable basis of music, namely the perfect cadence V-I. It was the end of the “dictatorship of the tonic”. Of course, there were still composers who worked with these old categories, and nevertheless they still produced a sort of progress. The best example of this is represented by Brahms, who used the form in quite a traditional way, but, on the other side, produced an advancement, for example, in the field of the motivic transformation. And it is exactly for this reason he is to be included in the list of the innovators, in the list of the

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alltägliche Umgang mit Musik, ja der scheinbar nur sinnliche Vorgang des Musikhörens selbst von begrifflichen Unterscheidungen geprägt wird, die im jeweils vorherrschenden Paradigma gebündelt sind. Ein Paradigma ist eine Art von Kollektiver Theorie, die [...] das praktische Verhältnis zum Gegenstand bestimmt».

37 To deepen this matter from a historical perspective see Eric Hobsbawm’s trilogy (*The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848; The Age of Capital: 1848–1875; The Age of Empire: 1875–1914*). From a musicological perspective see Kalisch, Volker, *Studien zur “Bürgerlichen Musikkultur”*, Universität Tübingen, 1990, PhD dissertation.

38 Rosen, Charles, *Sonata Forms*, p. 161.

young composers, who, as Umberto Eco reminds us, to bring their innovations tried to kill their own fathers<sup>39</sup>.

When an old paradigm collapses, a new one takes its place; and the concept of symbol could be raised to the role of key concept during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which allows for the embracing and explanation of many different social, cultural, and musical matters. The concept here is not intended to be as a melodic or a harmonic figure, interval or other structural feature that has a symbolic function – think, for example, about the so called “cross figure” in Liszt; it is a symbol, whose meaning is clear, and whose occurrences are easily identifiable in the score –; here symbol means that a musical structure possesses the same features as the symbol, namely, the musical structures do not have a structure fixed once for all, but they are open, and therefore susceptible of multiple interpretations. The symbol brings the idea of multiplicity as polysemy in the field of the arts. This concept will be clarified later on, and its relevance will emerge during the analysis of Liszt’s compositions presented in the following chapters. Anyway, as for the music of Liszt, we do not have to think about the definition of the human being as an animal symbolicum suggested by Ernst Cassirer<sup>40</sup> to explain the use of symbols in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as most of the philosophical reflections on the idea of symbol emerged exactly within this century.

## The symbol

The word *symbol* comes from the ancient Greek συμβάλλω (*symbállō*) and it means to hold together. But in the ancient Greek culture the symbol was not just an abstract concept, but it was even a concrete object, which «denotava [...] la “tessere dell’ospitalità”, ossia un oggetto spezzato in due parti, ciascuna delle quali veniva tenuta da un membro di una famiglia, di una comunità o di un’assemblea come segno di riconoscimento reciproco. Il simbolo, dunque, fin dalla sua origine, denota non soltanto un semplice oggetto, ma anche un’operazione particolare, la quale, estesa ad un livello generale, *significa il ricongiungimento in un tutto unitario di due parti separate*»<sup>41</sup>. The symbol, since its origins, denotes the

39 Eco, Umberto, *Sulle spalle dei giganti*, in *Sulle spalle dei giganti, Lezioni alla Milaneseiana 2001–2015*, La nave di Teseo, Milano, 2017, p. 20. «[...] ogni atto d’innovazione, e di contestazione dei padri, avviene sempre attraverso il ricorso a un antenato, riconosciuto migliore del padre che si tenta di uccidere, e a cui ci si rifà».

40 Cassirer, Ernst, *Versuch über den Menschen: Einführung in eine Philosophie der Kultur*, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2007. Cassirer explains the concept of *animal symbolicum* in the second chapter.

41 Pasqualotto, Giangiorgio, *Figure di pensiero*, Marsilio, Padova, 2007, p. 11. *Italic is mine*.

“holding together” of two different things, which are at the same time a part of a unitary whole. After the “Greek experience” the symbol had to wait till the 19<sup>th</sup> century to enter again the realm of philosophical reflections. Goethe was one of the first men of letters who noted the great possibilities offered by this concept, and he is therefore to be thanked for the return to life after centuries in oblivion.

Die Allegorie verwandelt die Erscheinung in einen Begriff, den Begriff in ein Bild, doch so, dass der Begriff im Bilde immer noch begrenzt und vollständig zu halten und zu haben und an demselben auszusprechen sei. Die Symbolik verwandelt die Erscheinung in Idee, die Idee in ein Bild, und so, dass die Idee im Bild immer unendlich wirksam und unerreichbar bleibt und, selbst in allen Sprachen ausgesprochen, doch unaussprechlich bliebe<sup>42</sup>.

Here, Goethe expresses two very clear concepts. The allegory creates a fixed and closed relationship between signified and signifier, while the content of the symbolism cannot be exhausted by its signifier, and it remains inexpressible, even if “spoken out in all languages”. Goethe understood both the ambiguity and the “open to the future” character of the symbol, and he assigned to these features a positive role. It is worth remembering that Goethe was one of the most influential figures for the entire Romantic Generation, and not only for the literary value of his poems and novels, but even as a scientist and philosopher. His literary works and his aphorisms constituted the common knowledge of the Romantic Generation, who loved to speak with catchphrases and quotations, and whose aspiration was to experience the same adventures of their heroes – the Liszt-d’Agoult affair can be seen as a good example of this attitude. But the symbol entered again the philosophical field thanks to the attention another thinker gave to it, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, whose figure and works monopolised the conversations of the bourgeois salons during the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century. The philosopher devotes to this topic an entire section of his *Ästhetik*. From this section emerges how the symbol lies at the basis of the first artistic productions, or better, that it is something that appears (historically) before art. Therefore, according to the Hegelian view, it must be considered

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42 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, *Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, Verlag der Goethe-Gesellschaft, Weimar, 1907, Vol. 21, aphorisms nns.1112–1113, pp. 230–231. Coleridge contributed to this renaissance of the symbol, too, and wrote that «a Symbol is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual, or of the General in the Especial, or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal». Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *The Statesman’s manual; or the Bible the best guide to political skill and foresight*, Printed for Gale and Fenner, London, 1816, p. 37.

as a typical manifestation of the ancient civilisations, which, in his division of history, occupy the pre-artistic stage:

Das Symbol in der Bedeutung, in welcher wir das Wort hier gebrauchen, macht dem Begriffe wie der historischen Erscheinung nach den Anfang der Kunst und ist deshalb gleichsam nur als Vorkunst zu betrachten [...] <sup>43</sup>.

Hegel is referring here to the artistic productions of the ancient Persian, Indians, and Egyptians, which in his view represent the creed, the beginning of human artistic production, the youth of the civilization. It is interesting to note that the *metaphor* of the ages of the human being used to describe *progress* is still alive and healthy. But aside from that, from this first excerpt the idea that the symbol cannot be considered as art clearly emerges. But it is not just a matter of quality and meaning of the ancient productions. Hegel perceived with embarrassment the ambiguous character of the symbol:

Symbol überhaupt ist eine für die Anschauung unmittelbar vorhandene oder gegebene äußerliche Existenz, welche jedoch nicht so, wie sie unmittelbar vorliegt, ihrer selbst wegen genommen, sondern in einem weiteren und allgemeineren Sinne verstanden werden soll. Es ist daher beim Symbol sogleich zweierlei zu unterscheiden: erstens die *Bedeutung* und sodann der *Ausdruck* derselben. *Jene* ist eine Vorstellung oder ein Gegenstand, gleichgültig von welchem Inhalte, *dieser* ist eine sinnliche Existenz oder ein Bild irgendeiner Art <sup>44</sup>.

The first problem of this definition is that the symbol is seen as an object of intuition <sup>45</sup>, of immediate intuition, and that it cannot therefore be the result of a reflection. Consequently, every human production which is the result of this immediate intuition cannot be considered art. On the other hand, Hegel noticed the most relevant aspect of the symbol, namely that the *signified* and its *expression* do not coincide:

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43 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 846.

44 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 850.

45 This idea is derived from Kant, who in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* wrote: «Es ist ein von den neueren Logikern zwar angenommener, aber sinnverkehrender, unrechter Gebrauch des Worts *symbolisch*, wenn man es der *intuitiven* Vorstellungsart entgegensetzt; denn die symbolische ist nur eine Art der intuitiven». Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Verlag der Dürr'schen Buchhandlung, Leipzig, 1902, p. 222.

[...] das Symbol, obschon es seiner Bedeutung, nicht wie das bloß äußerliche und formelle Zeichen, gar nicht adäquat sein darf, sich ihr dennoch umgekehrt, um Symbol zu bleiben, auch nicht ganz angemessen machen muß. [...] Der Inhalt bleibt daher gegen die Gestalt, welche ihn vorstellt, auch *gleichgültig*, und die abstrakte Bestimmtheit, welche er ausmacht, kann ebensogut in unendlich vielen andere Existenzen und Gestaltungen vorhanden sein. [...] Hieraus folgt nun, daß das Symbol seinem eigenen Begriff nach wesentlich *zweideutig* bleibt. a) Erstens führt der Anblick eines Symbols überhaupt sogleich den Zweifel herbei, ob eine *Gestalt als Symbol zu nehmen ist oder nicht*, wenn wir auch die weitere Zweideutigkeit in Rücksicht auf den *bestimmten* Inhalt beiseite lassen, welchen eine Gestalt unter *mehreren* Bedeutungen, als deren Symbol sie oft durch entferntere Zusammenhänge gebraucht werden kann, bezeichnen solle<sup>46</sup>.

Hegel, exactly like Goethe, noted the open character of the symbol, and that the correspondence between the *form* and the *signified* is never guaranteed within it. The *signified* is always something more than its form, something that always exceeds it. Namely one has to speak about the *meanings* of a symbol, and not about the meaning. This is exactly the reason why the symbol is basically ambiguous, and Hegel pontificates that it is exactly for that reason that it is not possible to include it in the category of art, because we always feel uncomfortable in its presence, because «wir fühlen, daß wir unter *Aufgaben* wandeln»<sup>47</sup>. These features, ambiguity and open character, far from being a limit, are the strength of the symbol, because they do not establish a closed relationship between the signified and the signifier, as pointed out by the philosopher Carlo Sini in more recent times:

Bisogna lasciare il significato nel nulla e nella distanza: identificarlo con una espressione equivale a cancellarlo [...]. Ma insieme non bisogna lasciare il significato in una separatezza assoluta rispetto alla sua espressione: escluderlo da ogni espressione equivale di nuovo a cancellarlo<sup>48</sup>.

Summarising, the symbol does not have a decisively defined relationship between the signifier and the signified; this gives rise to ambiguity, namely to multiple interpretations. And here another fundamental feature of the symbol arises, which shows its double oriented opening, both to the future and to the past:

46 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, pp. 854–856.

47 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 862.

48 Sini, Carlo, *Il pensiero e il simbolo*, pp. 109–110.

1) it is open to the future because, since its meaning is not singularly and categorically defined, it always accepts further and new interpretations. As Goethe said, recalling what Kant noticed, the symbol is a peculiar manifestation of the Universal, and this peculiar manifestation recalls the Universal itself. Of course, it is not possible to fix the Universal in just one figure, one concept. Therefore, this peculiar manifestation creates a never-ending mirror game between the multiple meanings and the single peculiar expression. When one looks at a symbol one grasps one meaning, and this meaning is consequently regarded as one peculiar manifestation of the universal. In this relationship between the observer and the symbol, the former is able to grasp, even if just for a moment, the Universal. However, this relationship is not unidirectional, but bidirectional: the Universal sends the observer back again to the peculiar manifestation, which is this time perceived from a new perspective, and, consequently, arises a new interpretation of it, an interpretation enriched by this contact with the universal. But through this new interpretation of the phenomenon the observer comes again in contact with the universal, which in turn sends him back again to the peculiar manifestation, from which arises a new interpretation, etc., and so on in a never-ending process; 2) the symbol is even open to the past, and precisely in two different ways:  $\alpha$ ) as the sum of all the previous interpretations of it;  $\beta$ ) as the outcome of a long cognitive process of sedimentation. The symbol is the result of a tradition which elaborated it, but this outcome was not created with esoteric intentions, namely the symbol was not thought of for the adepts of a school, science, or religion. On the contrary, the symbol belongs to the entire community. Since the symbol and its interpretations are a part of a tradition, then one might think that a “dictionary of symbols” could be a useful solution. Even if there already exist a great number of decoded symbols, their meaning is still open, because they are by their own nature indefinable, and new interpretations are always possible. And these interpretations will enrich the tradition, and they will be the basis for new interpretations, and so on. Once again, an example from Hegel could be helpful to explain the process:

Der Löwe z.B. wird als Symbol der Großmut, der Fuchs als Symbol der List, der Kreis als Symbol der Ewigkeit, das Dreieck als Symbol der Dreieinigkeit genommen. [...] So ist der Löwe z.B. nicht nur stark, der Fuchs nicht nur listig, besonders aber hat Gott noch ganz andere Eigenschaften als diejenigen, welche in einer Zahl, einer mathematischen Figur oder Tiergestalt können aufgefasst werden<sup>49</sup>.

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49 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, pp. 852–854.

For all these reasons the symbol is a key concept of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It not only occupies a relevant place in the philosophical reflection, but it possesses some peculiarities typical of the character of the “century of progress”. The tension towards the future, and the importance of the past, the teleological character – since its fulfilment lies somewhere in the future, which is of course unattainable in history –, all these aspects cannot only be used to describe the symbol, but they are even apt to describe the concept of progress, at least the idea of progress which was forming during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And progress, even if it can be represented by a straight line from one point to the future, possesses the same grade of ambiguity as the symbol. Even if humanity were able to describe with extreme precision what happened in the past and, consequently, to comprehend every aspect of the present, the future would still remain unpredictable and therefore open to many different interpretations, namely it would remain ambiguous. And ambiguity is one of the key concept for the Romantic Generation, and not just for writers and philosophers, but for musicians and for those music theorists who saw the ambiguity of some harmonies (diminished sevenths, augmented triad, etc.) as a fruitful means to expand the possibilities of the tonal system.

### Progress and society. The Lisztian pantheon

An attempt to summarise all the different theories on progress elaborated during the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is not the aim of this chapter. The investigation focuses here only on those theories which were on Liszt’s cognitive horizon, and which he probably came into contact with during his lifetime. Some of these ideas deeply influenced him, and they became consequently the theoretical background upon which he built his own vision of progress and society. Moreover, this survey will be useful to analyse the essay on Berlioz, of which these ideas form the theoretical background, and from which emerge Liszt’s view on the musical evolution. Furthermore, and it will strongly emerge in the last two chapters, these ideas formed Liszt’s mind, and they are therefore to be considered as responsible for his future oriented aesthetics.

The idea of progress, as we nowadays know it, arises between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to the historian Bury, two thinkers “prepared the soil” for the emergence of such theories, and they were Jean Bodin and Francis

Bacon<sup>50</sup>. But the origins of the idea of progress, as already pointed out, are to be found in antiquity. The philosophical reflection on the topic already began with the ancient Greeks. But the ancient thought, and it would be so until the Renaissance, was deeply influenced by religious beliefs, which involved the direct action of deities in human affairs. Hence, till then it was possible to speak of *providence* more than progress. The modern meaning of progress arises at the end of the Renaissance, and its emergence can be attributed to a change in the social paradigm. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century a paradigm was in effect in which the past was the main source of laws – both for the physical and for the juridical world –, and the place where it was possible to find the truth. Basically, there were two authorities, who were allowed to answer any question: The Bible and Aristotle. These texts represented the sum of human knowledge, and there every answer to any question was to be sought, from philosophy to physics, from law to astrology. The past was the most relevant source of knowledge. It was the reign of tradition, and every innovation was regarded as a threat to social stability. It was between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century that began what it is possible to call the “revolution against the past”. But even if everyone tried with all their strength to free humanity from the classical and medieval dogmas, the idea of progress during the 17<sup>th</sup> century is to be conceived «as [...] a modification [...] of the same largely *metaphoric view* of growth and development contained in classical and Christian ideas»<sup>51</sup>. Here lies one of the key concepts of Nisbet’s theory, namely that the reflections on the idea of progress of the 17<sup>th</sup> century only had an intellectual character and did not involve any social or moral theory. The famous *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, which is quite often seen as a struggle between the *passés* and the modernists, was actually the most evident fact to support his theory. The fight took place in the field of the intellect, and it was there where the *modernes* won the battle, where the intellect took its supremacy. No one wants to deny the relevance of this historical moment, but it is important to underline that it did not involve any immediate social reaction. The Cartesian ideas resumed with the motto *cogito ergo sum* became the new *Weltanschauung*. Here the change of paradigm is evident, since reality now fell under the control of reason, of pure reason, instead under of

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50 Bury, John Bagnell, *The idea of Progress*, pp. 35–36. «In this last stage of the Renaissance [...] soil was being prepared in which the idea of Progress could germinate, and our history of its origin definitely begins with the work of two men who belong to this age, Bodin [...], and Bacon [...]. Both had a more general grasp of the significance of their own time than any of their contemporaries, and though neither of them discovered a theory of Progress, they both made contributions to thought which directly contributed to its subsequent appearance».

51 Nisbet, Robert A., *Social Change and History*, p. 106.



that of beliefs and religion. Of course, religion was not completely excluded from the process, but it was exactly during the 17<sup>th</sup> century that it left the field to the “dictatorship of reason”. This passage is extremely relevant, since it gives birth to two concepts that will be fundamental for most of the theories on progress: 1) the cumulative character of knowledge, and 2) the uniformity of this process. The first feature is easily explained, and it is well exemplified through the image of the modern as dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, where the giants represent the entire knowledge acquired by humanity through the past centuries, and the dwarfs are the modern, which stand on top of it, and for this reason they can say that they possess it. The second feature is based on the Cartesian theory of the uniformity of the laws of nature. These laws are certain and immutable, since God created them. Consequently, according to the combination of these two laws, «does it not follow with inexorable logic that the progress of knowledge must continue into the indefinite future?»<sup>52</sup>. This is the rationalist argument: knowledge is sure, cumulative, and endless. It constitutes the axioms upon which future philosophers will build their theories. Since it is not possible to analyse one by one all the thinkers who produced reflections on the idea of progress, it is considerably more useful to create four different groups. Every group represents a source (direct or indirect) of inspiration for Liszt’s own ideas on society and progress: 1) the *Christian legacy*; 2) the *German reflections* (Goethe, Herder); 3) *Saint-Simon* and *Lamennais*; 4) *Thomas Carlyle*. These theories could be found here and there in Liszt’s writings, even if the authors are not explicitly named. But one has to keep them in mind, if one wants to fully appreciate the writings of the Hungarian composer, aside from his bombastic style. A special place is reserved to Thomas Carlyle, whose theories affected Liszt so deeply that it is possible to state that «Carlyle serves Liszt during the 1850s in the same way that Schopenhauer later served Wagner: viz., as a vehicle of his own thoughts and feelings»<sup>53</sup>.

### The Christian legacy

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. [...] God blessed them, saying: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion

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52 Nisbet, Robert A., *Social Change and History*, p. 108.

53 Winkler, Gerhard J., *Liszt’s “Weimar Mythology”*, p. 69.

over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth”<sup>54</sup>.

These two excerpts taken from the Old Testament, are enough to point out that under the light of Christianity the conception of history is no longer cyclical – even if the idea of a golden age survived in some Christian views, according to which a return to the Garden of Eden is still possible. Eden, this original and perfect condition of men, lies in the past. Actually, it lies outside of the past, because the original condition of men is outside time and history, while the end of this condition, with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, represents the beginning of human history. Hence, according to the Christian view, history has a double beginning: 1) the physical beginning, i.e., the birth of the universe, when God created it and its laws, and 2) the beginning of human history, which coincides with the expulsion of the original couple from the Garden of Eden. From these two starting points time began to flow straight and continuously and it is this same stream that excludes the possibility of a return to the Garden of Eden, of a golden age. From the Christian philosophy emerge four main ideas, which constitute the premises of any further development: 1) history is a necessity, since God created it, and it has already been written, since there is a precise plan for everything and everyone since the very beginning – even if it is unknown and unknowable; 2) this involves a movement *in* and *through* time towards a destination; 3) the idea of progress is of course involved in this process, as well as the idea of perfectibility of mankind, which has to redeem itself after the fall; 4) since Adam and Eve are our ancestors, humanity has a common birth, and with them is born the idea of humanity as a brotherhood of man.

These ideas are not relevant just for the birth of the modern conception of progress. These ideas were very well known to Liszt, since he already felt a religious vocation from his early youth. The Bible and Augustine of Hippo (St. Augustine) constitute the basic readings for every Christian. It is possible to find a trace of these readings in many places in Liszt’s writings, above all in the letters he addressed to the princess Sayn-Wittgenstein. The figure of Augustine is particularly relevant because with him the idea of progress reached «masterful and lasting expression [...], endowed the idea of progress with new attributes which were bound to give it a spiritual force [...]»<sup>55</sup>. The figure of Augustine is relevant for another reason too. His *City of God* is not just the glorification

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54 Bible, *Genesis*, 1.1 and 1.28.

55 Nisbet, Robert, *History of the Idea of Progress*, p. 47.

of God's creation, but it is even an exaltation of human intellect, able to invent everything that human beings needed, and, at the same time, to produce art. This idea is strictly related to the figure of the genius, with which Liszt was fascinated for his entire life. Therefore, it is possible to state that the Christian thought represents the first and oldest source of Liszt's concept of progress.

### The German reflection: Goethe and Herder

Christianity laid the foundations for the western idea of progress. And this idea, namely a religious idea of progress where Providence plays the most relevant role, survived during the entire Middle Ages, and, as already said, only the secularisation process begun during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was able to free the idea from its religious meanings. Of course, that does not mean that the action of providence was completely excluded from any reasoning on the topic. Quite the opposite. The majority of thinkers and philosophers professed both a faith in science, namely in the scientific progress, and in God, and they were able to combine these two beliefs in a very fertile way. Along this path towards the definition of the idea of progress, the German reflection deserves particular attention, and not just because it is fundamental in the history of ideas, but because one encounters the thinkers who constitute the cultural background in which Liszt lived. Furthermore, some of these thinkers belong to what Winkler called the *Weimar Mythology*<sup>56</sup>, namely a sort of Liszt's personal pantheon. It is sufficient to read some of the titles that appeared during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Germany to understand what was new during that time: *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Herder, 1774), *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (Lessing, 1780), *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Herder, 1784), *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (Kant, 1784), *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Kant, 1795). Theories on progress needed theoretical justification, and the only way to provide one was to analyse the entire history of humanity. It appears to be a sequence of forward steps, from the primitive and ancient civilizations to the present-day, driven by the same natural laws. The necessity to find the laws of progress in order to build a science upon them (here lies the origin of sociology) was felt following scientific discovery, such as Newton's law of universal gravitation. But there is another aspect to underline, and it clearly emerges with Kant, namely the idea that progress is to be found not

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56 Winkler, Gerhard J., *Liszt's "Weimar Mythology"*, pp. 61–73.

only in science, art, political institutions, but progress is possible, or better, progress means above all *moral* improvement<sup>57</sup>. These are the main aspects of the German reflection on the idea of progress. It is not possible here to focus on all of them, and therefore an account will be given of the contributions of two of the most relevant thinkers of the *New Athens*, Herder and Goethe, who were very well known to Liszt, and who inspired him both new compositions and new “social” writings.

Goethe is usually seen as the symbol of German poetry. In any case, we cannot forget his deep interest in biology, and his essay on the metamorphosis of plants is a clear indication of this. Metamorphosis is a concept which lies at the basis of that of progress. Therefore, one «might have expected to find him interested in theories on social progress»<sup>58</sup>, since his essay opened the door to the evolutionary hypothesis. Furthermore, Bury states that the speculations on progress «did not touch his imagination», and that «they left him cold and sceptical»<sup>59</sup>. Goethe certainly represents one of the sceptical voices, however he did have a precise vision on progress. On one side he identifies a positive and inexorable rule of progress, represented by nature, which advances continuously without breaks<sup>60</sup>; on the other side there is human progress:

“Die Entwicklung der Menschheit”, sagte ich, “scheint auf Jahrtausende angelegt.” / “Wer weiß”, erwiderte Goethe, “vielleicht auf Millionen! Aber laß die Menschheit dauern so lange sie will, es wird ihr nie an Hindernissen fehlen, die ihr zu schaffen machen, und nie an allerlei Not, damit sie ihre Kräfte entwickele. Klüger und einsichtiger wird sie werden, aber besser, glücklicher und tatkräftiger nicht, oder doch nur auf Epochen. Ich sehe die Zeit kommen, wo Gott keine Freude mehr an ihr hat, und er abermals alles zusammenschlagen muß zu einer verjüngten Schöpfung. Ich bin gewiß, es ist alles danach angelegt, und es steht in der fernen Zukunft schon Zeit und Stunde fest, wann diese Verjüngungsepoche eintritt. Aber bis dahin hat es sicher noch gute Weile, und wir können noch Jahr-

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57 The idea of progress related to the moral advancement of humanity is analysed by Saint-Simon too. See the paragraph of the present work, *Different religions: Saint-Simon and Lamennais*.

58 Bury, John Bagnell, *The idea of Progress*, p. 258.

59 Bury, John Bagnell, *The idea of Progress*, p. 258.

60 Goethe played a relevant role even in the field of science, and not just in botanic. Through cooperation with Herder, who was at that time writing his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Goethe came in contact with scientific literature on physiognomy and anatomy, which brought him to relevant scientific discoveries.

## II On the idea of progress

tausende und aber Jahrtausende auch auf dieser lieben alten Fläche, wie sie ist, allerlei Spaß haben”<sup>61</sup>.

From these lines Goethe’s idea clearly emerges: progress, intended as a natural development, in a biological sense, will always exist. And consequently it is possible to infer that he believed in the cumulative process of knowledge. Humanity will be even more intelligent, and its knowledge will always be larger. Nevertheless, states Goethe, more intelligence and a wider knowledge will never make mankind happier. Too many obstacles and demons lie across their path, and humanity will always meet new ones. For the German poet progress means moral advancement towards a happier condition, which is nevertheless unattainable. But there is another important aspect to underline here about Goethe’s statement, namely his idea of God. Although he was a believer, he thought that God does not interfere with human affairs, but in the end, when he will decide to recreate the world. Aside from this Christian idea of the Last Judgement, Goethe identified the very character of progress:

Die Welt soll nicht so rasch zum Ziele, als wir denken und wünschen. Immer sind die retardierenden Dämonen da, die überall dazwischen- und überall entgegen-treten, so daß es zwar im ganzen vorwärts geht, aber sehr langsam<sup>62</sup>.

Humanity is surely progressing, even if very slowly, and always through new obstacles. We think and desire for a better condition, and we work and fight to obtain it. This is of course a very long process, and it is undeniable that the world will come to an end before we reach such a goal. So, progress is a matter of faith. Finally, it is noted that Goethe had this conversation when he was already old, and a bit of disappointment surely contributes to his reflections, and it is probably his denial of the possibility of a happier condition for humanity in this world. It is impossible not to draw a link between the late thoughts of Goethe and Liszt in his final years.

Alongside Goethe, one cannot ignore the other great man of Weimar, Johann Gottfried Herder. Not only did they work together at the Weimar Hoftheater, but they were even two of the most relevant figures in Liszt’s pantheon during his experience as Kapellmeister, and during his entire life. The Goethe and Herder celebrations in 1849 and 1850 are the cause of new compositions and writings. It was in fact for these anniversaries that Liszt composed his first

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61 Eckermann, J.P., *Goethes Gespräche mit J. P. Eckermann*, pp. 60–61.

62 Eckermann, J.P., *Goethes Gespräche mit J. P. Eckermann*, p. 60.

version of *Tasso* and *Prometheus*, and he wrote his essay *De la fondation-Goethe à Weimar* (1850). The first chapter of this bureaucratic and historical essay is devoted to the history of the princes of Weimar, and it includes an ode to the glorious past of the *Minnesänger*, as the first peak reached by German literature<sup>63</sup>. The second peak, probably the highest, is reached at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the beginning of the government of Carl August, and is represented by the era of Goethe, Herder, and Schiller – but it had already begun with the ten years service of Johann Sebastian Bach at the court of Weimar (1708–1717):

Goethe était loin encore de cette solennité, de ce calme olympien, dont le Duc si riche de bon sens, disait avec belle humeur: «Es ist ganz possierlich, wie der Mensch feierlich wird!» - Goethe n'avait fait que commencer la série de ses créations en écrivant Goetz von Berlichingen, lorsque Charles-Auguste chercha à se l'attacher, en s'attachant à lui. En 1776, il le nomma conseiller de légation. [...] Les esprits d'élite qui flottaient sur les vagues onduleuses des divers états de l'Allemagne, se trouvèrent peu à peu rapprochés et retenus par ce centre attractif. Herder fut appelé (1776) à Weimar, en qualité de prédicateur de la cour, [...]. Quelques années après, Schiller y arrivait aussi; [...]<sup>64</sup>.

This celebration of the great men who were in Weimar during the 18th century has the purpose of glorifying the duchy of Weimar and above all the Duke Carl-August, father of Carl-Friedrich and grandfather of Carl-Alexander. These last two men were the patrons of Liszt during his Weimar period. But aside from this tribute to the family of Sachsen-Weimar, and to the historical reconstruction of the relevance of literature in it, there is a passage which deserves to be quoted, since from it one can deduce the Lisztian idea of history and progress and of the role that providence plays in this game:

Il sut identifier à jamais le souvenir de son règne avec celui de la plus florissante période de la littérature allemande. Était-ce chez lui un but prémédité? Nous ne le croyons pas. Qui peut préjuger des moissons que prépare la Providence? Qui peut prédire l'ingratitude ou la reconnaissance du cœur humain? Qui peut prévoir les bouleversements destinés à dévaster ou à découvrir les vallées où s'abritent les

63 Liszt, Franz, *De la Fondation-Goethe à Weimar*, pp. 10–ff. «En Allemagne, la littérature arriva deux fois à cette importance qui lui assure une place éminente dans les fastes de l'esprit humain. Au moyen âge, les *Minnesänger* firent surgir dans la poésie, un sentiment nouveau. L'amour que l'antiquité n'avait considéré que comme une volupté, fut peu à peu identifié par eux avec un tendre respect et un admiration émue. [...]»

64 Liszt, Franz, *De la Fondation-Goethe à Weimar*, pp. 48–49.

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gloires pacifiques? Charles-Auguste satisfait à sa propre passion, en recherchant l'intelligence, en rapprochant de lui tant d'hommes remarquables; et comme cette passion était noble, celle lui rapporta des fruits précieux, qu'il sut ensuite cueillir et faire germer de nouveau<sup>65</sup>.

There are two relevant matters to point out in this passage: 1) the faith in Providence, namely in the divine intervention in human affairs, and, consequently, the impossibility to foresee the future – there is a plan, but only God knows it –; 2) great men, such as the Grand Duke Carl-August, always pursue their objectives, and, if their aims are noble, they will be rewarded, in this life or in the future one. Liszt's mind had, at that time, already absorbed several theories on progress, but the Christian beliefs are still strongly evident in the background. Contrary to the title, the figure of Goethe is not the main topic of Liszt's essay. It is a mystified mythicisation of the relationship between Goethe and the court of Weimar. This from Liszt is without any doubt a propaganda essay, written to pursue his project of a New Weimar. Therefore, the real homage to Goethe is to be found in his music, more than in his writing. His symphonic poem *Tasso: Lamento e Trionfo*, even if it was composed on commission for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Goethe's birth, contains in its programme more ideas than the writing itself. The first version of this work is clearly bipartite; the first part, *Lamento*, and the second one, *Trionfo*. The programme is as a *Spiegel im Spiegel*, since Liszt looks at his own condition through the work of Goethe, and through the work of Torquato Tasso, who in turn reflects on the condition of artists in society<sup>66</sup>. Here lies the key to reading Liszt's work. But if Goethe and Tasso are oppressed by their role, by their loneliness, Liszt looks to the future with other eyes. It is true that the artist leads a life of sacrifices (*Lamento*), but it is even true that the genuine artist will be rewarded with eternal glory, even if it will come after his own death (*Trionfo*). Liszt's *Tasso* is not just a glorification of the most relevant German poet, but it is a hymn to all the poets (*Tondichter*), who are still awaiting their glory. The extra-musical programme here is not a specific poem or poet, but *la condition des artistes dans la société* itself.

This topic is a perfect link to the other symphonic poem, *Prometheus*, which works in turn to link to the other author in this section, Herder. Liszt was

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65 Liszt, Franz, *De la Fondation-Goethe à Weimar*, p. 47.

66 Goethe, after his *Werther* and his journey to Italy, came back to Weimar with a feeling of disappointment. He perceived that his works were not fully appreciated and understood. His *Tasso* focused on the moment in which Tasso finishes his *Gerusalemme Liberata*, and he experiences a sense of frustration, marginalisation and disappointment. The artist is alone in society. This same condition will be experienced by Liszt during his late years.

attracted to this work for two reasons: 1) Prometheus, with his «defiance against authority, his suffering for his ideals, civilizing contributions to – indeed, arguably the founder of – humanity, and tragic fate made him a popular figure among artists in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries»<sup>67</sup>, is the archetype of the artist, who sacrifices himself for the good of the people; 2) Herder's revisited version of the myth was very attractive for Liszt, because there the poet «reintroduces the idea of *Humanität* under a wealth of Greek symbolism»<sup>68</sup>. Liszt, composed for the occasion a series of choruses «moving between “suffering and apotheosis”»<sup>69</sup>, but in which the apotheosis plays the main role as in *Tasso*. But if in *Tasso* Liszt glorified the artist as individual, with his *Prometheus* he glorified both the artist and the people, which, finally freed, represent the glorious victory of the artist's sacrifice. Liszt himself gives us an account of the relevance of these ideals, when he wrote in his *Lohengrin* that, for the celebration of Herder, «un des premiers philosophes de l'*humanitarisme*», the court<sup>70</sup> decided to perform *Prometheus* «par un coloris de sentiment et un groupement d'idée, dont le majestueux et harmonieux ensemble peut être regardé comme un des meilleurs tableaux, conçu par une des plus nobles et des plus hautes inspirations de ce poète»<sup>71</sup>.

Herder surely occupies a privileged position in the history of ideas, since «there is almost nothing that would be contained a century later in the so-called “historical” schools of the social sciences that cannot be found systematically stated by Herder»<sup>72</sup>. It is with him that the paradigm of the linear conception of history of the Enlightenment is turned into something more complicated. A first essay on this topic appears in 1774 with the title *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*, where the philosopher outlines his organicistic view of history, and his idea, in opposition to that of the *philosophes*, that «one epoch should not be judged by the standards of another», because in doing so, on one side «they lose sight of the workings of Providence, whose wondrous works are manifest throughout history, a testament to the existence of a grand design», and on the other side «they also sin doubly against mankind by belittling entire ages, and thereby providing a false education to subsequent

67 Kregor, Jonathan, *Program Music*, p. 113.

68 Clark, Robert Thomas, *Herder: His Life and Thought*, p. 427.

69 Williamson, John, *The revision of Liszt's 'Prometheus'*, p. 381.

70 Liszt uses in this passage the French impersonal pronoun “on”, and later the plural “il nous a paru”. It is clear that it is a *pluralis maiestatis*, since Liszt's word, as the director of the *Hoftheater*, was more relevant as it appears in the writing.

71 Liszt, Franz, *Lohengrin, Grand opéra romantique de R. Wagner*. pp. 25–26.

72 Nisbet, Robert, *Social Change and History*, p. 122.



generations»<sup>73</sup>. This statement itself represents a little revolution, and it stays in open opposition with the (presumed) superiority of the Enlightenment intellect:

Der beste Geschichtsthreiber der Kunst des Alterthums, Winckelmann, hat über die Kunstwerke der Aegypter offenbar nur nach griechischem Maasstabe geurtheilt, sie also verneinend sehr gut, aber nach eigener Natur und Art so wenig geschildert, daß fast bey jedem seiner Sätze in diesem Hauptstück das offenbar Einseitige und Schielende vorleuchtet. So Webb, wenn er ihre Literatur der Griechischen entgegensetzt: so mache andre, die über ägyptische Sitten und Regierungsform gar mit europäischen Geist geschrieben haben – und da es den Aegyptern meistens so geht, daß man zu ihnen aus Griechenland und also mit bloß griechischem Auge kommt – Wie kanns ihnen schlechter gehen? Aber theurer Griechen! diese Bildsäulen sollten nun nicht weniger (wie du aus allem wahrnehmen könntest) als Muster der schönen Kunst nach deinem Ideal seyn! voll Reitz, Handlung, Bewegung, wo von allem der Aegypter nichts wuste, oder was sein Zweck ihm gerade wegschnitt<sup>74</sup>.

Hence, under the light of this new perspective, the idea of progress changes. If it is impossible to judge an ancient society by the standards of a modern one, consequently, in order to analyse the achievements of our ancestors it is necessary to take an imaginative step, namely the effort to understand them with the eyes of our ancestors, and not with our own modern eyes. This change of point of view, doesn't just represent a revolutionary perspective on history, but it is also representative of the change of paradigm. Contemporary culture, art, technology, are certainly better (more advanced) than in the past. But it does not mean that we are cleverer or better than an ancient civilisation, because our achievements are made possible thanks in great part to the accomplishments of the previous generations. This new perspective could be useful to understand what Liszt means with the word "progress" in relation to music, and to explain his worship of the ancient masters – something that wouldn't be possible for a maniac of progress. Anyway, what probably made Herder the most important thinker under Liszt's eyes is the relevance of Providence in history, and the idea of humanity, namely a process that moves from *Menschenheit* to *Humanität*. Both these ideas find their formulation in his capital work, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, written between 1784 and 1791. It is composed of twenty books, in which Herder deals with all the themes of

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73 Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Another philosophy of History, and Selected Political Writings*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 2004, p. xxvi.

74 Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Noch eine Philosophie zur Bildung der Menschheit*, p. 27.

human knowledge. The first part of his work is devoted to the analysis of the physical world, and from the analysis of these physical phenomena he developed a symmetrical history of human beings, one of the first attempts in this field. The natural outcome of his theories is a conception, according to which the entire humanity is progressing towards a common goal. Every civilisation represents a further step. But history, from humanity's perspective, seems to be an endless sequence of unrelated events, which do not make sense. During the era of reason (the modern one), humanity understood that there is a higher plan. Nevertheless, they will never be able to grasp its meaning, since it is only possible from the outside to embrace the history in its entirety.

Ich wünschte, daß ich in das Wort Humanität alles fassen könnte, was ich bisher über des Menschen edle Bildung zur Vernunft und Freiheit, zu feinern Sinnen und Trieben, zur zartesten und stärksten Gesundheit, zur Erfüllung und Beherrschung der Erde gesagt habe: denn der Mensch hat kein edleres Wort für seine Bestimmung als Er selbst ist, in dem das Bild des Schöpfers unsrer Erde, wie es hier Sichtbar werden konnte, abgedruckt lebet. Um seine edelsten Pflichten zu entwickeln, dürfen wir nur seine Gestalt zeichnen<sup>75</sup>.

The main reason for this inability to comprehend history as a whole, is that humanity is and acts inside history, while only those who can elevate themselves outside history can grasp it, and consequently understand the entire process. According to this view, the only philosopher of history is God, because he is the only being who can see the entire process of human development, and, since he is infinitely good and wise, he can guide humanity in history through divine Providence. Progress is then an act of faith in the existence of this greatest philosopher. And faith is exactly what connect Herder and Liszt. The German philosopher was not just a fervent Christian, but he was a pastor and a preacher, sure that «[...] die Religion soll nichts als Zwecke durch Menschen und für Menschen bewirken»<sup>76</sup>. This statement recalls the idea of the great men. Liszt himself was, from his point of view, a pastor and a preacher, and he tried to carry the Christian message through his art. It is still possible to doubt whether Liszt actually read all the philosophical books he quoted here and there, but it is undeniable that he was an expert on religious matters, as his interest in spiritual things is dated long before his encounter with Father Solfanelli in

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75 Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Volume I, Book IV, p. 244.

76 Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Noch eine Philosophie zur Bildung der Menschheit*, p. 76.

1865. It is therefore very plausible that he could be inspired by Herder's idea of humanity as a brotherhood of men, masterfully described in this passage:

Dieselbe nun, so sonderbar entstandene Religion sollte doch das ist unleugbar, nach dem Sinne des Urhebers [...] sie sollte eigentliche Religion der Menschheit, Trieb der Liebe, und Band aller Nationen zu einem Bruderheere werden – ihr Zweck von Anfang zu Ende! Eben so gewiß ist, daß sie [...] die Erste gewesen, die so reine geistige Wahrheiten, und so herzliche Pflichten, so ganz ohne Hülle und Aberglauben, ohne Schmuck und Zwang gelehrt: die das menschliche Herz so allein, so allgemein, so ganz und ohne Ausnahme hat verbessern wollen. Alle vorigen Religionen der besten Zeiten und Völker waren doch nur National, [...] kurz, Religionen eines Volks, eines Erdstrichs, eines Gesetzgebers, einer Zeit! diese offenbar in allem das Gegenteil. Die lauterste Philosophie der Sittenlehre, die reinste Theorie der Wahrheiten, und Pflichten, von allen Gesetzen, und kleinen Landverfassungen unabhängig, kurz wenn man will, der menschenliebendste Deismus<sup>77</sup>.

But Herder is, alongside with Goethe<sup>78</sup>, the founder of the aesthetics of Romanticism, which emerged as an act of rebellion against the supremacy of the intellect, which was the main future of the Enlightenment.

Der scheinbare epistemische Vorteil von Gefühlen ist, darauf hat etwa Herder schon in seinem frühen fragmentarischen Text *Versuch über das Sein* aufmerksam gemacht, dass sie selbstevident sind: „Aber sind nicht sinnliche Begriffe gewiß!“ Das führt Herder zu der erkenntnistheoretisch paradoxen Formel vom „theoretische[n] Instinkt“, der allen „anderen Erfahrungsbegriffen“ vorgängig ist. Diese Form der Selbstgewissheit setzt er dem theoretischen Selbstbewusstsein entgegen, von dem die Erkenntnistheorie im Anschluss an Descartes ausging: „Ich fühle mich! Ich bin!“, schreibt Herder in *Zum Sinn des Gefühls* – eine Formel, die die Leib/Seele-Trennung des cartesischen *cogito* aufhebt: „Hier würde eine Physiologie der Seele und des Körpers kommen, die wir noch nicht haben“. [...] Mit der Selbst-

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77 Herder, Johann Gottfried, Noch eine Philosophie zur Bildung der Menschheit, p. 72–73.

78 The words «Gefühl ist alles», spoken out by Faust, are a sufficient example to prove the existence of this new aesthetic conception already in Goethe. Even if Faust is just a character of a play, its relevance in the history of literature, above all that one of the Romanticism, makes of him a quasi-real figure or, at least, a figure capable to influence the aesthetic conception of a century.

evidenz des Gefühls stellt Herder der kritischen Vernunft eine anthropologische Alternative an die Seite<sup>79</sup>.

Under these revolutionary forces the Cartesian motto *cogito ergo sum* becomes *Ich fühle mich! Ich bin!* This is the birth of a new anthropocentrism in which not only the intellect, but the entire human body is at the centre of the universe. The intellect is not excluded, but it is no longer the only actor on the stage. The proposition *Ich fühle mich* bears a double interpretation: 1) it means that “I can feel myself through my senses, and that I can perceive myself through emotions, and that I myself can feel emotions”. That leads to a 2) deeper self-awareness, and at the same time, it opens the door to the process of recognition of “the others” as human beings. Consequently, the word “feel” describes a double movement: inwards, to perceive the self, and outwards, to recognise the others. Without this new perspective it would be impossible to perceive people as a brotherhood of men. For Liszt, feelings are not just a “justification” to distort the form, but it is a belief, a totalising *Weltanschauung*, since the aim of the composer, according to Liszt, is to express his feelings. This wasn’t just a precept of the Romantic Generation, but it was for them an inner necessity. Progress and religion, themes of the highest relevance to Liszt, have a common ground: faith, and any act of faith begins with a feeling. These themes are fully recognisable in his writings, and this perspective sheds new light on his compositions, as it will be shown in the following chapters. For now, it suffices to keep in mind that Herder’s ideas are fundamental to understanding the Lisztian aesthetics.

After a résumé of the contributions of Goethe and Herder to the cause of progress, and to the development of the Lisztian aesthetics, some words on Kant and Hegel would be necessary in order to complete the chronological development of this idea. However, since this dissertation is not a treatise on the idea of progress, and since it is quite impossible to summarize the ideas of the two most important philosophers in German history, it has been decided here just to focus on the names of Goethe and Herder, as they are the two thinkers which influenced Liszt the most, and they are sufficient to complete the frame. Aside from this, it should be stated that, as it will clearly emerge in the third chapter of this dissertation, the intellectual relationship between Hegel and Liszt is at least problematic. In its place is preferred a more exhaustive analysis of the French thinkers, which Liszt had already encountered during the 1830s,

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79 Jost-Fritz, Jan Oliver, *Erkenntnis unter Blättern: Affekt und Selbstgefühl in Arnims Gedicht “Waldgeschrey”/“Stolze Einsamkeit”*, in *Emotionen in der Romantik, Repräsentation, Ästhetik, Inszenierung*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2012, pp. 227–228.

who without a doubt influenced him more deeply than Kant and Hegel. The Lisztian association with the Saint-Simonian in Paris during the 1830s and the acquaintance with Lamennais constitute the fertile ground upon which Liszt developed his own ideas on society and on the role of artists.

### Different religions: Saint-Simon and Lamennais

The association of Liszt with the Saint-Simonians in Paris caused some trouble for musicologists, because of his quite immediate dissociation from the group: «[...] during the late 1830s, 40s, and 50s, Liszt disassociated himself repeatedly and heftily from the movement, most prominently in an open letter to Heinrich Heine which he published in the *Revue et Gazette musicale*»<sup>80</sup>. This point deserves a little parenthesis, because if Heine's opinion of Liszt's intellectual faculties is assuredly negative<sup>81</sup>, worse still is the opinion he had of the music of the Hungarian composer. According to the poet, Liszt wrote corrupted music as direct consequence of his confused mind. That means that a mind which cannot produce its own ideas cannot produce either art, nor beautiful art:

Mais on ne peut refuser des éloges à cette infatigable soif de lumière et de divinité qui témoigne de ses tendances vers le choses sacrées et religieuses. Qu'une tête aussi inquiète, tiraillée en tous sens par toutes les doctrines et toutes les misères du temps, qui sent le besoin de se tourmenter de tous les intérêts de l'humanité, qui aime à fourrer son nez dans tous les pots où le bon Dieu fait cuire l'avenir du monde; que Franz Liszt enfin, ne soit pas un pianiste calme à l'usage de paisibles citoyens et de sensible bonnets de coton, cela se comprend. Quand il s'assied au piano, qu'il rejeté plusieurs fois eu arrière sa longue chevelure et qu'il commence à improviser, il se jette souvent avec furie sur les touches d'ivoire; alors surgit une forêt de pensées chaotiques, à travers lesquelles les fleurs des plus doux sen-

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80 Locke, Ralph, *Liszt's Saint-Simonian Adventure*, p. 211.

81 See Heine, Heinrich, *Lettres confidentielles II*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 5, 4 February 1838, where he wrote: «[Liszt] est un homme d'un caractère mal assis, mais noble, désintéressé et sans détour; Ses tendances intellectuelle sont for remarquables : il a un goût très-vif pour le spéculation et les intérêts de son art le préoccupent moins encore que les recherches des différentes écoles où l'on discute la grande question qui embrasse le ciel et la terre. Il fut pendant longtemps tout ardeur pour les beaux aperçus Saint-Simoniens; plus tard, il se perdit dans les pensées spiritualistes ou plutôt nébuleuses de Ballanche. Il extravague aujourd'hui pour les doctrines catholico-républicaines d'un Lamennais, qui a planté sur la croix le bonnet du jacobinisme... Le Ciel sait dans quelle écurie philosophique il trouvera son prochain dada!».

timents répandent leur parfum. Il vous oppresse et vous enflamme tout à la fois, mais la part de l'oppression est la plus fort. Je vous avoue que, quelle que soit mon amitié pour Liszt, sa musique n'affecte pas agréablement ma sensibilité, d'autant plus que malheureusement je suis un voyant, et que je vois les spectre que d'autre ne font qu'entendre<sup>82</sup>.

After this direct and public attack against his person, the young Liszt could not keep quiet; therefore the answer he gave to the German poet is noteworthy. It is written, as usual, with the typical extravagant and bombastic style of Liszt, but one will not find there any denial of his engagement with the group. Quite the opposite, he writes that he participated in the “*prédications Saint-Simoniennes*”, but from the obscurity of a remote corner, as if he was an anonymous listener. Nevertheless, this is a deliberate lie. As Locke informs us «[...] at the beginning “he not only was among the most ardent visitors to their meetings but also considered joining them as a member”. In the end, though, he never did join but only “embraced their essential philosophical ideas”»<sup>83</sup>. Hence, Liszt's aim was not to discredit himself and his ideas, and he followed two paths to this purpose: on one side he minimised the influence of the movement on him, and his engagement with them, and on the other side he responded to the attack of his critic stating that Heine was a more active member of the community<sup>84</sup> – the same community whose ideas were at the beginning of the 1830s already considered dangerous, and whose leader, *Père Enfantin*, was imprisoned in 1833. The Saint-Simoniens «were accused of having raised money upon a wholly fictitious security, [...] of having formed associations with a view to overthrow the existing order of society, of having declared against the existence of private property, and thereby inciting a war of classes; they were accused, moreover, of cheating doctrines subversive of public morality, and incompatible with the

82 Heine, Heinrich, *Lettres confidentielles II*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 5, 4 February 1838, p. 42.

83 Locke, Ralph, *Music, Musicians and the Saint-Simoniens*, p. 101.

84 Liszt wrote about Heine's relationship with the Saint-Simoniens: «Si je ne me trompe, alors que je suivais obscurément les prédications saint-simoniennes à côté de beaucoup d'autres, [...] je vous voyais de loin, vous le poète illustre, introduit jusque dans le sanctuaire, et vous ne craignîtes pas de le confesser plus tard, en dédiant au père Enfantin un beau livre, dans lequel vous lui demandiez de COMMUNIER AVEC LUI A TRAVERS LE TEMPS ET L'ESAPCE. [...] Plus tard encore, la bienveillance dont m'honora M. Ballanche me permit de me rencontrer avec vous chez lui, et de me faire quelquefois l'humble écho des témoignages d'admiration qui, dans votre bouche, pouvaient le flatter». Liszt, Franz, *Lettres d'un bachelier ès musique VII*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 27, 8 July 1838, p. 280.

existence of a well-ordered state»<sup>85</sup>. It is consequently not surprising that both the poet and the musician tried to distance themselves from a dying movement, which was furthermore considered a menace to public security. Above all, the accusation of immorality did matter for Liszt, who, in 1833, was on the run from Paris with Marie d'Agoult. The following year Liszt had to defend himself from the accusation of Saint-Simonism, namely to defend himself from the accusation of immoral conduct. He had to distance himself from the movement. In doing so, probably with the help of the countess d'Agoult, he used a strategy which finds its strength in the weakest point of Liszt. It is well known that Liszt felt his education inadequate in comparison with that of the bourgeoisie. And it is exactly for this reason that he advocates for his right to explore all the philosophical schools, and to follow his own intellectual curiosity. As a mere musician, the intellectual *pèlerinage* cannot lead to dangerous consequences.

Vous m'accusez d'avoir un caractère *mal assis*, et pour preuve, vous énumérez nombreuses causes que j'ai, suivant vous, embrassées avec ardeur; [...] Mais, dites? cette accusation, que vous faites peser sur moi tout seul, ne devrait-elle pas, pour être équitable, peser sur notre génération tout entière? Est-ce donc moi seul qui suis *mal assis* dans les temps où nous vivons? ou plutôt, malgré nos beaux fauteuils gothiques et nos coussins à la Voltaire, ne sommes-nous pas tous assez mal assis entre un passé dont nous ne voulons plus, et un avenir que nous ne connaissons pas encore? Vous-mêmes, mon ami, qui paraissez en ce moment prendre si gaiement votre part des misères du monde, avez-vous toujours été très-bien assis? [...] Vous qui avez une haute mission de penseur et de poète, avez-vous toujours bien discerné les rayons de votre étoile? [...] Oh! mon ami, croyez-moi, point d'accusation de versatilité, point de récrimination: le siècle est malade; nous sommes tous malades avec lui, et, voyez-vous, le pauvre musicien a encore la responsabilité la moins lourde, car celui qui ne tient pas la plume et qui ne porte pas l'épée peut s'abandonner sans trop de remords à ses curiosités intellectuelles, et se tourner de tous les côtés où il croit apercevoir la lumière<sup>86</sup>.

From this quotation, the social and philosophical view of Liszt clearly emerges. On one side, as already seen, to state that *le siècle est malade* means that there is the possibility to recover it, and that men have to act in a precise direction if they aim for the amelioration of their condition. And Liszt clearly stated that

85 Booth, Arthur John, *Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonism*, p. 162.

86 Liszt, Franz, *Lettre d'un bachelier ès musique VII*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 27, 5 July 1838, pp. 280–281.

the artists have a prominent role in this process some years later on the pages of the *Gazette*: «Que fera l'art, que feront les artistes en ces *jours mauvais*? [...] les musiciens donneront des concerts au bénéfice des pauvres. Sans doute ils feront bien d'agir ainsi, ne fût-ce que pour témoigner d'un vouloir toujours présent de servir la cause de prolétaire. [...] l'heure est venue pur eux de relever le courage du faible et de calmer les souffrances de l'opprimé. Il faut que l'art rappelle au peuple les beaux dévouements, les héroïques résolutions, la fortitude, l'humanité de ses pareils; [...]»<sup>87</sup>. Saint-Simon insists in almost all of his writings on the fact that the world is sick. In his last work, *Nouveau Christianisme*, this idea is still alive, and it is reinforced by the conviction that progress means *moral* advancement<sup>88</sup>. These ideas come from Kant, but if the German philosopher believed that humanity is (slowly) progressing, the French thinker believes that science is always progressing, but that «[...] la morale a suivi une marche absolument opposée à celle des sciences physiques et mathématiques», statement that confirms that Rousseau's idea of the decay of the human morality was still alive in the middle of the century of progress. But if Rousseau sees the decay as an intrinsic property of humanity, Saint-Simon thought that the moral was declining in the modern world, because priests and religion were already corrupted, and that is the reason why «their prerogatives have passed to the scientists»<sup>89</sup>. The obvious result of this reasoning is a theory whose aim is to found a new religion, to form new priests, who can finally regain their role as spiritual guides.

Behind the sick-world metaphor lies the idea of men's perfectibility<sup>90</sup>. Liszt surely supported this idea, and he underlines several times that the world is sick, but, on the other side, he stated that there is no medicine capable of curing it, because the moral is corrupt, and only a priest can show the way to salvation. The theme is then Liszt's favourite one, namely the role of artists in society. But again, Liszt felt if it was his responsibility to speak the truth. For this reason, he creates two categories of artists: on one side those who have the power, and,

87 Liszt, Franz, *Lettre d'un bachelier ès musique III*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 6, 11 February 1838, p. 61.

88 Saint-Simon, *Nouveau Christianisme*, p. 99 : «[...] il est une science bien plus importante pour la société que les connaissances physiques et mathématiques; c'est la science qui constitue la société, c'est celle qui lui sert de base; c'est la morale».

89 Murphy, Ella M., *Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians*, p. 97.

90 It is to note that Saint-Simon believed in the scientific progress, but he was sceptical about the moral advancement of humanity. Then, Liszt's faith in future and in the possibility of amelioration comes from his Christian spirit, and from the words of Lamennais «La terre est triste et desséchée, mais elle reverdira». Lamennais, Félicité Robert de, *Paroles d'un Croyant*, p. 29.



on the other side, those who are powerless. Of course, he didn't mean political power, but the capacity to influence the masses. Consequently, the writers and poets are to be found in the first category, because they can use their *plume* to influence the people. In the second category are the musicians. In this social analysis Liszt has to note – of course with a touch of sadness –, that they are still the less influential kind of artists, and therefore they have less impact on what happens in society. The theme of the role of the musician constitutes the backbone of his literary work or, at least, the first relevant topic on which he expressed himself in a literary form. But, even if those ideas came from the mind of a young man, and even if they were probably modified by the intervention of Marie d'Agoult, they still represent Liszt's true beliefs, and this creed was so strong that it entered Liszt's own music. And this is exactly what makes his compositions so interesting, and at the same time so difficult to analyse. Liszt's music is supposed to possess thaumaturgical powers.

The influences on Liszt of the theories of the *Comte* de Saint-Simon, are clearly visible in almost all the writings of the 1830s, such as the *De la situation des artistes et de leur condition dans la société* of 1835. Furthermore, Locke points out, «in his later years Liszt felt freer to admit again, at least privately, how significant the ideas of the Saint-Simonians had been and still were for him»<sup>91</sup>. Liszt came in contact with the ideas of Saint-Simon through the Saint-Simonians in Paris. According to Lina Ramann, he was introduced to the circle by Emile Barrault<sup>92</sup>, soon after the July Revolution. Many musicologists, among them Alan Walker, deny any serious involvement of Liszt with the movement. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the thought of Saint-Simon deeply affected the musician. More generally, it is undeniable that, even if this socialist movement did not last long, its influence on the intellectual France was very relevant, as Iggers points out:

It would be difficult to write the intellectual or social history of nineteenth-century France without an evaluation of the impact of Saint-Simonian ideas and personalities. As a movement Saint-Simonianism was short lived, but considerable bits of its attitudes were to be reflected in widely varying patterns of social, literary, and artistic thought. Not only socialists but also the founders of modern French capitalism drew inspiration from the faith in order and planning. Almost

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<sup>91</sup> Locke, Ralph, *Liszt's Saint-Simonian Adventure*, p. 211.

<sup>92</sup> It is not surprisingly that Liszt was fascinated by the figure of Emile Barrault, who was, according to Walker the «leading aesthetician and finest public orator», which «placed art at the centre of life and elevated the artist to a new priesthood». See Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847*, p. 154.

all of the non-Marxist French socialist leaders of the last century as well as Marx himself had been influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the Saint-Simonian doctrine. The religious socialists, Buchez and Pierre Leroux, and Jules Chevalier among the later Fourierists had been associated with the movement at one point or other; [...] From Auguste Comte, the student and secretary of Saint-Simon, to Emile Durkheim, French sociology was to be colored by the conception of society as an organic, developing unit subject to strict lawfulness. Augustin Thierry, Saint-Simon's "adopted son", was to write the history of the masses, while Carlyle's antiliberalism and his philosophy of history were markedly influenced by the reading of the *Doctrine de Saint-Simon*. The writers who marked the transition from romanticism to social realism in literature, George Sand, Sainte-Beuve, Balzac, Heinrich Heine, and the Young Germans closely and sympathetically watched the movement. The terrestrial morality and the sanctification of the flesh were to effect the transformation of morals and mores and the rise of feminism<sup>93</sup>.

In this quotation the strong impact which Saint-Simon had on many intellectuals is summarised. Unsurprisingly, in the list Iggers's provides, we read names who were very close to Liszt, from George Sand, to Heinrich Heine, and even the name of Thomas Carlyle, who influenced Liszt the most. Aside from some internal divisions and some shift of emphasis «the most basic of the movement's beliefs remained constant, for they derived directly from the Saint-Simonian "Old Testament": the writings of Saint-Simon»<sup>94</sup>. The *Comte* wrote above all about economics, and even if Liszt was an omnivorous reader, it is not sure if he actually read these writings too. More probably he came in contact with some of the Saint-Simon's social writings, and for sure he read his last and most influential essay, *Nouveau Christianisme*. Walker reports that Liszt even read «Saint-Simon's *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*»<sup>95</sup>. These writings are the only ones in which Saint-Simon developed his religious thought. But if in the first one, the idea of a new religion and of its spiritual guide (Newton) seems «une sorte de fantaisie demi-ironique»<sup>96</sup>, in the latter this idea became more concrete, and Christianity, even if reduced to a sole principle, is outlined as the religion of the entire world. The "mystical crisis" of Saint-Simon is at the basis of the Saint-Simonian movement, which arose as a sect: at his summit there is a *Père* (a Father) who has to rule the ceremonies. Anyway, what the Saint-Simonians

93 Iggers, George G., *The Cult of Authority*, pp. 1–2.

94 Locke, Ralph, *Liszt's Saint-Simonian Adventure*, p. 211.

95 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847*, p. 152.

96 Janet, Paul, *Saint-Simone et le saint-simonisme*, p. 60.

became is probably the most obvious evolution of the thought of Saint-Simon: «The étatisme of his followers, their anti-rationalism, as well as their radical conceptions of property and women, were not found in Saint-Simon's work, even if to an extent they were developments of certain concepts found there»<sup>97</sup>.

Liszt's knowledge of the writings of Saint-Simon is consequently to be reduced to the two essays previously quoted, and it is possible to assume that he did not read any other works of the *Comte* directly from a letter the composer wrote to George Sand in 1835, in which it appears clear that he took part in some Saint-Simonians meetings, and that his Saint-Simonian ideas derived from the disciples assemblies, among which only the famous *Nouveau Christianisme* were well known<sup>98</sup>:

En arrivant ici, je me suis mis à relire plusieurs ouvrages St Simonien – et j'avoue à ma honte que j'en ai été encore plus frappé, plus profondément ému que par le passé. Incontestablement, le père Enfantin est un grand homme, nonobstant toutes les plaisanteries et quolibets de bonne et mauvaise compagnie. Vous le dirai-je?... Ce qui m'a surtout étonné c'est la réserve si digne, si sage qu'il a gardé dans la fameuse question de la femme. [...] J'ai sous les yeux la Brochure "Réunion de la famille", suivie d'une note sur le mariage et le divorce, [...]. Un ancien article de la revue encyclopédique sur les mystères chrétiens m'a aussi très vivement intéressé<sup>99</sup>.

From this excerpt it clearly emerges that Liszt came in contact first with the thought of the Saint-Simonians, and not directly with that of Saint-Simon, who, as stated by Iggers, «did not produce a systematic philosophy, Nor is there a clear unity in his thought, which was formulated in pamphlets and journal articles, often in response to immediate political problems. His work underwent constant development»<sup>100</sup>. It is impossible not to read this description of the figure of Saint-Simon without thinking of Liszt himself. And the two even

97 Iggers, George G., *The Cult of Authority*, p. 7.

98 The writings of Saint-Simon remained quite unknown till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, because his writings «[...] très nombreux, mai disséminés à tous les vents, publiés au jour le jour, commencés souvent sans être finis, [...] étaient devenus presque introuvables. Le seul recueil connu et à la portée de tous [...] était le choix d'écrit publiés en 1832, par Olinde Rodrigues, choix qui contient bien [...] l'essentiel des idées de notre prophète, ma ne nous apprend nullement le détail de ces idées, [...]». Janet, Paul, *Saint-Simone et le saint-simonisme*, pp. 3–4. From this quotation emerges the reason why at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the only guardian of the rite was Father Enfantin.

99 Liszt, Franz, *Letter to George Sang*, quoted in Marix-Spire, Thérèse, *Les Romantiques et la musique*, p. 466.

100 Iggers, George G., *The Cult of Authority*, p. 7.

share the same problems concerning the analysis of their production. Since their production underwent a constant development it is difficult for scholars to find a *fil rouge* in it, and it consequently appears as a multitude of unrelated works. For the same reason their production can easily be used to sustain the most different interpretations, and this is the perfect source of mystifications. Aside from their similar personality, it is sure that Liszt was deeply affected by the social theories of the Paris group. But that is not enough, and a distinction is necessary at this point, because, if on one side Liszt was certainly affected by the social theories concerning the role of the artists in society, on the other side he did not support the theories about the general organisation of it. The ideas in the early works of Saint-Simon<sup>101</sup> and those of the Saint-Simonians were a mix between the request of order originated during the enlightenment, and the request for a more equal society in socialism. This leads to the conception of an extremely organised and hierarchical society, in which the most capable must govern the others, but in which there is no place for democracy: «[...] La théorie des droits de l'homme, qui a été la base de tous leurs travaux en politique générale, n'est autre chose qu'une application de la haute métaphysique à la haute jurisprudence. [...]»<sup>102</sup>. These words were written by Saint-Simon in 1821, and they are clearly opposed to Liszt's position, who, in 1830 and soon after the July Revolution had already composed a *Symphonie révolutionnaire* dedicated to La Fayette, which contains a clear reference to the *Marseillaise* and then to the democratic values, and to the right of men to pretend the same rights for everyone.

The Saint-Simonian influences are expressed by Liszt in his series of articles appearing in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* in 1835 and titled *De la situation des artistes, et de leur condition dans la société*. If the writing appears sometimes naïve, and lacks a solid theoretical background, it is worthwhile remembering that Liszt wrote it when he was twenty-four. Since the beginning, Liszt made his intentions clear, and his declaration of intent alone contained all the key words of the Saint-Simonian thought:

Déterminer aujourd'hui avec largeur et précision quelle est la situation des artistes dans notre ordre social; – définir leurs rapports individuels, politiques et religieux; [...]

101 The ideas of his late works are more socialist than the previous ones. During the last years of his life Saint-Simon rediscovered the role of religion in society, and he stressed the miserable life condition of the poor masses.

102 Saint-Simon, *Du système industriel*, in *Œuvres de Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin*, E. Dentu Éditeur, Paris, 1869, Vol. XXI, pp. 83.

ce que sont ces hommes d'élite qui semblent choisis par Dieu même pour rendre témoignage aux plus grands sentiments de l'humanité et en rester les noble dépositaires... Ces hommes prédestinés, foudroyés et enchaînés qui ont ravi au ciel la flamme sacrée, [...] ces hommes initiateurs, ces apôtres, ces prêtres d'une religion ineffable, mystérieuse, éternelle, qui germe et grandit incessamment dans tous les cœurs<sup>103</sup>.

The first Saint-Simonian reference occurs at the very beginning of the article, where the words “*ordre social*” appear. According to the doctrine of the Saint-Simonians, society has to be organised in a very precise and strict way. When Saint-Simon first spoke about the theory of society around 1797, he was living close to the *École polytechnique*, and he was therefore surrounded by physicists and mathematicians. It is in this environment that he conceived his social theory, based on the beliefs that «the problem of society were soluble by scientific study and social engineering, planned action based on scientific knowledge»<sup>104</sup>. Under the light of his scientific studies, he conceived a hierarchical society with a fixed structure. There were three main groups in this construction: 1) the intellectual (scientists, artists); 2) the owners and the workers; 3) the rest of the population. Of course, the first group had to guide the nation, because they possessed the knowledge, since they received the correct education in order to do that. The society conceived by Saint-Simon is a place where the aristocracy of birth does not exist anymore, replaced by the aristocracy of talent, in which «democracy and autocracy were finally merged in the person of the “great man” or “father”, who, while not chosen by ballots, was to be the concrete representation and expression of the people’s will, spontaneously recognized by them»<sup>105</sup>. Liszt could surely not have supported this reactionary idea of society. He was nevertheless fascinated by the relevance which the artists assumed in this new social conception, a role which would lead them to a better condition, a dream in comparison with the actual situation in which musicians were living – described by Liszt as miserable, exhausting, and disappointing. Finally, a political and social role were allocated to artists, and a quite prominent one. It is now necessary to briefly focus on the matter of society and the role of the artists in it both from the Saint-Simonians’ and from Liszt’s perspective. The term “society” recurs several times in the writing *De la situation*, but Liszt does not provide any precise definition of it. What clearly emerges is that the artists

103 Liszt, Franz, *De la situation des artistes*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 18, 3 May 1835, p. 155.

104 Iggers, George G., *The Cult of Authority*, p. 10.

105 Iggers, George G., *The Cult of Authority*, p. 3.

and, among them, the musicians, have the right to claim a leading position in society. Nowadays, says Liszt, the musicians live in a condition of poverty and subalternity, even if philosophers, intellectuals, and politicians are elaborating even newer social theories in which the role of the arts is even more relevant. The reality, the facts as Liszt writes<sup>106</sup>, are under everyone's eyes, and the numerous charity events for the needy musicians are a proof of it – and Liszt gave countless concerts in favour of this social category. Liszt's words on the topic even assume the tones of propaganda, when he claims that the artists will lead more than a revolution:

Cette homme pourra faire aussi une question, non plus à la classe moyenne, mais aux deux classes qui ont mission et puissance de réconcilier toutes les classes, de les vivifier et de les diriger dans un commun amour ver le but assigné à l'humanité, les PRÊTRES et les ARTISTES; il leur demander, comme Sieyes aux membres du tiers, CE QU'ILS SONT et CE QU'ILS DOIVENT ÊTRE, et leur réponse sera plus qu'une révolution<sup>107</sup>.

The call for action contained in this quotation is worthy of note. As already seen, the metaphor of the sick world involves the possibility of a cure, and the cure consists of the action of men – in a desirable direction. But not everyone can, or is able to take action, because, in Liszt's view – who in this case follows the idea of the Saint-Simonians –, the masses need to be guided. The most suitable figures for this role are the priests and the artists, because both of them have both a social and a religious power. From this point of view, Liszt's thought is perfectly Saint-Simonist. The individual, as a single unit, disappears, because a single human being is defenceless. The individual can exist as a group, and this group, namely the masses, needs to be guided by the great men, namely the artists, the only relevant individuality. It is the birth of the cult of personality – even if it is to be said that, in Liszt's view, the prophet assumes a relevant role only through the masses. Hence, even if Liszt distanced himself from the Saint-Simonians – not only through the previously quoted letter to Heine, but

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106 Liszt, Franz, *De la situation des artistes*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 30, 26 July 1835, p. 247: «Non, cent fois non! Je n'exagère ni ne déclame. Mes paroles sont la traduction d'un FAIT, et vous savez que rien n'est entêté comme un *fait*. Au surplus, il est visible, palpable, vérifiable pour quiconque veut s'en donner la peine». Liszt used this words to answer to those people who claimed that his description of the social condition of the musicians was an exaggeration.

107 Liszt, Franz, *De la situation des artistes*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 30, 26 July 1835, p. 249.

writing, even if ironically, that «la trinité nouvelle de la science, de l'industrie et de l'art», namely the Saint-Simonian trinity who has to rule the world, is a «idée étrange, inouïe» carried on by «des nouveaux apôtres qui prétendaient réaliser gouvernementalement des fiction, [...]»<sup>108</sup> – nevertheless he never criticised their idea of an extremely organised society, in which the individual is absorbed by the collective, and there he lose his personality. If Liszt quite often uses words such “equality” it is not to be intended in a “socialist” way; there are men who deserve to lead, and others who have to follow the leaders. And Liszt would like to see the artists «à la tête du gouvernement», because they are «PRÊTRES de L'ARTE, chargés d'une mission et d'un enseignement sublime»<sup>109</sup>. The brotherhood of men is not a mere aggregation of human beings, but it is an organised and hierarchical society guided by enlightened leaders, who know perfectly what is better for the masses.

A threefold hierarchy was to rule all human activities. A “general” or “social” priest was to head a religious hierarchy consisting of governors, educators, and artists. The function of the artists was to popularize the basic social doctrine for the public<sup>110</sup>.

However, if Liszt could support the idea of a hierarchical society, he could not agree with the role Saint-Simon assigned to the art. According to the view of the Comte, art is just a means of expression of religion and politics, and it serves then to guide and to control the masses. In this view, in which «the artist. was merely a functionary of the hierarchy», the socialism of Saint-Simon «reminds» more «of the Soviet “new socialist realism”»<sup>111</sup>, than that of a liberal and progressive society. The collective body, the united individuals, is then seen as a threat to power, for that intellectual bourgeoisie who claimed to have the right to govern the uncultivated people: «The great power is the power of intellect. The learned classes and artists possess this power in an eminent degree; they should therefore become part of the governing body, for the object of government is to keep the ignorant in dependence upon the higher classes»<sup>112</sup>. But Liszt, as a musician, could not accept that the role of art, and of the artist, is again subjugated to other forces. That is the reason why he promoted the artists to the same

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108 Liszt, Franz, *De la situation des artistes*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 35, 30 August 1835, p. 285.

109 Liszt, Franz, *De la situation des artistes*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 20, 17 May 1835, p. 166.

110 Iggers, George G., *The Cult of Authority*, p. 32.

111 Iggers, George G., *The Cult of Authority*, p. 61.

112 Booth, Arthur John, *Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonism*, p. 23.

(hierarchical) level of the priests. Here lies the biggest difference between Liszt and the Saint-Simonians. The latter saw the artistic production as something useful to control the masses, and to address the individual forces towards the collective. On the other side, Liszt sees the artist as a guide of the masses, not to control them, but to guide them towards «le but assigné à l'humanité»<sup>113</sup>, because, as Saint-Simon himself ironically wrote, «Jésus [...] avait recommandé en même temps à son église de n'employer que les voies de la douceur, que la persuasion et la démonstration pour atteindre ce grand but»<sup>114</sup>. Concluding, Liszt's aim was to free the masses in a religious sense, and not to subjugate them to another power, even if enlightened. This deviation from the course of the Saint-Simonian thought could be ascribed to the influence of Lamennais social Catholicism on him. Unsurprisingly, the first meeting of Liszt with the abbé dates back to 1834, namely the year before Liszt's series of articles about the situation of the artists. It is again Lamennais that inspired him with the paragraph *De la musique religieuse*<sup>115</sup> and it is therefore undeniable the influence of the abbé's ideas on the musician. Anyway, the articles published during the 1830s are evidence that in Liszt's mind there coexisted the authoritarianism of the Saint-Simonians and the social Catholicism of Lamennais.

The thoughts of Saint-Simon and of Lamennais could appear incompatible, but they share some elements. First of all, it is worth noting that some of the intellectuals who were close to the Saint-Simonian group, were also close to Lamennais, and they wrote both for *Le Globe* or *Le Producteur*, and for *L'avenir*<sup>116</sup>. Secondly, and more relevant, both schools of thought assign to the artists a leading role in society. As already noted, the Saint-Simonians conceived of the artist as a bureaucrat, just another link in the command chain. Furthermore, Saint-Simon speaks about religion and puts the priest at the top of his organisation. But the priest here has nothing to do with God and spiritual matters, because the only true religion is the State and the good of the collective. It is with his last work, *Nouveau Christianisme*, that Saint-Simon again faced spiritual problems. Actually, his aim is to reduce Christianity to a sole divine principle: «Les hommes doivent se conduire en frères à l'égard les uns des autres»<sup>117</sup>. This principle leads automatically to a State Religion, because this sole divine

113 See footnote 108.

114 Saint-Simon, *Nouveau Christianisme*, p. 49.

115 It is the last paragraph of the sixth article of *De la situation des artistes*, published in *Revue et gazette musicale*, No. 35, 30 August 1835, p. 291.

116 The first two are Saint-Simonians' journals, the latter is the journal founded by Lamennais.

117 Saint-Simon, *Nouveau Christianisme*, p. 10.



principle asks more for social organisation, than for spiritual precepts. And it is Saint-Simon himself who stated that: «Ainsi le système industriel scientifique n'est autre chose que le christianisme lui-même devenu constitution politique; car la doctrine de la fraternité ne peut pas être établie tant que le pouvoir restera entre les mains des guerriers et des théologiens»<sup>118</sup>. But the critic of Christianity is the first link between Saint-Simon and Lamennais. The latter came into conflict with the Vatican because of his revolutionary idea, according to which he conceived the separation between the State and the Church. The book *Paroles d'un croyant* is the result of this conflict, and it is the book which even led Liszt to La Chênaie in the summer of 1834. The words here written by Lamennais are the second, and most important, link between the two thinkers. The similarity between the *Paroles d'un croyant* and the *Nouveau Christianisme* is self-evident. In the preface of his writing, Lamennais wrote: «[...] aimez-vous les uns les autres comme le Sauveur de la race humaine vous a aimé jusqu'à la mort»<sup>119</sup>. This is clearly a reference to the Christian commandments, but Lamennais is undertaking the same operation here that Saint-Simon already had, namely to reduce the Christian Doctrine to a sole and unifying principle, and probably the most “divine” one. Despite many theological quotations, the abbé reiterates this principle for the entire book, which opens, not surprisingly, with the dedication *Au peuple*. People, religion, and art are in fact the three ingredients of the writing of both Saint-Simon and of Lamennais, and the most relevant topic in the mind of the young Liszt, whose dream was to create a more just society. The entire book of the abbé is a call for the unity of the people to fight against everyone who would try to subjugate them. It is undeniable that the thought of the abbé is more revolutionary than that of Saint-Simon. But it is between the call for a revolution of Lamennais and the industrial-hierarchical system of Saint-Simon that Liszt found his path. Starting from the assumption «réformez ce qui a besoin de réforme»<sup>120</sup>, which can be read as a call for action if read through the sick-world metaphor, Liszt found the reform's plan of the Saint-Simonians a good answer to the call of Lamennais. The Saint-Simonians wanted to conquer power peacefully, and did not want to rule over people. Their aim was to convince people to recognise the illuminated minds as superior, and consequently to recognise them as their natural leaders. Liszt's mind merges the Lamennais's idea of a brotherhood of men without any leader, with the Saint-Simonians' idea of a people capable of recognising the great men, who

118 Janet, Paul, *Saint-Simone et le saint-simonisme*, pp. 65–66.

119 Lamennais, Félicité Robert de, *Paroles d'un Croyant*, p. 29.

120 Lamennais, Félicité Robert de, *Paroles d'un Croyant*, p. 29.

have the right to guide them in an organised society, in which the artists have the most prominent (spiritual) role.

## The relevance of the individual: Thomas Carlyle

The last figure of Liszt's pantheon which here deserves to be mentioned is Thomas Carlyle. It is of course anachronistic to speak about his *On heroes* in relation to Lisztian writings of the 1830s since the book first appeared in 1841. But Liszt's writings of the 1850s are without doubt in debt to this essay. For this reason, Winkler mentions the Scottish philosopher among the most influential figure of the *Weimar Period* in what he called the *Weimar Mythology*. The pantheon outlined by Winkler in his essay is extremely relevant, but its name could be a source of misunderstandings, because the expression "Weimar Mythology" alludes to a very precise place and time. Consequently, it seems that Lisztian cultural Olympus arose in that place during that time, whereas it has older and wider origins. Therefore, it is conceivable that instead of a *Weimar Mythology* it would be more correct to speak of a *Paris Mythology*, since it is during the French years that Liszt created his pantheon which would last till the end of his life – Paris is of course just the birthplace of this mythology, which included thinkers from all over Europe. Aside from this brief but necessary clarification, the link between the 1830s and the relevance of Carlyle's book is that, as already said, the Scottish philosopher came in contact with the Saint-Simonian too, even if, as reported by Murphy<sup>121</sup>, his interest was limited to their ideas, and to their organisation, and not to their thoughts, which he labelled as "nothing new". Furthermore, Carlyle translated into English the Saint-Simon's *Nouveau Christianisme*, which he found an interesting lecture containing «several strange ideas, not without a large spice of truth» even if it «is ill-written»<sup>122</sup>. Aside from the relationship between Carlyle and the Saint-Simon's thought, what should be underlined here is the prominent role of great men in the two theories. Carlyle read some of the Saint-Simon's and Saint-Simonians' writings at the beginning of the 1830s, and, even if he found some good ideas there, he could not agree with the role they assigned to the individual. In their view, as already noted above, the individual disappears because he is absorbed by the collective (the state). Even the great men – the learned men, the artists, the musicians –, namely those people who have theoretically to lead the masses, are fully absorbed into

121 Murphy, Ella M., *Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians*.

122 Murphy, Ella M., *Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians*, p. 106.

this mechanism, and they do not exist outside this social organisation. That is to say that the collective is the source of their own existence, and vice versa. Carlyle could not agree with this view, because the great men exist even if they live as hermits. His faith in the individual forces acting in, and transforming society found a systematic exposition in his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* published in 1841. Liszt only read the book in 1850<sup>123</sup>. After this enlightening lecture, he would exploit its content in several articles, but he would never make direct quotations. But before entering an analysis of the extent of Carlyle's influence on Liszt, it is necessary to open a brief parenthesis on the idea of great men, because it is present in Liszt's mind long before 1850. The figure of the hero, of the man who is able to do extraordinary things is of course a very old one. Since the beginning of time, writers and philosophers created myths and tales, whose protagonists were uncommon figures. Just think of Homer and his epic poems: one of the first examples of western written literature is about an extraordinary man, a hero. And it is not by chance that the name of Homer appears several times in Carlyle's book. But if during the ancient times the majority of heroes were invented to be moral examples in order to create models of social virtues for the people, during modern times they became something more complex, giving birth to what can be called a "canon". Carlyle himself, aware or not, through his book created a canon, because, if his aim was to describe the universal history as «the History of the Great Men who have worked here»<sup>124</sup>, the (unforeseen) effect is the birth of a model. According to Carlyle, the great men were «the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain». Hence, in the exact moment in which the great men became models to follow, there arose a canon (moral, aesthetic, social). The idea of a canon is still very relevant nowadays. The book *The Western Canon*<sup>125</sup> is the most relevant example of it. In his book the author attempts to «isolate the qualities that made the authors canonical, that is, authoritative in our culture»<sup>126</sup>. If Bloom's aim is to find the aesthetic value in literature, Carlyle's aim was to find the features of the great men throughout history, and a different kind of hero-worship. Liszt, showing an incredible historical awareness, did the same operation in the musical field, becoming in this way one of the founders of

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123 Winkler, Gerhard J., *Liszt's "Weimar Mythology"*, p. 68: «A small notice-book of 1850, [...] contains extracts from Carlyle's work in the hand of the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein».

124 Carlyle, Thomas, *On Heroes*, p. 1.

125 Bloom, Harold, *The Western Canon*.

126 Bloom, Harold, *The Western Canon*, p. 1.

what could possibly be called the modern western musical canon. In 1852, Liszt wrote a famous letter to Wilhelm von Lenz, in which one reads that «pour nous, musiciens, l'œuvre de Beethoven est semblable à la colonne de nuée et de feu qui conduisit les Israélites à travers le désert – colonne de nuée pour nous conduire le jour –, colonne de feu pour nous éclairer la nuit “*afin que nous marchions jour et nuit*”. Son obscurité et sa lumière nous tracent également la voie que nous devons suivre; elles nous sont l'une et l'autre un perpétuel commandement, une infaillible révélation»<sup>127</sup>. These words not only resemble the ones used by Carlyle – when he wrote that «we cannot look [...] upon a great man, without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to be near. The light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world; [...] a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven»<sup>128</sup> –, but they affirm a theoretical principle, namely that Beethoven is a pole star for the musicians; i.e., these words affirm the Lisztian canon. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century composers began to rediscover the masterpieces of the ancient masters – they started to study them as artworks –, following the fascination for the past raised during the previous centuries, and they found in the musicians of the past models to follow, and upon which it was possible to build new paths, and to find new compositional possibilities. Such a simple operation lies at the basis of our Western Canon. Liszt contributed to its birth, and his concert programmes are the best evidence of this tendency. But his action was not limited to the composers of the past<sup>129</sup>. His consideration for the music of Wagner, Berlioz, Chopin, Schumann, and many others, and his efforts to spread their music throughout Europe is one of the reasons why today we have such a high consideration of these authors. Proof that Liszt was following a plan, and consequently that he intentionally created this canon, is given by

127 Liszt, Franz., *Franz Liszt Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, Vol. I, pp. 123–124.

128 Carlyle, Thomas, *On Heroes*, p. 2.

129 Liszt acquaintance with the ancient master is a very old one. Walker reported that his father «had a broad musical background» and he was «familiar with a wide range of repertoire, including much of the keyboard music of Bach, Mozart, Hummel, and early Beethoven. We know that he introduced Liszt to their works, for he was prepared publicly to exhibit his son playing them». Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847*, pp. 59–60. But the relevance of the masters of the past is not just the result of his education, but it is part of a greater plan, that of the musical canon. Under this light the huge number of transcriptions and paraphrases Liszt wrote assumes a new quality. They are not just (above all the early works) virtuoso pieces, but they are a means through which Liszt spread culture. He transcribed and paraphrased masterpieces which deserved to be heard by everybody. The foundation of the canon, or, following the nomenclature used by Winkler, the Lisztian Mythology, had already been born a long time before Weimar.

his 1835 essay *De la situation des artistes* in the paragraph *Du conservatoire*. Giani noted that «Già nel 1835 Franz Liszt, andando in un certo senso contro i suoi stessi interessi di compositore desideroso di veder affermate le proprie creazioni, suggerì una serie di riforme per promuovere la conservazione e la conoscenza capillare del patrimonio musicale del passato recente e più remoto»<sup>130</sup>. Actually, Liszt did not work against himself, because in his idea the composers of the past lived side by side with modern musicians, creating a sort of evolutive line, or a chain, which linked all the men of genius<sup>131</sup>:

Des concerts plus fréquent, plus complet, et par cela même plus variés, fondés dans un *double but* de conservation et de progrès, des concerts dont le programme se partagerait entre le chefs-d'œuvre de Weber, Beethoven; – sans oublier comme en le fait que trop, ceux de Mozart, Haydn, Haendel, Bach, et de tous les grands maîtres [...]; et les productions nouvelles ou peu connues des compositeurs et des contemporains: – Cherubini, Spohr, Onslow, sans mettre tout-à-fait de coté les plus jeunes: Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Hiller, etc., etc.<sup>132</sup>.

This quotation alone is enough to show what the idea of canon was for Liszt. The idea of canon is itself based on the idea of great men. The artistic production of these men deserves to be preserved, but, at the same, the work of the contemporary composers has to be spread, because they will be the ancient masters for future generations. The essay of 1835 was entirely based on Liszt's own ideas (even if it was probably written with the help of Marie d'Agoult), and it already contained some of the ideas that Liszt would find some years later in the great men theory of Carlyle. The first paragraphs of his 1851 essay *Lohengrin* are an ode to the great men, without doubts inspired by Carlyle's

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130 Giani, Maurizio, *Canone retrogrado*, p. 201. «Already in 1835 Franz Liszt suggested, somehow going against his own interest of composers who claims for the success of his own creation, a series of reforms, whose aim was to promote the preservation and the knowledge of the musical heritage of the past.»

131 The idea of a chain – that is anyway related to a specific idea of progress that sees knowledge as a cumulative process – is expressed by Liszt in his Mozart essay: «Kann seine Virtuosität auch nicht mehr unmittelbar von uns empfunden werden, so besitzt sie dennoch einen Antheil an dem Einfluß, den Mozart auf seine Zeitgenossen, sowie auf seine Nachfolger ausgeübt hat». Liszt, Franz, *Mozart. Bei Gelegenheit seiner hundertjährigen Feier in Wien*, in *Franz Liszt. Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Lina Ramann, p. 153.

132 Liszt, Franz, *De la situation des artistes*, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, No. 35, 30 August 1835, p. 288 (italic is mine).

book<sup>133</sup>. Winkler complains that «[...] several of these excerpts» – which are in the diary of the princess Sayn-Wittgenstein (see footnote 123) – «were cited by Liszt in *Lohengrin et Tannhäuser*, unfortunately without being identified correctly»<sup>134</sup>. But what is relevant to note in Liszt's essay is not the number of the exact quotations one can identify in it. What is really relevant are the ideas which are there exposed, and which create a direct link with Carlyle who, even if Liszt did not name him directly, clearly represents the theoretical background of the writing:

Les hommes qui se sont élevés au-dessus de leurs semblables par l'éclat de leur génie ou l'empire de leurs talents, et si bien appelés *les grands hommes*, ont de tout temps été l'objet d'un culte qui a pris des formes diverses selon le degré de civilisation des époques où ils ont vécu<sup>135</sup>.

Carlyle surely represents one of the most fruitful sources for Liszt of the 1850s, but, even if his theories deeply influenced the Hungarian composer, their reasoning path diverges at a simple, but fundamental point. The philosopher aimed to analyse the qualities of the great men during the different phases of the human evolution; namely he wanted, as philosopher, to identify the *per se* features of the great men. On the contrary, Liszt aimed to glorify the past (Mozart, Beethoven, Herder, Goethe, etc.), and to add a link to this chain of great men: Wagner and, consequently, himself. To give to this idea a theoretical foundation, Liszt exploited Carlyle's construction to build his own tripartition of the human epochs. At the beginning, during the childhood of men «le culte porta naturellement le caractère d'une religieuse adoration»<sup>136</sup>. These great men, Liszt says, walked among normal people, and they were called *demigods*. But this

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133 Liszt's essays of the 1850s are all quite an ode to the great men. «Welcher Musiker stimmt nicht mit ganzer Seele ein bei dem Triumph dieses Genies, dem wir den größten Theil dessen, was wir als Musiker sind, zu verdanken haben». Liszt, Franz, *Mozart. Bei Gelegenheit seiner hundertjährigen Feier in Wien*, in *Franz Liszt. Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Lina Ramann, p. 153. This kind of enthusiasm in describing the work of Mozart could be seen in almost all Liszt's writings, on Schumann, on Berlioz, on Wagner. It is further evidence of the Lisztian canon, and a further warning to those people who pretend to limit the circle of Lisztian influences to few composers. «Liszt owed the greater part of what he was as a musician to the Viennese master». Wright, William, *Liszt and the Mozart Connection*, p. 300. What Wright says is right, if one repeats the sentence several times, every time replacing the complement with the name of a different composer.

134 Winkler, Gerhard J., *Liszt's "Weimar Mythology"*, p. 68.

135 Liszt, Franz, *Lohengrin, Grand opéra romantique de R. Wagner*, p. 11.

136 Liszt, Franz, *Lohengrin, Grand opéra romantique de R. Wagner*, p. 11.

old age is behind us and «in the history of the world there will not again be any man, never so great, whom his fellowmen will take for a god»<sup>137</sup>. Thereafter, as human knowledge increased, and with the birth of institutions, men ceased to believe in miracles, and they started to glorify more human heroes. During the boyhood of humanity a new wind blew across the earth, and it brought secular and spiritual divisions. Nevertheless, the division between great men and deity was not completely affirmed. It was the Middle ages, about which Liszt devoted some attention, which changed this tendency. Liszt's view on the Middle Ages is able to clarify his view of history, and his idea of progress:

Ce malheur, qui était cependant un progrès, car Il donnait au sentiment une supériorité sur l'intérêt matériel, devait nécessairement diminuer le prestige du génie et du talent, et l'on continua à profiter de leur dons, mais en négligeant de leur en rendre grâces. En proie aux horreurs d'une confusion, que rendaient également épouvantable les brutalités de la barbarie nouvelle et les raffinements de la dépravation antique, le moyen âge ne put voir la grandeur que dans la piété, ne voulut adorer que la sainteté, n'admira que la pureté. [...] L'excès de la douleur rend insensible à tout ce qui ne lui apporte pas un soulagement immédiat, et lorsque les vicissitudes du sort sont fréquentes, ni le génie, ni le talent n'ont à donner de soulagement aussi efficace que celui d'une espérance transmondaine. En outre, dans cette mêlée de tant d'éléments contraires, qui devaient par leur fermentation et leurs bouillonnements faire surgir du fond de ce chaos une civilisation plus belle, la puissance individuelle dans les souverains eux-mêmes, était singulièrement resserrée par la puissance des choses. Le génie n'avait que peu à accomplir. Il ne pouvait que luire. Mais l'immortel rayonnement de son flambeau, ne devait être reconnu que longtemps après. Ce n'est que dans les calmes contemplations d'une existence paisible, qu'il fut possible de lui reporter l'hommage dû aux bienfaits des lueurs qu'il avait répandues sur les ténèbres de tant de luttes sanglantes. Quand des trêves suivirent enfin ces luttes, alors il appartenait aux hommes éclairés qui considéraient le Passé pour y démêler la genèse des troubles et des infortunes au milieu desquels les idées et les problèmes s'étaient si longtemps aheurtés comme des astres errants, lumineux ou éteints, de rappeler ce culte primitif des grands hommes, non plus dans sa *mythologie* grandiose et poétique, mais dans la juste reconnaissance qui revient à ces élus, porteurs des dons et des bienfaits que la Providence répand sur l'humanité par leur entremise, alors même qu'ils ignorent le sens de leurs mystérieuses missions, et la qualité des fruits que doivent porter les branches nouvelles, qu'ils greffent sur le vieil arbre

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137 Carlyle, Thomas, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*, p. 51.

de la Science du Bien et du Mal, lequel après nous avoir tant appris, nous laisse encore tant ignorer<sup>138</sup>.

The Middle Ages is seen as the era of the selfishness and of the brutality of men, in which the individuals, too focused on their own affairs, forget the existence of the genius. As already seen, it was a common idea to identify the Middle Ages as a dark period in which reason left the earth, replaced by pure inhumanity. But it was even a common idea to state that the forces of progress were still working in obscurity. Liszt was a supporter of this last idea, and he affirmed that during this bloody era the intellectuals could just see the «grandeur [...] dans la pitié» and the great men could just admire «la sainteté, [...] la pureté». But the achievements of this dark era would only be recognised long after its end, as Liszt already noted. These are the modern times, and, even if Liszt does not use this expression, it appears clear that he is referring to his present times, and that he is using the metaphor of the three ages of men (childhood, boyhood, maturity<sup>139</sup>) to reach his objective. Luckily, writes Liszt, we are living in a time in which admiration and enthusiasm is devoted to those men «dont la vocation était d'agrandir le cercle des idées, de réveiller les beaux sentiments, de révéler de grandes aspiration, de provoquer d'heureuses améliorations, d'inciter aux nobles désirs, [...]»<sup>140</sup>. This speech serves Liszt to glorify Weimar – which were the New Athens and the city of Goethe, Schiller, Herder, Hummel –, and then to promote his project of a New Weimar<sup>141</sup> – in this project the city should have been the centre of European culture –, and, again, to promote his personal canon: the great men of the past had to be glorified, but we have to

138 Liszt, Franz, *Lohengrin, Grand opéra romantique de R. Wagner*, p. 15–16.

139 As already seen the last age is the more complicated one. Liszt, who really believed in progress and in its eternal flow, cannot use the expression “old age”: Humanity is, and will always be, in an everlasting maturity. Stating that humanity is in an “old age” is to state either that time is cyclical or that history will come to an end, and both options are inadmissible.

140 Liszt, Franz, *Lohengrin, Grand opéra romantique de R. Wagner*, p. 17.

141 «Non pas Delenda Carthago, mais Aedificanda Vimaria. Weymar était sous le grand-duc Charles-Auguste une nouvelle Athènes, songeons aujourd'hui à construire la nouvelle Weymar. Renouons franchement et hautement les traditions de Charles-Auguste. Laissons les talents agir librement dans leur sphère. Colonisons le plus possible et tâchons d'arriver peu à peu à ce triple résultat qui doit être toute la politique, tout le gouvernement, l'Alpha et l'Oméga enfin de tout Weymar : une Cour aussi charmante, aussi brillante, aussi attractive que possible ; un théâtre et une littérature qui ne pourrisse pas dans le comble du grenier et qui ne se noie pas dans les soupentes des caves ; et enfin une Université (Iéna). Cour, Théâtre. Université, voilà la grande trilogie pour un état comme Weymar qui ne saurait tirer d'importance ni de son commerce, ni de son industrie, ni de son armée de terre, ni de son armée de mer, etc., etc. ...» Liszt, Franz, d'Agoult, Marie, *Correspondance*, Grasset, Paris, 1934, letter dated 23 January 1844.



recognise and then to glorify even the contemporary masters, namely Wagner, whose *Lohengrin* is the perfect tribute to the memory of Goethe, because the German composer «aussi poète que musicien, a donné au livret de cet opéra tout l'intérêt, toute la perfection littéraire d'une tragédie [...]. Cet opéra [...] méritait certainement de figurer aussi à titre d'une des plus poétiques productions que la muse de l'antique Germanie ait inspiré dans ces derniers temps, à la solennelle célébration d'une fête dont Goethe était l'objet»<sup>142</sup>.

Now, the reason why Liszt did not quote Carlyle directly is clear. The Scottish philosopher served him to build the theoretical background, as a reference, as a support for his own ideas. Liszt, even if it is often said the contrary, created here a system, in which music, literature, art, poetry, of the past and of the present, are gathered together, and together they shine thanks to the men of genius. And this is not just a theoretical statement. Liszt, following the suggestion of Fétis, tried to keep together past and present (and future) according to the principle of the unity of multiplicity. From the beginning of the Wagner essay it appears clear that the names of Herder, Goethe, Schaller (the sculptor of Herder's statue), Wagner, Haendel, and indirectly that of Liszt himself, are on the same level – or at least on the same evolutionary line –, because «les grands hommes» bring to light «les dons et les bienfaits que la Providence répand sur l'humanité»<sup>143</sup>. As Carlyle wrote, it is not relevant with which name we call them, because they can be, and somehow, they always will be, all these names at the same time:

Hero, Prophet, Poet, – many different names, in different times and places, do we give to Great men; [...]. I will remark again, however, as a fact not unimportant to be understood, that the different *sphere* constitutes the grand origin of such distinction; that the hero can be Poet, Prophet, King, Priest or what you will, according to the kind of world he finds himself born into. I confess, I have no notion of a truly great man that could not be *all* sorts of men. [...] The Poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior, unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too. I fancy there is in him the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher; – in one or the other degree, he could have been, he is all these<sup>144</sup>.

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142 Liszt, Franz, *Lobengrin, Grand opéra romantique de R. Wagner*, p. 35.

143 Liszt, Franz, *Lobengrin, Grand opéra romantique de R. Wagner*, p. 16.

144 Carlyle, Thomas, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*, pp. 92–93.

There is no privileged means of expression of the genius, and if the glorification of the ancient masters is necessary to remember their teachings, it is to underline that their cults do not have to darken the lights of our own times. Liszt, as Carlyle, understands that the genius is everywhere, but it is something very vulnerable when alone. The men of letters have to search for, and to defend, the genius of every epoch. These guardians of the cultural heritage are to be considered as great men too, because in doing that they become *vates*<sup>145</sup>, they are the spiritual guides of humanity. They have the greatest honour and responsibility, because their choices will determine what the future generations will learn from the past. The theoretical construction of Liszt is a warning too: during the Middle Ages humanity risked losing its path, and the creation of a canon – which of course does not have to become a dogma –, which has to be continuously updated, could represent the only salvation of our culture. In more recent times Giani has pointed out the importance of the canon, stating that «Dire [...] che Beethoven si difende da solo, o che non ha bisogno di difendersi, assume in questo contesto un significato preoccupante. Se davvero la grande arte potesse difendersi da sola, Dresda non sarebbe mai stata distrutta. Certo è impossibile nel mondo occidentale bombardare effettivamente Beethoven, [...] ma può essere trascurato, relativizzato, dimidiato, deriso [...], infine dimenticato»<sup>146</sup>. The education of the human race, the role of artists in society, and the defence of our heritage, are not just theoretical discourses for Liszt, but they are the ground upon which he built his own aesthetics.

## Conclusion

Concluding here it is important to underline, again, that this chapter is not an exhaustive presentation of every single aspect of every theory on progress elaborated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nor is it a complete overview of Liszt's cultural environment. It is a résumé of the main theories which, directly or indirectly, influenced Liszt and which have left an evident trace in his writings. The next chapter focuses on one of these, the Berlioz essay, which represents one of the

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145 «In some old languages, again, the titles are synonymous; *Vates* means both Prophet and Poet: [...] they have penetrated both of them into the sacred mystery of the Universe; what Goethe calls “the open secret”. “Which is the great secret?” asks one? – “The open secret”, – open to all, seen by almost none!». Carlyle, Thomas, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*, pp. 94.

146 Giani, Maurizio, *Canone Retrogrado*, p. 207.

most dense writings of the literary production of the Hungarian composer, and in which all the matters that emerged here are recognisable. It is again vital to underline that the theories presented in this chapter, and which deeply affected Liszt, were not used by him to show the readers his erudition. Liszt went through these ideas, he immersed himself in them, and he elaborated upon them to give form to his own thoughts. The analysis of the idea of progress – the idea according to which the men will never degenerate and that growth is unlimited – during the 19<sup>th</sup> century creates a lot of trouble, because it is, even with all its opponents and its facets<sup>147</sup>, still alive, even if the events of recent history have made the idea of the perfectibility of human beings even more unsustainable, and the idea of progress a mere illusion. It is therefore very hard to separate our perception from the 19<sup>th</sup> century perception of progress. All the themes exposed in this chapter– the idea of progress, the symbol as a paradigm, etc. – are the theoretical basis upon which Liszt built his own ideas, and they are at the same time the evidence that Liszt possessed a systematic thought, even if it is not systematically expressed – somehow his thought is systematically organised. But this is perfectly coherent with his idea of the role of the musician as a guide. He could not convey his thought in a complex system, otherwise the masses would not be able to understand them. On the other side, the theories outlined in this chapter have one common element: they all contributed to the emergence of an anti-dogmatic thought which involved the idea of multiplicity and of ambiguity, without which Liszt would not have been able to create some of his most intriguing composition.

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147 «For every Abbé de Saint-Pierre, every Kant, every Condorcet fascinated by the marks of progress alone, there was a Voltaire to point to the melancholy fact “that in the course of many revolutions, both Europe and Asia, peoples which once were well organized have fallen into a state of near savagery”». See Nisbet, Robert A., *Social Change and History*, p. 128.

### III *Im Reich der Ideen* An analysis of Liszt's essay *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*

La vie intellectuelle de Liszt est entièrement soumise à sa vie sentimentale. Aussi est-il très difficile d'établir si telle initiative ou suggestion vient de lui-même, de l'une de ses Muses, ou bien de ses collaborateurs? Malgré le caractère synthétique de l'homme et de sa musique, le problème Liszt forme un tout organique et indivisible, ce qui ne fait qu'augmenter les difficultés de la question<sup>1</sup>.

1 Haraszti, Emile, *Le problème Liszt*, p. 123.



## Introduction

The quotation from Haraszi that accompanies the title of this chapter, in all its strength, illustrates the matters related to the analysis of Liszt's musical and literary production. Firstly, the problem of authorship. Nowadays, it is well known that Liszt wrote the great majority of his theoretical works with the support of either Marie d'Agoult or Carolyne de Sayn-Wittgenstein. Furthermore, he often wrote his articles in French, and afterwards he asked his friends and collaborators to translate them into German. Consequently, a doubt about the accuracy of the translation – even if the majority were approved by Liszt himself – and about the real authorship of these writings arises quite spontaneously. Finally, it is worth pointing out Liszt's linguistic *mélange*: he grew up in a German speaking country, thereafter he moved to France, where he had to learn what would become his new “native language” – still in 1850 Liszt wrote: «Les pages suivantes qui s'adressent particulièrement à l'Allemagne, sont pourtant écrites dans une langue qui n'est pas la sienne. Obligé, pour donner à ma pensée sa plus naturelle et sa plus véritable expression, de me servir de l'idiome avec lequel un usage habituel de vingt-cinq années m'a le plus familiarisé»<sup>2</sup> –, and finally he settled down in Weimar, where he had to “again learn” German. In any case, it seems that he felt unsure in the use of his native language. For that reason, he always asked for the help of his collaborators to proofread his writings; because he felt his prose and his education insufficient to accomplish the task by himself. It is possible to state that Liszt, as a consequence of his *pèlerinage* through Europe, had no native language. Indeed, he even wrote his essay on Berlioz in French, and he asked Richard Pohl<sup>3</sup> to translate it into German:

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2 Liszt, Franz, *De la fondation-Goethe*, p. 7. It is interesting to note that Liszt did not refer to German as “my native language.” Liszt national identity, and its related language problem, are analysed in Cormac, Joanne, *Liszt, Language, and Identity: A multinational Chameleon*.

3 Richard Pohl was one of the most relevant figure in the war between the conservatives and the progress party. He met Robert Schumann in 1851 and in 1854 moved to Weimar following an invitation of Liszt. He was close to Franz Brendel, Richard Wagner, Hector Berlioz and Hans von Bülow. He wrote between the 1854 and the 1863 for the *Neuen Zeitschrift für Musik* under the pseudonym “Hoplit”, name which comes from the ancient Greek *Hoplites* (ὁπλίτης), who were the soliders, who utilized the phlanx formation. He was one of the most determined supporters of the *Neudeutsche Schule*.

Dear Friend,

Here is the *Harold!* a capable piece of symphonic literature – clear, beautiful and written in fine hand. You will have much to brood upon with it and Cornelius is keen for your accurate translation. [...] The article must ring out clearly, nobly and vigorously in the German language. Go to the work on it soon and send me the translation before it is published, for I may yet permit myself a few margin notes<sup>4</sup>.

From this letter, it appears clear that Liszt could have managed the German, but this statement does not clarify the real reasons why he did not write his essay directly in this language. But from the tone of the letter, it emerges that this translation procedure was quite normal, and that this was not the first request of this kind. Anyway, even if Liszt's German articles are actually translations from the original French, he revisited them all before presenting them to the press. Therefore, their paternity should not be questioned. As a consequence, his writings possess a typical style, and they are sometimes not easy reading. According to Haraszti, the essays published in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* during the 1830s were written with the large intrusion of Marie d'Agoult, while the writings of the so called *Weimar Period* were written by Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein<sup>5</sup>. According to Haraszti these writings do not deserve much attention, as they do not represent the literary production of Liszt, because, if it is sure that he was a great pianist, it is likewise sure that he was not an intellectual as Schumann or Wagner were. According to what emerged in the previous chapter of this dissertation, it is possible to state that, even if Liszt cannot be considered an intellectual of the same level as his more educated colleagues, his production, both musical and literary, is sustained by some key ideas, which finds a linear development in his works. Therefore, while he may

4 Liszt, Franz, *Liszt letters in the library of Congress*, letter to Richard Pohl dated 7 July 1854, p. 104.

5 Haraszti, Emile, *Franz Liszt, écrivain et penseur. Histoire d'une mystification*, pp. 20–21: «La question de l'authenticité des œuvres littéraires, des écrits du musicien, est un des côtés les plus curieux et les plus importants de l'énigme lisztienne. Il ne fait plus de doute, aujourd'hui, que les articles parus, de 1836 à 1840 dans la *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, publiée par Schlesinger, sous la signature de l'illustre pianiste, sont l'œuvre de Mme d'Agoult, et que, d'autre part, sa gloire (disons plus simplement sa renommée) littéraire est l'œuvre de la princesse Sayn-Wittgenstein, qui devait inciter Mme Lina Ramann à publier, avec la collaboration de Mme La Mara et de Peter Cornelius, les cinq volumes des Œuvres complètes. [...] Sauf sa correspondance privée et quelques pages de journal, Liszt on le sait maintenant, n'a jamais rien écrit [...]. Il est donc impossible de parler de ses œuvres littéraires, de ses écrits, comme on fait de ceux d'un Berlioz, d'un Schumann, ou d'un Wagner».

not the finest, he is to be considered as an intellectual musician. However, it is Liszt himself who is to be blame for his reputation. He never spent a word trying to clarify his role in the creative process, and he furthermore informs us about these interferences in his articles<sup>6</sup>. According to Dalmonte «il éprouvait souvent le besoin de rédiger un brouillon avant de formuler un texte quelconque» because «il écrivait toujours dans une langue étrangère»<sup>7</sup>. However, on the other hand, it is impossible to ignore the fact that Liszt signed all these articles. That means that he agreed with their content, and consequently that he gave his blessing for their publication. Of course, as Haraszti argued at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when approaching Liszt's writings, one deals with *une autorité en questions*<sup>8</sup>, but anyway a confrontation with these essays is inevitable, and for a very simple reason: it is not very relevant whether Liszt himself wrote the articles. What really matters is that he agreed with their content, and he approved their printing. Therefore, one might say that these were his ideas, and that he was their father, even if the prose, or some of the content did not come directly from his pen. Furthermore, thanks to the stylistic analysis of the writings of the two Liszt's muses, it is possible to identify the passages, paragraphs, chapters, which were written by the two dames<sup>9</sup>. Anyway, Liszt, as reported by Walker,

had to exercise both discretion and diplomacy when attempting to curb the excess of zeal that Princess Carolyne sometimes brought to her task goes without saying. The letter that he wrote to her from Gotha, in March 1854, in which he voiced his concern about the forthcoming article on Beethoven's *Egmont*, is a case in point. Apparently the princess had inserted material that went far beyond the scope of the essay, and Liszt was determined that she take it out. After telling her,

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6 Liszt, Franz., *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, Vol. 4, p. 96 : «Quand vous aurez entendu le *Harold*, nous nous mettrons à l'œuvre du feuilletton – pour lequel je préparerai les matériaux, aussitôt que j'aurai expédié mon Concerto et les *Études Paganini* à Härtel».

7 Dalmonte, Rossana, *Les révélations d'une traduction «fidele»*, p. 326.

8 Duchesneau, Dufur, Benoit-Otis (dir.), *Écrits de compositeurs, une autorité en question*, Vrin, 2013. In this book several authors confronted themselves with many essays, writings, and treatises written by many composers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two essays deal with Franz Liszt: *Les écrites de Franz Liszt: Quelques réflexions épistémologiques et méthodologiques sur leur paternité et leur typologie*, by Nicolas Dufetel, and *Les révélations d'une traduction «fidele»: Lohengrin de Liszt-Wagner*, by Rossana Dalmonte. Both texts deal more with the lexical and philological matter than with the content and aesthetics problems.

9 For example, it is nowadays sure that the first chapters of Liszt's essay on Chopin, which are an analysis of the political situation in Poland, were very likely written by Carolyne and not by Liszt.



somewhat mockingly, that it was quite unnecessary for her to broach the subject of the “intellectual and moral progress of musicians from the coming of Jesus Christ,” and that he had in any case things of a musical nature that he would prefer to include, he made it plain that he intended to postpone publication of the article by a few days in order to get it right. “Be tolerant of my harshness,” he added tactfully – a phrase that sounds symbolic of their general working relationship at this time<sup>10</sup>.

Hence, what we read today couldn’t be not exactly what Liszt wrote – it is essential, anyway, not to forget that Lina Ramann made a lot of adjustments in her edition of Liszt’s *Gesammelte Schriften* –, but it is for sure his thoughts that one reads. For that reason, the aim of this chapter, as the title suggests, is to provide an analysis of the essay *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie* written by Liszt in 1855 – and as it appeared on the pages of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*<sup>11</sup> in the same year – it is considered an original creation of Liszt. This article had a very long gestation period. In 1851, Liszt already had the idea to write about the *Harold-Symphonie*: «Pour vous décrire la Symphonie de Berlioz, il me faudrait vous faire un feuilletton»<sup>12</sup>. Further correspondence between Liszt and Carolyne suggests that they worked together on the writing. The wide erudition of the princess is surely at the basis of the many quotations one encounters while reading the essay. The work of analysis is however complicated by (at least) two reasons: 1) the critical literature on the essay is still limited even if the writing is very often quoted as an example of Liszt’s defence of programme music. As it will emerge, the defence of programme music is not the main aim of the article, which despite its fame is very rarely analysed in its entirety; 2) despite its relevant content and its chronological relevance, the “stream of consciousness-like” technique used by Liszt creates more confusion than clarity. Of course, it is a newspaper article, and it is therefore worth considering that its main purpose was to convince the reader of the goodness, even the truth, of the author’s ideas.

For that reason, the aim here is to create a step-by-step analysis of the essay, focusing on those aspects which are relevant to this dissertation, namely the idea of progress, and the related problem of the form. Some analysis of the

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10 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Weimar Years, 1848–1861*, p. 378.

11 The article was published in 5 episodes on the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*: the number 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, between 13 July and 24 August 1855. For the present analysis were used both the original edition and the one published by Lina Ramann in 1882 (s. bibliography).

12 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt’s Briefe, Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, letter dated 11 April 1851, Vol. IV, p. 87.

linguistic and formal construction of the essay will be necessary, in order to identify those passages where Liszt used a philosophical language and those where he used a more poetic language. In this regard, it is noteworthy to quote the suggestion made by Lazzarini Belli, according to which the Berlioz-essay can be regarded as the first answer of an artist to the music related problems arisen from Hegel's *Ästhetik*. The starting point of her interesting investigation is that «Hegel inserì nelle sue Lezioni di Estetica una parte dedicata alla musica che contiene riflessioni acute, singolarmente perspicaci e, in molti casi, quasi preveggenti gli sviluppi futuri di quest'arte. Liszt se ne accorse, valutò la profondità di questo esame filosofico della musica, e riportò alcuni passi delle Lezioni in un suo scritto»<sup>13</sup>. Surely, Hegel made a sharp analysis of the aesthetic of music and of its achievements and future development, but, on the other side, it is worth pointing out that his statements remain strictly connected to a conservative view on music. Hegel's ideas on music can hardly be connected with Liszt's progressive view, and this fact creates an obstacle on the path outlined by Lazzarini Belli. The perspective of the philosopher of Stuttgart on art is directly derived from those of Kant, as it is possible to see from the following quotation:

In der ähnlichen Art ist ebenso die regellose Unruhe an einer *table d'hôte* unter vielen Menschen und die unbefriedigende Anregung durch sie lästig; dieses Hinundherlaufen, Klappern, Schwätzen soll geregelt und, da man es nächst dem Essen und Trinken mit der leeren Zeit zu tun hat, die Leerheit ausgefüllt werden. Auch bei dieser Gelegenheit wie bei so vielen anderen tritt die Musik hilfreich ein und wehrt außerdem andere Gedanken, Zerstreuungen und Einfälle ab<sup>14</sup>.

Aside from the ambiguous expression «auch bei dieser Gelegenheit *wie bei so vielen andere*», where the words “other occasions” remain unclear, here emerges from this quotation in all its strength a conception of music as a pleasant background, which is sometimes able to push away “other thoughts” from the philosopher's mind. From this point of view the music, far away from being a source of reflections, as well as of new ideas, is seen as a powerful tool which is able to inhibit the normal functions of our most important organ, the intellect. Consequently, since its functions are inhibited, the philosopher can take part in the normal activities requested by social life, without being disturbed by

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13 Lazzarini Belli, Alessandra, *Hegel e Liszt: un incontro sulla musica*, p. 17.

14 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2182.

his thoughts. This conception of music is strictly related to Kant, who, evoking the same situation, wrote:

[...] Tafelmusik; ein wunderliches Ding, welches nur als ein angenehmes Geräusch die Stimmung der Gemüther zur Fröhlichkeit unterhalten soll und, ohne dass jemand auf die Komposition derselben die mindeste Aufmerksamkeit verwendet, die freie Gesprächigkeit eines Nachbarn mit dem anderen begünstigt<sup>15</sup>.

From these two quotations it clearly emerges that both Kant and Hegel were not experts in the musical field, with the difference that the latter cared to inform us of his lack, and, in the first pages of his chapter on music, he wrote: «In diesem Gebiete aber bin ich wenig bewandert und muß mich deshalb entschuldigen, wenn ich mich nur auf allgemeinere Gesichtspunkte und einzelne Bemerkungen beschränke»<sup>16</sup>. Despite his confession, which alone is enough to doubt the accuracy of his musical analysis, Hegel's theories influenced the reflection on music of the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the writings of the philosopher were such a common lecture among the bourgeois salons, that everyone who was used to take part in these social events was automatically submerged in his thought. From this point of view, it becomes quite clear the reasons why Liszt quoted from Hegel's *Vorlesungen*, namely to extend Hegel's authority on his essay. If Hegel said that it must be true, *ipse dixit*. Anyway, this is not the place for a critique of Hegel's thoughts and reception, because two other matters deserve to be analysed before entering the Berlioz-essay: 1) the first concerns Liszt's reception of the *Ästhetik*, namely, if he read it or if he just had a second-hand knowledge of it; 2) the second point is if the Berlioz-essay is, as Lazzarini Belli suggests, one of the first answers to the lessons of Hegel. About the first point it is possible to state that it is plausible that Liszt came in contact with the thoughts of Hegel through the princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, but the precision with which he quoted from the *Vorlesungen* is a sign that he had at least a copy of the writing under his eyes. Furthermore, the name of Hegel appears only a few times in his correspondence, and most of these times named in the letters addressed to Carolyne. Furthermore, in support of the view according to which Liszt had a first-hand knowledge of Hegel, it emerges that the philosopher's ideas were matter of discord between Liszt and Carolyne, a sign that the two discussed this topic often – since the beginning

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15 Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, p. 167.

16 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2152.

of their relationship –, and that they both had quite a deep acquaintance with his production, as these two excerpts from Liszt's letters prove:

Vous avez la passion du Grand – et reprochez à Hegel et au C. Antonelli de n'avoir pas été assez grands! Je vous écoute – et ne réussis pas à comprendre! [...] *Gott ist das ewige Werden!* Cette formule fut déjà donnée par Hegel, qu'à Woronince, en 1847, vous déclariez "non grand" [...] <sup>17</sup>.

But, on the other hand – in support of the view according to which Liszt had a second-hand knowledge of Hegel – from the analysis of his letters, and from the few quotations he made in his writings, it is possible to state that Liszt had a partial knowledge of the Hegelian writings. It is true that he quoted some passages from the *Vorlesungen*, but it is also true that he seemed to ignore other relevant parts which could have been more useful to his cause. Concluding, it is believed that this matter will remain unsolvable. The point of view of this dissertation is that Liszt quoted from Hegel to assure a more scientific tone for his article. Namely Hegel is the *ipse dixit* argument, against which no one can rebut. Turning to the second point, it is now time to analyse the suggestion of Lazzerini Belli, according to which Liszt's article as the first answer of an artist to the *Vorlesungen* <sup>18</sup>. It is believed that this suggestion, even if it is assuredly fascinating, seems to be barely plausible. Above all, how could Liszt answer a colossal philosophical writing – which was perfectly integrated into an omni-comprehensive system, and based on a centenary philosophical tradition – with a few pages of polemical essay written in a quasi-poetical style? It is therefore inferred that Hegel was not the recipient of Liszt's article, but just a means through which Liszt conveyed a message, a message which was addressed to someone else. And there is a thinker who can be regarded as the secret recipient of Liszt's essay on Berlioz: Eduard Hanslick. His writing *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* appeared the year before (1854), and there the figures of Liszt and Wagner – even if they were not explicitly named in the first version <sup>19</sup> – are the privileged targets of Hanslick's criticism. Furthermore, Liszt met Hanslick several times during the year 1855, precisely when he was still working on his Berlioz's article, as it clearly appears from the two letters he sent

17 Listz, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, letters of the 14 January 1877 and of the 21 May 1882, Vol. IV, p. 72 and p. 345.

18 It is at this point useful to remember that Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* appeared posthumous in 1835, published by Heinrich Gustav Hotho.

19 The names of List and Wagner explicitly related to the criticism of the *Neudeutsche Schule* appeared from the second edition in 1858.

to Carolyne on 28<sup>20</sup> and 30<sup>21</sup> May, 1855. Nevertheless, the genesis of the article is still obscure. As already noted, Liszt had already written a first draft in July 1854, namely before the appearance of Hanslick's book, but then he had time to revisit his writing before the publication in the *NZfM* in 1855. Even if there is no proof of that, this revision process seems to be very plausible. Mark Evan Bonds seems to be one of the few to note that Liszt's article is «Ostensibly a commentary on Berlioz's *Harold en Italie*, the essay in fact has little to say about that particular work and focuses instead on broader questions about the nature of instrumental music in general. And while Liszt never cites Hanslick or his treatise explicitly [...] his essay stands as one of the earliest extended responses to *Vom Musikalsich-Schönen*»<sup>22</sup>. The Viennese critic was a great supporter of the pianist Liszt, but he was not a supporter of Liszt the composer, or Liszt the conductor. Famous are the words he wrote on *Die Presse* after the *Mozartfest* in 1856, in which Liszt, invited as conductor, is depicted as the worst possible choice, and to which the composer answered with an ironic and bitter letter: «[...] La manière dont vous avez rendu compte dans la *Presse* des deux concerts de Dimanche et Lundi, correspond entièrement à l'opinion que j'avais de vous – et vous êtes montré en cette circonstance, selon votre habitude, critique éminent et parfait *gentleman*. Permettez-moi de vous faire mes sincères remerciements pour la part que vous avez bien voulu m'accorder et d'espérer que les années prochaines en nous rapprochant davantage me mettront à même de vous mieux témoigner les sincères sentiments d'estime et de considération distingués dont je vous prie d'agréer l'assurance»<sup>23</sup>. And, again, during his old age, Liszt informs

20 «En fait de notabilité, en visite à ce festival – j'ai renouvelé connaissance avec Hanslick, [...]», in Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, letter dated 28 May 1855, Vol. IV, p. 216.

21 «Je me suis placé vis-à-vis de M<sup>r</sup> et M<sup>me</sup> Hiller, entre Hanslick et Wasielewski, [...]», in Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, letter dated 28 May 1855, Vol. IV, p. 220.

22 Bonds, Mark Evan, *Absolute Music, The History of an Idea*, p. 210. If it is true that Liszt does not name Hanslick explicitly, he does attack explicitly the formalists, as it is possible to read, for example, at p. 52 of Liszt's article.

23 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Vom Rom bis an's Ende*, to Eduard Hanslick, 31 January 1856, Vol. II, pp. 404–405. The footnote of Lina Ramann declaims: «Der Brief bezieht sich auf das von Liszt dirigierte mozart-Jubiläumsconcert in Wien und Hanslick's Kritik, in welcher er den Mangel an Courtoisie rügte, womit man Liszt, der zur Leitung dieses Concerts eingeladen worden war, seitens des Publikums und des Comité's behandelte». Hanslick wrote in his article that «Alles wohl erwogen, was sich gegen die Einladung Liszt's ernstlich einwenden läßt, kann man doch eigentlich von ihr nur sagen, daß sie nicht nothwendig war», because «steht Liszt's künstlerische Individualität zu Mozart in gar keine organische Beziehung, noch

us that, according to Hanslick, «je ne dois rester qu'un célèbre pianiste»<sup>24</sup>. Liszt and Hanslick conducted a remote battle, the former writing in the *NZfM*, the latter writing in *Die Presse* first and then in the *Neue freie Presse*. Liszt's article on Berlioz is surely a response to Hanslick's book of 1854, since in it Liszt defends programme music, which was one of the main targets of Hanslick's criticism. Since the beginning, the Austrian critic admitted that his analysis of the essential beauty in music would only be concerned with the so-called pure instrumental music:

Wir haben absichtlich Instrumentalsätze zu Beispielen gewählt. Denn nur was von der Instrumentalmusik behauptet werden kann, gilt von der Tonkunst als solcher. Wenn irgend eine allgemeine Bestimmtheit der Musik untersucht wird, etwas so ihr Wesen und ihre Natur kennzeichnen, ihre Grenzen und Richtung feststellen soll, so kann nur von der Instrumentalmusik die Rede sein. Was die Instrumentalmusik nicht kann, von dem darf nie gesagt werden, die Musik könne es; denn nur sie ist reine, absolute Tonkunst. [...] Sogar Tonstücke mit bestimmten Überschriften oder Programmen müssen wir ablehnen, wo es sich um den „Inhalt“ der Musik handelt. Die Vereinigung mit der Dichtung erweitert die Macht der Musik, aber nicht ihre Grenzen<sup>25</sup>.

However, the real point of confrontation is not programme music, but the problem of the form. Hanslick criticised Liszt (and with him the entire *Neudeutsche Schule*) not because they composed programme music, or operas, or any other kind of music with, or related to, words. Hanslick criticised them because of their use of musical structures and forms, and for the related idea according to which the extra-musical materials can provide proper support for the musical structures, which the composers used to create music, which is otherwise *Formlos*, without form – or, even worse, the form lies outside the music. Those of Liszt and Hanslick are apparently two incompatible aesthetics, but they are actually complementary. According to Hanslick the form is the supreme beauty:

Keineswegs ist das „Specifisch-Musikalische“ als bloß akustische Schönheit, oder proportionale Dimension zu verstehen [...]. Der Begriff der „Form“ findet in der Musik

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weniger in der fachlichen, [...]». See Hanslick, Eduard, *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien*, Vol. 2, p. 109.

24 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Neue Folge zu Band I und II*, to the princess Marie Hohenlohe, March 1881, p. 383.

25 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854, p. 20.

eine ganz eigenthümliche Verwirklichung. Die Formen, welche sich aus Tönen bilden, sind nicht leere, sondern erfüllte, nicht bloße Linienbegrenzung eines Vacuums, sondern sich von innen heraus gestaltender Geist<sup>26</sup>.

The form for Hanslick is not something cold, it is not, using the word from Liszt, a *formula*, but it is something that the composer has to fill with its inventive – the form is then more or less fixed, but the composer can fill the scheme with unlimited melodic and harmonic combinations, and through this process he can transform the form itself. From this point of view Liszt and Hanslick are very close. But for the latter the form is simultaneously cause and aim of any beauty, while for the first, the form is a consequence of the beauty, of the inventive of the composer. But Hanslick claimed in his essay that his system is founded on some laws of nature – which anyway remains unspecified. Therefore, there is a shift of perspective in the battlefield. Hanslick defends the tradition, stating that it has the right to exist and to rule, because it is related to these laws of nature; on the other side, Liszt has to prove that even progress and the new are related to these laws, and that they are simple evolutions of them. This is the real terrain upon which the battle is fought. From the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, to the battle between Hanslick and Liszt, to the debate between Schönberg and the formalists, everyone pretended to found his system on some unspecified laws of nature. After all, the theoreticians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century believed that the tonal system itself was directly derived from nature. Hegel himself, even if he did not explicitly use the word “nature”, explains that sounds are related to each other by specific relations, and that these relations follow specific physical laws, where the word physics is to be understood as a synonym of nature.

From this point of view, the reason why Liszt quoted Hegel becomes clearer. Hanslick’s writing reflects the construction of the Hegelian chapter on music: both writings contain a chapter, or a section, about the effect of music, the content of music, feelings, accompanied music, instrumental music, etc.. Consequently, a confrontation with Hanslick must have taken its moves from a confrontation with Hegel. The German philosopher, or better his systematic view of the arts, constitutes the theoretical weapon used to fight the war. After his *Lectures* anyone who pretended to confront himself with the aesthetics had to take into account his thoughts. Therefore, during the analysis both the passages will emerge from Hegel’s *Ästhetik* which support Liszt’s ideas, and the passages which could be analysed as an answer to Hanslick and other opponents. On

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26 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854, p. 34.

the other side, as already stated, every essay of Liszt had a propaganda function, too. In the specific case of the Berlioz-essay, Liszt had more than one purpose: 1) to defend the music of his friend Berlioz; 2) through this defence he aimed to legitimize the creation of a second Berlioz week in 1855 – after the first in 1852 –; 3) to defend programme music and a new conception of form driven by feeling and invention. Aside from that, it is ideally possible to identify a passage of Hanslick *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* as the spark which started the fire, namely as the reason for Liszt's article:

Man pflegt oft anzuführen, daß Beethoven beim Entwurf mancher seiner Kompositionen sich bestimmte Ereignisse oder Seelenzustände gedacht haben soll. Wo Beethoven oder irgend ein anderer Tonsetzer diesen Vorgang beobachtet hat, benützte er ihn bloß als Hilfsmittel, sich durch den Zusammenhang eines objektiven Ereignisses das Festhalten der musikalischen Einheit zu erleichtern. [Wenn Berlioz, Liszt u.a. mehr als dies an der Dichtung, dem Titel oder dem Erlebnis zu haben glaubten, so ist es eine Selbsttäuschung]. Die Einheit der musikalischen Stimmung ist's, was die vier Sätze einer Sonate als organisch verbunden charakterisiert, nicht aber der Zusammenhang mit dem vom Komponisten gedachten Objekte. Wo sich dieser solch poetisches Gängelband versagte und rein musikalisch erfand, da wird man keine andere Einheit der Teile finden, als eine musikalische. Es ist ästhetisch gleichgültig, ob sich Beethoven allenfalls bei seinen sämtlichen Kompositionen bestimmte Vorwürfe gewährt; wir kennen sie nicht, sie sind daher für das Werk nicht existierend. Dieses selbst, ohne allen Kommentar, ist's, was vorliegt, und wie der Jurist aus der Welt hinausfingiert, was nicht in den Akten liegt, so ist für die ästhetische Beurteilung nicht vorhanden, was außerhalb des Kunstwerks lebt. Erscheinen uns die Sätze einer Komposition als einheitlich, so muß diese Zusammengehörigkeit in musikalischen Bestimmungen ihren Grund haben<sup>27</sup>.

If analysed from this point of view, the title Liszt gave to his article is just camouflage, as he devoted just two of the five parts in which the article was published to the analysis of Berlioz's symphony. After all, Liszt's aim was primarily to convince the readers of the goodness of his choices in music, and

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27 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1922, pp. 77–78. The passage between square brackets on Berlioz and Liszt did not appear in the first edition of Hanslick's book (See Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, Rudolph Weigel, Leipzig, 1854, pp. 43–44), but it first appears in the ninth edition of 1896. Then Liszt did not read his name in the essay, but the paragraph itself is an attack against the legitimacy of programme music.



of his work as musical court director. Despite the first Berlioz week being a success, the orchestra of the Weimar theatre was in really poor condition, and Liszt decided to write to Carl Alexander to complain about the conditions under which he had to work. The Grand Duke replied: «Vous êtes, j'espère, tout autant accoutumé à trouver en moi de la bonne volonté guidée par une amitié commun. Nous nous y mettons, n'est-ce pas, et nous ne nous désespérons point, si tout en combattant, tous nos désirs ne se réalisent pas de suite dans cette vie qui n'est autre chose qu'un combat. [...] bon courage et bonne réussite»<sup>28</sup>. Liszt «must have been cruelly disappointed», and he «between June 1853 and January 1854, did not conduct in Weimar at all»<sup>29</sup>. But Liszt was determined, and he wanted to succeed where Goethe and Hummel before him had failed. Supported by Carolyne, he used all his energies to pursue his aims. This is the reason why the Weimar years were so fertile, both in compositions and essays. This is even the reason why his defeat, and his departure from Weimar in 1861, caused him quite a long period of depression and seclusion. Anyway, this essay is still worthy of analysis, since all Liszt's ideas on music of the 1850s are summarised there, and it can therefore shed light on one of his most successful compositions, the *B minor Piano Sonata*, because, as Dalmonte summarised, «Ces écrits remplissent souvent une fonction de propagande, Liszt les rédigeant afin de justifier ses choix après du public; mais c'est aussi dans cette catégorie que l'on trouve la plus grande concentration d'idées sur la composition musicale et ses effets sur le public»<sup>30</sup>.

## Zum Streit über Berlioz' Werke<sup>31</sup>

In the first part, which constitutes the first chapter in Ramann's edition, it is possible to identify the following topics: a) The war in the ideas realm; b) the role

28 Liszt, Franz, Carl Alexander, *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander Grossherzog von Sachsen*, letter dated 17 February 1853, p. 42. It is worth pointing out that the letter is written in French.

29 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848–1861*, p. 164.

30 Dalmonte, Rossana, *Les révélations d'une traduction «fidèle»*, p. 326.

31 The titles of each paragraph of this analysis of the Berlioz-essay are taken from Lina Ramann's edition of 1882 (s. Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine "Harold-Symphonie"*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Lina Raman, Vol. IV). The quotations are taken directly from the original edition appeared on the *NZfM* in 1855.



Liszt created, aware or not, a link with the ancient idea of *Polemos*<sup>33</sup>. The link with this concept is strengthened by the relationship Liszt creates between the contemporary war and the ancient one in Athens – moreover this relationship underlines that the war is not just in the realm of ideas, and, above all, that this war will decide the future of the music. Furthermore, Liszt speaks about *Innerer Krieg*, a concept which, in its political meaning, means civil war, while in its philosophical meaning represents the commencement of thinking. On the other side, note that Liszt spent much time reading a lot of books during the 1830, including Plato:

Voici quinze jours que mon esprit et mes doigts travaillent comme deux damnés, – Homère, La Bible, Platon, Locke, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber sont tous à l'entour de moi. Je les étudie, les médite, le dévore avec fureur; [...]<sup>34</sup>.

And it is plausible that Liszt read *Protagoras* too. And it is in this dialogue that the idea of *polemos* is presented. But in this same dialogue there are two other themes which were dear to the composer: the myth of Prometheus, and the problem of virtue. The fascination with the Titan was already briefly discussed in the previous chapter. The problem of virtue is related to two other aspects, religion and progress. As a fervent Catholic, Liszt was at ease with the theological virtues, above all after his acquaintance with the princess Sayn-Wittgenstein. On the other hand, the civil virtues are related to a concept of progress according to which humanity is progressing towards the better. Under this light, progress means (and can only mean) moral advancement. As was just pointed out, Plato, in his *Protagoras*, did not just expose the myth of Prometheus and the virtue's problem, but he exposed the idea of *polemos* too, a main idea in ancient Greek philosophy. Related to the *polis* and directed outwards, this concept is the key for advancement, it is what brings progress and prosperity; conversely, if it is directed inwards, it is the most dangerous thing, because this leads to an absence of movement (*stasis*), which, in most cases, leads to the outbreak of violence (civil war). But this is the political analysis of the concept. On the philosophical side, *polemos* is related to the world of ideas, and it constitutes the premise of the most productive thinking-process, especially if it is inward-oriented, i.e.,

33 This word can be translated with *war* (*Polemos* was the god of war), but its root *pol* is constitute the basis of many words, such as *polemic*.

34 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Vom Paris bis Rom*, letter to Pierre Wolff dated 2 May 1832, Vol. I, p. 7.

if it used to conduct our own thoughts. In this last case it produces pairs of opposing concepts which in turn create harmony in the world – since their confrontation produce a balance between them. These few opening words assume a completely different meaning under this light, from which the sociologist Liszt emerges. As had happened in Athens, yet during Liszt's present time, people were only able to use these pairs of opposites in the field of reality. That produces an all against all war, where every person who wanted to think and to discuss, namely everyone who did not want to choose a party, was attacked, and therefore labelled as a traitor. Still, after so many centuries *polemos* only means *stasis*, negation of any dialectical movement. Liszt, pretending to be an impartial judge, affirmed the necessity for a real confrontation, which, as it will emerge in the following chapters, never took place. But these opening words assume yet another meaning, if one relates them to a passage from Liszt's essay on Schumann (1854), where it is possible to read: «In diesem Kampf mit sich selbst [Schumann's fight between classical form and his inner necessity] muß er viel gelitten haben»<sup>35</sup>. The "struggle with himself" is the positive side of *polemos*. Positive, but dangerous. If the composer is stuck in the dualism between Florestan and Eusebius, and he is not able to merge these two aspects of his personality (Meister Raro), the result cannot be anything else but a breakdown. Hence, the aim of Liszt in his Berlioz-essay is to show a possible path to salvation, an *Aufhebung* of the division between progress and reaction. This principle, which becomes an aesthetic rule, is expressed in a few lines:

„Der Künstler kann das Schöne außerhalb der Regeln der Schule verfolgen, ohne befürchten zu müssen, es dadurch zu verfehlen“<sup>36</sup>.

At its basis, this principle does not have a fearful veneration of the works of the ancient masters, neither a worried application of their rules of composition. The principle is based upon the research for beauty, and the composer has to search for it at any cost, even if that means leaving the path traced by the ancient masters. But who decides when and if a composer has left the right path? And according to which rules it is possible to establish it? And what exactly does "leaving the right path" mean? To underline that all these questions can only be answered from an ideological point of view, Liszt introduces in his writings words such as *Partei*, *Herrschaft*, *Verbannungsdekrete*, *Credo*, *Autoritäten*, *Musikalische Orthodoxie*,

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35 Liszt, Franz, *Robert Schumann*, in *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Julius Kapp, Vol. IV, p. 174.

36 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 25.

*Sekte, Dogma*<sup>37</sup>, which all refer to an ideologically oriented perspective. These expressions point out that those people who pretend to possess the greatest knowledge, and, therefore, that pretend to be the impartial judges are actually the less recommended figures who can decide upon the quality of new art expressions. The tradition and its guardians alone are not allowed to set the rules which, under their orthodoxy, become dogmas. Liszt's is fighting against this dogma, for the right of the young generation to find their own way, assuming the ancient rules as the starting point, i.e., to compose following one's own inclinations and ideas, it is necessary to know perfectly the works and the rules of the ancient masters. Anyway, Liszt continues, there is a group of people who decide what is right and what is wrong in the field of art production, even if no one assigned them this authority. They are the critics, which Liszt called *die Unproduktive*<sup>38</sup>. Here ends, after very few pages, Liszt's pretension of neutrality in the debate. This epithet is related to the idea of the critique developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to which only composers can create a positive critique. Contrarily, the professional critics, who possess a wide theoretical knowledge, but who have no idea of the problems involved in the compositional process, tried to understand and to set down on paper once and for all the general rules which govern a genre or a style. If one takes this position to its extremes, the result is that the composers have to follow the rules, which were created by these critics, so that they can ascribe their works to this or that style or genre. In this dictatorship of the negative critique the process of the art production is turned upside down. Liszt decided to affirm the opposite. In fact, after these few lines, in which he attacks the music orthodoxy, he introduces a speech about the role of the critique and its real meaning, using sharp words to describe the terrible service these unproductive men have done in the past, and in his present era:

[...] sie, die Unproduktive würde ja darin den beliebten Kanzelton gegen schaffende Künstler aufgeben, vom hohen Pferd herabsteigen, und der fatalen Nothwendigkeit nachgeben müssen, die Dinge einmal aus ihnen selbst heraus zu beurtheilen, statt ein Werk einzig vom herkömmlichen Standpunct richten zu wollen; sie würde sich gezwungen sehen mit der Aufrichtigkeit und dem guten Willen, die einzig zu vollem Verständniß zu bringen vermögen, den poetischen Intentionen zu

37 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, pp. 25–26.

38 The use of the word *unproductive* recalls the idea of Schumann on critique, i.e. only the musician could critique the music, because they know how the creative process works. Liszt is creating here a further distinction between him and his party on one side, and the others, the academics, on the other. Art is not a matter of science (see later in this chapter).

folgen, ehe sie sich für berechtigt hält eine Meinung über das Verfahren des Autors auszusprechen, sein Wollen und Können zu vergleichen; sie müßte aufhören gleich der Harpie die Beute zu beschmutzen, die sie in den Klauen hält, sie müßte so manchen Helfershelfern entsagen, die ihren Neid nicht zu Anerkennung hinaufzuschrauben vermögen<sup>39</sup>.

From this perspective, the voices that arose against Berlioz's works were due to a misconception of the role of the critique. In this false view, tradition is seen as the comparison element with which new works have to confront themselves. If they respond to the same aesthetic canon, then they are good works; if they introduced some kind of innovation, they are degenerated. The relationship between innovation and tradition will be debated by Liszt later on. Now he has to focus on his idea of a positive critique, because the defence of Berlioz and of the new generations pass through the foundation of a new conception of critique. This process is actually nothing new. In fact, to reach his aim, Liszt reports two quotations from two poets of two different epochs, namely from Jean de La Bruyère and François-René de Chateaubriand. The first, who in 1688 wrote his *Les Caractères ou Les Mœurs de ce Siècle*, stated:

Wie oft hindert das Wohlgefallen an der Kritik den Genuß des Schönen und Großen!<sup>40</sup>.

The critic as an obstacle to the perception of beauty. This is doubtless a first shaft against Hanslick. The quotation of La Bruyère is significant for another reason, too. He pronounced a speech at the *Académie* in which he defended the *anciens* against the *modernes*, but not because he was a conservative, but because of the excesses and the extravagance of his contemporaries. Therefore, La Bruyère, who was considered by his contemporaries too progressive in his production, assumes in Liszt's discourse the role of the impartial judge, a role which Liszt assigned to himself, since he, exactly as La Bruyère, on one side defended the ancient masters, and conversely was accused by his contemporaries of bringing excessive innovation into the musical field. The second poet from which Liszt quotes is Chateaubriand, who stated:

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39 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855. p. 26.

40 Bruyère, Jean de La, *Les Caractères ou Les Mœurs de ce Siècle*, Paris, Librairie de Firmin Didot Frères, 1851, p. 28. «Le plaisir de la critique nous ôte celui d'être vivement touchés de très-belles choses».

Es ist Zeit, daß eine Kritik der Vorzüge auf die Kritik der Mängel folge<sup>41</sup>.

La Bruyère, the «kaltblütige, scharfe Charakterbeobachter des siebzehnten», and Chateaubriand, the «enthusiastische Poet des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts»<sup>42</sup>, serve Liszt to recall the double meaning of the word “critique”. The first poet, identifies a more conventional meaning of the word, namely a conception in which the critique assumes the negative meaning of condemnation and blame. This quotation clearly shows a critique of the role of the critique, as something useless, that prevents our full appreciation of an artwork. Critique becomes a sort of hedonistic pleasure, critique for critique’s sake. On the other side, Chateaubriand gives back to the word its original value. Hence, critique means at the same time study, research, and blame and condemnation. Nowadays, according to Liszt, too many people only use the word in its negative meaning. But a change is necessary, a change that not only Chateaubriand firmly asked for, but that the philosopher Victor Cousin in his *Du Vrai, du Beau, du Bien* (1853) even marked as necessary<sup>43</sup>. Here Cousin recalls the Greek precept of the καλὸς κάγαθός (*Kalos kagathos*), of the beauty and of the good, which automatically involves the concept of truth – and, in some respects the idea of the intervention of a deity. What is good and beautiful is necessarily true, because both these features directly emanated from this same deity. This is the new trinity which Liszt involved in his speech, and that constitutes the background of this new idea of critique, namely a critique based on the idea of beauty:

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41 Chateaubriand, François-René de, *Œuvres complètes de M. le vicomte de Chateaubriand*, tome 201 : *Mélanges littéraires*, Ladvocat, Paris, 1826, p. 342: «Il était utile, sans doute, au sortir du siècle de la fausse philosophie, de traiter rigoureusement des livres et des hommes qui nous ont fait tant de mal, de réduire à leur juste valeur tant de réputations usurpées, de faire descendre de leur piédestal tant d'idoles qui requrent notre encens en attendant nos pleurs. Mais ne serait-il pas à craindre que cette sévérité continuelle de nos jugements ne nous fit contracter une habitude d'humeur dont il deviendrait malaisé de nous dépouiller ensuite ? Le seul moyen d'empêcher que cette humeur prenne sur nous trop d'empire, serait peut-être d'abandonner la petite et facile critique des défauts, pour la grande et difficile critique des beautés».

42 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 26.

43 Cousin, Victor, *Du vrai, Du beau, Du bien*. At the beginning of his book it is possible to read a sentence that could have captured Liszt attention too: «Nous ne pouvons accepter leur héritage que sous bénéfice d'inventaire. Notre premier devoir est donc de nous rendre compte de la philosophie du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, de reconnaître son caractère et ses principes, les problèmes qu'elle agitait et les solutions qu'elle en a données, de discerner enfin ce qu'elle nous transmet de vrai et de fécond, et ce qu'elle laisse aussi de stérile et de faux, pour embrasser l'un et rejeter l'autre d'un choix réfléchi», pp. 1–2.

Der Kunstrichter muß eine Klar sehende, aber innige Liebe zum Schönen besitzen: er muß ihm willig begegnen, es suchen, es begehren. Unschönes erkennen und darlegen ist ein trübseliges Vergnügen, eine undankbare Aufgabe. Dagegen das Schöne herausfühlen, sich von ihm durchdringen lassen, es anschaulich machen und anderen seine Empfindung mitteilen, ist ein hoher Genuß, eine edle Aufgabe. Bewunderung beglückt und ehrt zugleich den, der sie hegt. Sie beglückt ihn durch ein tiefes Gefühl des Schönen; sie ehrt ihn, weil er zur Erkenntnis desselben beiträgt<sup>44</sup>.

In this passage the aesthetics of Liszt are condensed, which are in open opposition to that of Hanslick. The latter, taken as a symbol of Liszt's opponents, is accused of being a mediocre intellect, who pursues mediocre tasks, namely to condemn, from his personal point of view, what is wrong with an artwork. Consequently, the critic participates in the spreading of mediocre in the world. The genuine critic is he who, with great passion and enthusiasm, spreads the beauty and its understanding into the world. This view of the role of the critic in society is perfectly consistent with the Lisztian idea of the role of the artist. If the artist is a prophet who has to lead people towards the moral amelioration, then he, in playing the role of the critic, cannot just bring to light what is wrong, because once people understand what they do not have to do, the wrong, they do not yet know what they have to do, the right. And this is the task of the artists, of the finest intellects and of the noblest hearts: to show what beauty is, what is right, and they have therefore to be to themselves an example of rectitude. Liszt recalls Chateaubriand to state again the necessity of a critique of the merit and virtue in opposition to the critique of the fault. This positive critique is even more important when its subject is a work, which is struggling with all the problems a new form brings with it:

Chateaubriand fühlte schon die Nothwendig, die Kritiker zu machen, dass sie ihre Aufgabe edler erfüllen, aller Schwerwilligkeit und systematisch gepflegten

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44 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 27. «Outre l'imagination et la raison, l'homme de goût doit posséder l'amour éclairé mais ardent de la beauté: il faut qu'il se complaise à la rencontrer, qu'il la cherche, qu'il l'appelle. Comprendre et démontrer qu'une chose n'est point belle, plaisir médiocre, tâche ingrate; mais discerner une belle chose, s'en pénétrer, la mettre en évidence et faire partager à d'autre son sentiment, jouissance exquise tâche généreuse. L'admiration est à la fois pour celui qui l'éprouve un bonheur et un honneur. C'est un bonheur de sentir profondément ce qui est beau; c'est un honneur de savoir le reconnaître. L'admiration est le signe d'une raison élevée servie par un noble cœur». Cousin, Victor, *Du Vrai, du Beau, du Bien*, pp. 152–153.



Kurzichtigkeit entsagen möchten, wenn sie mit Werken zu tun haben, die mit allen den Schwierigkeiten kämpfen, denen das Auftreten neuer Formen ausgesetzt ist, die aber gerade deswegen das Recht beanspruchen das Neue erkannt zu wissen welches sie bieten, ein Verdienst das man bei allem Herummäkeln und Kritteln nicht unter der Last bombastischer Phrasen begraben, und einstiger gerechter Anerkennung entziehen kann<sup>45</sup>.

And Liszt concludes this passage with a prophetic sentence: «Der Tag wird kommen». He is confident that one day the critique will finally be something useful both for the arts, the artists, and society. This sentence echoes his *Ich kann warten*. Unfortunately, both these fully confident in the future sentences would be contradicted by the lifelong hostilities against which Liszt had to defend his compositions. Consequently, the new critics have a very relevant role, and their task is even more complicated when they have to deal with something new. Liszt shows here an incredible historical awareness, because he states that if one can aesthetically judge an innovative composition – namely one can say if it is nice or not to the ears –, one cannot judge its aesthetical value, because, in order to provide an impartial verdict of it, a period of sedimentation is necessary – namely a period in which the innovations are allowed the time to be fully understood. This is of course a topic of the first relevance in Liszt's discourse, but before entering into this matter, he exploits the term “new” to begin a digression on the evolution of the music.

The theme of the new, which goes side by side with the problem of the form, brings Liszt to ask an epistemological question, namely if music was always as we nowadays know it: «War die Musik immer das, was sie heute ist? Gehorchte sie stets denselben Gesetzen, entzückte sie durch dieselben Reize? Hat sie immer denselben Charakter beibehalten?»<sup>46</sup>. This question automatically involves the concept of “change”; and when this changing takes a precise direction it becomes “improvement” or even “progress”. This underlines that Liszt's point of view is very fascinating, since he is not interested in rewriting the history of music. Instead, he creates an interesting list of people who, in the past and in the present, yelled that music was dead. And this yelling involves a different and opposite concept of progress. The theoreticians of every epoch developed a canon – in this case this means the opposite of what was already explained in the previous chapter, namely it describes here a series of rules that the composers have to follow –, and music has to adhere to this canon if it strives for recognition as

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45 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 27.

46 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 28.

a beautiful art. Consequently, art lives in every epoch on the belief that it has reached its final stage, namely its highest development, and that no further improvement is possible. But, during this same time, a composer appears who stretches these rules, creating then something new. At this point the theoreticians, who could not understand the necessity of what they identify as a crime against the Art (with a capital A), complain that music relentlessly declines, and that it leaves the old, sure, and beautiful path traced by the ancient masters. Thereafter – and this point represents a very sharp critique against the role of the theoreticians – the future generations of theoreticians will regard, *a posteriori*, to this improvement phase, and they will describe it as a natural process of evolution, which permitted the birth of the music of the present time. Of course, they regarded this last phase as the final stage of the art, and so on. This is a never-ending circle of improvement and formalisation of this improvement, which anachronistically creates a cyclical conception of history. It is interesting to point out the sarcastic tone with which Liszt reproached these theoreticians in this passage: «Und wenn sie [the music of one epoch] nichts destoweniger eine Erweiterung erleiden, einen Fortschritt machen müßte, kamen dann nicht immer die Herren Magister *a posteriori* nachgehinkt, die sie ein für einmal als unverbesserlich, perfect erklärten?»<sup>47</sup>. This passage could be read, following the suggestion of Lazzerini Belli, as a critique of Hegel. The philosopher, as already noted, stated that his philosophy represents the highest point ever reached, and no one would ever exceed him. The idea that the 19<sup>th</sup> century represents the highest point of humanity was a common one among the German speaking philosophers. For example, Schopenhauer wrote, summarising the thought of his rival Hegel, that «Über mich kann man wohl in der Breite, aber nicht in der Tiefe hinaus»<sup>48</sup>. The idea of a humanity which has reached its highest development finds its expression in the theory of the end of history, of which Hegel can be considered one of the founders. Liszt, conversely, believed that there is no limit to progress and amelioration. Here his idea of *Fortschritt* emerges (Liszt used the words *Fortschritt*, *Erweiterung*, and *Verbesserung* as synonyms), and he uses it to explain the history of music not as something fixed once and for all, but as a process, whose forces are inexorably proceeding. It is exactly from this idea of progress acting in history thanks to those men of genius that Liszt attacks all of Berlioz's detractors, starting from the words Rossini used to praise the French master as example. It is well known that the swan of Pesaro spoke these words: «Das ist keine Musik mehr! [...] Es ist ein großes Glück,

47 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 28.

48 Schopenhauer, Arthur, *Die Kunst zu beleidigen*, C.H. Beck, München, 2016, p. 93.

daß dieser junge Mann keine Musik macht, denn in diesem Falle möchte Sie verteufelt schlecht ausfallen!»<sup>49</sup> Liszt is trying to prove that his reasoning has a solid basis, i.e., contemporary musicians criticise the innovators, because they tend to preserve the old rules, which they cannot overtake. This introduction serves to outline the teleological movement of the musical materials to Liszt, namely to inform the readers that music was not as it is nowadays, and that it will always progress. Consequently, he states that the critics who cry out that music is fading, are a part of this process, but he even underlines that they are not to be taken seriously. To prove that music has evolved, Liszt chose the most complicated way. In fact, he breaks out with an ontological question, «Was ist denn schließlich die Musik?»<sup>50</sup>, which is immediately abandoned in the subsequent lines in favour of a religious, mystical, view on music, which is conceived as a trinity. This trinity is formed by the following elements: rhythm, melody, harmony – not surprisingly they are the same musical elements that Hegel analyses in his *Vorlesungen*. And as a trinity it acts: «die Musik selbst, gleich einer Gottheit mit mannichfachen Attributen, bleibt in ihrer Wesenheit einfach; sie ist eine Dreieinigkeit deren Einzelelemente wir soeben genannt haben, die aber als eine einzige, untheilbare besteht»<sup>51</sup>. This definition recalls Liszt's idea of music as something spiritual [*geistlich*], something that cannot be explained through rules and theories. Hence, from this depiction a conception of music emerges as something mystic, something that is closer to the category of beliefs, than that of human rationality. This idea clearly comes from Liszt's religious education. But this passage shows more than that. It emphasises the relationship of music with something magical, as if it were not entirely human. The mystical conception of art, far from being something new, was actually quite common among a portion of the Romantic Generation. And even the formalists were not completely alien to this romantic cliché. Wrote Hanslick:

Form und Charakter des Gehörten verlieren ganz ihre Bedeutung [...], wir können uns nicht loswinden von seinen Klängen, – nicht mehr das Tonstück fühlen wir, sondern die Töne selbst, die Musik als gestaltlos dämonische Gewalt, wie sie mit Zauberaugen glühend an die Nerven unseres ganzen Leibes rückt.<sup>52</sup>

49 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 28.

50 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 28.

51 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 28.

52 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854, p. 59.

Even if Hanslick is speaking here of peculiar states of mind, what is relevant are the magical qualities conferred to music. Music possesses an intrinsic power, which is unknowable to men, but whose effects are evident. Neither the psychologists, nor the physiologists, concludes Hanslick, were able to explain the effect of music on the human nervous system. Aside from that, it is noteworthy to underline that a man like Hanslick, who pretended to create a science of music – and this is the reason why he appeals several times to psychology and to physiology –, namely a musicology with precise rules and laws exactly as those of physics and chemistry, described the act of composition as a kind of magical process governed by unknowable rules, which only the intellect of the composers of genius is able to grasp, but, again, not to explain:

Es gibt keine Kunst, welche so bald so viele Formen verbraucht, wie die Musik. Modulationen, Cadenzen, Intervallenfortschreitungen. Harmoniefolgen nützen sich in 50, ja 30 Jahren dergestalt ab, dass der geistvolle Componist sich deren nicht mehr bedienen kann und fortwährend zur Erfindung neuer, rein musikalischer Züge gedrängt wird. [...] Die Phantasie des geistreichen Künstlers wird nun aus den geheim-ursprünglichen Beziehungen der musikalischen Elemente und ihrer unzählbar möglichen Combinationen die feinsten, verborgensten entdecken, sie wird Tonformen bilden, die aus freister Willkür erfunden und doch zugleich durch ein unsichtbar feines Band mit der Nothwendigkeit verknüpft erscheinen. Solche Werke oder Einzelheiten derselben werden wir ohne Bedenken „geistreich“ nennen<sup>53</sup>.

Afterwards, once Liszt has established that music is a trinity composed of rhythm, melody, and harmony, he states that these elements always progress together, exactly as an organism: if during a period of time rhythm progresses more than the other two, then, in the subsequent period melody and harmony will progress faster, in order to reach the same level of progress of the rhythm, and so on. Following these premises, Liszt concludes that, since music acts as an organism, then its elements have to follow some kinds of rules of nature, according to which they always find their balance. With this statement Liszt considers the ontological matter solved, and he can in turn come back on the initial matter, namely the problem of the so called “end of music”, in order to solve it. He starts from a series of examples. Spontini did not appreciate Weber, of whom he never wanted to conduct a work; Cherubini, who laughed and commented

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53 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854, p. 42.

with a “kannitverstan”<sup>54</sup> on Berlioz’s works<sup>55</sup>. But the history of music is full of examples from which clearly emerge this negative attitude directed towards the new generations. For example, Liszt reports, in 1704 Benedetto Marcello warned that «die Musik geht unter!»; and Rameau, some decades later, in 1760 stated that «die Musik ist verloren»<sup>56</sup>. Luckily in our present day, says Liszt, we even have theoreticians who studied the phenomenon, and they are therefore able to explain these shouts and cries, these *Requiem* for the dying music:

Die Musik nährt sich von Gemüthsbewegungen. Diese sind um so lebhafter, je mannigfaltiger sie sind. Sei werden schnell abgenutzt, weil bei der fortgesetzten Gewöhnung an den Genuß dieser Kunst das Bedürfnis des Neuen sich hier schneller als bei jeder anderen fühlbar macht. Daher das Interesse an ihren Umwälzungen, der Enthusiasmus, den sie erregen; daher auch die Klagen jener, welche die gewohnten Formen für die einzig zulässigen halten, daher die so oft erneuerten Weherufe: die Musik geht zu Grunde, die Musik ist verloren!, die eben doch nur bedeuten, *daß die Musik eine andere Form angenommen hat*<sup>57</sup>.

From this last quotation another idea of progress emerges, which was well known to Liszt, and of which he was a supporter. Many historians noted that when a

54 The word comes from the expression “Ik kan niet verstaan” (I don’t understand), and it is taken from the novel written by Johann Peter Hebel in 1808.

55 It is well known that Cherubini did not appreciate the music of Berlioz, and of any other progressive composer. In his *Memoire* (chapter XXXI) Berlioz tells us an anecdote in which it is clear what the thoughts of the Italian master were: «Eh bien, monsieur Cherubini, vous ne venez pas entendre la nouvelle composition de Berlioz? — Zé n’ai pas besoin d’aller savoir comment il né faut pas faire!».

56 These quotations are very often reported in a huge series of articles and writings (*Musée de familles: lectures du soir*, Bureaux du Musée des Familles, 1841, p. 275; François Henri Joseph Blaze, *Dictionnaire de musique moderne*, *L’Académie de musique*, 1828, p. 20; Joseph Henri Mees, *Abreégé historique sur la musique moderne depuis le quatrième siècle*, p. 20), but always miss the original source. Most likely Liszt took these quotations from the book *Curiosités Historiques de la musique, complément nécessaire de La Musique mise à la portée de tout le monde* (pp. 1–2) written by François-Joseph Fétis where it is possible to find exactly the same quotations.

57 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 30. The quotation is from the book *Curiosités Historiques de la musique, complément nécessaire de La Musique mise à la portée de tout le monde* by François-Joseph Fétis, Paris, Janet et Cotelle libraires, 1830, pp. 3–4: «La musique vit d’émotions. Celles-ci sont d’autant plus vives qu’elles sont plus variées. Elles s’usent promptement, parce que, l’usage de cet art étant habituel, le besoin de nouveauté s’y fait sentir plus souvent que dans tout autre. De là l’intérêt qu’on prend à ces révolutions et l’enthousiasme qu’elles excitent. De là aussi les regrets de ceux qui considèrent les formes auxquelles ils sont accoutumés comme les seules admissibles, et ces exclamations: *la musique se perd! La musique est perdue!* Qui signifient seulement que la musique a changé de forme». Italic is mine.

civilisation dies, a new one arises. But the discoveries and the achievements of the former one are not lost forever, but rather they are taken up, and brought forth, by the newcomers. Sustained by this theory, Liszt stated that the same process is to be found in music: when a style, or a genre, disappears, then a new one – or a modified version of it – comes to fill the gap left by the predecessor. This happens because man cannot progress through simple imitation. Consequently, the achievements of a civilisation, or of a generation, have to be used as a starting point to develop new, and more suitable solutions. Every new generation has to find its own way to solve its own problems every time. This theory of progress is exposed by Liszt several times in different writings, but it finds its clearer formulation in the essay on the Goethe-Foundation:

Nous croyons que l'homme, dans ses efforts collectifs comme dans ses recherches individuelles, ne peut arriver à ce mérite d'une perfection quelconque et à cette gloire enviable que par des voies toujours diverses, qu'une triste nécessité l'oblige de toujours découvrir<sup>58</sup>.

There is certainly some melancholy to this statement, since man has to restart the process every time. The problems humanity encounters need different solutions every time. One can surely look to the past to find inspiration, but the lesson one learns is not enough to reach a new peak. The solutions found by the ancient generations, are not useful any more to the new ones. The path of progress seems to be ruled by Sisyphus. The statement of Fétis is actually based on the same premises which were common among every evolutionist during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that Nisbet summarised as follows:

What are these premises? They are drawn from the metaphor of growth, from the analogy of change in society to change in the growth process of the individual organism. Six seem to me the most constitutive and far-reaching in their relation to the theories of the major social evolutionists in the century. *Change is natural* [...]. *Change is directional* [...]. *Change is immanent* [...]. *Change is continuous* [...]. *Change is necessary* [...]. *Change proceeds from uniform causes*<sup>59</sup>.

Progress is natural and no one can stop it; innovation is a necessity in order to survive. But how can one recognise it? Here comes one of the most interesting parts of the essay. Liszt begins to debate the role of the public and the critics in

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58 Liszt, Franz, *De la Fondation-Goethe*, p. 33.

59 Nisbet, Robert A., *Social change and History*, pp. 166–182.

the recognition process of the “new” in music. If the new in music shows up through new forms, critics and public must recognise and understand them in order to appreciate them. However, what is the meaning of these new forms? When is a form in music really new? For example, is the form of the *B minor Piano Sonata* really something new, or is it rather new wine in old bottles? To answer the question it is necessary to remember that progress, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was conceived as a cumulative process. Consequently, it is quite impossible to speak about something really “new” in this field. Furthermore, as previously stated, every new generation has an initial knowledge, constituted by the achievements of the previous ones. From these premises it follows that every “new” actually brings with it a more or less relevant part of the past. But if a typical form of a specific period is based upon the assumption that it is the most advanced form, and that no improvement is possible, it becomes a dogma. A dogma labels every “new” as something strange and as a corruption of the costumes, as degenerated. The form becomes a stiffened thought, and the public and the critics become addicted to it. Consequently, they are not able to understand or recognise anything else aside from it. The habit makes critics lazy. Instead of finding the features of the old forms which are still alive into the new ones, they prefer to banish everything they do not immediately understand or appreciate – namely to banish everything that does not perfectly fit the formal schemes they support. Music becomes a dogmatic religion. Public and critics become devoted followers of this new creed. But, as proved by the Middle Ages<sup>60</sup>, innovation always finds its way, even if it has to wait many decades or centuries. The most famous example in the history of music comes from Beethoven. Nowadays the master of Bonn is recognised as one of the most relevant composers of all time, and no one would deny it. But during his lifetime some of his works were labelled, by the *Herren Magister*, as grotesque and bizarre. It is exactly there, Liszt continues, namely where one finds something strange, that one has to search for the activity of the genius. Of course, eccentricity could even be the mask of mediocrity, but according to Liszt there is a method to discern the former from the latter:

*Seltsamkeit* wird immer das sublime beneidenswerthe Unglück jedes musikalischen Genius sein, nicht an und für sich selbst, sondern als unzertrennlich von der wirklichen Erfindung. Genie und Erfindung ist eines; Erfindung und Neuerung geht aber über das Bekannte hinaus, und erscheint dann vielen Augen seltsam. Die Schwierigkeit besteht darin, die Fälle wohl zu unterscheiden, wo diese Seltsamkeit nur eine

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60 See p. 90 and ff.

Zuflucht geistiger Armuth, eine Maske ist, hinter welcher sich ein nichtssagendes Gesicht versteckt, oder wo sie unvermeidliche Folge einer neuen Gefühlsweise und der neuen Form ist, welche diese nothwendig macht. Nur seinen Intelligenzen vermögen ist es gegeben sie dann zu erkennen, nur der Zukunft vorbehalten, die Behauptung dieser zu bestätigen<sup>61</sup>.

Liszt proves in this passage to be a forerunner. *Seltsamkeit* will always be the enviable misfortune of the genius. He identifies the relevance of the relationship between *strangeness* and *invention*. Liszt is here saying that every genuine innovation appears to people as something unusual. The interdependence between genius and strangeness is identified, many years after Liszt, by Harold Bloom. The American critic, in his previously quoted book *The Western Canon*, states that the greatest works of Western literature have only one common feature: unfamiliarity. In his book Bloom analysed twenty-six writers, from Dante to Samuel Beckett, searching for what makes these authors canonical.

With most of these twenty-six writers, I have tried to confront greatness directly: to ask what makes the author and the works canonical. The answer, more often than not, has turned out to be strangeness, a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange. Walter Pater defined Romanticism as adding strangeness to beauty, but I think he characterized all canonical writing rather than the Romantics as such. [...] When you read a canonical work for a first time you encounter a stranger, an uncanny *startlement* rather than a fulfillment of expectations<sup>62</sup>.

Hence, if an artist strives for recognition, and aims for a place in the canon, then he has to deal with strangeness. A true artist, who works following his vocation, will always bring innovations within his work. Innovation means that the artist uses a form in a way which goes beyond what is already known. Therefore, people will look to the genius with suspicion, because he is bringing something “unfamiliar”, and this “unfamiliar” inevitably sounds as something strange. The suspicious attitude is not to be regarded as a negative behaviour towards the new music – unless it is an *a priori* attitude against any new – but as a defence mechanism. In fact, Liszt warns us, sometimes strangeness is the sanctuary of mediocrity. Because it is very hard to immediately recognize when the strangeness is the outcome of the work of a genius, and when it is the out-

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61 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 30.

62 Bloom, Harold, *The Western Canon*, p. 3.



come of a mediocre composer. Liszt identifies two ways to solve the problem: 1) he says that our intelligence is able to recognise when it is an expression of the former or of the latter. And here our intelligence has to be sustained by our instinct. This solution is consequently not very sure – here the word of Liszt resembles those of Cousin<sup>63</sup>; 2) the last word about the strangeness of a new composition can only be declared by history. Only future generations will be able to say if the strangeness actually was the outcome of a genius, or the trick of a mediocre mind.

The element of Liszt's historical awareness emerges in this passage with all its strength, and it has more than one implication, because here is where it is possible to operate an inversion of the point of view on the idea of *Zukunftsmusik*. Liszt used the term to identify the artists of his circle, and, more generally, all the progressive musicians. It is here unnecessary to open a parenthesis on who was considered part of this group, and who was not, or on the differences that this expression assumes in Liszt and in Wagner. For the purpose of this dissertation it is sufficient to analyse this term for his literary meaning, and thereafter to operate an inversion of its meaning. The word *Zukunftsmusik* is usually translated to the expression "music of the future." If one takes these words in their literal value, it is possible to state that it creates nonsense, a contradiction. It is a contradiction since the compositions of Liszt, or of any other progressive composer, do exist; they are an historical fact and they resounded in Liszt's present time. Under the light of progress, a music of the future represents nonsense too. First of all, because the path of progress is unknowable, exactly because no one can predict with exactitude which direction it will take. Consequently, a music which pretend to be "of the future" is impossible, exactly because no one can predict what music will be. It is at this point that an inversion of the meaning of this term is necessary, and, furthermore, more consistent with the overall theoretical building elaborated by Liszt. Hence, it is possible to turn the concept of *Musik der Zukunft* [music of the future] into *Musik für die Zukunft* [music for the future], basing this inversion upon some of the most recurring expressions used by Liszt, such as «Ich kann Warten», or «Der Tag wird kommen»<sup>64</sup>. This idea is strictly related to the one of a sedimentary process. As already seen for the symbol in *Chapter II*, it is possible to state that

63 See footnote 43.

64 The motto «Der Tag wird kommen» is used by Liszt at the beginning of his essay on Belrizo. The words «Ich kann warten» were used by the Hungarian pianist several times during his life. He used them to comment the negative reception of his *Sonata*, as reported, among others, by Paul Bekker in his essay *Franz Liszt Reconsidered*, p. 187; but the main sources of this expression are: Ramann, Lina, *Franz Liszt, Die Jahre 1848 bis 1886*, Vol. II, p. 475; and

the musical language itself is the output of a long sedimentary process. Every innovation, where innovation is a different use of the old forms and materials, leaves the critics, the public, some musicians and composers puzzled in the beginning. That happens because every form, in order to fix its rules and its style, needs an experimentation period. During this time composers discard the material they do not need. It is during this period that a form, which is not yet set once for and all, lives its highest freedom. Exactly for this reason, namely for the absence of rules, this first moment is the most problematic. But when a form reaches its final stage, namely when its main features are identified by theoreticians, it becomes widely accepted, and therefore easily recognisable. But, since the form, from the composer's point of view, is always progressing – from this perspective it could even be said that the form does not exist – this last stage coincides with its decline. This process, which was already described by Hanslick<sup>65</sup>, finds a more complex and complete formulation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the contribution of Adorno<sup>66</sup>. That is exactly because every “new” needs a certain period of time to be understood. It has to break down a wall of scepticism to be accepted, and for itself to become part of the norm – in this case “norm” is to be intended as a synonym of standard procedure, of convention, and not as a synonym of formula. The critics and the public, on their sides, need time to familiarise with these new forms, namely their minds need a sedimentation period. This happened to the last works of Beethoven, and the same happened to Liszt. The same faith would be shared by the works of Schönberg, etc. Consequently, the simple sentence «Ich kann warten» has the power to overturn the meaning of *Zukunftsmusik*. It does not mean that a music from the future is materialising in the present, but that a music that already exists, namely a music which is the result of a long sedimentation process, is addressed more to the future generations than to the present ones. This kind of music will only be understood in the future, exactly because it finds itself in the middle of the experimentation period, which needs a sedimentation period to separate the strangeness of the mediocre from the invention of the genius.

The strangeness as the hallmark of the genius is strictly related to the problem of the form which is, as already said, the real topic of Liszt's essay. What is new in the symphonic poems, or in the music of Berlioz, and of the *Neudeutsche*

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Lachmund, Carl, *Living with Liszt*, p. 300; here the quotation is reported in another form, i.e. «Wir können warten».

65 See footnote 53.

66 Adorno devoted some passages of his *Ästhetische Theorie* and of his *Philosophie der neuen Musik* to the concepts of new, decline, necessity, and innovation of the musical language.

*Schule*, is not that they have an extra-musical programme, but their form, and the fact that the musical material is organised in new ways. The musician of genius is an innovator, because he must express his individuality in this or that form, because he feels it as a necessity. He cannot avoid it. To underline this point Liszt recalls a motto attributed to Lorenzo Ricci, «*Sint, ut sunt, aut non sint!*». This quotation serves Liszt to create a bridge to the second chapter of the article. In these last two paragraphs he defends Berlioz, and at the same time he introduces the main subject of the article, namely programme music. As already seen, programme music is just an example made in order to point out that musicians have to follow their creativity, namely that they have to discover new forms. Liszt introduces the discourse on the programme explaining its function, i.e., the programme is used to clarify to the listener the thoughts, the images, the feelings, that the composer had in mind during the composition. The programme then provides to the public the guidelines on the thoughts of the artist. It is a means with which the public can come closer to the state of mind of the composer. Anyway, this is an *a posteriori* justification: the programme exists, and this is its function. But Liszt knows how to carry on a polemic speech, and then he underlines two more points:

Ist sie [the programme] eine Erscheinung ohne jeglichen Vorgang, ohne frühere ähnliche Beispiele? Ist sie ein bei Berlioz allein sich findendes Phänomen, eine ausnahmsweises Vorkommniß und knüpft es sich an keinen vorbereitenden Versuch? Welche sind sodann die schlimmen Folgen, die der Kunst aus ihr erwachsen könnten? Welches mißliche Uebel wird sie im Geleit führen? Mit anderene Worten: hat daß Programm eine Berechtigung, da zu sein? Kann es sein Bestehen verantworten?<sup>67</sup>.

One has to keep in mind these two questions, because during the analysis of the second part of his article, how Liszt tried to answer the matter will emerge. In doing that he had to face two further problems: 1) he had to walk backwards through the history of music searching for the programme prodrome, in order to historically justify it, and thereafter 2) he even had to justify it philosophi-

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67 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 37. In the Ramann's version of 1882 the first lines of this quotation was changed as follow: «[...] ob sie [the programm] eine Erscheinung ohne *jeglichen historischen Vorgang*, [...]». Even if the change is not substantial, it is here to underline the relevance of the *historisch*, since the historical awareness plays a very relevant role both in Liszt's theroeris on musical evolution and in the thesis on the progress of the presnet work.

cally, namely he had to answer the ontological question about the right to the existence of programme music itself.

## Zur Programmfrage der Instrumentalmusik

Der Meister kann die Form zerbrechen  
Mit weiser Hand, zur rechten Zeit,  
Doch wehe, wenn in Flammenbächen  
Das glühnde Erz sich selbst befreyt!<sup>68</sup>

Since this essay is a journal article, the second chapter of this writing opens with a recapitulation in which Liszt recalls the meaning of the programme: any kind of preface, written in an understandable language, which the composer attaches to his music in order to guide the interpretation of the listeners towards the ideas which inspired the work<sup>69</sup>. The programme is a tool in the hands of musicians to prevent mystifications, and to bring the listener as close as possible to the “real” meaning of the work. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century some critics were used to describing some pure instrumental works by assigning them fictive characterisers and stories, namely, they used what was described in *Chapter II* as the metaphorical perception of music as a methodological tool. If some suggestions which emerged from this operation could be useful for the performer to reach a better interpretation of the work, conversely, they have the immediate effect of giving rise to ridiculous misinterpretations, as it will emerge later on.

As already stated, every text, especially if it is a poetic one, possesses different interpretations. Explaining a form of art through another form of art is to look into a mirror through a mirror. It creates an endless network of references from which it would be impossible to escape. But the problem of the interpretation is a quite modern one, and it would be a mistake to apply this reasoning to Liszt’s point of view. Although a poetic text is by its own nature open to many

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68 Schiller, J.C.F., *Das Lied von der Glocke*, in *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1800*, J.G. Cotta’schen Buchhandlung, Tübingen, 1799, p. 260.

69 The programme is described as «irgend ein der rein-instrumentalen Musik in verständlicher Sprache beigefügtes Vorwort, mit welchem der Komponist bezweckt, die Zuhörer gegenüber seinem Werke vor der Willkür poetischer Auslegung zu bewahren und die Aufmerksamkeit im Voraus auf die poetische Idee des Ganzes, auf einen besonderen Punkt desselben hinzu lenken».

different interpretations, it is somehow undeniable that the general atmosphere which poetry is able to evoke is more or less the same for every reader. That is exactly the core of Liszt's reasoning. The programme is therefore not used to assign a univocal interpretation of a work. Liszt is not working against the intrinsic open character of the artwork, namely he is not working against the concept of *Mehrdeutigkeit* – which is, and he was perfectly aware of this, a gold mine for composers. Therefore, he emphasises several times that the programme must evoke an atmosphere, a general feeling that must be as close as possible to the one experienced by the composer during the act of creation. Before answering the ontological question, Liszt has to justify the programme on the historical evolutionary line. This is his opening statement:

Das Programm [...] ist so wenig von Berlioz erfunden, daß wir ihm schon vor der Haydn'schen Periode begegnen<sup>70</sup>.

To support this thesis Liszt exploits the authority of one of the most relevant composers of the previous century, Johann Sebastian Bach – who during that time enjoyed his first period of posthumous glory – and his *Capriccio sopra la lontananza del fratello diletissimo* (BWV. 992) as an example of early programme music. This work was composed before 1705 and it represents a unicum among Bach's production, because it is the only composition with programmatic subtitles<sup>71</sup>:

1. Ist eine Schmeichelung der Freunde, um denselben von seiner Reise abzuhalten. Arioso, Adagio
2. Ist eine Vorstellung unterschiedlicher Casuum, die ihm in der Fremde könnten vorkommen
3. Ist ein allgemeines Lamento der Freunde. Adagissimo
4. All hier kommen die Freunde, weil sie doch sehen, dass es anders nicht sein kann, und nehmen Abschied
5. Aria di Postiglione. Adagio poco
6. Fuga all'imitazione della cornetta di postiglione

70 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, pp. 37–38.

71 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 38, footnote. Most likely Liszt reported the titles without having the score under his eyes, because they do not coincide with the original ones assigned by Bach.

Liszt is perfectly aware that this example is not enough to historically justify the programme, precisely because this is an exception among Bach's opus, and it is an early work, although a masterpiece. Therefore, Liszt produces a list of other, older composers, the ancient masters, whose works involve some kind of description or evocative title. He chronologically lists works of Clément Janequin, and Philippe Verdelot for the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>72</sup>; of Johann Jakob Froberger, and Johann Kuhnau for the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>73</sup>; of François Couperin for the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>74</sup>; and, in the last paragraph of this long footnote, he conclude:

In den Jahren, welche zwischen Händel's und Haydn's Blüthezeit liegen, finden wir öfters Orgelcompositionen und andere Instrumentalstücke mit einem, ihren Charakter und Zweck andeutenden Titel versehen. Es sind Stürme, Meerfahrten etc. in ihnen beschrieben<sup>75</sup>.

From the recapitulation at the beginning of the second chapter, and from this footnote, Liszt's idea of the programme clearly emerges. Everything could be a programme; a painting, a sculpture, a novel, a poem, or even a simple evocative title. What is strange in this long footnote is that Liszt used most of the space to report the programme of Bach's and Kuhnau's work, and he missed informing the reader of other, and probably more pertinent works. Surprisingly a lot of composers are missing from this list, such as Vivaldi, Tartini, Rameau, Frescobaldi. But we have to keep in mind that he is writing an article for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, and he has a precise target audience. Probably the readers of the *NZfM* were more familiar with names such as that of Bach and Kuhnau, than with those previously listed. Above all, Liszt was trying to root

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72 Liszt refers to the *Le dixième livre de chanson de plusieurs célèbres musiciens* printed in Anvers, 1545.

73 Liszt reports the word which Johann Mattheson used to describe the music of Froberger, stating that he «hat auf dem bloßen Claviere ganze Geschichten, mit Abmalung der dabei gegenwärtig gewesen und Theil daran nehmenden Personen, sammt ihren Gemüthseigenschaften, gar wohl vorzustellen gewußt». Johann Kuhnau composed a biblical history in six sonatas with a programme:

Sonata I Der Streit zwischen David und Goliath (C major)

Sonata II Der von David vermittelst der Music curirte Saul (G Dorian mode)

Sonata III Jacobs Heyrath (G major)

Sonata IV Der todtkrancke und wieder gesunde Hiskias (C Dorian mode)

Sonata V Der Heyland Israelis, Gideon (F major)

Sonata VI Jacobs Tod und Begräbniß (E♭ major)

74 Liszt claims that the *Pièces de clavecin* (1713–1730) are almost all programmatic because of their evocative title.

75 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 38.

the birth of programme music to the German musical tradition. Namely, he was trying to state that it was something natural, the most spontaneous outcome of the evolution of German music, and, furthermore to state that it was something which the German composers had already used. Liszt's reasoning is based, here as well as in many other points of his article, on a fallacy, since he appeals to an *argumentum ab auctoritate* (appeal to authority). If Bach (the authority) used the programme, and if we appreciate his music, then modern composers have the same right to use the programme, and the same right to search for public recognition. But here it is necessary to make a distinction between the "ancient" use of the programme and the modern one. Even if Liszt wrote, trying in this way to anticipate a possible objection, that these old «Programme sind knapp gehalten»<sup>76</sup>, there is a fundamental difference between them and Liszt's conception – and Liszt seems to be aware of this too, since he states that one does not have to compare these old programmes with the new ones, but just that one has to keep them in mind as forerunners, as the place where the new ones come from. If one looks at the titles of the "programmatic" compositions of Couperin, Rameau, Janequin, but even those of Vivaldi, or Tartini, it clearly emerges that they are a description of something. That is related to the concept of *mimesis*, of mimetic art. Of course, this idea is a very old one, and it comes from Aristotle, according to which art consists basically in the imitation of nature. This statement influenced the aesthetic debate at least till the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century music was programmatic because composers tried to insert into their works some elements directly derived from nature. They are not pure imitation, but nature is mediated, and she enters the music through the mind of the composer. This is even an expedient to expand musical possibilities. Compositional rules were very strict at that time. Consequently, the expedient of the imitation of nature was used to introduce sounds and harmonies which were prohibited by these rules, but which were permitted in these special cases. It is also worth remembering that music, always fighting against an inferiority complex before the other arts and always considered, still during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, more as a *téchne* (practical knowledge) than as an art, tried to elevate itself by binding itself to, or imitating other artistic products. Concluding, the historical justification brought by Liszt is very weak. Furthermore, the operation he attempted to perform could even be described as reactionary. Liszt, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely in the middle of the emancipation of music from any extra-musical reference, tried to relate music to extra-musical works, denying

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76 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie*, 1882, p. 23.

in this way the self-subsistence for which music had been fighting for, for many centuries. Of course, Liszt's use of the programme does not go in this direction, and it is exactly for this reason that the examples he furnished are not completely appropriate. The last statement of the footnote and, more generally, the idea of programme music so far expressed by Liszt could be summarised with a sentence of Rainer Kleinertz, «all music is programmatic (in a broader sense)»<sup>77</sup>. And it is here, with this definition of programme, that it is possible to find a first common point with the autonomists. According to Hanslick's view, music is not able to evoke precise feelings or images. Music «vermag die Bewegung eines physischen Vorganges nach den Momenten», but this «Bewegung ist aber nur eine Eigenschaft, ein Moment des Gefühls, nicht dieses selbst»<sup>78</sup>. This statement finds its foundation in a well-known concept, namely the difference between “feeling” (*Gefühl*) and “inner climate”, a state of mind. The latter concept is described by the German word *Stimmung*, and it is to this word that Liszt's description of the programme is referring to when he wrote that the programme has to clarify to the listener the *Stimmung* of the composer, and not his *Gefühl*. Hence, on one side it is possible to state, quoting Mauro Mastropasqua (2011), that «il formalismo, che è un termine paradossale, segna in sé il suo punto di inversione, poiché in nessun modo l'immanenza della musica può fare a meno di riferirsi al soggetto che percepisce e immagina»<sup>79</sup>, and, on the other, that Liszt is working for the formalism, since his definition of the programme refers to the percipient subject, and not to the music itself, namely the programme is not able to explain the form. Liszt, in giving a description of the inner climate in which the artwork was conceived, limits the otherwise borderless imagination of the listener, who is then freer to focus on the musical material and structure. Somehow the programme, under this view, works for the formalists. Furthermore, Hanslick said that it is anyway useless to know if the artwork was inspired by any extra-musical element, because the composer deals with musical material, and the musical material has nothing to do with the phenomenal world. Aside from the fact that Hanslick is ignoring the symbolic power of music, and its symbolism – which is not only able to describe the phenomenal world, but even to convey very precise messages – he missed that an explanation of the *Stimmung* is even able to clarify the pure aesthetical choices of the composer. The composer, through the programme

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77 Kleinertz, Rainer, this sentence was spoken out during the conference *19<sup>th</sup> Century Programme Music*, Lucca, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

78 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854, p. 16.

79 Mastropasqua, Mauro, *Logica musicale*, p. 113.



can justify the use of this or that musical material and of this or that form. Consequently, the pure musical structures become clearer when the composer uses a programme to evoke the imaginary, the state of mind which guides his compositions. Of course, there is a substantial difference between Hanslick's and Liszt's idea on music, but it will be clarified later on, following the development of the essay.

From here on Liszt presented his personal idea of the history of music to the reader. On the one hand, there are the Oratorio and the Cantata, in which the orchestra, even during the instrumental moments, namely the ones without choir and soloists, has a role of *Landschaftlichen Hintergrund*, scenic background, and it has to create the framework in which the acting begins. With this statement Liszt is in open opposition both with Hegel and Hanslick. The latter in his *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* state that he is not interested in any kind of music which contains a text, because it influences our perception of the "meaning" of music<sup>80</sup>. What Hanslick is looking for is the beautiful in music, and it must be sought in pure instrumental music – anyway this research should involve vocal music too, because it is there that the pure instrumental music finds its origins. Hanslick is still related to a conception in which the literal meaning of the words prevail on the music, and it brings him to affirm something ambiguous, namely that the «die Vereinigung mit der Dichtkunst erweitert die Macht der Musik, aber nicht ihre Grenzen»<sup>81</sup>. The critic tries to explain this sentence in the footnote, where he reports the answer Ferdinand Hiller gave to Gervinius<sup>82</sup> to state that, since «es ist in den meisten Fällen dem Hörer gar nicht möglich, Worte und Melodie gleichzeitig zu erfassen»<sup>83</sup>, then the listener has to choose to which element is more relevant. Of course, the text of an oratorio is not as relevant as a text of an opera or of a poem – since the meaning of the text is already well known – and the attention of the listener will be directed to the music; but, what happens if the text is a poem? To answer this question, it is necessary to recall what Hegel wrote about this relationship, because it is on this ground that Hanslick found his thesis, and it is to this objection that Liszt has to answer:

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80 See footnote 25.

81 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1922, p. 34.

82 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1922, footnote pp. 34–36. The quotation is taken from the book *Aus dem Tonleben unserer Zeit* published in 1871. The footnote does not exist in the first edition of 1854, and it is here reported only because it rises a strong objection to the Liszt's argument.

83 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1922, p. 35.

Soll jedoch die musikalische Seite eines solchen Kunstwerkes das Wesentliche und Hervorstechende desselben bleiben, so darf die Poesie als Gedicht, Drama usf. nicht für sich mit dem Anspruch auf eigentümliche Gültigkeit heraustreten. Überhaupt ist innerhalb dieser Verbindung von Musik und Poesie das Übergewicht der einen Kunst nachteilig für die andere. Wenn daher der Text als poetisches Kunstwerk für sich von durchaus selbständigem Wert ist, so darf derselbe von der Musik nur eine geringe Unterstützung erwarten; wie z.B. die Musik in den dramatischen Chören der Alten eine bloß untergeordnete Begleitung war. Erhält aber umgekehrt die Musik die Stellung einer für sich unabhängigeren Eigentümlichkeit, so kann wiederum der Text seiner poetischen Ausführung nach nur oberflächlicher sein und muß für sich bei allgemeinen Empfindungen und allgemein gehaltenen Vorstellungen stehenbleiben. [...] Lieder, Opernarien, Texte von Oratorien usf. können daher, was die *nähere* poetische Ausführung angeht, mager und von einer gewissen Mittelmäßigkeit sein; der Dichter muß sich, wenn der Musiker *freien* Spielraum behalten soll, nicht als Dichter bewundern lassen wollen<sup>84</sup>.

But Hanslick, moving this objection to programme music, creates a false generalisation, because in programme music, text and music do not occupy the same place in time, namely the listener has to read the programme before the music begins. Liszt's and Hanslick's aims are the same, since no one of them wants to justify the text related music. Cantatas, oratorios, and all text related music, are not the subject of their investigations. Not one of them speaks about Opera, because it stands at the antipodes and has nothing to do with absolute music – furthermore Liszt is not searching for the perfect fusion between words and music, he is not trying to solve [*aufheben*] this dichotomy. Quite the opposite, he is here defending the right of pure instrumental music to connect itself with a programme, which is in turn able to recreate the psychological condition under which a composition was conceived. Liszt states without doubts the superiority of music on words. But he needed to create a connection with opera to provide a historical foundation to the programme. Even if its music has the same role as in the oratorios and cantatas, it contains the germ from which programme music was born: the *ouverture*, conceived as a *pure instrumental moment* detached from the opera – this is even further proof that Liszt is actually a supporter of pure instrumental music. The path that he outlined to describe the birth of programme music follows the same path which instrumental music faced to conquer its independence from text.

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84 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2168.

So, at the beginning the *ouverture* was just a short piece of music needed as introduction for the actors. Gradually it became even longer, and it began to have a specific weight, and a more defined *form*. So one finds *ouverture* without the connected opera, and the term starts to identify all the «instrumentalen Werke, die nicht wie die Symphonie in vier verschiedene Sätze zerfallen, sondern ein homogenes, organisches, unzertrennliches Ganze in einem Satze geben»<sup>85</sup>. The subsequent passage is one of the most relevant of this chapter, because Liszt tries to link the birth of programme music directly with the *ouverture*, providing some historical examples. Here again the necessity of linking the programme with the natural evolution of music emerges. Therefore, Liszt creates a connection with the tradition, with already well-known musical genres, and, above all, with a series of respectable authors (*argumentum ab auctoritate*), who here became untouchable authorities:

[...] der größere Spielraum, welcher hier der Phantasie des Componisten gelassen war, als auch die günstige Gelegenheit, solche Stücke an ein bestimmtes Sujet zu knüpfen, welches im Titel anzudeuten man fortfuhr, trug zum raschen Erblühen dieser Gattung Kunstwerke bei. Sie brachte, wie wir sagen möchten, das Privilegium des Programms mit auf die Welt<sup>86</sup>.

The *ouverture* was born as an introduction to the opera. Alongside the development of the latter, the *ouverture* became even longer, but at the same time even more relevant. Subsequently, it started to appear in concert programmes as an independent composition. It was in that moment that the composers realized the potential of this genre. In the beginning, this form was very short, since its role was just to introduce the tonality of the action. It is exactly for its simplicity that the *ouverture* gave composers a good chance to expand upon. Adorno said that «Der Komponist hat den der Erfindung zugewiesenen Raum gerade unschematisch zu erfüllen, um dem Schema Genüge zu tun»<sup>87</sup>. Then, when a form becomes larger, it leaves some empty spaces between its parts. And these spaces are the place where the composer finds his freedom to invent new possibilities. Thereafter, the *ouverture* became so relevant, that it achieved self-sufficiency, and the musicians started to compose *ouvertures* without opera, but they followed the convention to assign to their composition a title, as if they really were the beginning of an opera anyway.

85 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 38.

86 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 38.

87 Adorno, Theodor W., *Beethoven*, p. 98.

At this point Liszt plays his Mendelssohn card, «der moderne Klassiker». Liszt's reasoning is very simple: if it is possible to relate programme music to him, then no one would discuss the legitimacy of this “new” genre. Mendelssohn, who saved the name of Bach from oblivion, was surely more faithful to the ideal of classicism than to the excesses of Romanticism, even if the musicians of the Lisztian circle often quoted him among the initiator of the *Zukunftsmusik*. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that his corpus contains a good number of compositions which have clear programmatic intention – if the term programme music referred to Mendelssohn nowadays seems inappropriate, one should not to forget that one has to relate it to Liszt's polemical intentions – such as many of his orchestral compositions which were inspired by many different extra-musical sources: *Die Hebriden*, *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*, *Das Märchen von der schönen Melusine*, the *Scottish* and the *Italian* symphony, etc. But Liszt, in his attempt to root programme music to tradition, is here using Mendelssohn just as a link in a longer chain, namely to connect the programme tradition to the highest authority in the history of music, Beethoven. In the beginning of the second chapter, the polemical style of the writings is even clearer, since here Liszt uses again the *ipse dixit* strategy; if the Master (Beethoven) did that, it cannot be wrong. And he lists the programmatic works of Beethoven: the *Eroica* and *Pastorale* symphonies, the piano sonatas op. 27 No. 2 *Mondscheinsonate*, and op. 81a No. 26 *Les Adieux*, the string quartets No. 15, op. 132, and No. 16 op. 133, and even the *Faust Symphonie*, which he was unable to finish, because «Der Tod überraschte ihn»<sup>88</sup>. Furthermore, «[...] seit etwa fünfzehn Jahre immer häufiger vorkommenden Versuche, seine Symphonien, Quartette und Sonaten in uns herforgerufenen Bilder in pittoresken, poetischen oder philosophischen Commentaren festzuhalten, zeigen, wie lebhaft das Bedürfnis sich ausspricht, den leitenden Gedanken großer Instrumentalwerke genau bezeichnet zu sehen»<sup>89</sup>. But the result of Liszt's determined effort of relating programme music to the old German tradition has the opposite effect. If the programme is an extra-musical element which is able to clarify to the listener the psychological and emotional state of the composer during the act of composition, and it could be applied *a posteriori* or *a priori*, but it forms nevertheless a unity with the music, and it is the expression of the will of the composer, then imposing *a posteriori* a programme on a work of another composer, is an interpretative act that goes against the role of the programme itself: «[...] das Programm oder Titel nur dann gerechtfertigt erscheinen, wenn sie eine poetische Nothwendigkeit,

88 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 39.

89 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 39.

eine unablässbarer Theil des Ganzen und zu seinem Verständniß unentbehrlich sind, [...]»<sup>90</sup>. Furthermore, it exposes his view to critiques and misconceptions. And Hanslick is there to point out every inconsistency. He wrote:

Überschriften und Notizen, auch authentische, von Beethoven selbst herrührende, würden das Eindringen in Sinn und Bedeutung des Kunstwerks nicht wesentlich fördern, es ist vielmehr zu fürchten, daß sie ebensowohl Mißverständnisse und Verkehrtheiten hervorrufen würden, wie die, welche Beethoven, veröffentlicht hat. Die schöne Sonate in Es-dur (op. 81[a]) trägt bekanntlich die Überschriften „Les adieux, l'absence, le retour“ und wird daher als zuverlässiges Beispiel von Programm-musik mit Sicherheit interpretiert. «Das es Momente aus dem Leben eines liebenden Paares sind», sagt Marx, der es dahingestellt sein läßt, ob die Liebenden verheiratet sind, oder nicht, «setzt man schon voraus, aber die Komposition bringt auch den Beweis». «Die liebenden öffnen ihre Arme, wie Zugvögel ihre Flügel», sagt Lenz vom Schluß der Sonate. Nun hat Beethoven auf das Original der ersten Abteilung geschrieben: «Das Lebewohl bei der Abreise Sr. Kais. Hoheit des Erzherzogs Rudolf, d. 4. Mai 1809» und auf den Titel der zweiten: «Die Ankunft Sr. Kais. Hoheit des Erzherzogs Rudolf, d. 30. Januar 1810». Wie würde er protestiert haben, daß er dem Erzherzoge gegenüber diese «in schmeichelndem Kosen beseligter Lust» flügelschlagende Sie vorstellen sollte! – «Darum können wir zufrieden sein», schließt Jahn, «daß Beethoven (in der Regel) solche Worte nicht ausgesprochen hat, welche nur zu viele zu dem Irrtum verleitet haben würden, wer die Überschrift verstehe, der verstehe auch das Kunstwerk. Seine Musik sagt alles, was er sagen wollte»<sup>91</sup>.

Liszt was perfectly aware that some programme supporters tended to impose their own interpretation on other's compositions, which were not intended to be programmatic, or to interpret works with evocative titles, as in the case of Beethoven's *Les adieux*, in too peculiar a way. It is worth remembering that for Liszt the programme is not a description of the music, but it has an evocative power. Perfectly aware of the possible mystifications of his thought he added, at the end of the second chapter, a passage which is both a clarification of the meaning of the programme, and an answer to the (future) objection of Hanslick:

90 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 40.

91 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1922, footnote pp. 78–80. The footnote does not appear in the first edition, because neither Marx's (1859), nor Jahn's (1866) books had appeared at that time. Anyway, this remains one of the best example of mystification that can occur when one tries to impose his own will on someone else's artwork.

Das Programm will nur die Möglichkeit anerkannt wissen einer genauen Bestimmung des Seelenmoments, der den Componisten zum Schaffen seines Werkes trieb, des Gedankens, der er zur körperlichen Erscheinung brachte. Wenn es nun kindisch müßig, ja oft verfehlt ist, nachträgliche Programme zu zeichnen, das Gefühl einer Instrumentaldichtung erklären zu wollen, und so den Zauber zerstören, Gefühle entweihen, feinste Gespinnste der Seele durch das Wort zerreißen, die gerade nur diese Form annahmen konnten, weil sie sich nicht in Worte, Bilder und Ideen fassen ließen, so ist doch auch wieder der Meister Meister über sein Werk und kann es unter dem Einfluß bestimmte Eindrücke schaffen, welche er im Zuhörer zu vollem ganzen Bewußtsein bringen möchte<sup>92</sup>.

Even if Liszt's answer to the Hanslick's objection is anachronistic, it anyway provides the best explanation of his intention. The composer decided if his composition had to be explained through a programme, or if it was a pure instrumental work. Liszt reiterates the concept several times from many different perspectives. *Repetita iuvant*, this latin locution represents one of the simplest communicative strategies, but anyway it cannot erase the weakness of the historical justification of the programme provided by Liszt. On the one side it is based upon the appeal to the authority fallacy, and, on the other side, it seems that the only means with which it is possible to justify a new musical idea is to rewrite the history of music, imposing upon it a concept that did not exist in the past centuries. And that is precisely what Liszt suggests in the subsequent paragraph:

Ein aufmerksamer Blick auf die Entwicklung der rein-instrumentalen Kunst, besonders seit Haydn, würde uns alsbald, nach einigen staubigen Untersuchungen, wie einen mehr und mehr betretenen Pfad eine ununterbrochene Reihe von Programmversuchen wahrnehmen lassen, welche das immer wachsenden Verlangen der Künstler bezeugen, die Lösung des Räthsels zu geben, welches aus den Wellen der Instrumentation ihnen entgентаucht<sup>93</sup>.

According to this view the history of music from Haydn to the present day shows an unbroken line of composer's attempts to unite music and programme. As already noted, the relationship between music and other arts, especially literature, was always problematic. But this view of Liszt erases all the attempts made by hundreds of composers through countless compositions to give to music its own place among the arts, and to free it from any external interference. Fur-

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92 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 52.

93 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 39.

thermore, the majority of examples Liszt reports, are ascribable to the category of descriptive music, than to that of programme music. But in a dialectical war any means is legitimate, and here Liszt is deliberately manipulating the history of music, because his aim is to convince the reader that what he is doing is right, and based on solid and old traditions – even if his insistence on the past seems to contradict the relevance he gave to the role of progress and of the new in music. If programme music was discovered by the ancient master, he is doing nothing innovative. But this passage plays a very relevant role in Liszt's narration. His aim is not to state that programme music is something new which belongs to the *Neudeutsche Schule*. His aim is to point out a process, namely a historical process which involves the transformation of the form, or the birth of new one, as in the case of the *ouvertures*. His reasoning is quite simple: the programme is something that has existed for a very long time and it was used in relation to many different musical forms; so, the programme is the constant in this process. What is changing is the form. Liszt's aim here is then to prove that these transformations (progress, innovations) naturally belong to music, and they are essential to its own life. Under this light, the main topic of the Berlioz-essay is not programme music itself, because Liszt wants to justify here his new conception of the form, and this illustrating that even the old masters brought innovations in this field, and this not due to the human caprice, but to the laws of nature:

Jedes Element erlangt durch Berührung mit einem anderen neuen Eigenschaften, indem es ursprüngliche einbüßt; andere Wirkungen in veränderter Umgebung ausübend, nimmt es einen neuen Namen an. Ein Wechsel in den bezüglichen Verhältnissen ihrer Mischung reicht hin, um das durch ihr Zusammentreten erzeugte Phänomen zu einem neuen zu machen. Das amalgamiren von Formen, die ihrem Ursprung nach verschiedener Art sind, wird in der Kunst wie in der Natur entweder Erscheinungen von ganz neuer Schönheit oder Ungeheuerlichkeiten erzeugen, [...] <sup>94</sup>

Die [Gattungen] von Menschen, wie er selbst scheinbar von der Natur, ausgehende Kunst, die, wie er selbst das Meisterstück der Natur ist, als sein Meisterstück von ihm mit Gedanken und Gefühl begabt wird – die Kunst kann der nothwendigen Veränderung nicht entgehen, die allem eigen ist was die Zeit gebiert. Ihr mit dem der Menschheit zugleich bestehendes Lebensprincip bleibt, wie das Lebensprincip der Natur, nur eine Zeit lange denselben Formen innenwohnend und geht von einer in die andere in ewigem Wandel über und treibt die Men-

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94 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 43.

schen an sich neue zu schaffen in dem Maaße, als er die Verblühten und Veralterten verläßt<sup>95</sup>.

These two excerpts from a longer passage, are very interesting, because they point out the relevance of historical time in human affairs. Everything that lives under the influence of time changes. And this is certainly true for nature. For human beings and their productions this law of nature is still valid, but one has to add to it the changes of society. Then, every new genre, or style, or art in general, undergoes these two forces, the changes of natural time and the changes (requirements) of the epoch. So, the artwork is both in the natural time, and in the historical times – and, as already pointed out in the chapter on the idea of progress, both these times have a direction and a movement, which involves the idea of transformation.

Indeed, after these examples of programme music taken from Beethoven and Mendelssohn, Liszt states that Berlioz belongs to this same tradition, and that what he is doing is actually nothing new. This statement leads to the key point of the essay, because it is used by Liszt to point out the main concept of his essay, using a circular construction<sup>96</sup>: the programme arose from a poetic necessity, as a part of the musical work, and it serves to explain it, because the musical artwork is the highest expression of feelings, and the composer has the moral duty to guide the listener in the right direction. Liszt is perfectly aware that one of the strongest objections of the programme music opponent lies on this argument: the programme music composer attaches an extra-musical content to his works, because he is convinced that the music is not self-subsistent, that the music acquires its value only when it carries a thought:

Verhüte der Himmel daß Jemand im Dociren über Nützlichkeit, Zulässigkeit und Vortheil des Programms den alten Glauben abschwöre und vorgebe, daß die himmlische Kunst nicht um ihrer selbst willen bestünde, nicht sich selbst genüge, daß sie den göttlichen Funken nicht aus sich selbst entzünde und nur als Vertreterin eines Gedankens, als Erhöhung des Wortes Werth habe. Die Wahl zwischen einem solchen Vergehen an der Kunst und der gänzlichen Ablehnung

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95 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 44.

96 Starting from the statement that programme music is a fact today, Liszt re-read the history of music until he finds the foundation of this practice, and from there, since the programme is an inner necessity for the composers, he infers that it is something natural, which is sprung from the compositional practice itself. In fact, after the analysis of the past, he comes back to the present day to state the validity of programme music, and consequently to affirm its place among the classical genres.



des Programms würde nicht schwanken dürfen, und es wäre vorzuziehen, eine ihrer reichhaltigsten Quellen versiegen zu lassen, als mit dem Lügen ihres Bestehens durch eigene Kraft, ihren Lebensnerv zerschneiden zu wollen. Das Gefühl incarnirt sich in der Musik, ohne, wie in seinen übrigen Erscheinungsmomenten, in den meisten Künsten und vornehmlich denen des Worts, seine Strahlen an dem Gedanken brechen, ohne die Nothwendigkeit sich mit ihm verbinden zu müssen<sup>97</sup>.

Liszt here does not want to be misunderstood and he writes that it would be better to completely abandon the programme, if it would lead listeners to think that the music has no independent existence. To sustain his statement Liszt adds a series of excerpts from Hegel's *Vorlesungen*, all with the same aim, i.e., to prove that the music is «die Seelensprache, welche die innere Lust und den Schmerz des Gemüts in Töne ergießt und in diesem Erguß sich über die Naturgewalt der Empfindung mildernd erhebt, indem sie das präsenste Ergriffensein des Inneren zu einem Vernehmen seiner, zu einem freien Verweilen die sich selbst macht und dem Herzen eben dadurch die Befreiung von dem Druck der Freuden und Leiden gibt [...]»<sup>98</sup>.

The idea that music is the privileged means of feelings' expression arose with the Romantic Generation. Music, exactly because it does not have any phenomenical object to which it referred to, opens our minds to the comprehension of the infinite, and during its unfolding the listener is able to grasp for a moment the ineffable breath of the universe:

Die Musik dagegen giebt gleichzeitig Stärke und Ausdruck des Gefühls; sie ist verkörperte faßbare Wesenheit des Gefühles; [...] Das Gefühl selbst lebt und leuchtet in der Musik ohne bildliche Hülle, ohne Vermittelung der That, des Gedankens; es hört hier auf Ursache, Quelle, Triebfeder, bewegendes und erregendes Prinzip zu sein, um sich faltenlos und ohne vertretende Symbole in seiner unbeschreiblichen Ganzheit zu offenbaren [...]»<sup>99</sup>.

Aside from this poetic view on the topic of the infinite, which sometimes turns into the «male romantico dell'inettitudine a vivere, la sostituzione dell'arte alla

97 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855 p. 40.

98 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2234. For the other quotations see Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 40, footnote.

99 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 41.

vita»<sup>100</sup>, this statement has many philosophical implications, above all when analysed from the Hegelian perspective, that it would take too much place in this work. Liszt is writing an article, whose aim is to persuade the readers of the quality of his idea. In doing so, he tried to give it a systematic structure. It is for this reason that he has to recall the ideas of many philosophers and writers to sustain his thesis. The result is a row of quotations, more or less explained, more or less relevant, but which doubtless create a sense of a systematic presentation – and it does not matter if Liszt uses the words “*Geist*” and “*Gefühl*” as quasi-synonymous.

Once Liszt stated that programme music is perfectly consistent with the historical evolution of German music, he has an essential task to fulfil in the battle against formalism, namely to demonstrate that feelings are both the source and the aim of music, and that they are therefore the only force able to create new forms:

Zwischen Tondichter und bloßem Musiker ist dies der Unterschied: der erste reproducirt seine Eindrücke und Seelenereignisse, um sie mitzutheilen; der zweite handhabt, gruppirt, verkettet Töne nach gewissen hergebrachten Regeln, und gelangt darin höchstens, mit spielender Ueberwindung von Schwierigkeiten, zu neuen und kühnen, ungewöhnlichen und verwickelten Combinationen. [...] Nur dem *Tondichter* ist es gegeben, die Grenzen der Kunst zu erweitern, indem er die Fesseln zerbricht, die den freien Aufschwung seines Gedankens hemmen. [...] während die Formalisten nichts besser zu thun vermögen, als das von Jenen Errungene zu nutzen, zu verbreiten, einzutheilen und gelegentlich zu verarbeiten<sup>101</sup>.

It is interesting that this attack against the formalists take its steps from a quotation from Hegel:

Der Komponist seinerseits kann nun zwar selber in sein Werk eine bestimmte Bedeutung, einen Inhalt von Vorstellungen und Empfindungen und deren gegliederten geschlossenen Verlauf hineinlegen, [...]. Das Tiefere ist daher darein zu setzen, daß der Komponist beiden Seiten, dem Ausdruck eines freilich unbestimmteren Inhalts und der musikalischen Struktur, auch in der Instrumentalmusik die gleiche Aufmerksamkeit widmet, [...]<sup>102</sup>.

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100 Mila, Massimo, *Breve storia della musica*, Einaudi, Torino, 1963, p. 232.

101 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, pp. 51–52.

102 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2290.

In this passage Hegel states for sure that the composer should care about both the musical structure and the spiritual content of his composition. But Hegel's idea is based upon the ancient Aristotelian idea of «das rechte Maß»<sup>103</sup>, and then it is closer to a formalistic conception of the music, than to the Romantic one. It is worth remembering that Hegel's ideal composers are «Palestrina, Durante Lotti, Pergolesi, Gluck, Haydn, Mozart»<sup>104</sup>. Furthermore Hegel, divided the music listeners into two categories: the amateurs and the experts. And it is only the latter who can enjoy music in its completeness:

[...] der Kenner dagegen, dem die inneren musikalischen Verhältnisse der Töne und der Instrumente zugänglich sind, liebt die Instrumentalmusik in ihrem kunstgemäßen Gebrauch der Harmonien und melodischen Verschlingungen und wechselnden Formen; er wird durch diese Musik selbst ganz ausgefüllt und hat das nähere Interesse, das Gehörte mit den Regeln und Gesetzen, die ihm geläufig sind, zu vergleichen, um vollständig das Geleistete zu beurteilen und zu genießen, [...] <sup>105</sup>.

On the other hand, the musical experience of the amateur is described by Hegel as *symbolic*, because «er steht mit dem Versuch, die Bedeutung zu erhaschen, vor schnell vorüberauschenden rätselhaften Aufgaben, die sich einer Entzifferung nicht jedesmal fügen und überhaupt der verschiedenartigsten Deutung fähig sind»<sup>106</sup>. So, in this passage Hegel supports the formalistic point of view, stating that, to fully enjoy a pure instrumental composition, one has to grasp and understand the structure and its causal nexuses. If the listener does not understand the formal structure of a musical artwork, then he will be looking for images, which are maybe valid substitutes of the formal structures (while listening), but which are not able to explain them. On the contrary, from this kind of listening a myriad of different interpretations, the *Mehrdeutig*, emerges. This is perfectly consistent with the Hegelian idea of *symbol*, as it already emerged during the chapter on the idea of progress – the symbol, exactly because it will never be defined once and for all (it will always be open to new interpretations), cannot be part of a system, which tries to systematise the entirety of human knowledge, the Hegelian one. Liszt seems to ignore these matters, and anyway he used the *Vorlesungen* to sustain his thesis. After all a quotation without its context can

103 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2276.

104 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2256.

105 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2288.

106 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2290.

be used for every scope, and here Liszt's aim is to point out that the feelings of the composers are a necessary feature of any artwork.

It will emerge that, in elaborating what it can be called a modern *Affektenlehre*, Liszt will reach its inversion, becoming more formalist than Hanslick. In order to absolve this task, Liszt has to recall the most relevant authority in the field of aesthetics: Hegel. And here Liszt starts to play with words, a clear sign that the philosopher in his game plays the role of the authority, and he is not exploited to theoretically sustain the ideas. Liszt reports some excerpts, but he avoids quoting them in their entirety. Therefore, it is possible to state that he either did not possess a good knowledge of Hegel's writing, or that he manipulated the text in order to reach his objective. This second option is of course the most plausible. For example, Liszt quotes a passage from the *Vorlesungen*, which seems to validate his thesis: «Musik ist Geist, Seele, die unmittelbar für sich selbst erklingt und sich in ihrem Sichvernehmen befriedigt fühlt»<sup>107</sup>. The quotation, if reported in its entirety, works actually against the idea of a music driven by feelings. Quite the opposite, Hegel is celebrating the “golden middle way”, principle which recalls the ancient Greeks' precept on art, according to which *symmetry*, *proportion*, and *harmony* are the three elements of beauty. Indeed Hegel wrote:

Als schöne Kunst [Musik] nun aber erhält sie Seiten des Geistes her sogleich die Aufforderung, wie die Affekte selbst so auch deren Ausdruck zu zügeln, um nicht zum bacchantischen Toben und wirbelnden Tumult der Leidenschaften fortgerissen zu werden oder im Zweispalt der Verzweiflung stehenzubleiben, sondern im Jubel der Lust wie im höchsten Schmerz noch frei und in ihrem Ergüsse selig zu sein. Von dieser Art ist die wahrhaft idealische Musik, der melodische Ausdruck in Palestrina, Durante Lotti, Pergolesi, Gluck, Haydn, Mozart. Die Ruhe der Seele bleibt in den Kompositionen dieser Meister unverloren; der Schmerzen drückt sich zwar gleichfalls aus, doch er wird immer gelöst, das klare Ebenmaß verläuft sich zu keinem Extrem, alles bleibt in gebändigter Form fest zusammen, so daß der Jubel nie in wüstes Toben ausartet und selbst die Klage die seligste Beruhigung gibt<sup>108</sup>.

From this passage Hegel's view on music emerges in all its strength. It is of course the language of feelings, and it is of course “spirit which resounds directly on its own account”, but it is not emotional. The composer has to control

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107 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2254.

108 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2254–2256.

and balance its elements in order to obtain a language which is able to express feelings, but that, at the same time, has to limit their extremes in a “restrained form”. Hegel’s view on feelings is still imbued with Cartesian thought. After all, Hegel did not utter a word on Beethoven’s works, and this is not because of his musical ignorance, but because the master of Bonn did not represent, from a Hegelian perspective, a composer of fine music. He already created degenerated art. It is undeniable that Liszt was aware of the existence of this passage, and that he omitted part of it just to exploit Hegel’s authority, since he was trying to demonstrate that feelings and music are strictly related, and that, since the composer has the inner necessity to express them, this relationship is the reason for the changing of the form. Liszt’s aim is to philosophically demonstrate that feelings are the driving force of change, namely that they are progress itself. And it is exactly the reason why he cannot quote Hegel’s passage in its entirety. First of all, the philosopher cites some composers as models. None of them were alive when he wrote the passage. Secondly, Hegel says that the emotions must be balanced to avoid the excesses, and therefore they have to be enclosed in a restrained form. This statement not only goes against what Liszt wrote in his famous letter to Luis Köhler – in which he describes his programmatic intentions, namely «bitte ich nur um die Erlaubnis, die Formen durch den Inhalt bestimmen zu dürfen [...] und dass führt uns immer auf das *Empfinden* und *Erfinden* zurück, wenn wir nicht im Gleise des Handwerks herumkrabbeln und zappeln wollen»<sup>109</sup> –, but it even goes against the entire romantic idea of art. From the confrontation between Liszt and Hegel, it clearly appears that they are on two opposite sides of the barricade. Hegel defends the “tradition” of a balanced music, which has to amuse the listeners with its melody and rhythm, and whose harmony has to follow a precise path. Liszt is searching for new means of expression, and this research led him to new harmonic, melodic, and formal constructions.

Hegel’s passage quoted by Liszt in the footnote is explained by the composer in the subsequent lines, from which emerge Liszt’s inability to keep the speech on the philosophical field. Firstly, he explains Hegel’s view with other words, which are more poetical than technical; it is clear that Liszt is trying to convince the readers using a dialectical artifice: he quotes from a philosopher to give validity to his speech, and suddenly he turns back to a poetical language in order to move (in its etymological meaning of *con-movēre*, move together) the readers. That is the reason why he turns from Hegel to Jean Paul

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109 Franz Liszt, *Franz Liszt’s Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, Letter to Luis Köhler dated 9 July 1856, Vol. I, p. 225.

and E.T.A. Hoffman within a paragraph<sup>110</sup>. Here Liszt's romantic view of music emerges: at the beginning he still follows Hegel, affirming that music, contrary to other arts, affects our feelings and it is able to make every inner impulse audible, but it cannot give us precise descriptions of them, because, in order to do that it needs images or comparisons. And everything without the help of reason. However, the relationship between music and feeling is perceived by Hegel with a certain embarrassment, exactly because intellect is not involved in this process. Liszt said that liberation from the *Dämon Thought*<sup>111</sup> is the reason why music can access the *überirdische Welt*. The *Gefühl* ceases to be the «Quelle, Triebfeder, bewegendes und erregendes Prinzip», and, as the *Gott der Christen*, it can show itself in its totality. Here Liszt read the Hegelian *Geist* as *Gefühl*, and this changing of perspective creates an aesthetic view that is in open contrast with that of Hanslick. Liszt starts from Hegel's proposition according to which "music is spirit sounding for itself"; but what resounds in music, is not the pure spirit, but the feelings of the composer. Consequently, during a performance, it is the pure feeling that resounds, since music is unable to recreate precise emotions without referring to images or words. «Ist nicht die Musik die geheimnisvolle Sprache eines fernen Geisterreiches, deren wunderbare Accente in unserem Inneren wiederklingen und ein höheres, intensiveres Leben erwecken?». The words by E.T.A. Hoffmann, and those of Jean Paul, and likewise those of Liszt recall the idea of magic. That is probably the only thing that Hegel, Liszt and Hanslick have in common. Namely they are all unable to explain pure instrumental music without referring to a sort of magical world from which music arises, and from which the composer takes his material. The composer is seen as a sort of magician, and the art of composing follows mysterious rules. As already seen before in this chapter, even the Viennese critic could not avoid describing the work of the composer without a reference to a sort of magical world<sup>112</sup>. If the aim of Hanslick was to lay the foundation of a musicology intended as a *science of music*, the two statements cited above are alone enough to invalidate his efforts. How is it possible to analyse a work if the material that the composers use has a mysterious source? And how can we analyse their compositions if we are not able to grasp the process the composers used to select the material? Finally, how can we explain the entire creative

110 Jean Paul and E.T.A. Hoffmann are quoted at pages 41–42. Liszt quoted Jean Paul from his *Hesperus, oder 45 Hundposttage* (from *O Tonkunst to Wunden bringen*) and then from his *Blüthen*, a collection of writings (from *O Musik! to ihrer Wüste*); Hoffman quotation comes from chapter 9 of his *Serapions-Brüder*, with the evocative title of *Der Dichter und der Komponist*.

111 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie*, 1882, p. 30. In english in the original.

112 See footnotes 52 and 53.

process? Hanslick's crusade against the *aesthetic of feelings* transforms his *Vom Musikalisch-schönen* into a treatise on cognitive psychology. The listener point of view is predominantly compared to that of the composer. The same perspective guides Hegel's investigation, since the philosopher, as he informs us, was nothing more than an amateur. He wrote, for example, that «In dieser Art der Ausübung genießen wir die höchste Spitze musikalischer Lebendigkeit, das wundervolle Geheimnis, daß ein äußeres Werkzeug zum vollkommen beseelten Organ wird, und haben zugleich das innerliche Konzipieren wie die Ausführung der genialen Phantasie in augenblicklichster Durchdringung und verschwindendstem Leben blitzähnlich vor uns»<sup>113</sup>. Concluding, the philosopher, the critic, and the composer, use the same key concepts to describe pure instrumental music. Even if they differ in content, they all think that there is something magic, something that comes from a *primitive power*, something that is the *spirit sounding for itself*, or something that can open our minds for a while to the comprehension of the infinite, to the reign of the spirit. Music is just half-human, and this romantic view of art is what the three have in common.

The long paragraph on pure instrumental music serves Liszt to respond to the attacks of the formalists, and to those who criticise programme music. But now he has to justify it using the same instruments as his detractors. He has to demonstrate that programme music follows the rules of nature, and that nature and art evolves in the same way. The main aim of the passage is to demonstrate that the union of music and words neither impoverishes the music nor the words:

Wer möchte es wagen, unserer erhabenen Kunst die höchste Kraft des Sichselbstgenügens abzusprechen? Heißt aber einer neuen Form sich bemächtigen, den angeborenen und geschichtlich anerzogenen auf immer entsagen? Schwört man der Muttersprache ab, wenn man einen neuen Zweig der Beredsamkeit erringt? Weil es Werke gibt, welche eine gleichzeitige Thätigkeit des Fühlens und Denkens beanspruchen, wird deßwegen der reine Instrumentalmusik für Solche seinen Zauber einbüßen, die gern mit ihrem ganzen Empfindungsvermögen in ihr aufgehen, ohne durch einen bestimmten Gegenstand in der Freiheit des Gefühles gehindert zu sein? Hieß es nicht Mißtrauen in seine Lebensfähigkeit setzen, befürchtete man sein gänzliches Verwelken, weil ihm zur Seite eine neue Gattung entsteht, die von Drama, Oratorium Cantate verschieden, dennoch mit ihnen die poetische Grundlage gemein hat?<sup>114</sup>

113 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2298.

114 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 42.

These are the premises of this new paragraph. The self-subsistence of pure instrumental music is undeniable, but to create a new *form* does not mean to renounce pure instrumental music, nor to deny the heritage of the ancient masters, nor to deny other forms. Furthermore, Liszt is dealing here with a fundamental aesthetic problem, namely how can the music convey a precise content? As already seen in the previous chapter, Liszt was interested in many social and humanitarian philosophies. His objective is then to find out a way to convey these ideas to the listeners, namely, he has to find a way through which the musician, the prophet, can guide the people towards the good. How can the artist, with his art, actively change society? From the Lisztian point of view, both the aesthetic of feelings and the formalism deny this possibility to the music. For the former, music is not able to convey neither particular nor general feelings. And if it is not able to convey feelings, how can it be able to convey ideas, or philosophical concepts? According to the formalist point of view, the content of music is the music itself, and it is to be understood through its formal structures, harmony, melody, and rhythm<sup>115</sup>. Liszt, on the other side, founds his aesthetic view on the principle according to which beauty in art means moral beauty<sup>116</sup>, and therefore he proposes to the readers a solution to this matter. The solution cannot imply the use of vocal forms, such as the cantata, the oratorio, or the opera. His declared aim is to unify the power of the pure instrumental music – which is able to arise feelings –, to the power of the words – which is able to evoke precise images and to convey precise ideas. It is of course an ambitious task, and therefore Liszt, giving proof of his mountebank character<sup>117</sup>, has to jump from philosophy to poetry and vice versa. Liszt recalls the Hegelian view according to which the union of words and music can only obfuscate one or the other of the two arts, in order to deny it. More than that,

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115 Symbolism could be an alternative; but the message would then only be understandable to the adepts, who, most likely, already knew the message, or at least, possess the key to decode it.

116 This view is based on the theories of a philosopher which Liszt knew quite well, Friedrich Schiller. In his *Ästhetische Vorlesungen* he states that «Die menschliche Gestalt ist einer doppelten Schönheit fähig. Die eine ist ein bloßes Geschenk der Natur und erweckt Liebe, die andere beruht auf sittlichen Eigenschaften und erwirbt zugleich Achtung». Furthermore his aesthetics is based on a conception of technique as a mean of art expression and not as aim of art: «Technik ist die Verbindung des Mannigfaltigen nach Zwecken, und zur Schönheit notwendig, wiewohl sich diese nicht auf die Beurtheilung der Technik gründet, wie Sulzer annimmt». Sulzer, around 1775, already elaborated a theory in his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* in which the feeling of beauty is connected with the moral feeling.

117 Marie d'Agoult in a letter to Georg Herwegh dated May 28, 1844 defined Liszt as a «Half mountebank, half juggler, who makes ideas and sentiments disappear up his sleeve». Haraszti, Emile, *Franz Liszt, écrivain et Penseur. Histoire d'Une Mystification*, p. 19.



he states that what Hegel describes happens only if the two arts are *combined* instead of *unified*. Liszt is of course playing with the words, but, in order to convince the reader of the value of his perspective, he affirms that the natural output of the first case (combination) would be something unharmonious and offensive to the good taste, which cannot strive for its self-subsistence, while his solution (unification) can achieve the self-subsistence, because it follows the rules of nature.

Ist nicht die Kunst im allgemeinen und eine jede insbesondere eben so reich an verschieden gearteten und unähnlichen Erscheinungen als die Natur im Wechsel ihrer Hauptreiche und deren mannichfachen Abtheilungen? Die Kunst stellt wie die Natur stufenweise Gliederungen her, welche die entferntesten Reiche und unentschiedensten Abstufungen durch vermittelnde Gattungen aneinander kettet, die nothwendig und natürlich, also auch lebensberechtigt sind<sup>118</sup>.

Here Liszt, with a literary *coup de génie* recalls the main argument in a defence speech: the relationship with nature. Programme music is justifiable because it is a product of art, and since art follows the same rule of nature, programme music finds its validity on the natural evolution process.

Wie es in der Natur keine Leere giebt, in der menschlichen Seele nicht blos Contraste sich zeigen, so klaffen keine steile Abgründe zwischen den Gipfeln der Kunst, un es fehlen nirgends Ringe in der wunderbaren Verkettung ihres großen Ganzen. In der Natur, in der Menschenseele und in der Kunst sind die Entfernungen, die Gegensätze und Höhepunkte durch eine ununterbrochene Reihenfolge verschiedener Arten des Seins miteinander verbunden, in welchen durch Modificationen Verschiedenheiten herbeigeführt, zugleich aber Aehnlichkeiten aufrecht erhalten werden<sup>119</sup>.

Art, like nature, proceeds without leaps. The principle was already stated by Leibniz, back in 1704, when he wrote that «Natura non facit saltus», and it was used again by Darwin and the positivists to «Banish the thought of discontinuities and fortuitous jumps which might make a true science impossible. Nature never makes leaps. Always she proceeds in continuous, gradual, and cumulative

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118 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 42.

119 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 42.

fashion»<sup>120</sup>. The comparison with nature serves Liszt to state that «Die Sterne des Himmels kommen und gehen»<sup>121</sup>, namely to state that nothing is eternal, not even the musical forms. As already expressed, Hanslick was of the same idea when he stated that musical material remains usable for a limited period of time. It becomes old, and composers have to find other solutions. From very similar premises, Liszt and Hanslick arrive at two very different conclusions. For the Hungarian composer the «ganze Künste sterben aus und ihr ehemaliges Leben ist nur noch an den Skeletten zu erkennen», but «durch Kreuzung und Verschmelzung entstehen neue, bis dahin unbekannte, die durch ihre Ausdehnung und Mischung vielleicht dereinst wieder ihrem Ende entgegengeführt werden, so wie im Thier- und Pflanzenreich ganze Gattungen durch andere ersetzt worden sind»<sup>122</sup>. Here the influences that the evolutionary theory had on Liszt emerges. Art is created by men, but it does not follow men's rules. Instead, it behaves like a second nature, and it follows the rules of nature itself, namely birth and death, evolution, and selection. Therefore, for both Liszt and Hanslick, art can preserve «nur eine Zeit lang denselben Formen»<sup>123</sup>, because it undergoes an incessant process of change and innovation. It is exactly here that the difference between the two aesthetics emerges. Liszt wrote that the last aim of progress lies outside of the human comprehension and knowledge. Consequently, even the most erudite scientist can «wohl den Spuren ihrer Vergangenheit nachgehen, nicht aber voraussehen, welcher Endbestimmung künftige Umwälzungen sie entgegenführen mögen»<sup>124</sup>. Hence, at the basis of Liszt's aesthetics lies the idea according to which progress is a natural process. It was, and it always will be, even if we are not aware of its unfolding. For that reason, it was for him extremely logical to infer that music is always progressing, and that the entirety of humanity will always be inside this process. The prophet can, guided by the providence which descends on Earth like a divine blow, compose new works, which distanced themselves from the habit. But these compositions still possess some signs of tradition, because it is anyway the ground from which the new grew, namely the process of evolution is cumulative. The old forms do not die, but they are absorbed into the new ones. Contrarily, Hanslick's view is closer to that of Hegel. The philosopher stated, as already seen, that his system represents the highest peak of western philosophy,

120 Nisbet, Robert A., *Social change and History*, p. 116.

121 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 43.

122 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, pp. 43–44.

123 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 44.

124 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 43.

even if he did not deny the possibility of future improvement. Hanslick did the same. He did not deny the possibility of future improvement in the field of music, but, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the highest peak of musical production, this amelioration remains a remote possibility:

Aus diesem Proceß ergibt sich, daß auch unser Tonsystem im Zeitverlauf neue Bereicherungen und Veränderungen erfahren wird. Doch sind innerhalb der gegenwärtigen Gesetze noch zu vielfache und große Evolutionen möglich, als daß eine Änderung im Wesen des Systems anders wie sehr fernliegend erscheinen dürfte. [...] Der musikalische Theoretiker kann daher gegenwärtig den Ausblick auf diese Zukunft noch kaum anders frei lassen, als durch die einfache Anerkennung ihrer Möglichkeit<sup>125</sup>.

Namely, the musical system of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is not perfect, and it will be improved in the future; it is possible to state, with an anachronistic quotation, that «there were still many good tunes to be written in C major»<sup>126</sup>. Then, if both Liszt and Hanslick agreed, that the musical systems undergo a transformation process, why are their positions so different? The point is that the music composed by Liszt and the so called *Neudeutsche Schule*, does not represent the kind of break suggested by Hanslick. For the Viennese critic, the idea of progress seems to mean something closer to what (partially) the twelve-tone system, or the avant-garde in the mid–20<sup>th</sup> century did, namely the creation of a new system which can completely replace the old one. What Liszt and his disciples brought about were just *Bereicherungen und Veränderungen*, i.e., something permitted by the aesthetics elaborated by Hanslick. Liszt did not invent a new system, but he used the same old material in different and, perhaps, original ways, the results of which were not appreciated by Hanslick.

The last passage of this chapter which deserves a little attention, and which represents again an answer to Hanslick, concerns the relationship between art and science. Liszt quoted Newton and the rules of the physical world to state that art and science follow the same rules, the laws of nature. According to them art is kept between its two extremes, sterile forms and progress, thanks to the «Finger Gottes, [...] dies geheimnißvoll Bewegende, dies verborgen Waltende, welches zwischen den verschiedensten Elemente die Harmonie erhält und unser Fortschreiten in Zeit und Unendlichkeit entscheidet, durch das Genie»<sup>127</sup>. Sci-

125 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854, pp. 87–88.

126 Schönberg to his advanced composition class at UCLA, ca.1940.

127 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 44.

ence has to investigate the laws of nature. It should follow that, if art responds to the laws of nature, and if science has to investigate them, then science can even explain art. Of course, according to Liszt, it cannot be that easy, because if it is true that music follows the same laws of nature that science tries to explain, it is even true that music is a human product, and this simple feature adds too many variables to the equations which make science powerless in the face of music. But, if a science of music is not possible, who can explain music? What does it mean to be an expert in the musical field? Liszt has to come back to Hegel in order to produce a solid argument to answer this issue.

Der *Laie* liebt in der Musik vornehmlich den verständlichen Ausdruck von Empfindungen und Vorstellungen, das Stoffartige, den Inhalt, und wendet sich daher vorzugsweise der begleitenden Musik zu; der *Kenner* dagegen, dem die inneren musikalischen Verhältnisse der Töne und Instrumente zugänglich sind, liebt die Instrumentalmusik in ihrem kunstgemäßen Gebrauch der Harmonien und melodischen Verschlingungen und wechselnden Formen; er wird durch die Musik selbst ganz ausgefüllt und hat das nähere Interesse, das Gehörte mit Regeln und Gesetzen, die ihm geläufig sind, zu vergleichen, um vollständig das Geleistete zu beurteilen und zu genießen, obschon hier die neu erfindende Genialität des Künstlers auch den Kenner, der gerade diese oder jene Fortschreitungen, Übergänge usf. nicht gewohnt ist, häufig kann in Verlegenheit setzen<sup>128</sup>.

It is fascinating that Hegel places himself among the amateurs at the beginning of his speech («In diesem Gebiete aber bin ich wenig bewandert»<sup>129</sup>), and subsequently states that the amateurs are not able to (fully) understand music. Liszt cannot speak against the authority of Hegel, since he does not possess the knowledge to survive the confrontation. Furthermore, he cannot attack his *argumentum ab auctoritate*. Moreover, Liszt defends the philosopher from the attacks of those people, who, exactly for this reason, pretend to diminish the value of his thought, affirming that «wir finden seine Urtheile doch meistens zutreffend»<sup>130</sup>. Furthermore, he takes the opportunity to use the lack of musical education of the philosopher, who in spite of his ignorance made very pertinent

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128 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2288. The passage is quoted in its entirety by Liszt himself at p. 45.

129 See footnote 16.

130 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 51, footnote. «Obschon man gegen Hegel einwendet, er habe von Musik gesprochen, ohne eine umfassende Kenntniß dieser Kunst zu besetzen, finden wir seine Urtheile doch meistens treffend und wie von jenem graden gefunden Verstand dictirt, der mit der allgemeinen Ueberzeugung zusammenstimmt».

observations, to go against the academics, the *Herren Magister*, and against all those people who pretend to possess the highest musical knowledge, namely the formalists. Hegel wrote that «Einerseits nämlich gehörte zu einer weitläufigen und begründenden Abhandlung des Gegenstandes eine genauere Kenntnis der Regeln der Komposition und eine ganz andere Kennerschaft der vollendetsten musikalischen Kunstwerke, als ich sie besitze und mir zu verschaffen gewußt habe, da man von den eigentlichen Kennern und ausübenden Musikern – von den letzteren, die häufig die geistlosesten sind, am allerwenigsten – hierüber selten etwas Bestimmtes und Ausführliches hört»<sup>131</sup>. Liszt, still playing the role of the impartial judge, states that his activity, both as composer and as theatre director, is devoted to filling this gap.

Conversely, the formalists share Hegel's distinction between the expert and the amateur to support their reasons, stating that genuine musical enjoyment lies in the comprehension of all the musical structures and relationships. More, Hanslick wished to build a science of music. Of course, he is aware that it will not be a science like chemistry, but it can aspire to the same status of philosophy or sociology, whose aim is to create a system in which every element is connected with the others.

So hätte die „philosophische Begründung der Musik“ vorerst zu erforschen, welche nothwendigen geistigen Bestimmtheiten mit jedem musikalischen Element verbunden sind, und wie sie miteinander zusammenhängen. Die doppelte Forderung eines streng wissenschaftlichen Geripps und einer höchst reichhaltigen Casuistik machen die Aufgabe zu einer sehr schwierigen, aber kaum unüberwindlichen, es wäre denn, daß man das Ideal einer „exakten“ Musikwissenschaft, nach dem Muster der Chemie oder Physiologie, erstrebte!<sup>132</sup>.

But programme music is not *Begleitungsmusik*, and it is not a negation of the beauty of musical structure. Furthermore, Hegel himself underlines that even the experts can be surprised by, and therefore not understand, some of the innovations brought about in music by the creativity of the composer. And Liszt uses this argument to attack Hanslick. The musician, the genius, is always a step ahead of the theoreticians. Anyway, Liszt has to criticise Hegel for his analysis according to which only the musical expert can enjoy the beautiful in music, since he possesses the ability to catch its most secret formal structures and connections. If it were really like this, says Liszt, then beautiful would be

131 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 2234.

132 Hanslick, Eduard, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854, pp. 40.

With this passage Liszt not only assigns a primary role to the form – or at least at the same level of the emotions, since the two elements are interdependent –, but he places himself on the same path as Hegel. While the formalists care about the form for its sake, and they declare their passion for the calculation, Liszt, on the other hand, declares that the tone poet works with the form. That means not just that he applies the traditional forms, but that he even has to analyse them, to understand them, namely the composer has to interact with them, because they are the means through which he has to express himself. A fixed form, which someone else has discovered, is good enough to express the discoverer's ideas, or to express a meaning which this form has acquired through the centuries. But in this last case, even if the artist can sometimes use formulas, what is missing is the idea – the idea as Hegel described it, as

135 S. footnote 101.

the only premise for beautiful art<sup>136</sup> –, and since «die Kunstschönheit ist die aus dem Geiste geborene und wiedergeborene Schönheit»<sup>137</sup>, an artwork without ideas cannot be beautiful, exactly because it is the sensible appearance of the spirit (*Geist*):

Die Kunst nun und ihre Werke, als aus dem Geiste entsprungen und erzeugt, sind selber geistiger Art, wenn auch ihre Darstellung den Schein der Sinnlichkeit in sich aufnimmt und das Sinnliche mit Geist durchdringt. [...] Und wenn auch die Kunstwerke nicht Gedanken und Begriff, sondern eine Entwicklung des Begriffs aus sich selber, eine Entfremdung zum Sinnlichen hin sind, so liegt die Macht des denkenden Geistes darin, *nicht etwa nur sich selbst* in seiner eigentümlichen Form als Denken zu fassen, sondern ebenso sehr sich in seiner *Entäußerung* zur Empfindung und Sinnlichkeit wiederzuerkennen, sich in seinem Anderen zu begreifen, indem er das Entfremdete zu Gedanken verwandelt und so zu sich zurückführt<sup>138</sup>.

It is somehow surprising that Liszt did not quote this passage, because here, as in many other passages of the introduction of the *Vorlesungen*, Hegel presents his main point, namely that art, beautiful art, is nothing more than the perceivable manifestation of the spirit. And since art comes directly from the spirit, it cannot be empty, and exactly for the same reason it cannot find its fulfilment in the pure form. Hegel says in this respect something that Liszt shouldn't have ignored:

Hieraus ergibt sich sogleich nach der Seite des *Inhalts*, daß die schöne Kunst nicht könne in wilder Fessellosigkeit der Phantasie umherschweifen, denn diese geistigen Interessen setzen ihr für ihren Inhalt bestimmte Haltpunkte fest, mögen die Formen und Gestaltungen auch noch so mannigfaltig und unerschöpflich sein. Das gleiche gilt für die Formen selbst. Auch sie sind nicht dem bloßen Zufall anheimgegeben. Nicht jede Gestaltung ist fähig, der Ausdruck und die Darstellung

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136 «Denn die Schönheit, [...] ist nicht solche Abstraktion des Verstandes, sondern der in sich selbst konkrete absolute Begriff und, bestimmter gefaßt, die absolute Idee in ihrer sich selbst gemäßen Erscheinung. Wenn wir, was die *absolute Idee* in ihrer wahrhaftigen Wirklichkeit sei, kurz bezeichnen wollen, so müssen wir sagen sie sei *Geist*, und zwar nicht etwa der Geist in seiner endlichen Befangenheit und Beschränktheit, sondern der allgemeine unendliche und *absolute Geist*, der aus sich selber bestimmt, was wahrhaft das Wahre ist». Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 362.

137 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 150.

138 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 176.

jener Interessen zu sein, sie in sich aufzunehmen und wiederzugeben, sondern durch einen bestimmten Inhalt ist auch die ihm angemessene Form bestimmt<sup>139</sup>.

Even if in this passage Hegel's idea of the "rechte Maß" still emerges, where all the elements have to be balanced, Liszt could have found the best argument in defence of his new conception of the form-content relationship, exactly where Hegel writes that not all the forms are able to host all the expressions, and exactly for this reason every content has to be expressed in an adequate form. So, in Hegel's intentions it is clear that this relationship between form and content is dialectical. Nonetheless it could have represented a good defence point for Liszt.

## Zur geschichtlichen Stellung und Aufgabe der *Programm-Symphonie*

The opening of the third chapter (of Ramann's 1882 edition) is further evidence that the effective topic of the essay is not programme music, but rather the problem of *form*. Nevertheless, Liszt has to conclude his speech on programme music, in order to historically justify it. Once he has established that this genre has a long tradition, he can infer that the *Programm-Symphonie*, as a new musical genre, has to reach the same celebrity of its predecessors. What follows is then an analysis of the role of the musical genres, from which emerges Liszt's extraordinary historical awareness. He affirms that the old forms, such as the *Oratorio* and the *Cantata*, were brought to their highest level by the ancient masters. For this reason, it is difficult for modern composers to successfully use these forms. And it is not because the composers of the past were superior to their living colleagues, but because the social and historical situation has changed, and the old forms are no longer able to answer the demands of the present time. Two passages are relevant in this sense. In the first, Liszt affirms that he wants to give to programme music the same role, even if in a modern sense, which cantatas and oratorios had in the past. Namely, he recognises that musical genres have a role, evidently, in society. And this is a first reason why they are no longer usable for composers today, because they have lost their social function, or, if this definition sounds too Adornian, listeners do not find them interesting any more, because «haben diese Gattungen aufgehört ein

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139 Hegel, G.W.F., *Lezioni di estetica – Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, p. 178.



ähnliches Interesse einzuflößen»<sup>140</sup>. Here Liszt states that the old forms are not able to arouse the interest of the listener any more, and this because the correspondence between a specific form of art and society has fallen apart. From this Liszt's dialectical conception of the musical material emerges. Forms and genres become old, and the composer has to answer the questions asked by the relationship between musical material and society. The movement towards the future dictated by progress, forces the composer to an incessant re-thinking of his own works. Because, and here lies the evidence of the Lisztian sociology of music, every *Kunstform* has to respond to, and to reach the «Ideal ihrer Zeit»<sup>141</sup>. The necessity of the programme arises exactly from this concept, to respond to a sociocultural demand. The ancient epic gave to readers a depiction of society, and the heroes were examples of integrity, and every citizen aimed to be like them. The antique *epos* was a static depiction of the state's life, with its rules and rituals. In this frame the heroes were examples to follow. In the modern *epos*, which, according to Liszt, has to be called *Philosophische Epopöen*, the poet is more interested in the depiction of the hero's *feelings* and inner life, than in the depiction of his public virtues. Above all, these heroes are no longer examples of integrity, but rather they represent the fragility of the human being. Modern heroes have something obsessive, sick, and sometimes even demonic. Their feelings are unknown to the majority of readers. Anyway, they know perfectly that the line between the balance of mind and insanity is very thin. But that didn't happened because the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became sick, but because these feelings are «das lebendigste Abbild des Zeitgeistes, der Nation»; namely, the modern *epos* represents «das Ideal von Seelenstimmungen [...], welche zu ihrer Zeit die Gebildeten aller europäischen Länder durchdrang»<sup>142</sup>. Again, Liszt shows his Hegelian thought, stating that literature is the artistic embodiment of the spirit of the time. Consequently, in an artistic work one expects to find all the main features of an epoch, and the main characteristic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the relevance of the inner life of men, his inclinations, and his most secret desires. And as literature has to express these feelings, exactly

140 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 52.

141 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie*, 1882, p. 51. This expression is not to be found in the original article of 1855, where it reads: «[...] die Programm-Symphonie dazu bestimmt ist, festen Boden in der jetzigen Kunstperiode zu gewinnen, gleiche Wichtigkeit wie Oratorium und Cantate zu erreichen, und nach mancher Seite die Bedeutung dieser beiden in modernem Sinne zu erfüllen» (Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 52). The idea of progress emerged here as a natural and inevitable force, it is able to explain, partially at least, the revisiting process to which Liszt forced the majority of his works.

142 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, pp. 53–54.

because it is its artistic mission, then music has to do the same. How? Liszt gives an answer that goes, for the second time, against the Wagnerian aesthetics. He states that, on one side the drama alone is not enough to bring to listeners the ideas of the composer, to give them an idea of the movement of the inner life of the characters on the stage. Drama is more action oriented, namely it is more suitable to express the outer world, the public virtues. On the other side, Liszt says, the symphony is not enough either, because «Das Ringen ihres unabhängigen Stils mit dem aufgezwungenen eines Sujets würde unangenehm berühren, weil es der augenscheinlichen, faßbaren Ursache entbehrte»<sup>143</sup>. Hence, the composer could not lead the listeners «[...] in die Regionen eines der ganzen Menschheit gemeinsamen Ideals zuführen, [...]», because «[...] ohne genau Angabe der besonderen Wege, [...]»<sup>144</sup> they would be confused, and they can therefore only start to wander following their own imagination. The only way in which the music can answer this demand for the expression of the most inner life of the subject, lies in the same solution identified by Wagner, namely in unifying drama and music<sup>145</sup>. But, according to Liszt, the union of these two elements does not lead to opera, and he states that the composer can reach the same results of the literature just by adding a programme to his music. According to him the programme can give to the listeners the direction of the composer's ideas and, through them they can comprehend the subject. Now, it is worth noting that in this speech Liszt forgets to mention the *form*. It is clear that what is relevant here, is not the formal structure that the music will take, but the idea expressed *through* music. In this passage Liszt even quotes an excerpt from Fétis<sup>146</sup>. In this passage the musicologist states that the most cultivated people always outline a programme when listening to a symphony, a quartet, or any other kind of instrumental composition. Through this expedient they assign to the music the faculty of evoking feelings. The listeners, while hearing the music imagine actions, but these actions are different from listener to listener. Consequently, continues Liszt, if the listeners already used a programme in their

143 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 54.

144 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 54.

145 Of course, Wagner primary aesthetic aim was not that to express the feelings and the inner life of his characters.

146 It is not clear where the quotation comes from, but it is sure that Liszt and Fétis had a very long and friendly relationship, and the composer, already in the '30s, discussed with the philosopher about music aesthetic questions: «Les temps forts de cette entente musicale sont marqués par les échanges sur l'*Histoire de la musique* de Fétis, ouvrage qui commence à partir en 1869, et reste inachevé, avec ses cinq volumes. Le 22 octobre 1849 Liszt souhaite connaître le contenu de l'*Histoire de la musique* et fait allusion aux cours suivis à Paris avec Fétis». Reynaud, Cécile, *Fétis et Liszt* p. 84.

minds, and the theoreticians have already recognised and described the process – namely the metaphorical perception of the music –, then there are no reasons why the composers cannot make evident his programme. Anyway, this underlines a substantial difference between Liszt and Fétis. The first refers to the programme as a consequence of human perception of music. The listeners, according to this view, have a metaphoric perception of music. As already seen in *Chapter II*, this is a cognitive process, according to which we assign some features to music. That is the reason why Fétis wrote that the public can imagine an action, and that this action is different from listener to listener. Liszt, quoting this passage seems to go against his own statement of programme, namely an understandable description of the psychological moment in which the composition has been conceived. A programme as described by Fétis would lead to descriptive music, and this is not Liszt's aim, since the latter aimed to exploit the psychological, and not the descriptive power of an extra-musical element. Furthermore, as it has already emerged, Fétis was quite a conservative composer and critic, while Liszt used the expedient of the programme to conceal his process of re-construction of the form – namely, first had he to reduce the form to its constituent parts, and to use them not as pre-constructed forms (formulas) any more, but as particles, which can be assembled and disassembled in many different ways. In turn, this fight against the formulas is the highest tribute a modern composer can pay to the old patriarchs: their forms are exhausted, and from them nothing else can rise but copies of little value. Change is a social necessity, which is in turn, for the social composer, an inner necessity. This is what Berlioz did, and what his detractors will never forgive him for is «daß die Form bei ihm nur eine dem Gedanken nachstehende Wichtigkeit hat, daß er nicht wie sie die Form um der Form willen hegt; sie werden es ihm nie verzeihen, daß er Denker und Dichter ist»<sup>147</sup>. The role of the *Tondichter*, and the supremacy of the role of the ideas upon the form is a topic that has already been analysed, and Liszt added nothing new here. It is just a repetition (*repetita iuvant*), or better, a coda. Even this article is built with a cyclical form, and, after a long development, the topic of Berlioz comes back on to the stage.

However, before that, there is a further aspect to take into consideration, namely the relationship between music and text, the «[...] Verbindung der Musik mit literarischen oder *quasi* literarischen Werken [...]»<sup>148</sup>. As Liszt himself points out, this is a very old relationship. But at the beginning, and still today, the music is just combined with literature. This combination gives rise

147 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 78.

148 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 77.



musician could still build everything. The levity of life seemed to ensure an easy and straightforward future;

2. *Zeitgeist* is even intended to be an intellectual fashion. When Liszt arrived in France, he began to attend the bourgeois salons, and he came in contact with world literature, and to be influenced by these readings. This is the beginning of Liszt's life as an intellectual<sup>150</sup>. The *Weimar Period* is evidence of the "maturity of the Romanticism". Musicians are not just musicians, but they are also intellectuals. They wrote articles, books, and essays, and they spoke about aesthetics and philosophy; they pretended a more relevant role in social organisation. Music asks for its self-subsistence, and the old forms cannot contain the composers' creativity and all their requests;
3. Liszt embodies the spirit of the time even in a chronological sense. Using a metaphor taken from Dante's *Divina Commedia*, Liszt was a sort of Charon, and he ferried the music from the side represented by one of the highest points of classicism to the beginning of the "tonal crisis". These are even the *Final Years* of the Romanticism, and of the bourgeois society. The dreams of a bright future start to fall apart, and war (Franco-Prussian) and disillusion are the most common feeling across Europe. Liszt and his historical awareness, gave rise to works that are not only introspective, but they are even a representation of the anxiety of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Under this light, they represent the *Ideal ihrer Zeit*, from the cheerfulness of the first years to the *Ur-schrei* of his old age. The latter is the scream that embodies a cry of despair, which is not subjective any more: «Die seismographische Aufzeichnung traumatischer Schocks wird aber zugleich das technische Formgesetz der Musik. Es verbietet Kontinuität und Entwicklung»<sup>151</sup>. This topic will be explored more deeply in the last chapter of this dissertation.

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150 Though the first part of this period sees Liszt behaving more as a character of a 19<sup>th</sup> century novel. This is proven by the correspondence first between him and Caroline de Saint-Cricq, and then with Marie d'Agoult and less with Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein. This correspondence is full of quotations taken from the fictive world, and it is possible to state that the way in which these letters are written seems excessively "romantic". Furthermore, this period of his life gave rise to what it could possibly be called the "comedy of Liszt's life"; the period in which Liszt created his mountebank reputation.

151 Adorno, Theodor W., *Philosophie der Neuen Musik*, p. 44.

## Musikalisch-ästhetische Analyse der „Harold-Symphonie“

In spite of its relevant title, in this chapter Liszt decreases the weight of his polemics, and states that everyone is free to hear in the pure instrumental music what he wants to hear: «Jene Symphonie ist den gebildeten höchsten Ausdruck der verschiedenen Phasen eines leidenschaftlich freudigen Gefühls, diese der einer elegischen Trauer, die andere einer heroischen Begeisterung, wieder eine der klagenden über ein Unersetzliches»<sup>152</sup>. These people have to experience a natural distaste for every work in which the direction of feelings is well defined by a programme. Liszt does not deny the right of composers to write pure instrumental music, and neither does he deny to listeners the right to hear the «abstrakten Ausdruck allgemeine menschlicher Gefühle»<sup>153</sup>. But he asks for himself, and for other composers who want to follow his teaching, the right to find new ways, the right of the existence of other kinds of musical genres: «soll aber deswegen anderen Gattungen ihr Daseinsrecht geschmälert werden? Sollen diejenigen unter das Joch einförmiger Arbeiten gebeugt werden, die von ihrem Genius und dem Geiste der Zeit zur Erfinden neuer Gießformen sich getrieben fühlen?»<sup>154</sup>. Through the analysis of the Berlioz's work Liszt aims to show that these new forms have the right to exist. The French composer, according to Liszt, brought some innovations within his music, and they, as it will emerge, consisted not in the programme, but in the form. As already pointed out, Liszt's aesthetics, which at the beginning were described as a new *Affektenlehre* – namely an aesthetic where the most relevant place is occupied by the content, where the musical material is used with the unique purpose of expressing this content (feelings) –, turns into a more balanced aesthetic, namely in a theory where the extra-musical elements serve to conceal the transformation of the form, and then in a theory where the form in which the content is expressed plays at least the same role as the content. As already pointed out, the form cannot (concretely) exist without a content, which can model it; but the content cannot exist without a form, which can host it, and which is able to express it. The dialectical relationship between the two elements is self-evident

In the introduction of this fourth chapter, Liszt exposes the innovations Berlioz brought about. The French composer was able « [...] Personen (wie im Harold) oder Leidenschaften (wie in der Fantastique) durch eine wiederkehrende

152 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 80.

153 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 80.

154 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, pp. 80–81.

Melodie zu Charakterisieren»<sup>155</sup>. Berlioz reached this aim creating a new idea of theme, which he called the *Idée fixe*. It is able, going through modulations and rhythmical variations, to express all the different atmospheres, feelings, and nuances through which the symphony is developing. Hence, a musical theme is able to symbolise a person, and the orchestral frame changes as if it was theatrical scenery: «Durch diese, von ihm zuerst angewandte Symbolisierung ermöglicht Berlioz nicht nur Anwesenheit oder Abwesenheit seines Helden in verschiedenen Szenen anzuzeigen; mit Hülfe der Modulation, Biegung des Rhythmus und harmonischen Ausdrucks macht er alle Wendungen seiner Gefühlsbewegung verständlich»<sup>156</sup>. But this is not, according to Liszt, the main innovation Berlioz brought about. His main contribution to the music lies in the primacy of the idea upon the form. Liszt, at this point uses his best argument against the formalist. Unfortunately, neither him, nor the translator of the Berlioz-essay or any of his collaborators, were able to develop a defence starting from this statement<sup>157</sup>.

In der sogenannten classischen Musik ist die Wiederkehr und thematische Entwicklung der Themen durch Regeln bestimmt, die man als unumstößlich betrachtet, da doch nur die eigne Phantasie Jenen die Anlage ihrer Stücke vorschrieb, die zuerst in die gewisse Reihenfolge anordneten, welche man jetzt als Gestz aufstellen will. In der Programm-Musik ist Wiederkehr, Wechsel, Veränderungen und Modulation der Motive durch ihre Beziehung zu einem poetischen Gedanken bedingt»<sup>158</sup>.

With this argument Liszt and his fellows could have annihilated the thesis of their opponents. And the argument is a very simple one. The rules, which were used by the classic composers are not eternal. They grow up with them. Actually, the rules did not exist at that time. They are just identified *a posteriori*,

155 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 81.

156 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 81.

157 About the inability of the *Neudeutsche Schule* to create a defence of programme music based on solid theoretical bases, see Deaville, James, *The Controversy Surrounding Liszt's Conception of Programme Music*, pp. 106–107: «Liszt – by virtue of his developing thoughts about programme music – was the best-prepared to respond to Hanslick, and may have needed just to go public with his own aesthetic theory». But Liszt always felt himself unable to create a systematic thought, because of his lacking education. Then, even if the «response to the book were many and varied. [...] the New Germans simply were not able to produce the decisive refutation, nor did they publish their own aesthetic theory that could compete with Hanslick in terms of perceived quality, popularity and dissemination».

158 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, pp. 81.

and therefore they started to exist when the theoreticians put them on paper. It is a utopia to think that it is possible to develop a series of rules, which are able to explain at the same time all the works of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven without creating any contradictions. The composer works on the path of tradition, following the costumes of a style or a genre. But the tradition always leaves some empty spaces which gives to the composer some freedom for his creativity. The process that Liszt is describing here is the expansion of the field of possibilities, that is the process at the basis of every progress. Liszt's new formal rules are then the repetition, the change, the transformation and the modulation of a motive, following a poetic idea. The rest of the chapter is an analysis, and not a very enlightening one – since Liszt's aim is an educational one –, of Berlioz's *Harold*. There are many references to other works of the French master, but Liszt's article is an ode to the genius of the French composer till the end, written in the typical Lisztian bombastic style. The musical analysis itself, even if it is from an historical point of view interesting, is a description through metaphors of the content and of its relationship with the programme.

## Conclusion

During the analysis of the essay *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie* many different topics emerge, from the role of the critique and of the public, from Liszt's idea of progress to his conception of the role of the artist. Anyway, the main aim of the analysis was to point out that Liszt used this article not only to defend Berlioz, but also to expose two major topics: 1) using the French composer as starting point, Liszt defended on the one side his work as theatre director, and, on the other side, his work as composer; 2) both of these two defensive speeches need to be theoretically justified, and, through this justification, Liszt outlined the most relevant characters of his aesthetics. In the beginning it seems to be a defence of the feelings against the cold formalism, but afterwards the form is defined by Liszt not as an obstacle in the path of the innovators, but as the real tool in the hands of composers to bring to the listener their ideas. Consequently, the essay does not focus on programme music, but, on the contrary, it declares the form as the real centre of Liszt's theory – of course if one looks at the form not as a set of fixed rules, but as a collection of tools in the hands of the composers, which they can use, and rework in accordance with their own needs. Under this light, and quite surprisingly, Liszt's aesthetic follows the Hegelian path, since the artwork that emerges from the composer's mind is the phenomenal appearance of thought. The thought needs a form to become



phenomenon. Consequently, it is possible to state that it is a super-formalism. It is not a formalism because the form is the most relevant part of a composition, but because the spirit, in order to reach the phenomenical world, models the form, which is consequently to be understood as the container for the spirit itself. Nevertheless, the article failed to convey precisely this message. Its style and structure were certainly good for Liszt's propaganda purpose – and this was assuredly one of his primary aims –, but they are not good enough for the emergence of a clear idea on music and of the role of musicians. Anyway, the essay is a very precious source of information about Lisztian aesthetic thought, and it can shed new light on his compositions, as it will emerge in the following chapters, in which his compositions are analysed following the traces of the ideas that emerged here.

## **PART II**

### **THE PROGRESS IN MUSIC**



## IV The *B minor Piano Sonata* S. 178

### The meaning of progress

Kretzschmar kehrte danach gar nicht mehr vom Pianino zum Rednerpult zurück. Er blieb, uns zugewandt, auf seinem Drehsessel sitzen, in der gleichen Haltung wie wir, vorgebeugt, die Hände zwischen den Knien, und führte so mit wenigen Worten seinen Vortrag über die Frage zu Ende, warum Beethoven zu Opus 111 keinen dritten Satz geschrieben. [...] Ein dritter Satz? Ein neues Anheben – nach diesem Abschied? Ein Wiederkommen – nach dieser Trennung? Unmöglich! Es sei geschehen, daß die Sonate im zweiten Satz, diesem enormen, sich zu Ende geführt habe, zu Ende auf Nimmerwiederkehr. Und wenn er sagte: «Die Sonate», so meine er nicht diese nur, in c-moll, sondern er meine die Sonate überhaupt, als Gattung, als überlieferte Kunstform: sie selber sei hier zu Ende, ans Ende geführt, sie habe ihr Schicksal erfüllt, ihr Ziel erreicht, über das hinaus es nicht gehe, sie hebe und löse sich auf, sie nehme Abschied, – das Abschiedswinken des vom cis melodisch getrösteten d-g-g-Motivs, es sei ein Abschied auch dieses Sinnes, ein Abschied, groß wie das Stück, der Abschied von der Sonate<sup>1</sup>.

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1 Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus, Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 2007, p. 85.



## Introduction

In this chapter an analysis of Liszt's *B minor Piano Sonata* is provided. As the main focus is on the aesthetic issues, then the historical vicissitudes and the compositional stages will only be dealt marginally. Those who would seek to explore these matters in greater depth could refer to the works by Rey Longyear, Sharon Winklhofer, Michael Heinemann, Kenneth Hamilton, and Maria-teresa Storino, and many others, who have analysed these aspects in a more exhaustive fashion. Therefore, the genesis of the work is taken for granted, in order to focus on some musical and aesthetic features that were only touched upon elsewhere. Anyway, in many cases, it will clearly be impossible to avoid references to the manuscript of the *Sonata*.

After this brief preamble it is necessary to explain the path through which the chapter about Liszt's most famous piano work was developed. This clarification is necessary in the sense that it is always difficult to approach the *Sonata* and to analyse it, due to the vast amount of literature that already exists about it, because there are too many ways in which this work could be approached, and, above all, because there are so many different and at the same time valid analyses of it. These analyses create what could possibly be called an "interpretative chaos", whose explanation is the main aim of the chapter. For these reasons, a complete account of the *Sonata* is impossible, since it would cover the space of several volumes. Therefore, the work will be analysed following the four subsequent points:

1. The chronological problem: The *Sonata* was written during the Symphonic poems period, namely in the middle of Liszt's activity as programme-music composer; but it does not show any programme or evocative title, unless the same name "*Sonata*" is the programme. It is an anachronistic work anyway, since Liszt's declared intention was to «briser ma chrysalide de virtuosité et de laisser plein vol à ma pensée»<sup>2</sup> ;
2. The dedication to Schumann, the relationship to his *Fantasie* op. 17, the relationship with Schubert's *Fantasie* op. 15 D.760 "Wanderer Fantasie"; and the relevance of Beethoven's sonatas. These elements support the interpretation of the title "*Sonata*" as the programme of the work. It is the musical application of the ideas Liszt expressed in several writings: the ancient masters showed the path, but it is the task of modern composers to find new means of expression (new forms);
3. Analysis of the *Sonata* between Newman, Longyear, Winklhofer and Walker. The *Sonata* will be analysed first as a multi-movement work, then as a sonata-form.

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2 Liszt, Franz, *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander Grossherzog von Sachsen*, letter dated 8 October 1846 p. 8.

From the complexity of the form and the several diverse analyses of the work, the necessity of a theoretical answer emerges, which make it possible;

4. The answer involves the idea of progress, and that in two ways: on the one hand, it is possible to see the progress of music acting in the work itself, and, on the other hand, one has to take into account the theoretical progress of music. Both movements involve the idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit*.

To provide an analysis of the B minor Piano Sonata, after so much has already been written, is certainly an arduous task. When one decides to approach the work starting from a historical and aesthetic point of view especially, which could appear to be marginal compared to the density of Liszt's work. Furthermore, showing from the very beginning that the main aim is to answer the question concerned with the meaning of progress in the Sonata, could give rise to the idea that one is going to answer to the necessity of a new analysis of the Sonata in a vague and superficial manner. Nevertheless, the four points outlined above illustrate a well-defined programme: contextualize the Sonata among Liszt's production, and try to provide a new interpretative edge, walking through the analysis made by Walker, Newman, Longyear, and Winkelhofer. Concerning the theme of with the dedication to Schumann – which many musicologists often stress as a key point of view on the work – and the chronological position of Liszt's work, are relevant, but not so fundamental to the overall comprehension of Liszt's masterpiece. Regardless, both themes are put on the table in order to create a preamble in which the climate, both cultural and psychological, in which Liszt composed his Sonata is placed under investigation. If the first three points strictly concern the analysis of the Sonata, the last one is an attempt to bring to light those aspects which on one side represent a real innovation in the field of musical language, and on the other are a clear manifestation of what one might call a "the unfolding of progress" in the music itself; namely, music does not simply progress following a historical line, but it also progresses in the exact moment of its unfolding. As it will emerge, this approach could be seen as a radicalised version of Adorno's theory on the ageing of musical materials. According to this new view, the musical material is ageing in the work itself, and it is exactly for this reason that it is necessary to submit the musical material to continuous variations<sup>3</sup>. It could be suggested that Adorno's idea

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3 This is the same idea, which lies behind the continued revisions Liszt brought about to his compositions, namely to conform them to new compositional models, to new psychological states, to new performances, to new scholars, etc.

of the “duration of the new” is brought here to its extreme, to the paradox<sup>4</sup>: music becomes old at the time of its own unfolding. The last point of the investigation on the Sonata is set in order to comprehend Liszt’s awareness of this dynamic. The theme is strictly related to the notion of the self-awareness in history (Selbst-Geschichtsbewusstsein). In turn, this concept is related to the role of artists in society, and, consequently, to a precise idea of progress. Then, if in the previous chapters Liszt’s theoretical ideas emerged on music in society, and his philosophical guides, here how these views influenced his conception of music and his compositional practice will emerge; in the background there are some musical theories which make this possible. Then, the Sonata and its multiple interpretations are justifiable both philosophically and musically without bringing the 20th century into the debate.

## Some preliminary observations

The fact that Liszt wrote his piano masterpiece, his largest one, possibly the work with the most complex structure, and, the fact that he wrote it without any kind of relationship with a (specific) literary reference or evocative title, and in the middle of his activity as a symphonist, and in this specific case as a programme-music composer, appears to be somewhat contradictory. Why did Liszt feel the necessity to give life to a pure instrumental work for the piano, when his symphonic poems were bringing him great satisfaction? Just after the completion of the *Sonata*, Liszt wrote what seemed to be a greeting, even temporarily, to his beloved instrument to his friend, the critic Luis Köhler: «Mit diesen Sachen [Sonata, Scherzo und Marsch, Années de Pèlerinage] will ich einstweilen mit dem Clavier abschliessen, um mich ausschliesslich mit Orchester-Compositionen zu beschäftigen und auf diesem Gebiet mehreres zu versuchen, was mir schon seit längerer Zeit eine innerliche Nothwendigkeit geworden»<sup>5</sup>. Liszt dedicated a lot of

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4 In his *Ästhetische Theorie* Adorno dedicated a paragraph to this topic *The new and its duration*, where he wrote that «The category of the new produced a conflict. Not unlike the seventeenth-century *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, this is a conflict between the new and duration. Artworks were always meant to endure; it is related to their concept, that of objectivation. Through duration art protests against death; the paradoxically transient eternity of artworks is the allegory of an eternity bare of semblance. Art is the semblance of what is beyond death’s reach. [...]». Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Athlone Press Ltd, London, 1997, p. 27.

5 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt’s Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated April or May 1854, Vol. I, p. 153.



time during the Weimar years to revisit and republish his already written works, as in the case of the two volumes of *Années de Pèlerinage* (Swiss and Italie), or the two piano concertos, instead of composing new and original music. According to Redepenning «von den 768 Titeln, die dieses Werkverzeichnis aufführt, sind nur 350 den Originalen zugeordnet. Strenggenommen ist diese Werkgruppe sogar noch viel kleiner, denn viele Titel sind als Eigenbearbeitungen (mit dem Anspruch von Originalwerken) zwei- bzw. dreimal in dieser Rubrik genannt»<sup>6</sup>; but what is relevant here is that this phase of “revisiting works” came to an end around 1854: «Man kann hier durchaus von einer „Werkphase“ sprechen, denn zwischen 1854 und 1860 entstehen fast keine Bearbeitungen fremder oder eigener Werke»<sup>7</sup>. Conversely, as it will emerge in the subsequent chapter, after the Weimar period Liszt went through a phase of low creativity. Then, the *Sonata* seems to appear out of nowhere, written, accordingly to the first critics, furiously in about one year. Liszt never modified a note, except from the finale and some other small details, which had already been changed during the work on the *Sonata* itself. Then, he published it in 1854 without any further afterthoughts. Furthermore, it is possible to state that the *Sonata* works as his testament concerning the piano. Using the words of Newman «this work marked the end of much of his important writing for piano»<sup>8</sup> – maybe it is the testament of the so-called *Glanzperiode*, and not of the entire category of the piano works. It is worth noting that during the same years Liszt was improving his orchestration skills. In any case, according to more recent analysis, the *Sonata* needed more than a year to be completed, as reported both by Hamilton<sup>9</sup> and Szász<sup>10</sup>, and its incipit (*Ur-motive*) already dates back to 1849<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, the manuscript

6 Redepenning, Dorothea, *Das Spätwerk Franz Liszt: Bearbeitung eigener Kompositionen*, p. 11.

7 Redepenning, Dorothea, *Das Spätwerk Franz Liszt: Bearbeitung eigener Kompositionen*, p. 15.

8 Newman, William S., *The Sonata since Beethoven*, p. 364.

9 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: sonata in B minor*, p. 1. «Although he had made at least two preliminary sketches of themes for the Sonata – one of the opening two motifs in 1851, another of the beginning of the *Andante sostenuto* in 1849 – it is likely that the main compositional work was started in the latter part of 1852».

10 Szász, Tibor, *Towards a New Edition of Liszt's Sonata in B minor*, p. 67. «Sharon Winkelhofer derived her statement that the Sonata sketch “dates from the second week of January 1851” from page 74 of the bound sketchbook into which Liszt wrote “Eilsen, 2 me semaine de Janvier 1851.”».

11 Szász, Tibor, *Towards a New Edition of Liszt's Sonata in B minor*, p. 69. «Winkelhofer stated that Arthur Hedley still possessed in 1967 a notebook page on which Liszt wrote down in 1849 the *adagio* theme of the Sonata. Hedley's statement has been corroborated by Szász, who discovered in 1982 that the entire melodic material of the Sonata's *Andante sostenuto* theme (triple piano, mm. 331–338, subsequently *Quasi Adagio*, double and triple forte, mm. 394–401) was based on an original Lied by the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna of Russia (1786–1859)».

shows signs of several revisions (*Annex II* and *III*), but it is still true that after its publication Liszt never came back to this work.

Let's proceed in an orderly fashion with the examination of the dedication to Schumann, because it is directly connected with the programmatic interpretation of Liszt's work. In 1839 the latter dedicated to the Hungarian pianist his *Fantasie* op. 17 (composed in 1836)<sup>12</sup>. Liszt himself was very proud of this dedication, since he thought that Schumann's composition was worthy of mentioning among the masterpieces of German music, and he really wanted to praise Schumann with a work of a similar value. Schumann dedicated his work to Liszt because Liszt, in the role of critic, wrote in 1837 a «long and highly favourable article about Schumann's keyboard works»<sup>13</sup> in *La Revue et gazette musicale*. Consequently, the dedication was a *hommage musicale* to thank Liszt for his article. However, knowing Liszt's nature, it is very probable that he desired to return the dedication with a piece of the same level, which could potentially affect Schumann in the same way that his *Fantasie* op. 17 had on him. Schumann had to wait 15 years to receive Liszt's answer. Unfortunately, at that time Schumann had already been admitted to a mental asylum in Endenich. Therefore, he could neither listen to the *Sonata*, nor know that it was dedicated to him. Furthermore, at this time the dedication to Schumann was intended more as a gesture made to try to fix their personal troubles, than to celebrate him. In 1847 the relationship between Liszt and Robert and Clara Schumann entered into a crisis, as he took Schumann's side in a legal controversy between Friedrich Wieck (Clara's father) and the German composer. All these elements are the reasons why we do not possess any comment on the *Sonata* from Schumann. Nevertheless, Clara Schumann gave us a sample of the coldness, not to say the aversion, with which the *Sonata* was received in some musical circles. In May 1854 Clara made an entry in his diary: «Liszt sandte heute eine an Robert dedizierte Sonate und einige andre Sachen mit einem freundlichen Schreiben an mich. Die Sachen sind aber schaurig! Brahms spielte

12 It is worth noting that the *Fantasië* was originally titled *Sonata* with the subtitle *Ruinen, Trophaeen, Palmen*, and intended to be a contribution to the Beethoven monument in Bonn. The change of mind could be a sign of the respect and the fear with which the Romantic Generation looked to Beethoven's sonatas and symphonies; in this respect William Newman wrote in his *The Sonata since Beethoven* that «The devotion to, even idolatry of, Beethoven's sonatas was extraordinary throughout the era. It began as early as 1800, in his own lifetime, with the transmitters mentioned earlier [Ries, Czerny, Moscheles, Cramer, and Hummel], and soon spread to France, England, and other countries by way of the publishers, though not yet public performers». Newman, William S., *The Sonata since Beethoven*, p. 12.

13 Walker, Alan, *Schumann, Liszt and the C Major Fantasia, Op. 17: A Declining Relationship*, p. 161.

sie mir, ich wurde aber ganz elend. [...] Das ist nur noch blinder Lärm – kein gesunder Gedanke mehr, alles verwirrt, eine klare Harmoniefolge ist da nicht mehr herauszufinden! Und da muß ich mich nun noch bedanken – es ist wirklich schrecklich»<sup>14</sup>. Eduard Hanslick wrote about the *Sonata* unmercifully, too. The critic listened to the work in Vienna during a piano recital of Hans von Bülow in 1881. After first a positive, or better perhaps, a neutral statement «es ist mir unschätzbar, dieses wenig bekannte und fast unausführbare Stück jetzt in vollendetem und authentischem Vortrage gehört zu haben», he continues:

Anderen freilich läßt sich durch Worte keine Vorstellung von diesem musikalischen Unwesen geben. Nie habe ich ein raffinierteres, frecheres Aneinanderfügen der disparatesten Elemente gehört, nie ein so wüstes Toben, einen so blutigen Kampf gegen alles, was musikalisch ist. Anfangs verblüfft, dann entsetzt, fühlte ich mich doch schließlich überwältigt von der unausbleiblichen Komik, ide in diesem Krampfhaften Ringen nach Unerhörtem, Colossalem liegt, in diesem athemlosen Arbeiten einer Genialitäts-Dampfmühle, die fast immer leer geht. [...] Den einen Ruhm muß man der Lisztschen „Sonate“ lassen, daß ihresgleichen in der gesamten Musik-Literatur nicht wieder vorkommt. Da hört jede Kritik, jede Diskussion auf. Wer das gehört hat und es schön findet, dem ist nicht zu helfen<sup>15</sup>.

To grasp the warmth with which the *Sonata* was welcomed, it can be useful to quote the review the critic Gustav Engel made in the columns of the *Spener'schen Zeitung*, where he was no less merciful. He listened Liszt's masterpiece from the hands of von Bülow too, during a recital in Berlin in 1857, and reacted with the following words:

Die zweite Nummer des Concerts war eine Sonate von Liszt (H moll). Sie hat das Eigenthümliche, daß sie aus einem einzigen, sehr ausgedehnten Satz besteht. Gewisse Hauptthemata bilden den Mittelpunkt des Ganzen; unter ihnen ist das erste von einer Beschaffenheit, daß man fast daran schon allein den Charakter des Werkes erkennen kann. Auf harmonischen und rhythmischen Überschwenglichkeiten, die mit der Schönheit nicht das Mindeste mehr gemein haben, ruht das Gebäude; schon das erste Thema ist als entschieden unkünstle-

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14 Diary entry by Clara Schumann dated 25 May 1854. Cited after Litzmann, Berthold, *Clara Schumann. Ein künstlerleben. Nach Tagebüchern und Briefen*, Vol. 2: *Ehejahre 1840–1856*, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1905, p. 317; also cited in Kube, Michael, *Vorwort zu F. Liszt b-Moll Klaviersonate*, Bärenreiter, 2013, p. IV.

15 Hanslick, Eduard, *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuose der letzten fünfzehn Jahre. 1870–1885*, Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, Berlin, 1886, p. 317.

risch zu verwerfen; doch ist freilich das, was uns im Laufe der Entwicklung geboten wird, noch viel schlimmer. Von vernünftigen, harmonischem Zusammenhang ist oft gar nicht mehr die Rede; man muthet uns zu, an dem willkürlichen Nebeneinanderstellen von Tonarten Gefallen zu finden; die Melodien, welche hie und da erscheinen, haben ein so gespreiztes Wesen, daß dadurch aller Reiz vernichtet wird; höchstens in den Clavierfiguren, die sehr reichlich verwandt sind, läßt sich Originalität und Geschmack erkennen. Um an Werken dieser Art Gefallen zu finden, muß man auf Alles, was in der Natur und in der Vernunft der Sache liegt, vollständig Verzicht leisten; es ist kaum möglich, sich weiter von der Gesetzmäßigkeit zu entfernen, als es hier geschehen ist. Herr v. Bülow spielte das Werk übrigens in jeder Beziehung vollendeter Meisterschaft, sowohl was die Überwindung der immensen technischen Schwierigkeiten betrifft, als in der Mannigfaltigkeit der Klangwirkungen.<sup>16</sup>

It is very interesting to note that not one of them listened the work from Liszt's own hands, except for Brahms, who had this great honour in Weimar in 1853, and who, according to the anecdote, fell asleep even though he was sitting in a very uncomfortable chair. Anyway, we have no idea of the way in which von Bülow or Brahms played the *Sonata*. For that reason, every comment about it could just be metaphysical speculation. However, on the other hand, the words of the critics presented the *Sonata* to the musical world. Birkin reports in his book *Hans von Bülow – a Life for Music* that the great pianist became furious when he read these reviews. First of all, he wrote to Engel, also sending him a copy of the *Sonata*, and he offered him a private performance of the work, complete with a step-by-step analysis of the composition<sup>17</sup>. The critic ignored him, and the pianist, although Liszt himself tried to calm him down, decided to start a “crusade against the philistines” and gave an uncountable number of concerts in order to defend and to spread throughout Europe the music of the Hungarian pianist<sup>18</sup>. It is clear, beyond this little parenthesis concerned with the vicissitudes of Clara Schumann and Hans von Bülow, that Schumann's *Fantasie* op. 17 was an enlightening composition for Liszt. The words “*an Robert Schumann*” which appear upon the title *Sonata für Pianoforte von F. Liszt*, on the copy addressed to

16 Engel, Gustav, *Bericht über eine Claviersonate von Franz Liszt*, in Bülow, Hans von, *Briefe und Schriften*, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1898, Vol. 3, pp. 65–66.

17 Bülow, Hans von, *Briefe und Schriften*, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1898, Vol. 3, p. 67. «Wie dem sein mag: ein gedrucktes Exemplar liegt für Sie zum Abholen bei mir bereit. Ich darf es Ihnen nicht *aufnöthigen*; ich kann es Ihnen nur anbieten. Zugleich bin ich bereit, Ihnen das Werk ebensowohl nochmals vorzuspielen, als musikalisch zu analysieren».

18 Birkin, Kenneth, *Hans von Bülow, a Life for Music*, p. 106–107.

Schumann, are not just a little homage to the German composer, but are something akin to a clear declaration of a debt of inspiration<sup>19</sup>. Heinemann wrote that «So wäre denn die Widmung der h-Moll-Sonate an Robert Schumann als Zeichen nicht nur langjähriger freundschaftlicher Verbindung [...], sondern auch einer weitestreichenden Übereinstimmung in der Beurteilung kompositorischer Fragen – mit einer unverkennbaren geschichts-philosophischen Implikation – zu werten»<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, concerning the structural and formal construction of these two works, both compositions are very far from being able to be described using the conventional terms of the sonata form. Probably Liszt's *Sonata* would be very different without the *Fantasie* op. 17. To conclude this brief examination devoted to the history of mutual dedication, it is useful to list a series of piano compositions written by Liszt between 1836 and 1853<sup>21</sup>:

1836 Grande Valse di Bravura	1842 Petite Valse favorite
1836–1853 Années de pèlerinage, Pre mière et Deuxième Année	1847–1852 Harmonies poétiques et religieuses
1837 Après une Lecture de Dante. Fantaisie quasi sonate (revisited 1849)	1848 Trois Études de Concert
1838 Grandes Études	1848 1. Ballade in Des-Dur
1838 Études d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini	1849–1850 Six Consolations
1838 Grand Galope chromatique	1850 Valse-Improptu
1839 Valse mélancolique	1849 Grosses Konzertsolo
1839 tre sonetti del Petrarca	1849 Après une Lecture de Dante
1840 Mazepa	1849 Totentanz
1840 Réminiscences de Robert le diable	1850 Fantasie und Fuge über den Choral «Ad nos ad salutarem undam»
1840–1841 Réminiscences de Don Juan	1850 Trois Caprices-Valses
1841–1843 Réminiscences de la Norma	1851 two Polonaises
1842 Fantasie über Themen aus Figaro und Don Juan	1851 Scherzo and March
	1851 12 Etudes d'exécution transcendante
	1851 (1849?)–53 B minor Piano Sonata

19 On the original manuscript there is no dedication to Schumann; more than that, there is no dedication at all. The only words written on the first page of the first *folio* are the title written in French: *Grande Sonata / pour le Pianoforte / par F Liszt / terminé le / 2 Février 1853*. According to William Mason, one of the Liszt's pupils, the master dedicated one of his copies *für die Murlbibliothek* (the library of the Weimar circle), but it is possible that this copy was conceived for the students of the circle of Weimar.

20 Heinemann, Michael, *Liszt, Klaviersonate h-Moll*, p. 13.

21 This list, although rearranged, is taken from Searle, Humphrey, *The Music of Franz Liszt*, pp. 163–169.

In 1836, Liszt was in his “travelling Virtuoso” period. That could be a further explanation for the delay of his dedication to Schumann. He felt himself an uncultivated composer and he had to learn more. From this point of view, the concerts of the young virtuoso assume another function. They are no longer the performances of a talented pianist, or at least not only, but they are an educational moment, for at least two reasons: 1) outwardly, because Liszt, according to his social view, was instructing the public; 2) inwardly, because he was educating himself by analysing and studying the works of the ancient masters. So, his compositions are both virtuoso pieces composed to amaze the public at his concerts, and at the same time – and in some cases mostly – they are a study in compositional technique. For example, most of his *Études* use the A-B-A form, or its variations; the sonata form finds application in many works, as in the *Après une Lecture de Dante*, or in the *Grosses Konzertsolo*; the variation technique is present in most of the works, above all in his *Totentanz*. Then, under this light, the list of his piano compositions becomes a path in which the form becomes more and more complex and larger, and the *Sonata* appears then the most natural result of the merging of all these techniques. Unity in the multiplicity, namely the principle which lies at the basis of the idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit*, which Liszt was discovering exactly during the years 1834–1854. However, this point will be explored later. Before entering into an analysis of the *Sonata*, it is necessary to stress its chronological position among Liszt’s productions. He reported on the manuscript the date of the completion of the work: 2 February 1853. Since 1848, the year in which he decided to settle down in Weimar, Liszt dedicated a lot of time to an exhaustive review and rethought of his previous works, instead of creating new original piano compositions. His aim was to update them, entering into a sort of never-ending vortex of continuous improvement. These reviews can therefore be seen as evidence of the dialectical process between musical material and history: during his development as composer, Liszt improved his compositional skills, and he wanted to update the form of his works; at the same time he acquired new ideas, both on music and on society, which obliged him to modernise his works, because they no longer responded to the question of the *Ideal der Zeit*. This never-ending process of improvement presents the idea of progress, and since Liszt was part of the Fortschrittspartei, his music consequently had the need to represent this same progress. But there is something more than propaganda and the adherence to an ideal behind this. There is a fundamental aesthetic question regarding the self-subsistence of the artwork through time. This question assumes a peculiar significance during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely the period which declared the end of the so-called Kunstperiode. According to Heine the

artistic period began at Goethe's cradle and ended at his coffin (1832)<sup>22</sup>. Heine's old prophecy underlines this point exactly, i.e., the contradiction between the modern demand for precise answers and the old response from an art which is still bound to the past. Art at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century starts to lose its cohesion, and consequently it does not appear in unity anymore. Even if the poet saw in Liszt's music a sign of decay, and his virtuosity as a perfect representation of the noise of the "railways society" of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is actually an attempt to answer this fundamental aesthetic question. The quotation from Mann's Doctor Faustus in the opening page of this chapter shows how the idea of the end of the *Kunstperiode* affected the musical world, expressing in superlative prose the adornian idea of the end of the art. After Beethoven it was impossible to create a self-subsistent artwork, where the term applies to a work which fully matched the *Ideal der Zeit*, namely an artwork which is in unity with society – an artwork written in a fully comprehensible language for society<sup>23</sup>. An artwork that immediately possesses a meaning to the listeners. Contrary to what is usually stated, this bond between art and society was not completely broken at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was simply society which was developing so extremely fast during this period. Therefore, the answer to this demand for velocity and advancement can only be an aesthetic of progress; namely the composer, if he wants to save his artworks from the action of the time, and from inevitable decay, has to re-work them incessantly. From this point of view, the never-ending process of improvement under which Liszt rethinks his works is undoubtedly modern, and it is evidence of his self-awareness of his position in history. Art is not once and for all, but it is "in progress"; and, as it will emerge in the following sections, Liszt recognised this movement and tried to reproduce it, and to involve this

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22 Heine, Heinrich, *Französische Maler. Gemäldeausstellung in Paris 1831*, in *Heinrich Heine Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, Hoffmann und Campe, Hamburg, 1973, Vol. 12/1, p. 47. «Meine alte prophetische von dem Ende der Kunstperiode, die bey der Wiege Goeth es anfang und bey seinem Sarge aufhören wird, scheint ihrer Erfüllung nahe zu seyn. Die jetzige Kunst muß zu Grunde gehen, weil ihr Prinzip noch im abgelebten alten Regime, in der heiligen römischen Reichs- und Partheystürmen die Kunst ihre herrlichsten Blüten entfaltetete».

23 This is of course the "progressive-party" point of view. The work of Brahms is the most eminent example, that a self-subsistent artwork in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was still possible. This is not the place to discuss the role of Brahmsian production in the history of music. It suffices here to state that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was an epoch of profound transformation, during which the arts lost their deepest relation with society.



movement in his music through a new compositional technique. Nevertheless, in the last chapter it will emerge how this “aesthetic of progress” brings to a complete rupture the relationship between art and society, because at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the principle of unity in the multiplicity lost its adherence to the theoretical background, and therefore to society. In this process it lost its own possibility to be “unity”, and so multiplicity become the fragmentation of unity into many isolated singular entities.

## On the question about the programme of the *Sonata*

During those same years in which Liszt’s productions for piano were less prolific, original works appeared instead for orchestra<sup>24</sup>. In 1853, Liszt had already concluded, or he was about to conclude his symphonic poems *Ce qu’on entend sur la montagne*, *Tasso, lamento e trionfo*, *Les Preludes*, *Prometheus*, *Mazeppa*, *Festklänge*, and *Heroïde funèbre*. With the year 1854, six years after he settled down in Weimar, Liszt had already composed seven of the twelve symphonic poems<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, during these same years, or at any rate not later than 1855, he also drafted his *Orpheus* and *Hungaria*, in addition to his *Eine Faust Symphonie* and to the *Dante Symphonie*. For that reason, it appears legitimate to ask ourselves the reason why Liszt felt the necessity to compose a sonata, namely a pure instrumental work, while he was in the middle of his creative phase as a symphonist. Its existence of just a manuscript and the few annotations and changes within it, suggest that the *Sonata* was composed as the result of an improvisation<sup>26</sup>, then it could be possible to think of it as a violent outburst caused by a prolonged absence from the keyboard. This suggestion could serve to justify why the *Sonata* does not have any programme, but, for the reasons already disclosed, this can hardly be true. A composition that is the

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24 The orchestral works that appeared at the beginning of the 1850s, namely the symphonic poems, underwent the same treatment, namely they passed through several reviews before finding their final form.

25 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt’s Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated April or May 1854, Vol. I, p. 154. Liszt wrote that «7 von den symphonischen Dichtungen sind gänzlich fertig und abgeschriebene. Bald sende ich Ihnen die kleinen Vorreden, welche ich denselben beifüge, um den Standpunkt der Auffassung bestimmter zu bezeichnen».

26 Storino, Mariateresa, *Franz Liszt. La Sonata in si minore*, p. 30. «La *Sonata* comparve all’improvviso, quasi frutto di un atto creativo estemporaneo, preceduta dalla sola scrittura di alcune idee musicali in un quaderno di appunti del 1851».



result of improvisation would be more similar to the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*, or to the *Grand galop chromatique*, namely a relatively short piece of music with a simple linear structure. It is a hard task to think of Liszt's half hour, very complex 760 measures *Sonata* as the result of an improvisation. Anyway, it is probable that, as it was common during the Romanticism, at least the basic idea of the work is a result of improvisation. Probably, the first motivic cell was drafted in 1851, while the basic idea of the *andante* had already been drafted in 1849<sup>27</sup>; but the thematic, structural, motivic, and harmonic work that the *Sonata* clearly displays, all these aspects show us that Liszt surely spent more than the time of an improvisation on his work to refine every single note of his masterpiece. Winklhofer, in her analysis of the work, notes that Liszt used different inks and pencils, and she discovered three different work levels: 1) the first one is the skeleton of the *Sonata* itself; 2) during the second stage Liszt added the dynamics and the expression marks; and 3) at the last stage he introduced some modification into the introduction, the substitution of the finale, and finally the title with date and signature: *Grande Sonata / pour le Pianoforte / par / F Liszt / terminé le / 2 Février 1853* (See Annex I, II, III). To conclude, it is more plausible that the *Sonata* is the result of a very long meditation on the form, and on the further possibilities offered by the use of the expanded tonal system. If one looks again at the list of his piano compositions above, it clearly appears that he had been working on the sonata form and on the motivic (or thematic) transformation technique for a very long time. This *Sonata* is hence the encounter/clash between this period – during which he experienced new ways to compose, but also new kinds of timbre and harmonic combinations – and the application of these findings to the large forms. The fact that he decided to use the piano and not the orchestra is quite a simple matter to resolve: Liszt had much more affinity and familiarity with the keyboard than with the orchestra, and it is therefore unsurprising that he tested his advancements with the piano first. It is interesting, perhaps banal, to underline how strong his relationship was with his beloved instrument:

Vous ne savez pas que me parler de quitter le piano, c'est me faire envisager un jour de tristesse; un jour qui éclaira toute une première partie de mon existence, inséparablement liée à lui. Car, voyez-vous, mon piano, c'est pour moi ce qu'est au marin sa frégate, [...] plus encore peut-être, car mon piano, jusqu'ici, c'est moi,

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27 This information emerged after the analysis of Sharon Winklhofer on the manuscript of the *Sonata*. See Winklhofer, Sharon, *Liszt's Sonata in B minor*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1980, p. 93.

c'est ma parole c'est ma vie; c'est le dépositaire intime de tout ce qui s'est agité dans mon cerveau aux jours les plus brûlants de ma jeunesse; c'est là qu'ont été tous mes désirs, tous mes rêves, toutes mes joies et toutes mes douleurs. [...] et vous voudriez, mon ami, que je me hâtasse de le délaisser pour courir après le retentissement plus éclatant des succès de théâtre et d'orchestre? Oh! non. En admettant même ce que vous admettez sans doute trop facilement, que je suis déjà mur pour des accords de ce genre, ma ferme volonté est de n'abandonner l'étude et le développement du piano lorsque j'aurai fait tout ce qu'il est possible, ou du moins tout ce qu'il m'est possible de faire aujourd'hui<sup>28</sup>.

Aside from the fact that this open letter to Adolphe Pictet of 1838 contains the aesthetic programme of Liszt's piano music – «ma ferme volonté est de n'abandonner l'étude et le développement du piano lorsque j'aurai fait tout ce qu'il est possible» –, it is no coincidence that the year after the appearance of the *Sonata*, Liszt gave birth to another masterpiece, this time composed for orchestra: his *Eine Faust-Symphonie in drei Charakterbildern (nach Goethe)*. Both these compositions share the same structural form, and the same compositional technique. Before moving on, it is necessary to open a parenthesis related to this symphony, concerning the identification of the *Sonata* with a precise programme. According to many scholars, the problem arose from this argument: «Se Liszt aveva così tante volte affermato i diritti della musica a programma, e con efficacia e lucidità aveva accompagnato la quasi totalità delle sue composizioni, se non con un programma, almeno con un *titolo evocativo*, come poteva aver ideato il suo capolavoro senza alcuna premura per l'ascoltatore?»<sup>29</sup>. Hence, for a long time, and still today, many musicologists think that the *Sonata* arose in the same way as its “little” sister, the *Après une lecture du Dante* sonata. «L'assunto di base è che se Liszt compose una sinfonia e una sonata dedicata a Dante, non poteva non aver composto un corrispettivo per pianoforte della *Faust-Symphonie*: l'eroe goethiano come motivo ispiratore di una sonata era d'obbligo, Liszt non aveva reso noto il titolo della *Sonata* in si minore, né aveva precisato la fonte letteraria, poiché gli adepti della scuola neotedesca ne avrebbero rintracciato il legame senza suggerimento alcuno»<sup>30</sup>. Now, if what Storino here describes happened, why do we have so many different interpretations of this work? Why didn't Lina Ramann mention the programme in his *Liszt-Pädagogium*? Unfortunately, there is no evidence of what Storino suggests, even if

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28 Liszt, Franz, *Pages Romantiques*, p. 135.

29 Storino, Mariatersa, *Franz Liszt. La sonata in si minore*, p. 60. Italic is mine.

30 Storino, Mariatersa, *Franz Liszt. La sonata in si minore*, p. 61.

the idea of a *Goethe-Sonata* lies at the basis of many interpretations, as it will emerge later. Nevertheless, if one analyses Storino's reasoning with the strict rules of the logic, one should label all the musical analyses of the *Sonata* which involve a Goethe-programme with the locution *non sequitur*. Namely, from the premise according to which both a *Dante Sonata* and a *Dante* and a *Goethe Symphony* exist, it does not logically follow the conclusion for the necessity of the existence of a *Faust Sonata*. Some scholars have gone so far as to identify the different themes of the *Sonata* with the intricate vicissitudes of Goethe's Faust, while the *Faust-Symphonie* presents just three descriptive portraits (Faust, Gretchen, Mephistopheles). For that reason, some musicologists suggested the title *Après une lecture du Goethe*<sup>31</sup> for the *Sonata*. Moreover they identified, for example, the repeated D of the third theme (m. 14) as the sarcastic laughing of Mephistopheles, while its transformation (mm. 153–154) is described as the gentle laugh of Gretchen. Following these examples, it is now time to analyse the three main programmatic interpretations, which were imposed upon the *Sonata* over the years:

1. The biographical interpretation, founded by Peter Raabe, according to which this Sonata is a musical autobiography, which narrates Liszt's successes and failures, his loves and enmities. Hamilton suggests that this interpretation «[...] tells us nothing beyond the one thing that we already know for sure – that the sonata was composed by Liszt and not a computer»<sup>32</sup>. It is believed that Hamilton's statement exhausted all the possible objections to this interpretation.
2. The second could be defined the eschatological interpretation. This theory was elaborated for the first time by Tibor Szász, who saw in the contrasts between the various parts of the Sonata a struggle between God and Lucifer (Good and Evil), who fight for the human soul<sup>33</sup>. This theory is based upon the Bible and on the book *Paradise Lost* by Milton. Paul Merrik elaborated on a theory related to the one just presented; he started from the similitude between the so-called *Grandioso Theme* (mm. 105 ff) and the *Crux fidelis* theme, that Liszt used in his symphonic poem *Hunnenschlacht* to represent Christianity, to give an explanation in a religious key. For example, under the light of this interpretation, the slow

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31 S. Ott, Betrand, *An Interpretation of Liszt's Sonata in B Minor*, in *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, Nr. 10, 1981, pp. 30–38.

32 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor*, p. 29.

33 Szász, Tibor, *Liszt's Symbols for the Divine and Diabolical*. This is of course a simplified version of the theory. Szász exposes an insightful analysis of the *Sonata* and explains how its motives can be related to the theme of the «Lucifer-Satan duality» (p. 49), and to the overall Biblical imagery.

section can represent just one thing, namely the redemption of man after the fall. The so called eschatological interpretations are, of course, very suggestive, but they do not enrich any aspect of the *Sonata*; actually, the contrasts between the first theme, generally associated with a male character, more impetuous, and the second theme, associated with a female character, sweeter than the first one, could connect almost every sonata ever written to the struggle between good and evil – one could even state that this contrast represents the *conditio sine qua non* of music itself, where music is the counterpart to silence.

3. The last interpretation is that already discussed above, according to which the programme of the Sonata is in some way related to the theme of Faust (by Goethe).

Of course, these programmatic interpretations are all interesting, and they certainly grasp some peculiar feature of the *Sonata*. It is nevertheless possible to state some objections to these arguments, in order to analyse the work purely from a musical point of view:

1) It is believed that the title *Sonata* is itself very evocative, since this term brings with it almost the entire history of music. As Rosen writes, «much of the history of music from 1749 to 1828 can be written in terms of developing and changing sonata techniques»<sup>34</sup>. Consequently, to ascribe the word *Sonata* after Beethoven is a clear sign of Liszt's great historical awareness. Just using this term was a risk for a musician, because at that time those who decided to compose sonatas risked being a simple imitator of the master of Bonn, or literally applying the rules elaborated by Reicha, Marx, and Czerny, or, on the contrary, to bring about excessive innovations, and therefore to remain unappreciated. «When sonata form did not yet exist, it had a history – the history of eighteenth-century musical style. Once it had been called into existence by early nineteenth-century theory, history was no longer possible for it; it was defined, fixed, and unalterable. Except for a few small and unimportant details, sonata form will be for all eternity what Czerny said it was»<sup>35</sup>. The form dies – i.e., cannot be transformed any more, as Rosen points out – in the exact moment in which the theory fixes its rules. Using the sonata form in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was an attempt to progress with the genre for Liszt, an attempt to give back to the sonata form its history. From this Hegelian perspective on the sonata form it emerges in all its strength the distance between the theory and the compositional practice, a theme which was dear to Liszt, and to which he

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34 Rosen, Charles, *Sonata Forms*, p. 366.

35 Rosen, Charles, *Sonata Forms*, p. 365.

devoted some reflections in his Berlioz essay. The topic is related again to the theme of historical awareness. Hamilton seems to be the only one who relates it to the *Sonata*. In his analysis he wrote that «no Romantic composer was more aware than Liszt of the *sonata tradition* and its relevance to the formal structure of his larger works. If this has taken a long time to be recognised, it is because thoughtless repetition of Identikit formas was anathema to Liszt. His sonata forms are not still-born Reicha/Czerny clones»<sup>36</sup>. Again, it is undeniable that Liszt did not tolerate the “identikit formas”, but the main reason for his use of the sonata form has historical causes. In his social view, the “identikit formas” – which anyway were not “formulas” in the beginning, as they were the living results of the compositional practice – were good for the ancient masters during ancient times, but they did not respond to the questions of the modern era. The musical language has to change alongside society, in order to reach the previously explained *Ideal der Zeit*. Surely, Liszt was not the only composer who noted the troubles related to the problem of form. This problem was a big deal for all the Romantic Generation, and the sonata form is the form which embodies this issue the most. In 1839, Schumann had already noted that: «Es ist lange her, daß wir über die Leistungen im Sonatenfach geschwiegen. Von außerordentlichen haben wir auch heute nicht zu berichten. [...] Sonderbar, daß es einmal meist Unbekannte sind, die Sonaten schreiben, sodann, daß gerade die älteren noch unter uns lebenden Komponisten, die in der Sonatenblütezeit aufgewachsen, und von denen als die bedeutendsten freilich nur Cramer und Moscheles zu nenn wären, diese Gattung am wenigsten gepflegt. Was die ersteren, meist junge Künstler, zum Schreiben anregt, ist leicht zu erraten; es gibt keine würdigere Form, durch die sie sich bei der höheren Kritik einführen und gefällig machen könnten; die meisten Sonaten dieser Art sind daher auch nur als eine Art Spezimina, als Formstudien zu betrachten; aus innerem starken Drang werden sie schwerlich geboren»<sup>37</sup>. The problem of the form and the necessity of innovation and transformation would, from now on, be one of the most relevant themes for the aesthetic of music. With the 19<sup>th</sup> century musicians began to perceive their works as an outcome of social process – namely, they were acting in history, as all other human beings – and then to relate their compositions and their life conditions to society. These

36 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor*, p. 48. (Italic is mine).

37 Schumann, Robert, *Sonate für das Klavier*, in *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Vol. I, pp. 394–395.

theories found their best application in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the social view of Adorno, who, speaking about the weight of musical material used these words:

Die Annahme einer geschichtlichen Tendenz der musikalischen Mittel widerspricht der herkömmlichen Auffassung vom Material der Musik. Es wird physikalisch, allenfalls tonpsychologisch definiert, als Inbegriff der je für den Komponisten verfügbaren Klänge. Davon aber ist das kompositorische Material so verschieden wie die Sprache vom Vorrat ihrer Laute. Nicht nur verengt und erweitert es sich mit dem Gang der Geschichte. Alle seine spezifischen Züge sind Male des geschichtlichen Prozesses. Sie führen die historische Notwendigkeit um so vollkommener mit sich, je weniger sie mehr unmittelbar als historische Charaktere lesbar sind. Im Augenblick, da einem Akkord sein historischer Ausdruck nicht mehr sich anhören läßt, verlangt er bündig, daß seinen historischen Implikationen Rechnung trage, was ihn umgibt. Sie sind zu seiner Beschaffenheit geworden. Der Sinn musikalischer Mittel geht nicht in ihrer Genesis auf und ist doch von ihr nicht zu trennen<sup>38</sup>.

It is believed that the same argument Adorno used to defend the historical heritage of a chord, of musical material, can even be applied to the forms and genres. In Adorno's view, the material undergoes an ageing process, because of the dialectical movement between the music and the composers, that make it sound false if used in the wrong way. The composer's task is to understand this *Tendenz*. It is not necessary to explain here Adorno's theories – it would take too long –, but the quotation above, is sufficient to illustrate the main thesis of this section, that the word “Sonata” brings with it a huge historical heritage, the largest part of which is represented by Beethoven's works. For the Romantic Generation, Beethoven was a giant whose achievement were impossible to surpass. Therefore, a complex of inferiority was a typical psychological condition of those composers who tried to write sonatas or symphonies at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This condition was amplified by the critics, who compared every new work in these fields to Beethoven's achievements. The Romantic Generation had to deal with this complex of inferiority, and, if Beethoven was for Liszt «a pillar of cloud to guide us by day, a pillar of fire to guide us by night»<sup>39</sup>, for the majority of composers he appeared as Goliath, a giant impossible to defeat. Hence, the sonata form is itself the programme. To analyse, listen, and play the *B minor Piano Sonata* is to assist in the unfolding,

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38 Adorno, Theodor W., *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, pp. 36–37.

39 See footnote 127 at p. 87.

and at the same time in the renovation, and in the end of the sonata form itself. For all these reasons, it is possible to answer the musicologists, who say that the *Sonata* does not possess any “evocative title”; they have to reconsider the idea that the word “sonata” is the most evocative title possible.

2) Liszt was very precise in his work, especially when he had to assign a title or a programme to his works. The vicissitudes related to the programme of the *Dante Sonata* are in this sense very explicative. Therefore, it is believed that if he had wanted to assign a programme to his *Sonata*, and especially to let us know it, he would have done so. This means that Liszt himself might have been inspired by a literary work or another extra-musical element, yet, even if this was really the case, it was simply his intention not to give us the programme. Furthermore, there are historical facts which support the view of a *Sonata* without any programme. Hamilton underlines that Lina Ramann asked Liszt directly about the origin of this extraordinary work, and he denied any kind of relationship between the *Sonata* and any *specific* literary programme – where the word “specific” can be read as a confirmation of what was discussed in point 1 above. This second argument against the programmatic interpretation of the *Sonata* could be closed by citing from Dömling, who stated that «Die *Dante-Sonata* hat sozusagen ein „Programm“, die *b-moll-Sonate* keines, aber nichts unterscheidet die beiden Werke kompositionstechnisch und in der Formkonzeption voneinander. Die Interessante Formidee und der innere Reichtum der Musik, der aus dieser Formidee Gestalt ist, ist das Entscheidende, ein Reichtum an Umformungen und Variante, die ein ‚poetisches Subjekt‘, ein inneres ‚lyrisches Ich‘ der Musik offenbaren»<sup>40</sup>. In this way Dömling gives back to music its *per se* value, saving it from the hegemony of words.

3) The scepticism concerned with the research of a programme to relate to this work, derive from the point of view according to which this kind of exercise, based upon hypothesis and suppositions, subtract energies from the musical analysis of the *Sonata*. Anyone is free to think that this work truly possesses a programme, if it is necessary in order to reach a better sense of unity for its constituent parts during a performance. Furthermore, it could be useful for teachers to relate a composition to an extra-musical work, with pedagogical intent. Unsurprisingly, this is exactly what Liszt did, writing indications as *Paukenschläge*, or associating the second motive to the defiant character of Bee-

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40 Dömling, Wolfgang, *Franz Liszt*, p. 132.

thoven's Coriolan<sup>41</sup>. As already seen in *Chapter II*, all these indications are to be related to a metaphorical view of music, which is precious when the aim is to describe its general character, or to bring a student to a better understanding of a passage, and, consequently, to a better timbre/expression. On the other hand it is worth remembering that the programme is something extremely relevant, but only when it is provided by the composer himself, as Liszt wrote to George Sand: «ist es nicht unnütz und vor allem nicht „lächerlich“ – wie man so häufig zu sagen beliebt –, wenn der Komponist in einigen Zeilen die geistige Skizze seines Werkes angibt und, ohne in kleinliche Auseinandersetzungen und ängstlich gewahrte Details zu verfallen, die Idee ausspricht, welche seiner Komposition zur Grundlage gedient hat»<sup>42</sup>. Consequently, it is believed that continued and exhaustive research for extra-musical elements in the *Sonata* remains a metaphysical exercise, as no one can possibly confirm or deny these references. The Master is the master of his own works, and for that reason, to apply programmes to instrumental compositions can be seen as disrespectful to a composer's work, because that would mean «den Zauber zerstören, Gefühle entweißen, feinste Gespinnte der Seele durch das Wort zerreißen»<sup>43</sup>.

4) Lastly, it is necessary to discuss the relationship between the *B minor Piano Sonata* and the *Faust-Symphonie*. Similarities, that exist between the two works, are attributable more to the new compositional technique, instead of to a common programme. With the *Faust-Symphonie* and with the *Sonata*, Liszt successfully applied his thematic variations technique to the large forms. Hence, the two works are based on the same theoretical background, and they use the same new harmonic achievements (diminished harmonies, augmented triads, etc.) as functional elements – in place of the traditional tonal and thematic connections – between the motivic cells. Even the beginning of the *Faust symphony* which presents all the 12 pitches of the chromatic scale, and which is often regarded as a first example of twelve-tone technique<sup>44</sup>, is nothing more

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41 Ramann, Lina, *Liszt-Pädagogium*, Serie V., Nr. 16, p. 3. «[...] muß wie ein dumpfer Paukenschlag erklingen [...]. Bezüglich derselben äußerte (in Pest) der Meister gegen Stradal, daß ihm Beethovens "Coriolan"-Ouvertüre vorgeschwebt habe: "Warum soll ich Euch meine Leiden zeigen? Ich trage sie in meinen Innern und verschließe sie stolz von Euch"».

42 Liszt, Franz, *An George Sand*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II, p. 130.

43 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, 1855, p. 52.

44 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years*, p. 329. «The symphony begins with a slow introduction which contains two of Faust's principal themes, revealing him as magician and thinker, respectively. Appropriately, the first theme offers us a magical glimpse into the future of music, one of the first conscious twelve-note rows in musical history». And in the footnote Walker continues: «a brief inspection of the "tone-row" shows that it consists of three



than the result of the radicalisation of chromaticism and of the intense use of augmented triads, about which Liszt wrote, with just a touch of irony, that:

«les exercices élémentaires des Méthodes de Piano actuelles [...], devront être remplacés par celui-ci,



lequel formera aussi la base unique de la Méthode d'harmonie, tous les autres accords, usités ou non, ne pouvant s'effectuer que par le retranchement *arbitraire* de tel ou tel intervalle»<sup>45</sup>.

This aspect of Lisztian research, that of alternative harmonic systems will be dealt with later on. For now, it is relevant to restate that Liszt faced the sonata form several times throughout his life. Already in 1825, when he was fourteen years old, he composed three sonatas and a piano duo. These works are now lost, but musicologists agree that this doesn't represent any great loss. Liszt himself, who was used to reworking his early compositions, never made any effort to preserve them. In any case, after these first attempts, Liszt dealt with the sonata form many times without giving these works the title of *sonata*. Only in 1837 (1849 for the second version), did Liszt use again this term with his *Après une lecture du Dante*, but he even underlined that it was (after all) not a "true" sonata, but a *Fanatasia quasi sonata*. The connection with Beethoven op. 27 No. 2 is pretty obvious – a sonata which does not fit the classical sonata form scheme, although it is dedicated to Haydn. Therefore, Liszt's work is a clear sign of his study of Beethoven's works, and it is therefore a further element to support the idea that the title *Sonata* could be seen as the real programme

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augmented triads. It has been conjectured that Liszt was attracted to the tonal ambiguities of the augmented chords by the theories of C. F. Weitzmann, a Berlin musician whose book *Der übermäßige Dreiklang* was published in 1853. In September of that year, Weitzmann sent Liszt an unsolicited copy of his book and at the same time sought Liszt's permission to dedicate to him his next book, on the diminished seventh chord. The two men became friends and used to play whenever Liszt's travels took him to Berlin. The pair often discussed the theoretical basis of the harmonic system».

45 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated summer 1860, Vol. 1, p. 363.

of the *B minor Piano Sonata*. During the time in which Liszt did not compose sonatas, he spent a lot of energy spreading Beethoven's sonatas among the audiences of his recitals, and studying the piano works of the master. This is a clear sign of a deep relationship with Beethoven, and especially with the issues that his works, particularly those of the late period, had given rise to. This relationship is proven by a letter that Liszt sent to Wilhelm von Lenz, in which he discussed the division of Beethoven's life into three periods, affirming that he preferred to divide it into two periods: «la première, celle où la forme traditionnelle et convenue contient et régit la pensée du maître; et la seconde, celle où la pensée étend, brise, recrée et façonne au gré de ses besoins et de ses inspirations la forme et le style. Sans doute en procédant ainsi nous arrivons en droite ligne à ces incessant problèmes de l'*autorité* et de la *liberté*»<sup>46</sup>. That is also a pertinent statement concerning Liszt's idea of *form*, according to which the ideas govern the form, and not vice versa. It is very curious that Liszt did not quote from Adolf Bernhard Marx in this letter, in addition to ignore him in his Berlioz essay. The theorist wrote that «Form ist die Weise, wie der Inhalt des Werks – die Empfindung, Vorstellung, Idee des Komponisten – äusserlich Gestalt worden ist, und man hat die Form des Kunstwerks näher und bestimmter als die Aeusserung, als das Aeusserlich – Gestaltwerden seines Inhalts zu bezeichnen»<sup>47</sup>. But the problem of form will be discussed later on during the analysis of the *Sonata*. Here it is relevant to give emphasis to the relationship between Liszt and Beethoven, because it is a matter of the utmost importance. From the letter Liszt wrote to von Lenz, it emerges that Liszt was not just a mere performer of Beethoven's compositions, but that he dedicated great attention and profound reflections to them. In the same letter, Liszt tells us his idea of the historical role of Beethoven's production, defining the master as «la colonne de nuée et de feu qui conduisit les Israélites à travers le désert – colonne de nuée pour nous conduire le jour, – colonne de feu pour nous éclairer la nuit "afin que nous marchions jour et nuit". Son obscurité et sa lumière nous tracent également la voie que nous devons suivre»<sup>48</sup>.

The relationship between Liszt and Beethoven is so strong, that Liszt's *Sonata* can be considered a direct consequence of what the master of Bonn did. It can be considered the 33<sup>rd</sup> Beethoven sonata. For that reason the *B minor Piano Sonata* is ideally still related to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely it is a self-subsistent work. To support this point of view there is the fact that

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46 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated 2 December 1852, Vol. I, p. 124.

47 Marx, Adlof Bernhard, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, Vol. 2, p. 5.

48 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated 2 December 1852, Vol. I, p. 123.

the *Sonata* represents the only “closed case” in the entire production of Liszt. There are two reasons to consider it as the only “closed case”: 1) Liszt was probably proud and satisfied with his work. Furthermore, he was too busy with the symphonic poems during the Weimar period to come back to this work and to rework it. After Weimar his music took on other directions, and it would therefore be anachronistically a new version of the *Sonata*; 2) on the other hand, it represents a treatise written with notes instead of words. Liszt spent many years studying and analysing Beethoven’s Sonatas, and he spent many years experimenting with this form before using it. When he thought that he could master the form, he gave birth to a work that had to write a new chapter in the history of the genre, a work that had to surge as a model for the future generations. From this point of view, the *Sonata* is a work that can be related to the first twenty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – namely when art was still speaking an immediately understandable language – as a *per se* artwork, as the last Lisztian traditional composition. Practically it represents the “second death” of the sonata form, and at the same time a new conception of the genre itself, but one that Liszt never used by this name again, in his lifetime.

During the analysis that follows it will emerge that the *Sonata* was not just a *coup de génie*, but it was the outcome of a long research process – a process which is the backbone of Liszt’s entire production. From this point of view, the *Sonata* represents a turning point, more than an arrival point. Hereafter, a huge number of new ideas and compositions arose – and for that reason it is to be regarded as a turning point –, but at the same time it represents the end of his virtuoso pianism, buried in a marble grave represented by the *Sonata*. In summarizing the elements presented up to this point, it is necessary to underline again that Liszt was more comfortable with notes than with words. For this reason, instead of writing a heavy and undefined treatise concerning his musical researches, he preferred to write what can be described, taking the words of Paul Bekker as a «[...] kritischer Essay, geschrieben nicht in Worten und Begriffen, sondern in Klängen und über alle verstandesmäßigen Darlegungen hinausweisend durch die Kraft der Intuition, des schöpferischen Sehens»<sup>49</sup>. However, a treatise written with notes and not with words was necessary for another reason, too: Liszt was sure that if he had written a treatise, then princess Sayn-Wittgenstein would have corrected his “uncertain” prose, enriching it with her bombastic language full of useless details. The world had to wait a further year, until 1855, to see Liszt’s ideas put on paper with his essay *Berlioz*

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49 Bekker, Paul, *Schönberg, Erwartung*, in A. S. *Zum fünfzigsten Geburtstage*, 13. September 1924, in *Sonderheft der Musikblätter des Anbruch*, Wien, 1924, p. 275.

und seine *Haroldsymphonie*, which represented both an homage to Berlioz, and an aesthetic defence of both his programme music and his new compositional technique. With this essay Liszt proved that Friedrich Schlegel was correct when he wrote that musicians often have «mehr Gedanken in ihrer Musik als über dieselbe»<sup>50</sup>. The essay, as it emerged during its analysis, is of course full of thoughts on music and theoretical explanations, but they are expressed more to affect the reader emotionally as opposed to rationally. It is exactly for this reason that the *Sonata* is so relevant among Liszt's productions. On the basis of its comprehension and analysis, it is not only possible to better understand the previous compositions, but it is also possible to explain, in a theoretical and critical way, all further works – as they find their theoretical foundation here.

The fact that Liszt never came back to his *Sonata* in order to change it, represents another feature that make this work unique among his productions. As already suggested, the manuscript presents three different levels of writing<sup>51</sup>, but they are all ascribable to the period 1851–53. The revisions Liszt made on the manuscript did not deeply change the work, and that means that the overall structure of the *Sonata* was already clear in his mind from the first draft, «assuming we do not find a bundle of hitherto unknown sketches in some dusty Weimar attic»<sup>52</sup>. This *modus operandi* represents a singularity, an event which happened just once. And precisely because it is an exception, from it some issues arise: for one, Liszt had the habit of continuously reworking his previous compositions in order to upgrade them, following the inner necessity to reach an unattainable ideal of perfection; for another, it is strange that his masterpiece was conceived and composed in such a short time and without any

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50 Schlegel, Friedrich, *Athenäum-Fragmente*, No. 444. The phrase is taken out of context It is relevant to underline that Schlegel affirmed exactly the opposite. The whole passage declaims: «Es pflegt manchem seltsam und lächerlich aufzufallen, wenn die Musiker von den Gedanken in ihren Kompositionen reden; und oft mag es auch so geschehen, daß man wahrnimmt, sie haben mehr Gedanken in ihrer Musik als über dieselbe. Wer aber Sinn für die wunderbaren Affinitäten aller Künste und Wissenschaften hat, wird die Sache wenigstens nicht aus dem platten Gesichtspunkt der sogenannten Natürlichkeit betrachten, nach welcher die Musik nur die Sprache der Empfindung sein soll, und eine gewisse Tendenz aller reinen Instrumentalmusik zur Philosophie an sich nicht unmöglich finden. Muß die reine Instrumentalmusik sich nicht selbst einen Text erschaffen? und wird das Thema in ihr nicht so entwickelt, bestätigt, variiert und kontrastiert, wie der Gegenstand der Meditation in einer philosophischen Ideenreihe?».

51 Liszt used two different pens, black and red. With the black one he wrote the *Sonata* and with the red one he made the first level of corrections (phrasing, dynamics, accents); then with a red pencil he made the second corrections level, probably made at the piano, since they concern fingering and some indications for the correct performance of the *Sonata*.

52 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor*, p. 49.

reconsiderations or corrections. In this respect Hamilton wrote that if «many of the symphonic poems went through several complete versions before publication, [and] the revisions sometimes drastically altering the formal design», with the *B minor Piano Sonata* «[Liszt] seemed to have been relatively little doubt or hesitation over even the most complex element of its structure: the accommodation within a sonata form of a slow section and fugal “scherzo”»<sup>53</sup>. This is evidence that confirms that Liszt was thinking and experimenting with the sonata form for a very long time, and that with this work he meant to bring an end this research path with the piano. His late piano works (from *Rome* to the end) certainly bring about some innovations both in the harmonic, timbric, and in the compositional technique field; but it is possible to state that these were just improvements on the principles and findings already discovered during the Weimar period. All these elements, alongside an intensified introspection, which brought the expression of the subjectivity to its extreme level, represent the perfect link between the late compositions to the findings of the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (it is easy to think about the compositional technique and the sound affinity between works such as *Nuages gris*, *La lugubre Gondola*, *Unstern*, and the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*, and the works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of Schönberg, Debussy, Scriabin, etc.). However, one does not have to make the mistake of thinking about Liszt as a man from the future. Everything he did was perfectly consistent with the theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Trying to reach the *Ideal der Zeit* made Liszt the embodiment of the *Zeitgeist* of that epoch.

## The sources of Liszt’s new conception of the sonata form

This section is devoted to the influence of the “ancient” masters on Liszt’s mind. The investigation will be limited to some examples and it will only be concerned with the sonata forms. As already seen, the composer who influenced Liszt the most is without any doubt Beethoven, who was the guiding light for Liszt, which made any progress possible. However, as Heinemann pointed out, it is impossible to narrow it down to just one Beethoven’s sonatas that influenced Liszt more than others. Furthermore, Beethoven used the sonata form in almost all of his compositions, from his symphonies, to his concerts, from his chamber music, to his solo instrument compositions. For that reason it would be impossible to identify just one work as the source of Liszt’s inspiration. It is however possible

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53 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor*, p. 49.

to reduce the focus to two sonatas, which were certainly a source of great inspiration for Liszt, namely the opus 106, and the opus 111. If the *Hammerklavier* was one of Liszt's favourite and therefore often appeared in his concert programmes, there is no account that Liszt played the sonata in C minor. This is a curious and inexplicable fact, but it is sure that Liszt knew the score of this work, and that he had analysed it. In fact, it is possible to find a great number of correspondences between it and Liszt's B minor work. The Hungarian composer took many ideas from the sonata form used by Beethoven: the variation technique, the fusion of the movements into one, the motivic transformations, etc. Some works of Beethoven are always cited as the source of inspiration for Liszt's *Sonata*, such as the piano sonatas op. 106 and 101, or the Ninth Symphony. The op. 111 is cited less often, but it is possible to find many similarities. For this reason, its first movement deserves more attention here, and from a comparison of the two works it is possible to state the following: 1) both works begin with a seventh interval, and this interval is the cell from which the rest of the movement arises. Both in Beethoven and in Liszt's compositions an interval creates its own continuation; 2) both works have an introduction which simultaneously works as an exposition – it is of course hard to speak about an exposition when the motivic material is an interval; 3) both works use the motivic transformation to create its continuation; 4) both works use a fugato as development section; 5) the recapitulation begins both in Liszt and in Beethoven before the end of the development, creating problems in the identification of the end/beginning of the sections; 6) the tonality of the second thematic group is the only clear link with the classical sonata form scheme. Moreover, both the two works are highly tonally unstable, but this feature is of course the result of the extensive use of seventh and diminished seventh harmonies, which were quite a common device during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it cannot therefore be mentioned among the innovations. The relationship between Beethoven's last sonata and Liszt's work deserve more attention and a closer analysis, which are not the aims of this dissertation. The relationship between Liszt and Beethoven is outlined here enough to bring to light that the innovations brought about by Liszt's *Sonata* did not appear out of nowhere, but they have illustrious predecessors.

Among the illustrious predecessors it is impossible to avoid mentioning Franz Schubert, who, with his *Wanderer Fantasie*, deeply influenced Liszt, who, in turn, arranged a transcription for piano and orchestra of this work in 1851. Therefore, the *Fantasie* D.760 is undeniable evidence of the prominent role of Schubert's work in Liszt's conception of his *Sonata*. The *Wanderer-Fantaise* is relevant for at least two reasons, of which the first is a musical one, the second a theoretical one: 1) Schubert wrote a composition whose form is surely atypical: a) the four movements of the sonata are condensed into one, large movement,

whose sections are still identifiable (Allegro, Adagio, Presto, Finale); b) it is a cyclical composition, in which every movement is based on the transformation of the basic material; c) the slow movement is a theme with variations – whose similarities with Beethoven's *Arietta* from the op. 111 seem to have been ignored; d) the tonal structure of the work privileges the major third instead of the tonic-subdominant-dominant relations – the first movement is in C, the second in E, the third in Ab, the fourth again in C. Liszt was probably fascinated by this work exactly for the augmented triad relationship which lies in the background<sup>54</sup>. 2) There is even a theoretical reason, which arises from the name *Fantasie*. It is curious that Schubert gave the title of *fantasy* to his most innovative and complex sonata form work. But it was the year 1822, and this kind of revolutionary structure would hardly be accepted as a *Sonata*. But this example presents an idea of the climate of the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the sonata form was intended as a precise and very well defined form, and of the historical value of the battle against authority engaged by Liszt when he decided to entitle his work *Sonata*.

Therefore, unsurprisingly some years later, in 1836, Schumann erased the title *Sonata* from his *Fantasie* op. 17, which deserves a closer analysis here, since, as previously stated, it is dedicated to Liszt, and it is ideally the work which inspired Liszt's own *Sonata*. In 1835, the Beethoven committee asked for musical offers in order to raise money to build a monument to the composer. Schumann replied to this invitation by composing a sonata, whose original title was intended to be *Obolen auf Beethovens Monument: Ruinen. Trophaen, Palmen. Grosse Sonate für das Pianoforte. Für Beethovens Denkmal*, and which was supposed to have contained quotations from Beethoven's works. Only, Schumann completed his piece in 1838, and during these two years he decided to change the title from *Sonate* to *Fantasie*, and to erase the subtitles. Moreover, the only crystal-clear quotation from Beethoven's work which survived through this operation is taken from the last Lied from the *An die ferne Geliebte*, and it is more an homage to Clara Schumann – the relationship between her and Robert was going through a difficult phase, and this troubled period is the reason of the rift between him and Liszt – than to Beethoven. Nevertheless, this work was extremely relevant for Liszt too. Probably the slow section of the first movement would be where one has to search for the key point of this composition, and consequently the place where Liszt found his inspiration. Marston wrote on the subject:

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54 The relevance of the augmented triad in Liszt's music will be analysed in *chapter V* and *VI* of this dissertation.

As for the issue of form, analysts have been much exercised by the relationship to the whole of the *Im Legendenton* section. To the extent that this separately titled section is in a different key, metre and tempo to the rest of the movement, it appears to form an independent interlude; but closer study reveals that it grows out of the preceding music. It is precisely this quality of ambiguity, the capacity *to bear multiple meanings*, which distinguishes so much of the material of the first movement and makes it such a rich and fascinating – yet problematic – object of study<sup>55</sup>

Two things are extremely relevant in this quotation: 1) the slow section originates from the preceding music; 2) the ambiguity of the passage, and its multiple meanings. Both these aspects are present in Liszt's *Sonata*, and not as marginal characters. Quite the opposite, the ambiguity is the main character of Liszt's *Sonata*, as it will emerge later on. However Marston, speaking about the whole *Fantasie*, points out a general principle of the sonata form, which was changing under the hands of some composers such as Schumann or Liszt:

It is useful to think more generally of the sonata form structure in terms of a distinction between *stability* and *instability*. That is, the recapitulation is more stable than the exposition, in that it is free from tonal polarity developed there. Similarly, exposition and recapitulation are both more stable than the development, the tonal events of which are the least predictable of all. Tonal stability and instability tend to be matched in the thematic or melodic organization: the exposition and recapitulation generally present stable, identifiable thematic units which are fragmented – rendered unstable – in the development<sup>56</sup>.

From this quotation it seems clear that something was changing in the conception of the functional centre of the sonata form. In this *Fantasie*, the sonata form scheme is fully operative, but instead of using tonal relationships – the tonic-dominant relationship – Schumann used the character of the sonata form, namely the stability-instability relationship. It is possible to state that this is a kind of abstraction operation, in the sense that the main features of the sonata form are no more relevant, while the thinner aspects of the scheme become more pregnant. In this specific case Schumann preferred to use, according to Marston's analysis, the stability-instability relationship typical of the classical sonata form, and he elected to choose this relationship as the main feature of his work. But, if in the traditional conception of the sonata form this relationship

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55 Marston, Nicholas, *Schumann Fantasie* op. 17, p. 43. Italic is mine.

56 Marston, Nicholas, *Schumann Fantasie* op. 17, p. 47.



is still a harmonic one – i.e. the exposition is stable, because it is in the area of the tonic, the development is unstable, because it is the moment in which the composer can freely explore distant tonalities, and the recapitulation is the most stable moment, because it is entirely composed on the tonic – during these years of transition the dualism of stable-unstable was detached from its harmonic relations, and it therefore assumed new features. An example of this new conception is the *Im Legendenton* section, which appears totally unrelated to the first and the third sections of the piece, tonal unstable, and it is presented in a stable C minor key. This passage appears to be problematic for musicologists, who elaborated three possible interpretations of this passage. The movement *Im Legendenton* could be seen as: 1) an interlude; 2) a strange development section; 3) or as a second movement of a sonata. Following these three different interpretations it is possible to see the *Fantasie* as a *Lied* form (A-B-A'), or as a three movement sonata condensed into one (Allegro-Adagio-Allegro). In any case, it is not the aim of the present section to state once and for all whether Schumann's work is intended to be as a three movement sonata or as a *Lied*. The aim here is to point out the ambiguity that arises from the passage *Im Legendenton* and which creates a link between this work and Liszt's *Sonata*. Schumann's first intention was to compose a sonata, but in this he faced the problem of the entire Romantic Generation: Beethoven. So, to go further and to preserve the sonata form, many composers hid its structure inside *fantasy* compositions, which assured them more formal freedom. But this formal freedom, based on the sonata form scheme, gives rise to sections which are ambiguous, because they cannot be entirely explained with the vocabulary of the sonata form, as they bring with them the formal structures of different sections, movements, and sometimes of sonata-like genres. This terminological ambiguity creates then many different interpretations. Nevertheless, these works show an internal coherence, which is only explainable through the idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit*, and it was exactly the direction that Lisztian musical research took during the 1830s.

The last illustrious predecessor to the *B minor Piano Sonata* which deserves to be mentioned here is Liszt himself. As already suggested, the *Sonata* did not undergo the revision process which almost all of Liszt's works were subjected to. This is explainable historically – during the Weimar years Liszt was focusing on the orchestral compositions, and after this experience his aesthetic preoccupations changed, and they were no longer related to the kind of pianism expressed by the *Sonata* – and musically – Liszt used the sonata form several times, hiding it in numerous works which are not labelled sonatas. One of these works is the *Großes Konzertsolo* S. 176 (1849–1850), which represents a sort of preliminary work to the *Sonata*. The two works are so similar that Arnold writes «that it is intriguing to speculate how it would have been received without the *Sonata* in

the picture. Surely, the *Grosses Konzertsolo* would then be considered one of Liszt's most important keyboard compositions»<sup>57</sup>. Aside from these speculations, Arnold identifies the similarities between the two works, and sums them up as follow:

The similarities between the two works are conspicuous. Both use the same terminology for comparable events in the works: Allegro energico, Andante sostenuto, Grandioso, and Stretta. The second theme of the Sonata also appears regularly in the *Grosses Konzertsolo* and is used similarly, beginning in m. 46. The Grandioso themes are both heroic and short-lived with similar denouements. Both Andante sostenuto sections are lyrical, but more importantly, almost motionless in their beginnings. The original ending of the Sonata before Liszt revised it was also in the same mold as that of the *Grosses Konzertsolo*. Needless to say, both large-scale works require extraordinary virtuosity and display intriguing formal plans, working both as sonata form and as a multi-movement structure<sup>58</sup>.

The reason why the manuscript of the *B minor Piano Sonata* has such a small number of corrections and so few afterthought notes or signs is easily explained: Liszt had a draft under his eyes, and he just had to modify and to develop the ideas he had already experimented with. The resemblance between some of the material is incredible. For example, the second motivic cell of the *Sonata* is already present in the *Großes Konzertsolo* (Example 1):



Example 1 – Großes Konzertsolo, mm. 53–56 (Cfr. Example 8)

Other similarities are to be found in the *Grandioso* theme (Example 2a and 2b), and in the *finale* – if confronted with the original version of the finale of the *Sonata* (Annex II and III). It is not a coincidence that the *Großes Konzertsolo* was composed in 1849–50, namely when some of the themes of the *Sonata* had already been drafted. Liszt's own production represents a source of inspiration for Liszt himself. This view is perfectly consistent with the idea of progress according to which everything that lies in the past is a human achievement, which is to be used as a starting point for new advancements.

57 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 111.

58 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 112.

102 **Grandioso**

vibrato

ff

sempre ff

Example 2a – Großes Konzertsolo, Grandioso theme, mm. 102–124

105 **Grandioso**

ff

fff

Example 2b – B minor Piano Sonata, Grandioso theme, mm. 105–113

## An analysis of the *Sonata*<sup>59</sup>

Ich zum Beispiel habe, offen gestanden, meinen Schülern zeitlebens niemals ein Wort über den „Sinn“ der Musik gesagt; wenn es einen gibt, so bedarf er meiner nicht<sup>60</sup>.

### Introduction

It is not easy to find the right point of view from which one can begin an analysis of the *Sonata*, because, in order to furnish a complete account of it, it would be necessary to approach it from several points of view simultaneously. Even if an operation of this kind were possible, it would be too risky, because it would be impossible to follow all the paths at the same time, and consequently one would lose the unity, the inner coherence of the individual paths. Nevertheless, a holistic approach seems to be the «most profitable one», as Tanner suggests, because «the Sonata is meant to be more than the sum of its analysis»<sup>61</sup>. This assertion, and its related perspective, are the point of view which is given precedence in this section. However, if Hamilton and Tanner pointed out that the *Sonata* truly possesses structural and harmonic ambiguities without giving them a theoretical explanation, the aim here is to point out that the ambiguities respond to a precise aesthetic idea of artwork, and that this idea is sustained by many 19<sup>th</sup> century theories, and that behind them lies the previously discussed change of the social and philosophical paradigm. Firstly, however, a more traditional approach is necessary. That is the reason why the *Sonata* is analysed here first as a multi movement work, and then as a first movement form. Of course, before entering these complex matters, it is necessary to provide a brief introduction. In the middle of the several ambiguities which surround the work, there is an undeniable fact, that after many decades of analysis there is still no common agreement concerning with the way in which it is possible to divide the *Sonata* in sections, as can be discerned at first glance from the following table:

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59 The musical analysis which follows is based on the score of the *Neue Liszt Ausgabe* (NLA) published in 1983, Serie 1, Vol. 5 (s. bibliography). Both the Lehman Manuscript and the first edition of the sonata (Breitkopf & Härtel, 1854) are priceless sources of information for the philological work; for the analysis in this dissertation, even if sometimes the manuscript is quoted, the NLA edition was preferred, since it is already the result of this philological work, and it is the reference edition for the Lisztian works anyway.

60 Hesse, Hermann, *Das Glasperlenspiel*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main., 1971, p. 125.

61 Tanner, Mark, *The Power of Performance as an Alternative Analytical Discourse: The Liszt Sonata in B Minor*, p. 173.

William Newman	Rey Longyear	Sahron Winklhofer	Alan Walker
Cyclical form in four movements	Cyclical form in three movements	First movement form	Cyclical form in four movements
Exposition bb. 1–330 I movement (in the form of an incomplete sonatina)	Introduction bb. 1–7 Exposition bb. 8–178 I movement (continue in the development section)	Exposition bb. 1–204	Introduction bb. 1–31 Exposition bb. 32–330 I movement 'Allegro'
Development bb. 331–525 II movement 'Andante' (bb. 331–459) III movement 'Scherzo' (bb. 460–525)	Development bb. 179–459 I movement (until b. 330) II movement (bb. 331–459)	Development bb. 205–452 (She identified a slow section inside)	Development bb. 331–532 II movement 'Andante' (bb. 331–458) III movement 'Fugato' (bb. 459–532)
Recapitulation bb. 525–681 IV movement (in the form of an incomplete sonatina)	Recapitulation bb. 460–649 III movement	Recapitulation bb. 453–649	Recapitulation bb. 553–681 IV movement 'Allegro'
Coda bb. 682–760	Coda bb. 650–760	Coda bb. 650–760	Coda bb. 682–760 'Prestissimo'

Table 1 – Formal schemes of the Sonata<sup>62</sup>

The problem here is strictly related to the idea of *form*, as Liszt explained in a letter to Luis Köhler. This same letter is the cause of the many programmatic interpretations. Since the form is unclear, and since Liszt tells us that he followed “feelings and inventions”, consequently one tends to explain the ambiguities one encounters in Liszt’s compositions with the help of extra-musical elements. As it will emerge, this path could lead to relevant misinterpretations.

Es ist mir eine sehr angenehme Genugthuung, dass Sie, lieber Freund, einiges Interesse an den Partituren gefunden. Wie denn auch andere über die Dinger

62 The table is taken from Storino, Mariateresa, *Franz Liszt. La sonata in si minore*, p. 77.

aburtheilen mögen, so bleiben sie für mich die nothwendige Entwicklungsstufe meiner inneren Erlebnisse, welche mich zu der Überzeugung geführt haben, dass *Erfinden* und *Empfinden* nicht so gar vom *Übel* in der Kunst sind. Allerdings bemerken Sie ganz richtig, dass die *Formen* (welche nur zu oft mit den *Formeln*, ja selbst *Floskeln* von selbst ganz respectablen Leuten verwechselt werden): „Hauptsatz, Mittelsatz, Nachsatz etc. sehr zur Gewohnheit werden können, weil sie so rein natürlich, primitiv und am leichtesten fasslich sein müssen“. Ohne gegen diese Ansicht die mindeste Einwendung zu machen, bitte ich nur um die Erlaubnis, die Formen durch den Inhalt bestimmen zu dürfen, und sollte mir diese Erlaubniss auch von Seiten der hochlöblichen Kritik versagt werden, so werde ich nichtsdestoweniger getrost meinen beschiedenen Weg weiter gehen. Am Ende kommt es doch hauptsächlich auf das *Was* der Ideen und *Wie* der Durchführung und Bearbeitung derselben an – und das führt uns immer auf das *Empfinden* und *Erfinden* zurück, wenn wir nicht im Geleise des Handwerks herzukrabbeln und zappeln wollen<sup>63</sup>.

This idea of form as prison to the creativity of the genius is a common idea of the entire Romantic Generation;. Already in 1835, Schumann wrote in his article about Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* that:

Die Form ist das Gefäß des Geistes. Größere Räume fordern, sie zu füllen, größern Geist. Mit dem Namen „Symphonie“ bezeichnet man bis jetzt in der Instrumentalmusik die größten Verhältnisse. Wir sind gewohnt, nach dem Namen, die eine Sache trägt, auf diese selbst zu schließen; wir machen andre Ansprüche auf eine „Phantasie“, andre auf eine „Sonate“. Bei Talenten zweiten Ranges genügt es, daß sie die hergebrachte Form beherrschen: bei denen ersten Ranges billigen wir, daß sie sie erweitern. Nur das Genie darf frei gebaren<sup>64</sup>.

From the two quotations it is possible to infer that the composers of the Romantic Generation thought that it was their duty to free the content and consequently to expand the form. It is then undeniable that under Liszt's hands the sonata form was transformed into something that was no longer perfectly recognizable. Trying to constrain the *B minor Piano Sonata* into the classical sonata form would be equivalent to pretending that the day after Columbus reached the Americas, the Middle Ages were finished and the Modern Era began.

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63 Franz Liszt, *Franz Listz's Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated 9 July 1856, Vol. I, p. 225.

64 Schumann, Robert, *Symphonie von H. Berlioz*, in *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Vol. I, p. 70.

Boarders, categories, and generalisations, are of course useful in defining the general features of an epoch as well as of a musical genre, but when one analyses a precise subject in the details, they become chains. For this reason, the words written by Thomas Mann, alias Theodor Adorno, and quoted at the beginning of the chapter, far from being anachronistic, are useful in remembering the climate in which the Romantic Generation was working. The sonata, both as a genre and as a form, died after Beethoven. Of course, this does not mean that it is no longer at the composer's disposal – otherwise it would be impossible for the composers after Beethoven to create works using the title *sonata* – but it is dead in the sense that Beethoven had exhausted all the possibilities of the use of this genre and form in that precise way. Adorno's point of view is that of the musicologist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who analysed the evolution of the sonata form a posteriori. When Beethoven was active as a composer, there was no sonata form, intended as a fixed formal scheme to follow during the compositional process, just conventions. Here another problem arises, namely the contradictions between theory and compositional practice. The theorists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century created a category named "Sonata," and they decided a posteriori, analysing the compositions of Haydn, Mozart, and the first Beethoven, that this genre possessed some characteristics, and then they committed these rules to paper. The problem with this operation, which is perfectly legitimate as a historical study of the compositional practices of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, lies in the fact that the treatises the theorists wrote were not just a sum of the main features of the sonata form in the past, but they pretended to teach a new generation of composers *how* to compose. And the titles they gave to their theoretical works are very representative of their intentions<sup>65</sup>. The problem is that these rules are not even able to explain the sonatas composed by Mozart or Haydn. How can they be suitable for Liszt's works? It is clear that, in this case, the theorists worked against the compositional practice and with their rules they prevented the possibilities of this genre to evolve. As already stated, the sonata form died because the theorists committed these rules to paper, depriving it of its history. Paradoxically, Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven were freer than Liszt, or Schumann to compose sonatas because in their time the rules of the sonata form had not yet been fixed. Luckily some composers decided to follow their *Empfindung*, and expanded the range of possibilities of this form. It would not do to devote too much time here to clarify and retrace

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65 See, for example A.B. Marx, *Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, A. Reicha, *Cours de composition musicale ou traité complet et raisonné d'harmonie pratique*, F.J. Fétis, *Traité complet de la théorie et de la pratique de l'harmonie*.

the path taken by Beethoven in order to “destroy” the sonata form, but as a momentary conclusion, one can affirm that Beethoven’s piano sonata No. 32 Op. 111 in C minor ideally represents the end of the genre, which had then reached its final aspiration. The only possible way to compose other sonatas is to try to find other ways. Beethoven himself, with a quasi-aesthetic gesture, had already shown the direction in which one has to look to proceed. Liszt had the courage to follow his suggestion and attempted other ways to compose sonatas, and with his 1853 work he achieved exactly that. At the same time, he offered to his contemporaries and to the composers of the future new points of view on the sonata form. Of course, he was not the only one who tried to go further. The entire Romantic Generation confronted itself with the problem of tradition and of cultural heritage, and it was somehow balanced between the coldness of the classical forms – which were unable to contain the expansion of the tonality – and the flame of the “new” – which, on the other hand, brought much bizarreness with it. Liszt, speaking about Schumann, described the composer’s situation during this epoch:

Wie könnte man Schumann gegenüber verkennen, daß er, anstatt zu suchen, zu wagen, zu erobern, zu erfinden, vielmehr dahin strebte, seinen durchaus romantischen, zwischen Freud’ und Leid schwebenden Sinn, seinen in seinem Innern oft dumpfe, trübe Tonalitäten annehmenden Hang zum Bizarren und Phantastischen mit der klassischen Form in Einklang zu bringen, während sich gerade diese Form mit ihrer Klarheit und Regelmäßigkeit seinen eigenthümlichen Stimmungen entzog! Trotzdem suchte, wagte, erfand er, wenn auch weniger in freier Selbstbestimmung, als aus fatalistischem Zwang. Denn der echte Künstler wird durch die innerste Nothwendigkeit dahin getrieben, seine Form nach den Konturen seines Gefühls zu modeln, sie mit dessen erheiternden oder verdüsternden Farben zu durchdrungen und mit der Stimmhöhe seiner inneren Saiten in Einklang zu bringen<sup>66</sup>.

It was surely no mean feat for the composers to keep their balance on this thin line, and this brought inner conflict: «In diesem Kampf *mit sich selbst* muß er [Schumann] viel gelitten haben»<sup>67</sup>. Liszt seems to be very sure about him and his relationship to the ancient masters; but in the same essay on Schumann

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66 Liszt, Franz, *Robert Schumann*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Lina Ramann, Vol. IV, p. 113.

67 Liszt, Franz, *Robert Schumann*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Lina Ramann, Vol. IV, p. 113. This passage is relevant for two reasons: 1) Liszt gives us an account of the troubles he went through, and 2) with the words “Kampf mit sich selbst” he creates a link with his Berlioz essay, clarifying the opening words “Im Reich der Ideen giebt es innere Kriege”. See *Chapter III* of this dissertation.



one can read the following passage, which could be read as autobiographical: «Auf seinen schönste Blättern lassen sich Blutspuren, wie aus einer weitklaffenden Wunde, nachweisen. An manchen Stellen hört man ihn gleichsam im Zank mit seinem Genius»<sup>68</sup>. It was of course a dialectical struggle, and, as in any dialectical process, the moment of *Aufhebung* brings the composers to unknown territory. A new land was discovered, and its rules were yet to be written. This is what Liszt was facing with his *Sonata*. For the same reason, here a terminological question arose: the words used to describe the sonata form were coined for a world that did not exist anymore. For this reason, its vocabulary was not enough to explain the new forms. Before entering into the analysis of the sonata, it is necessary to recall again the aforementioned letter Liszt wrote to Luis Köhler. There he said that *feelings* and *inventions* constitute the basis of a composer's work. These are the necessary ingredients to give rise to new ideas and to break the chains of form (intended as formulas). That is the reason why during the following analysis the formal scheme of the sonata form is always taken into account, but as it is used by Liszt in a more flexible manner – and for that reason it is not so easily recognizable, and consequently there are no clear boundaries between sections and movements – the division of the *Sonata* in movements and sections are here provided as a suggestion, as a possibility among others, created to facilitate the analysis and consequently to make the section easily identifiable. «The *ambiguity* is an essential part of its richness and originality. In this respect it is a true successor not only to the late sonatas of Beethoven, but also to the piece for which it was reciprocally dedicated, Schumann's Fantasy»<sup>69</sup>. The ambiguity becoming a compositional principle finds here its practical and theoretical manifesto, and it would be a procedural mistake not to acknowledge it.

### The multi movement structure

As previously discussed in the four points listed at the beginning of the chapter, the first analytical approach to the *Sonata* follows the multi-movement scheme. From a glance at *Table 2*, it appears clear that it is not easy to precisely identify the beginning and the end of each movement. The interpretation according to which the work is formed by four movements seems to be more consistent

68 Liszt, Franz, *Robert Schumann*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Lina Ramann, Vol. 4, p. 113. It is impossible not to think of the *B minor Piano Sonata* as privileged terrain for this battle.

69 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: Sonata in B minor*, p. 47. *Italic is mine*.

with the overall structure of the work. But at the same time, it is impossible to state that Longyear’s analysis is wrong. First of all, because his arguments are supported by the solidity of the analysis; secondly, because the different interpretations are perfect examples of the ambiguity of the form. However, for the present analysis it is assumed that the *Sonata* consists of four movements: *Allegro*, *Andante*, *Allegro energico (Fugato)*, *Allegro*. The third movement is seen by Newman as a *Scherzo*, but, as Hamilton notes, it depends on the will of the pianist to perform it as a *Scherzo*, and on the will of the audience to hear it as a *Scherzo*. Hamilton immediately clarifies two aspects that emerge from his statement: 1) both interpretations are good and consistent – this point of view is key in the present chapter; 2) it is not a matter of the utmost relevance to identify this section as a *Scherzo*. One cannot do anything but confirm this first point. The *Sonata* and its sections can be interpreted in many ways and every interpretation, if it is of course adequately supported by the analysis, is consistent with the ambiguity of the form. On the other hand, one is forced to disagree with the second observation, because, while it may be true that this case is not a crucial one, even the smallest of nuances between the different interpretations can add something to the *Sonata*, enriching our knowledge and perception of it. As it will later emerge, the emphasis on ambiguity and on the multiple interpretations is necessary to bring to light the philosophical idea which lies behind the possibility of the birth of ambiguous forms.

	I movement	II movement	III movement	IV movement	Coda
Newman	1–330	331–459	460–525	525–681	682–760
Longyear	1–330	331–459	460–649	/	650–760
Walker	1–330	331–458	459–532	533–681	682–760

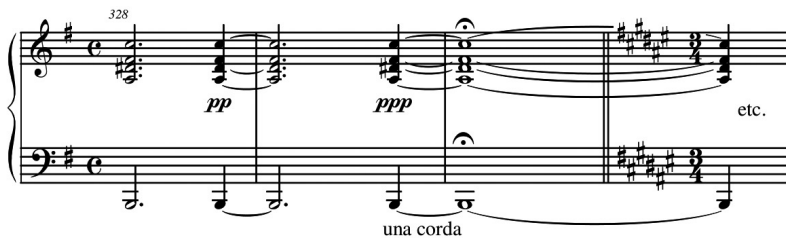
Table 2 – The multi-movement sonata

Table 2 shows that there is general agreement in identifying the first movement, that a little disagreement arises with the second movement, and that the third and the fourth movement create more trouble for the musicologists – first of all with the Longyear’s analysis according to which there is no fourth movement. The first movement *Allegro* begins at m. 1 and ends at m. 330, with a double bar line. It is built as a cyclical movement; at its end, a few measures before the beginning of the *Andante sostenuto*, the timbre and the atmosphere of the opening measures (*Lento assai*) are recreated through the use of the third motivic cell as a tonic pedal, and the second motivic cell in the treble line (*Example 3*).



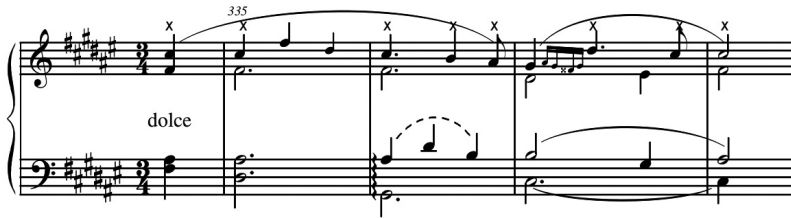
Example 3 – B minor Piano Sonata, mm. 319–324

Here the second motivic cell is not only rhythmically modified, but it is even harmonized for augmentation (*Example 3*), and it ends with a repeated A-C-D#-F# chord (*Example 4*). This chord could be understood as a ninth chord based on the left-hand note B (B-D#-F#-A-C), or as a diminished seventh chord (D#-F#-A-C). So, the final part of this section works simultaneously as a continuation, because the chord, if interpreted as a ninth based on B, works as the IV grade of F# – tonality which is confirmed in the subsequent four bars –, but, if the chord is interpreted as a “simple” diminished seventh chord, it is understood as a reference to the diminished seventh chord of the beginning, from which it is just a half step lower – the second motivic cell at the beginning is based on the A#-C#-E-G diminished chord. In this sort of recapitulation of the opening material, Liszt ignores the first motivic cell. This compositional procedure can be seen as a sign of ambiguity. Liszt creates a sort of recapitulation, which lead the listener to wait for the first motivic cell, and then, possibly, a conclusion or a development. Leaving the recapitulation “unfinished” creates a problem in interpretation, which will be investigated further during the analysis of the *Sonata* as a first movement form.



Example 4 – B minor Piano Sonata, mm. 328–330

The second movement begins at m. 331 with the *Andante sostenuto* which exposes a new thematic idea in the first four measures, and then (m. 334) it turns into a transformation of the third motivic cell, with the motive hidden in the treble voice of the melodic line (*Example 5*; the motive is marked with an “X”).



Example 5 – B minor Piano Sonata, mm. 335–338

This is the beginning of a slow section which contrasts with the climate and the agitated rhythm of the first movement, but it is nevertheless based on the three motivic cells exposed in the first seventeen bars of the *Sonata*. In this section they are transformed, varied, and exposed in a more intimate way that creates a sense of suspension. Just like the first one, the second movement is cyclical too. The climate of the end recalls the beginning of the section (till m. 459). Furthermore, it ends in the same key, F#, which is the dominant of B minor. Here it again recalls the sound of the first motivic cell with its descending scales, this time build upon the dominant of B. The first motivic cell exposed at his dominant gives the idea of a recapitulation. But Liszt, who is working “against” the fixed *formulas* interpreted enharmonically the F# as Gb, and instead of the recapitulation he gives rise to the third movement *Allegro energico* in Bb minor (*Example 6*).



Example 6 – B minor Piano Sonata, mm. 460–469

The third movement is written as a *Fugato*, that, as already said, can also be interpreted as a *Scherzo* section. The source of this construction can be found in Beethoven's piano sonata op. 110, where a fugue arises from the slow movement, and works as connective material between it and the final section. In Liszt's *fugato* passage, the motivic cells two and three work as subject, followed by some modulating arpeggios. As shown in the aforementioned *Table 2*, Newman and Walker disagreed on the identification of the end of this movement. According to Newman the *Fugato* ends at m. 525, while Walker identifies the end with m. 532. This is a clear example of the "mobile boundaries" between sections, and of the consequent ambiguity of the form. The differences between the two interpretations are a matter of primary relevance, as from them the different conception of the form emerge from the two musicologists: Walker adheres more to the "fixed rules" of the sonata scheme, stating that the *fugato* ends with a double bar line and a change in key signature, and therefore that the fourth movement begins with a restatement of the opening material. Newman, instead, proposes an alternative interpretation, which places the end of the third movement 5 measures before the double bar line. In the present analysis, Walker's interpretation is preferred, as it seems more consistent with the division of the work into movements. On the other hand, Newman's interpretation is preferred in the analysis of the work as a sonata form, as it will emerge later. For now, it is sufficient to point out that a more elastic form, such as that used here by Liszt, creates ambiguities. The double bar line of m. 530 and the following exact reprise of the musical materials of the beginning (m. 30–ff) from m. 531, are elements, which invites the establishment there of the beginning of the fourth movement. On the other hand, the double statement of m. 25 in m. 523 and m. 525 cannot be ignored. Are they or are they not already part of the fourth movement? An attempt to answer this question will be provided in the analysis of the sonata as a sonata form. In any case, these ambiguities, far from being a weak point, are the treasure of the form. They assume different meanings depending on the point of view from which one looks at them. Therefore ambiguities, the word possessing a mildly negative connotation, creates multiple interpretations, which are anything but negative. Consequently, the form acquires different meanings, namely ambiguity is intended as polysemy.

The fourth movement begins with this modulating bridge between measures 523–532, which create a sort of "grey area", which is neither the third nor the fourth movement, but it is at the same time a part of both. Walker decided that the fourth movement starts at m. 532 (533?), because there the literal re-exposition of mm. 30–53 begins (see *Annex VI*). The first statement which declares the beginning of the fourth movement is the exposition in the dominant area (of B minor) of the opening material. This passage creates a lot of dilemmas, as

its interpretations are built on the different definitions of the beginning of the *Sonata*, namely whether or not it possesses an introduction – in the case of an affirmative answer, one has to define the boundaries of the introduction too. This particular problem will be discussed later on, as the opening measures of the *Sonata* are a real musicological battlefield. Anyway, an interpretation according to which the fourth movement begins at m. 531 is the preference here, where a double bar line clearly separates the two sections (m. 530). The fourth movement ends, according to Walker and Newman at m. 681, and on m. 682 the coda section begins. Longyear states that the coda begins at bar 650. In this instance, Longyear's interpretation is preferred, as Liszt wrote at m. 650 *Stretta quasi presto*, which clearly alludes to a conclusive (coda) section. Furthermore, it begins in D#, which is the major third of B minor, and it ends on F#, before the beginning of the *Andante sostenuto* in B major. This interpretation offers then a precise scheme of the coda, which is more consistent with the overall structure. Furthermore, it follows the modulation scheme B-D#-F#, namely a scheme that follows the modulation to the third. Liszt preferred this option to the more traditional modulation to the IV or the V grade. And this aspect is a further link with Schumann's *Fantasie*, where the composer used the same strategy. Surprisingly, Liszt was less advanced in this case than his German colleague, and he preferred a modulation to the major third – whose final movement ends on the dominant – to a more modern augmented triad progression as Schumann did. However this coda, which also includes the finale (mm. 729–760), creates some interpretation problems which will be dealt in the next section. Concluding, it is possible to sum up what has emerged up to this point, and therefore to divide the *Sonata* into four movements: *Allegro* (mm. 1–330), *Andante* (mm. 331–459), *Fugato* (mm. 460–530), *Allegro* (mm. 531–760). Again it's worth emphasising that the suggested division is not fixed conclusively, but it is based more on some of the musical and edition parameters (tonalities, double bar lines, change in time indication, etc.) which Liszt inserted in his work. Anyway, it is worth underlining that the analysis of this work as a multi-movement sonata creates few problems if compared to the analysis of it as a sonata form.

## The sonata form structure

After the analysis of the *Sonata* as a multi-movement work, it is now time to investigate it as a first-movement form. It is here where the greatest problems arise, starting from the very first bars. Before entering into the analysis, it is necessary to recall *Table 1* and to take a last glimpse at the different interpretations of the *Sonata* both as a multi-movement, and as a sonata form work. In

some cases, the sections coincide with the movement, as with Newman, who sees mm. 1–330 both as the exposition and as the first movement. Though looking at *Table 3* below, the confusion that has already emerged appears even more clearly.

	Newman	Longyear	Winklhofer	Walker
Introduction	/	1 – 7	/	1 – 31
Exposition	1 – 330	8 – 178	1 – 204	32 – 330
Development	331 – 525	179 – 459	205 – 452	331 – 532
Recapitulation	525 – 681	460 – 649	453 – 649	533 – 681
Coda	682 – 760	650 – 760	650 – 760	682 – 760

Table 3 – The Sonata as first movement form<sup>70</sup>

During the analysis which follows, alongside the more traditional harmonic analysis and the necessary confrontation with the *double function theory*<sup>71</sup>, it is suggested what could possibly be described as a sort of expanded double function theory – a theory which is a key point of this dissertation – to introduce the concept of symbol. The idea of the symbol as the theoretical background upon which the *Sonata* is built – at least because it is the necessary condition for an ambiguous conception of the form – is not an imposed construction. Quite the opposite, it is the theoretical justification of its ambiguity, and it directly emerges from the idea of progress. The relationship between these two concepts will be clarified in the conclusion of this chapter.

The idea of the double function is extremely simple: The *B minor Piano Sonata* has a structure that could be analysed both as a multi-movement work, and as a sonata form. The theory of an expanded double function exploits the idea of the double meaning of the *Sonata*, and applies it to the single sections. Consequently, a section (or a part of it) could be seen as something else, namely a part of another section, or as a part of two sections at the same time. The introduction, whose analysis immediately follows and which represents the most problematic point in the analysis of the *Sonata*, works both as the introduction, and as (a part of) the exposition. This is the idea of ambiguity one has to have in mind during analysis of this work.

<sup>70</sup> See *Table 5* later in this chapter for further examples.

<sup>71</sup> Newman, William S., *The Sonata since Beethoven*, p. 376. «The double structural function in this work results largely from three innovations and makes three modes, corollarial compromises [...]».

## Introduction

The image shows a musical score for the first seven measures of the B minor Piano Sonata. The tempo is marked 'Lento assai' and the dynamics are 'p sotto voce'. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass staff. The first motivic cell is highlighted with a bracket and a '5' above it, indicating a fifth interval. The score shows a melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic line in the left hand. The first motivic cell is highlighted with a bracket and a '5' above it, indicating a fifth interval.

Example 7 – B minor Piano Sonata, first motivic cell, mm. 1–7

In the analysis which follows it is assumed that an introduction section exists, even if some clarification of this statement is necessary. More difficult is to identify its borders. Generally speaking, it is possible to identify this section with the first 31 measures, and this for many reasons. The material used to build this section is the same material that is used and varied during the entire sonata. The variation technique constitutes the ground of the entire composition. Usually, in the classical sonata form the material of the introduction is not used as thematic material for the sonata. For example, Beethoven in his last piano sonata built an introduction – although it cannot be numbered among the typical ones – which works as a long modulating bridge that leads to the key tonality. The material of this introduction is not used to compose the continuation of the sonata, except for one element, the seventh chord. Beethoven was probably the first composer who opened the doors to the modernity, and to involve harmonic features into motivic-thematic material. What had, for more than a century, constituted the functional centre was changing. In terms of the logic of music, themes and tonalities were no longer the only functional centres at a composer's disposal. So, in Beethoven's op. 111 the connection between the introduction and the exposition is not melodic, but harmonic. Consequently, since the entire work is built on and around the seventh chord, it is hard to speak about the two sections (introduction and exposition) as two well defined and "independent" entities, as if they were categories. With Liszt this intuition becomes even more apparent. In his *Sonata*, one does not just have to look for themes or keys as meaningful formal points, because they were substituted by



other features. In this specific case the functional centre of the *Sonata* is the smallest unit in music: the second interval.



Example 8 – B minor Piano Sonata, second motivic cell, mm. 8–13

The first motivic cell (*Example 7*) – which is very often morphologically described as a sequence of repeated Gs followed by an ascending seventh jump and a descending scale which brings back to the repeated Gs – is actually based on the second interval and its inversion. According to this view, the first measures consist then of a seventh interval (G-F/F#), and a second interval (G-Ab/A#). And it is from these two elements that the second motivic cell arises (*Example 8*). This second cell is both the continuation of the seventh jump – creating then this sequence: m. 2 G-F#; m. 5 G-F#; m. 8 G-G – and of the second interval – creating this sequence: mm. 2–3 G-Ab; mm. 5–6 G-A#; m. 9 G-A#. In m. 9 the augmented second is expressed in its inversion, and then used to create the diminished seventh chord A#-C#-E-G which, as previously stated, is a key chord in the work, and upon which the third motivic cell is built (*Example 9*). So, strictly speaking, the real introduction should be mm. 1–3, since this section already contains the material used to build the rest of the *Sonata*<sup>72</sup>. It is also true however that morphologically the three motivic cells are

72 This process can be described using a 20<sup>th</sup> century term, i.e. *Entwickelnde Variation* – more than an anachronistic definition, the term assumes here the character of a provocation. If the *Entwickelnde Variation* as a compositional process was identified by Schönberg in the

different, and since they are used in the development of the *Sonata* as thematic material, it comes quite spontaneously to think of mm. 1–17 already as part of the exposition, instead of an introduction. Furthermore, mm. 18–24 are a modulating bridge which leads to a passage built on a variation of the second motivic cell. It is strange that the variation of the thematic material coincides with the beginning of the exposition – from mm. 32 on, the second and the third motivic cells are used to create a theme.



Example 9 – B minor Piano Sonata, third motivic cell, mm. 13–17

At this point it is necessary to introduce what in the brief introduction of this chapter was called the expanded double function. According to this idea it is possible to analyse mm. 1–31 both as the introduction and as part of the exposition. The interpretation changes when the point of view changes: 1) if one considers the changes in the rhythm and tempo, the tonal instability, the rhapsodic passages of mm. 18–24, and of mm. 25–30, and the fact that the tonic (B minor) appears for the first time in m. 30 in its first inversion, but only in m. 32 in its root position. For this reason, mm. 1–31 have to be regarded as the introduction of the *Sonata*; 2) if one considers that the three motivic cells, with all their harmonic relations and implications, constitute the thematic material of the entire piece, then mm. 1–31 have to be regarded as part of the exposition. This is a direct consequence of the ambiguity, which does not mean chaos, but it does mean that different interpretations are allowed, and

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analysis of the works of Brahms, it is also true that too often the name of Liszt is excluded from the pool of composers considered the fathers of this technique.

that they are all consistent, because they are caused by the change in point of view from which the *Sonata* is analysed. It is like in poetry, where the overall meaning of a lyric, passage or line may be clear, but can also allow for multiple, acceptable interpretations. However, it is worth emphasising again that all interpretations are acceptable, even if some are preferable to others. For example, if one identifies the introduction as mm. 1–7, it is not only because of the double bar line or the change in the tempo signature. It is because this section already contains all the musical material of its continuation, even if it appears to be a separated section, both in its character and in its structure. This interpretation, supported by Gut and Longyear, is perfectly consistent, even if Hamilton reminds us that multi-tempo introductions were quite the usual for Liszt (*Eine Faust-Symphonie*). But for the purposes of this dissertation, it is necessary to consider these first seven bars as strictly related and bound to the following ones, with which it constitutes a united section. According to the aforementioned expanded double function theory mm. 1–31, if seen from the first perspective described above (the change in rhythm and tempo indication, tonal instability, etc.), constitute the introduction, even if an atypical one, which already contains thematic material.

The *Sonata* arises from silence, from which two repeated Gs appear – which, according to the *Liszt pädagogium* are to be played as *Paukenschläge*<sup>73</sup> – followed by a descending phrygian scale. This three measure figure is immediately repeated, but this time the descending scale follows the model of the Hungarian one (*Example 7*)<sup>74</sup>. The tonal ambiguity is the first element that is recognised by our ears: a sonata whose tonality is B minor opens with a polarization of G. Liszt is creating an introduction/exposition based on the sixth grade of the B minor scale. After these scales, we hear another two Gs, which suddenly explode with an octave jump into an *Allegro energico* with *f* indication (*Example 8*), which contrasts with the *p sottovoce* of the beginning, and with which the



Example 10 – B minor Piano Sonata, relation between motivic cell 2 and 3

73 S. footnote 41.

74 As already seen, the two descending scales, which are often ignored in analyses, are a relevant part of the thematic material, and they appear in key moments of the composition. Therefore, they deserve more attention than they usually receive. The relevance of the descending scales will emerge later in the analysis of the so-called *Grandioso Theme*.

second motivic cell begins. This is based on the diminished seventh chord A $\sharp$ -C $\sharp$ -E-G, that is, as already seen, a natural continuation of the second/seventh intervals of the very first measures. Another relevant element of this second thematic cell are the dissonances of the accented notes (D and A) in respect to the diminished seventh chord. Here Liszt suggested to his disciples to think of the adventure of Coriolan by von Collin, and relate it to the words «Warum soll ich Euch meine Leiden zeigen? Ich trage sie in meinen Innern und verschlieÙe sie stolz von Euch»<sup>75</sup>.

This suggestion gives the second motivic cell a dramatic (in a theatrical sense) tone. This theme ends on an A $\sharp$  in octave (m. 13). With the same note the third motivic cell begins (*Example 9*), the so-called “Hammerschlag” theme<sup>76</sup>, of which the treble line is based on the inversion of m. 9 (*Example 10*), and it ends with the second inversion of the A $\sharp$ -C $\sharp$ -E-G seventh chord. The third motivic cell ends with the A-C-D $\sharp$ -F $\sharp$  diminished seventh chord, followed by a double crown, that works as a theatrical pause on stage. It is as if Liszt told us that these are the players, and after this pause the play can begin. From m. 18 to m. 25, in an *agitato* section, Liszt shows us his virtuosity in a series of arpeggios that modulate until the E $\flat$  chord. With this chord Liszt starts the variations of the second motivic cell, inserting arpeggios and modifying the rhythm for reduction. Then, the third motivic cell appears in the left hand, working as a dominant pedal upon which we hear the tonic chord in its second inversion and which leads to a trill in the bass, which, finally, falls with a descending semiquaver quadruplet to the tonic in its root position (m. 32).

These first 32 measures, independently if one looks at them as the introduction or as the exposition, are so interconnected and interdependent that it is impossible to clearly separate them. Even the division into three motivic cells of mm. 1–17 could be seen as a stretch, since the real glue of the entire work is an interval from which everything springs forth. In any case, the B minor chord of m. 30 already represents a valid example of the fusion between sections. It is the first occurrence of the tonic, but it appears before the beginning of the exposition, and it creates a problem in interpretation of this chord, since it does not represent either the beginning of the exposition, nor the end of the introduction. It is something in between, a sort of “no man’s land”, where

75 S. footnote 41.

76 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt’s Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated 8 June 1854, Vol. I, p. 157. «Ihr so perspicaces Herausfinden meiner Intention des 2<sup>ten</sup> Motives der Sonate [musical example] im Gegensatz zu dem früheren Hammerschlag [musical example] hat mich wahrscheinlich dazu verleitet».

the sections are combined, related and bent together. The problem with the analysis of the *Sonata* is that one has to remember all these elements in order to find out the functional elements Liszt used during the development of the work, measure for measure. Clara Schumann was correct when she said that the *Sonata* has «kein gesunder Gedanke mehr, alles verwirrt, eine klare Harmoniefolge ist da nicht mehr herauszufinden!»<sup>77</sup>. She was correct, because here themes and clear harmonic concatenations are things that belong to the past, and they are intentionally ignored precisely for this reason. To fully appreciate and understand this work one must analyse it, starting a sort of hunting game looking for all the recurrences of the motivic material (chords, intervals, etc.), which are hidden in a masterly manner within the contrapuntal construction. Furthermore, the *Sonata* changes before our eyes every time we changed our point of view of it, or when we change the key element through which we analyse it (motives, themes, chords, keys, etc.). All these elements made this composition a sort of work in progress, something impossible to complete. That not only means that the material progresses during the unfolding of the *Sonata* itself, but that the *Sonata* progresses with us and changes through time.

### Exposition

The exposition (mm. 32–330) is, for the reasons that already emerged during the analysis of the introduction, not actually an exposition, as it begins with a contrapuntal variation of motivic cells two and three. This element confirms the idea of the expanded double function: Liszt exposes his material in the introduction; this section works simultaneously as the first part of the exposition – if analysed from another point of view – since the “real” exposition is actually built on a variation of the material already exposed. However, there is in any case a point of view that confirms that m. 32 is the beginning of the exposition. If mm. 1–31 displays many features typical of the introduction – multi tempo, tonal instability, irregular metre –, the exposition shows the traditional phrase construction, exposing the material in a  $(2+2)+(2+2)$  structure (*Example 11*), of which the second repetition exposed the material a fourth higher.

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77 See footnote 14.

The image displays a musical score for a piano sonata, specifically Example 11. It consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system is marked 'Sempre f ed agitato' and the subsequent systems are marked 'marcato'. The score is in B minor and features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings. The notation includes various accidentals, slurs, and articulation marks, indicating a highly technical and expressive piece.

Example 11 – B minor Piano Sonata, (2+2) + (2+2) structure, mm. 32–39

After this episode another modulating bridge begins, of which its last part (mm. 51–54) is based on the sevenths of motivic cell one and two. Here, it becomes clear in which sense Liszt used chords and intervals as functional centres. This bridge leads to the second motivic cell (*ff*) in B $\flat$  major, in which the seventh interval is reduced to a minor sixth (D-B $\flat$ ). This thematic area, that seems to be just a brilliant canon variation of the second motivic cell in octaves, is a modulating bridge in itself. It starts from the B $\flat$  major of bar 55, then it descends to G minor (m. 61) – tonality which recalls the beginning – and ends on the E $\flat$  of m. 58. This modulating bridge is built on the same material of the beginning, but here the diminished seventh chord A $\sharp$ -C $\sharp$ -E-G is transformed into the E $\flat$ -G-B $\flat$  major triad (melodically exposed), a tonality which is harmonically reached at m. 67, where the second theme is exposed in

E $\flat$  major on *fff*. From this passage it emerges that even the distant tonality of E $\flat$  major – a key tonality in the *Sonata*, which is used to create a contrast with the dark atmosphere of the other motivic cells – derives from the intervals of the beginning, proving once more the unity of the multiplicity. The passage of mm. 55–81 is related to m. 25, and it represents its expansion, since it is based both on the second motivic cell, and on the E $\flat$  chord.

The musical score for Example 12 consists of five staves of music. The first staff (measures 82-85) shows a bass line with a sustained A pedal point in the right hand. The second staff (measures 85-89) continues this pattern with a series of chords. The third staff (measures 89-93) shows a more complex harmonic structure with a sustained A pedal point. The fourth staff (measures 93-97) features a series of chords and a melodic line. The fifth staff (measures 97-100) shows a final variation of the first motivic cell, with a sustained A pedal point in the right hand.

Example 12 – B minor Piano Sonata, variation on the first motivic cell, mm. 82–100

From m. 71 Liszt begins an octave episode that brings us to the reappearance of the first motivic cell in the bass, sustained by an A pedal in the right hand. This time the cell is exposed for augmentation and it is exposed one tone higher. The original scale shows the G-A/A $\flat$  seventh relationship, while here the seventh relationship is represented by the A-G $\flat$ /G $\sharp$ . *Example 12* shows how Liszt inverted the appearance of the seventh: while in the original first motivic cell he used first a minor seventh interval, and then a major one, in the episode of mm. 81–92 he reversed the relationship, using first the major and then the minor seventh interval. This gives a sense of returning to the beginning to the passage, another sign that the harmonic relations constitute the real functional centres of the work. The A pedal, that seems to be a moment of tonal stability, actually creates a tritone relationship with the previous tonality of E $\flat$ , increasing the sense of instability. From m. 93 the first cell is exposed four times for reduction (*Example 12*). The fourth time (m. 101) it is exposed on a variation

of the original A $\sharp$ -C $\sharp$ -E-G diminished seventh chord, which here it becomes a V<sup>7</sup> of D major, tonality in which the second thematic group, the *Grandioso theme* (mm. 105–ff), is exposed. Hence, to create these first 104 measures Liszt used the same theoretical principle which lies at the basis of the sonata form, namely the centrifugal and centripetal forces, proving in this way that every “new” is actually something old used in a new way, and that the sonata was still an alive and fecund genre. The formal structure of these measures can be summarised as follows:

mm. 1–7	mm. 8–13	mm. 14–17	mm. 25–31	mm. 32–39	mm. 55–81	mm. 82–104
Motivic cell 1	M.c. 2	M.c. 3	M.c. 2+3	M.c. 2+3	M.c.2	M.c. 1

According to this scheme, the first 104 measures describe the departure and the return of the first motivic cell. Consequently, it is not just the *Sonata* and its sections that can be described as cyclical, but some parts of some sections can even be regarded in the same way. In fact, the *Grandioso theme* is introduced by a *molto crescendo* passage, which actually begins in the previous section, which begins with a V<sup>7</sup> of D major. It touches first a minor ninth of G $\sharp$  (A-B-D-F-G $\sharp$ ), then a diminished seventh chord on A (A-C $\sharp$ -D $\sharp$ -F $\sharp$ ) which creates tonal ambiguity, and again it finally reaches the dominant seventh chord (A-C $\sharp$ -E-G). Even if hidden in a tonally ambiguous passage, this modulation leads us, with an unexpected and welcomed V-I cadence, to the second thematic group in D major (m. 105), which probably represents one of the few links, or at least one of the most evident ones, to the classical sonata form (*Example 13*).

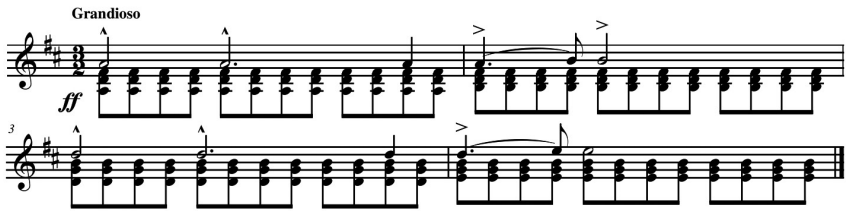


Example 13a – Crux fidelis  
motive

The second thematic group, the so-called *Grandioso theme*, reflects the classical sonata form scheme, because it presents its material in the relative major of B minor, and its character contrasts with the atmosphere of the first thematic group. At the same time it presents a more regular structure with its (2+2)+6. The left hand plays the D major chords on a tonic pedal. This is one

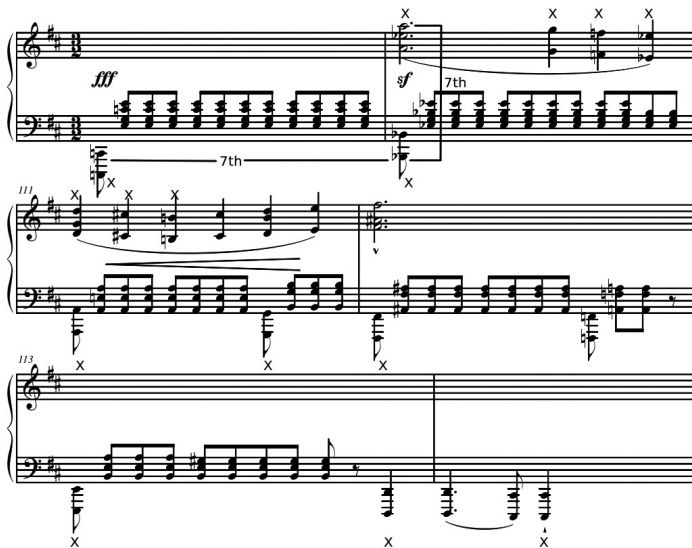
of the few places where Liszt clearly shows us the tonic. But even this passage, which seems to be a clear and bright section in the middle of this sea of innovations, is actually related to the beginning, since at its triumph moment (m. 109) it is broken by the entrance of the first motivic cell in the left hand. The new thematic material is sustained by the old one, in this way creating a relationship between the two, and consequently an obstacle in the path of the programmatic interpretations, as it will emerge later on.





Example 13b – B minor Piano Sonata, Grandioso theme, right hand, mm. 105–108

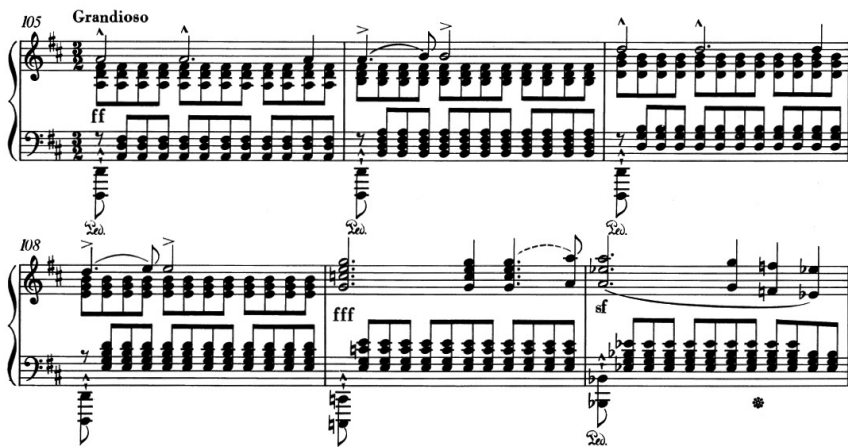
The right hand then plays the *Crux fidelis*<sup>78</sup> theme (based on the Gregorian motif, s. *Example 13a*) from m. 105 sustained by chords (*13b*), and then, at m. 110 it gives rise to a varied form of the first motivic cell, played in canon with the left hand in a sixth relationship (*Example 14*). Furthermore, at bar 110 the B $\flat$  of the left hand could be seen as the head note of the first motivic cell played by the right hand, although they are played together, creating a harmonic seventh relationship instead of a melodic one.



Example 14 – B minor Piano Sonata, left and right hand relationship, mm. 109–114

78 *Crux fidelis* is the Gregorian plainchant associated with the Solemn Adoration of the Holy Cross on Good Friday.

Before moving on, a further analysis of this *Grandioso* passage is necessary. This passage is very often related to the Good, as opposed to the Evil motive of the beginning. First of all, it is worth noting that the *Crux fidelis* motive, the symbol of Christianity, was already used by Liszt on many other occasions, and not always in the same way<sup>79</sup>; secondly, the ostinato chords of the right hand are a continuation of the A pedal begun in m. 82, which is in turn a derivation of the third motivic cell, the Evil motive<sup>80</sup> – this passage can even be read, according to its tonal progression, as a salvation process, from the tonal instability to the tonal stability –; thirdly, the *Crux fidelis* motive turns into the first motivic cell, the cell of the fall.



Example 15 – B minor Piano Sonata, *Crux fidelis* and first motivic cell relation, mm. 105–110

The eschatological interpretation of this passage falls apart for this last argument: the D pedal of the left hand is actually both the head of the first and of the third motivic cell, exposed per augmentation (*Example 15*). When the pedal reaches

79 According to Serge Gut, for example, in the symphonic poem *Hunnenschlacht*, Liszt used the *Crux fidelis* in a motive that recalls the theme of the *Walkürenritt*, creating in this way a strange relationship between Nordic mythology and Christianity. From this strange use of the *Crux fidelis* doubts rise about its univocal interpretation as the symbol of the Christian faith. For an analysis of the *Cross motif* and its appearances in Liszt's music s. Szász, Tibor, *Liszt's Sonata in B minor and a Woman Composer's Fingerprint*, pp. 2–4.

80 Szász, Tibor, *Liszt's Symbols for the Divine and Diabolical*, p. 50 (s. the example 15.4 at p. 77). «[...] the evenly spaced, sharply marked chain of repeated note symbolize the already fallen devil known as Satan, [...]».

m. 109 it reveals its true nature with the second interval – which is, as already pointed out, the interval upon which the beginning is built, and that in this case must be understood as a seventh – followed by the descending scale. The *Crux fidelis* motive occurs just four times in the whole *Sonata*<sup>81</sup>, and it is always sustained by the first motivic cell (except in mm. 700–703); namely, following the eschatological interpretation, the theme of Good is strictly related to that of Evil – and that could be a sign of the eternal battle between the two forces, but it could even be seen as the idea of contrast in general, since one can think about the two contrasting forces as a representation of the first and the second theme of classical sonata form, or as the concept of progress and tradition, or as any other pair of opposites –, but the Evil themes are never contrasted, or sustained by the Good motive. It is not the aim of this dissertation to present a last word about the programmatic interpretations of the *Sonata*, but it is believed that, since Liszt did not attach any programme to the work, it would be better to analyse this work without any reference to any hypothetical programme.



Example 16 – *B minor Piano Sonata*, second motivic cell variation, mm. 125–133

Even in this more relaxed climate of the *Grandioso* it is relevant to note the seventh interval. The *Crux fidelis* theme begins first on A, and then it is repeated a fourth higher. The third repetition of the theme, that turned then into a descending scale, started a fourth higher than the second repetition. This 2 + 2 phrase begins on A, passes through D and ends on G. This passage creates a seventh relationship, which is built again from the notes G and A. Until this point, just the beginning of the *Sonata* was an object of analysis, but it is already possible to state that the thematic and the motivic connections are not enough to understand the work. The functional centres are to be searched

81 It occurs another two times at mm. 297–300 and mm. 302–305, but here it has lost its “grandioso” character, since it is exposed in a *ff pesante*. It seems to be its last attempt to fight before final defeat.

for elsewhere. However, like all the innovations, Liszt did nothing new but use old material in a new way. There is a clear example of this procedure at m. 120. Here, Liszt repeats the second motivic cell at the same pitch as the beginning, and that gives the listener the idea of a repetition of the exposition as in the classical sonata form. Hamilton underlines that even Chopin, who surely was not worried about the rules of classical form, felt himself unable to avoid this element in his sonatas<sup>82</sup>. But the repetition is suddenly varied through the reinterpretation of the A# as Bb, and a new section marked *dolce con grazia* begins, which is based on the second motivic cell. Because of its rhythmic and harmonic transformation, the cell is quite unrecognisable here (*Example 16*). Liszt wanted to prove us his ability with the contrapuntal technique, and he delighted in hiding the motivic cells in the most unsuspecting of places. After this 6+6 bars construction based on the second motivic cell (mm. 125–138), Liszt creates a little coda in the left hand using the second motivic cell as material, which turns into the third in m. 141. This chromatic passage leads us to the *cantando espressivo* section, again in D major. This passage (*Example 17*) is sometimes seen as a new theme, even if it is believed that this interpretation is hardly explainable, since Liszt has no reason to present a new motivic cell here. This point represents just the beginning of a modulating and virtuoso section, that leads to a *recitativo*-like passage (mm. 197–204) and then to the end of the exposition. What is sometimes seen as new thematical material is actually the transformation of the third motivic cell per augmentation. The “hammer motive” goes through the D major *Grandioso*, and emerges transformed. This transformation could be used to sustain the eschatological interpretation: the *Grandioso* theme, the theme of Good, is so powerful that is able to transform the Evil theme. But a closer analysis reveals that, again, the left hand plays the first motivic cell (marked with X in *Example 17*) with its seventh jump (D-C#), and with its descending scale which creates the second interval (D-E). Aside from the programmatic interpretation, what is more relevant in this passage is that Liszt wants to guide the listener through these motivic transformations. For this reason, he used the third motivic cell first in a recognizable manner (mm. 143–148), before hiding it in a *cantabile* passage, where it is quite unrecognisable to the listener.

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82 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: B minor Piano Sonata*, p. 42.

The image displays a musical score for the B minor Piano Sonata, measures 153-159. The score is written for piano and includes a vocal line (cantando espressivo) and a piano accompaniment (l'accompagnamento piano). The key signature is D major. The score features complex melodic lines with triplets and a bass line with various chords and intervals. The piano section is marked *pp* (pianissimo). The score is divided into two systems, with measures 153-155 in the first system and measures 156-159 in the second system. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 17 – *B minor Piano Sonata*, second motivic cell variation in D major, mm. 153–159

The same technique is used by Liszt at mm. 161–164, where a theme derived from the second motivic cell leads us to a long variation based on theme three (mm. 165–173). The transformation of the second cell is built upon a bass of E and Bb, which creates then a tritone relationship (mm. 161–163). The tritone, the so-called *diabolus in musica*, used soon after the *crux fidelis* theme creates a strong opposition between these two sections, and it could be seen as further evidence against the eschatological interpretation. Furthermore, it seems that the supporters of the eschatological interpretation of the *Sonata* were unaware of this opposition. Aside from this Good-Evil opposition, it is relevant to point out that the *Sonata* is full of these subtle relationships, that are impossible to hear while listening. In order to fully comprehend the work, it is necessary to analyse it. Without this passage it would be impossible to grasp all these relationships, which constitute the functional centres, and the entire *Sonata* would lose its pregnancy. Under this light, the programmatic interpretations try to identify a programme in order to use it as if it was the functional glue of the work. This kind of operation deprives the work of its value per se. Moreover, the programmatic operations sustain Clara Schumann's view. The work has no harmonic and thematic concatenations; it is pure noise, but it describes the adventure of Faust or the eternal fight between Good and Evil. Namely, the music alone makes no sense, but if one attaches to it a programme, then it acquires a meaning. But it acquires the meaning of the extra-musical source, preserving its musical incoherence. It is not the intention here to deny the pregnancy of some of the programmatic interpretations, but it is to emphasise

that they should not be used to give coherence to the music. The rest of the exposition is a continued variation of the second and the third motivic cell in different tonalities for augmentation or reduction. There is another episode that is worth noting, the trills of mm. 197–200 and 201–204. These trills bring the music to two little recitatives, but the most important thing is that they represent the end of the rhythm and of the obsessive repetition of motivic cells two and three. They are a pause that serve Liszt to prepare the acrobatic prosecution of the music that starts at bar 205.

Before moving to the analysis of the last part of the exposition, it is necessary to make a brief digression on bar 205, because here some musicologists, such as Winklhofer, see the beginning of the development. This interpretation is bolstered by the identification of the *recitativo*-like measures with a coda, a caesura in the musical speech which prepares the acrobatic entry of the second motivic cell of mm. 205 and *ff*. But this *recitativo*-like passage is actually a bridge between the *agitato* section, which is very irregular both in the construction and in the harmonic sense, and the return to the *allegro energico*. This section is not a development, as its acrobatic progression leads to the real *recitativo* section (m. 301). Then, after this relaxing bridge of mm. 197–204 Liszt uses the second motivic cell in the right hand with a more regular structure, exposing twice a 2+2+4 structure, followed by a 2+2+8 structure with the second motivic cell played by the left hand. These two episodes are strictly related, and the *recitativo* section followed by the recapitulation, clearly identify the end of the exposition with m. 330, where the atmosphere of the beginning is evoked. Furthermore, the *Andante sostenuto* which begins at m. 331, exposed, finally, a new motive, which is neither related to the three motivic cells, nor to the *Grandioso theme* – even if, as previously stated, mm. 335–338 contain traces of the third motivic cell (*Example 18*; the motivic cell is marked X).

The last relevant passage of this section starts at m. 289, where the second cell is presented in F minor in octaves, and, with a modulating passage leads us to the *recitativo* section that begins in C# major. The last two quadruplets (m. 296) are intended enharmonically, as the preparation for the new tonality in which the *Grandioso theme* briefly reappears. This section is built upon a double 2+2+1 structure. The first four bars are built upon the fourth motivic cell (the *Crux fidelis* theme), while the other measures of this construction are a free *recitativo* based on the retrograde of the second motivic cell. The mm. 311–330 have already been described above in the analysis of the *Sonata* as a multi-movement work.

## Development

As for the two former sections, there is also no agreement concerning the development. While Longyear and Winkelhofer see a huge development section, respectively between mm. 179–459 and mm. 205–452, Walker, Newman and Heinemann see a smaller section, respectively between mm. 331–532 and mm. 331–525. As has already emerged, it is believed that these last three interpretations are preferable, since the changes in m. 331 – new tempo, new key signature, and a new melodic motive (m. 331, s. below) – seem to be more consistent with the beginning of a development section. Furthermore, what precedes this measure is a sort temporary conclusion on the B minor tonic. What happens thereafter is a rhapsodic transformation of the musical material, a procedure common to almost all developmental sections. Hamilton, who agreed with Winkelhofer, wrote that «Newman’s view is more difficult to accommodate», because «bars 205–331 have all the characteristics we would normally attribute to development sections: tonal instability, thematic fragmentation and sequential treatment of themes. To be sure, Liszt uses all these techniques at other points in the sonata, but the one thing that might allow us to call bars 205–331 a recapitulation – a firm return to the tonic – is lacking»<sup>83</sup>. From this quotation a problem arises. Hamilton identifies mm. 205–331 as a part of the development because the passage, the recapitulation, lacks a “firm return to the tonic”. The question is: where is it possible to find a firm return to the tonic in the *Sonata*? As there is no affirmation of the tonic in the exposition, there is no confirmation of the tonic in the recapitulation. However, there are other formal elements. In this case, what returns at the end of the exposition is the atmosphere of the beginning. Consequently, what creates a recapitulation is not the motivic, but the harmonic material. In addition to that, the passage of mm. 297–306 with its *ff pesante* and its *recitativo* passages hardly fits a development, since it works more as a preparation for it. Furthermore, with Beethoven the development section had already acquired a different meaning, namely brevity and stability. The stability-instability-stability principle described by Marston as the main feature of the sonata form, is still operative, even if it is inverted. In Liszt’s *Sonata*, as well as in the last piano works of Beethoven, the exposition and, consequently, the recapitulation are more unstable than the development, because the feature of the sonata form which survives is not the tonalities relationship, but the general character. Therefore, the development remains a contrast section, and the only way to contrast a highly unstable section is to create a more stable development.

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83 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: B minor Piano Sonata*, pp. 43–44.

Liszt could not quote directly from the introduction just before the development. For that reason, he closed the section with a passage based on the second and third motivic cells. Furthermore, he added a sense of conclusion, writing the only one *una corda* (*ppp*) of the entire work (m. 329), which recalls the *p sotto voce* of the first measures. Consequently, it is possible to state that mm. 205–330 are a sort of recapitulation. Against this view, Hamilton affirms that there is further evidence that this passage has to be regarded as a development, namely “the tonal instability, the thematic fragmentation and the sequential treatment of the themes”. Even if the musicologist notes that in other points of his writing, it is worth underlining that these are features that this work displays from the very first measures until the end. In conclusion, on the one hand Hamilton says that this section possesses all the characteristics of a development, such as “tonal instability thematic fragmentation and sequential treatment of themes”; and on the other Heinemann wrote that in the *Andante sostenuto* section «die Harmonik ist häufig bis an die Grenzen des tonalen System ausgereizt – mitunter ist in der Multivalenz gereicher verminderter Septakkorde die Fixierung der für einen Abschnitt fundierenden Tonart kaum noch möglich. [...] Worauf jedoch die Aufmerksamkeit gelenkt werden kann, sind Gegensätze innerhalb des Expositions-Teils und gerade insofern vermag das „andante sostenuto“ Funktionen von Durchführung zu übernehmen»<sup>84</sup>. Two points of view and two scholars who affirm the opposite of the other. But the ambiguity of this connective passage allows both approaches. Regardless, for the purpose of this dissertation, Heinemann’s interpretation is endorsed, as he grasps and points out the most relevant peculiarity of this passage, namely the *Multivalenz* of the diminished seventh chord. Ambiguity is the key concept of this work; though it is not just formal ambiguity, but above all tonal. It is therefore unsurprising that the recapitulation is still tonally ambiguous, because Liszt was mining the tonal system at its heart, and it is clear that in this process tonal stability has to be avoided exactly there, where it is more recognisable: exposition, and recapitulation. If Liszt had written a recapitulation in the tonic area, the entire work would have lost its value. The entire *Sonata* is a *promenade* between distant tonalities, diminished and unresolved harmonies, augmented harmonies and tritones. Hence, stating that a passage cannot be a recapitulation because it does not affirm the tonic seems to be a very weak argument. Last but not least, the B pedal in the left hand, makes this passage relatively stable, even if the right hand plays a seventh chord (C-D#-F#-A), which is left unresolved until mm. 332. Consequently, according to Walker’s and Newman’s

84 Heinemann, Michael, *Liszt Klaviersonate h-Moll*, p. 44.



view, the development begins with the *Andante sostenuto*, with a new theme which immediately appears to be based on the third motivic cell (Example 18; the cell is marked with an “X”).



Example 18 – B minor Piano Sonata, development, mm. 331–338

This first episode ends with a *Quasi adagio*, followed by a *dolcissimo, con intimo sentimento*, where the transformation of the third motivic cell is presented in A major (mm. 349–ff). Here the tonality is a little more stable: from the A major of the third motivic cell, Liszt creates a *dolcissimo* passage that moves on the third grade of A, C#, which is in turn used as the dominant of F#, tonality in which he proposes the *Grandioso theme* (m. 363). This time it is exposed without the *grandioso* character, and in *mf* instead of *ff*, as if it was a reminiscence. The *grandioso theme* is sustained, as in its original manifestation of mm. 105–ff, by chords from which (m. 367) emerge the descending scale of the first motivic cell. The trill on the F#, the treble voice of a diminished seventh chord, leads to the G minor tonality, where the fourth theme is presented again. The second occurrence of the *Grandioso theme* (m. 376) is presented here in the same tonality as the beginning, and it creates a highly dramatic passage. In this *crescendo molto* section (mm. 382–ff), the head of the second motivic cell is played in the lower register of the piano, and the last configuration of the fourth motivic cell is played in the higher register (mm. 385–391). It creates a contrasting passage, under which the ostinato chords increase the sense of anxiety of this moment. The tension continues to increase until m. 395–396, where Liszt suddenly reaches the climax of the *Sonata* on a *fff* where the fifth motivic cell (the *Andante sostenuto* theme) reappears. This moment is read as evidence of the fact that the development begins at m. 331. Liszt uses a “new” theme here to introduce the section, and with this material he reaches the most intense point of the *Sonata*, exactly in the middle of the development. From now on his aim is to return home.



Example 19 – B minor Piano Sonata, Climax, mm. 393–396

It is still matter of debate whether or not this passage represents the climax of the *Sonata*, and even if the work truly possesses one; but this is certainly the only moment in the entire work in which a prolonged section of tension explodes into a *fff* passage, which releases this tension, and gives rise to a *dolce* passage built on the theme of the *Andante*, sustained by a perfectly tonal arpeggio in F# major (mm. 397–ff), namely the dominant of B minor. These measures are very well described by Storino, who writes: «*Ex abrupto un esile arpeggio di fa diesis spegne il fuoco sonoro; il porto era solo una visione onirica*»<sup>85</sup>. This time the *Andante* theme does not lead to the transformation of the third theme, but to a passage of sextuplet in the right hand, while the left hand outlines the descending scale of the first motivic cell. At m. 433 the third motivic cell returns in a modulating passage, which ends with a sort of recapitulation (*Example 20*).



Example 20 – B minor Piano Sonata, false recapitulation, mm. 453–459

85 Storino, Mariateresa, *Franz Liszt. La sonata in si minore*, p. 100.

The *Paukenschläge* on F# and the descending scale recalls the beginning of the *Sonata*. Here the classical sonata form scheme is respected: a dominant recapitulation seems to bring the listener back to the first theme and then to the recapitulation of the themes in the tonic area. Nonetheless, after a few measures, it clearly appears that what is going on is not a recapitulation, but a three-voices fugue. Consequently, this episode is not intended as a recapitulation, but as an illusion of a recapitulation. Liszt used this expedient to introduce the fugue – which, in this context, is to be read as a “new beginning”, as a new transformation idea, as a last form of variation (proving that this transformation technique involves every element of the musical discourse) of the material of the beginning – which is based on the second (mm. 460–465), and on the third (mm. 465–467) motivic cell. The first motivic cell does not serve as a conclusion, but as an introduction to recreate the sequence of the motivic cells, in order to give rise to the last part of the development: the fugato section (see *Example 6*). The fugue was already a matter of investigation in the analysis of the multi-movement sonata, though briefly. Here a closer analysis of it is necessary. The subject of the fugue is built on the second and the third motivic cells. The first voice enters at m. 461, the second voice at m. 470, and the third voice at m. 480. The counter subject (begins in m. 467) is a sequence of staccato quadruplets. At m. 493 the fugue ends its movement at the head of the second motivic cell, which is obsessively repeated three times, and finally it is completed in m. 500. At m. 502 Liszt creates something really interesting, which presents us with the idea of the forthcoming recapitulation: all the material is varied and blended: the left hand plays the second part of the subject of the fugue (third motivic cell), and the beginning of the counter subject; the right hand plays both the second and the third motivic cells, following the same scheme of mm. 32–ff, before stopping at the head of the second motivic cell. From m. 506 the rhythm becomes more obsessive with the appearance of the *Hammerschlag* in the left hand in octaves, and then explodes in the *f energico* of m. 509, where the second theme is played in the right hand in a rhythmic variation which recalls the opening of the *Dante sonata*, while the same cell is presented in specular form in the left hand (*Example 21*).

Example 21 – B minor Piano Sonata, variation of the fugue, mm. 502–512

The *Rinforzando* of m. 513 and the increasing tension clearly show that we are reaching the fundamental point in this development section. Before reaching this point, Liszt has another trick to employ. At m. 513 he repeats the theme of the left hand a fourth lower, the theme of the right hand a fourth higher, and this feature gives the listener the idea that a new fugue is going to start, but suddenly, at m. 523, he alludes to the exposition on an *ff*. This is an anticipation, a sort of a recapitulation before the recapitulation, which is in turn only reached at m. 531, preceded by a set of descending scales and a set of quadruplets that abruptly fall to the F# in the lowest octave of the piano.

### Recapitulation

As in the classical sonata form scheme, the first part of the section is a literal repetition of a part of the exposition. In this case mm. 531–554 are an exact copy of mm. 30–53. But the exact beginning of the recapitulation is anything but clear. Walker and Gut identify it with m. 533. It appears to be the best choice, since the tonic reappears there, and because the exposition section begins exactly in the same way. Nevertheless, mm. 531–532 still represent a problem. They are the repetition of mm. 30–31, which for Gut are part of the exposition, while for Walker they are part of the introduction. This latter view seems to be more consistent, since mm. 30–31 are part of the introduction, and they are consequently used to

introduce the recapitulation. Gut's view is more problematic. If mm. 30–31 are part of the exposition, and not such a relevant one, why are they quoted here? Furthermore, if the exposition begins at m. 9, why does the recapitulation begin with a literal quotation of mm. 32–ff? The recapitulation seems to confirm the idea of the beginning of the exposition at m. 32. But such clear evidence appears somewhat unusual for this work, and a closer analysis reveals that the beginning of the recapitulation is more ambiguous than it appears. According to the idea of the expanded double function, it is possible that a section is actually part of two different sections. Consequently, mm. 531–532 possess the same ambiguity and the same role of mm. 30–31, and it is therefore possible to state that Liszt used them in this place for two reasons: 1) to recreate a clear and easily identifiable introduction to the recapitulation; 2) to recreate the same “grey area” of the beginning, in order to emphasise the unity of the sections. However, the matter is unsolved, and it is possible to identify another reason for Liszt's procedure. As already pointed out, several times during the development Liszt inserted elements which can be interpreted as the beginning of the recapitulation. It is as if the recapitulation had been broken into several parts, and that these fragments were then inserted into development. Somehow the listener experiences the feeling of the recapitulation several times during the unfolding of the work. For that reason, it is possible to state that the recapitulation begins before the end of the development. This technique is anything but new. Liszt took it to the extreme here. Beethoven had already used this expedient when he «begins the recapitulation of opus 111 before the harmony has resolved to I»<sup>86</sup>. Then, as Beethoven did in his last sonata (*Annex V*), Liszt had already outlined the recapitulation in m. 523 and in m. 525, before exposing the thematic material in the tonic area. Under this light it is possible to analyse mm. 531–532 as a last hint at the recapitulation, before the recapitulation itself (*Annex VI*). At m. 554 Liszt used a varied version of m. 53, where the quadruplets instead lead to the B $\flat$  major with the second motivic cell, lead to a E $\flat$  major chord – the relevance of the E $\flat$  tonality was already pointed out at the beginning of the analysis. This chord is followed (mm. 555–581) by a reinterpretation of mm. 81–104. Under the chords in the right hand, the first motivic cell resounds in the left hand, which turns from the E $\flat$  major to E minor. The first motivic cell dialogues with the second.

It is now necessary to open a very brief parenthesis on the descending scale of the first motivic cell, as too often it is seen as a melodic movement which has very little relevance in the *Sonata*. The first motivic cell, which is of course

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86 Rosen, Charles, *Sonata Forms*, p. 99. The last two bars of the retransition could be regarded as part of the recapitulation itself. See *Annex V*.

the source of all other ones, is not reducible to its harmonic functions, namely the second-seventh interval. It possesses a descending scale too, which is a functional element. If one does not recognise the relevance of this movement, then its several occurrences during the unfolding of the *Sonata* were completely inexplicable, as in the case of *Example 22*.

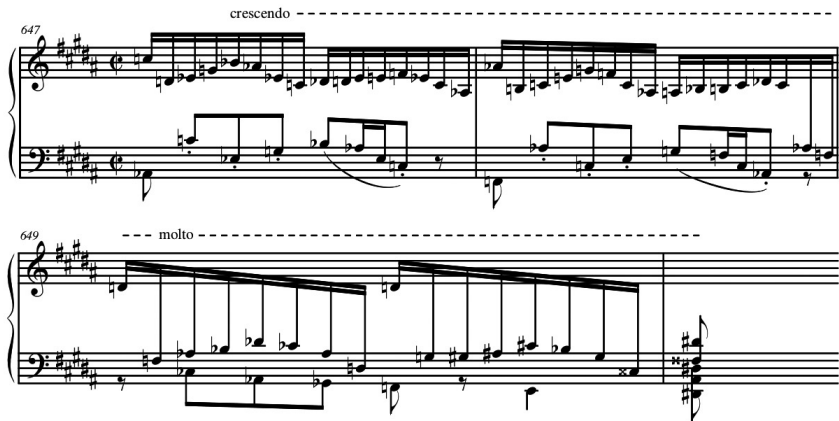


Example 22 – B minor Piano Sonata, dialogue between motivic cell one and two, mm. 569–572

This game between the first and the second motivic cell leads to the *Paukenschläge* (m. 582), which are used in order to create a dominant pedal that promises the B minor. The only thematic element on this pedal is the second motivic cell, although it is quite unrecognisable, since it has lost its characteristic dotted rhythm, and it is here reduced to simple quadruplets (*Example 23*).

Example 23 – B minor Piano Sonata, transformation motivic cell one and two, mm. 582–590

At m. 590 an octave episode with a *precipitato* section begins. At the end of this passage (m. 595), Liszt uses an obsessive repetition of the third motivic cell, which leads to the B major. If he had followed the classical sonata scheme, at this point he would use the B minor tonality. From m. 600 to m. 604 the *Crux fidelis* theme reappears, based on a tonic pedal. As he did in mm. 105–114, here (mm. 604–609) the first motivic cell reappears in the left hand too, even if the *grandioso* chords are substituted by more sober crochet arpeggios. The *Sonata* goes on following more or less the same structure as the exposition. At m. 616, the third motivic cell in B major creates a *cantando espressivo* passage, that leads through a chromatic descending scale to a varied form of the second motivic cell, as it happened in mm. 161–164. Exactly as during the exposition, at this point Liszt uses the third motivic cell and its variations (mm. 628–ff), alternating it between the right and the left hand. From m. 642 the right hand plays a set of scales in a *pp* brilliant passage, while the left hand plays an obsessive repetition of a variation of the second motivic cell. This passage, which leads to the *Stretta (quasi presto)* (m. 650), ends on a D# chord, that is the enharmonic interpretation of the Eb tonality, that Liszt uses in the last bars of this passage (mm. 647–649; *Example 24*).



Example 24 – B minor Piano Sonata, modulation to the III grade of B, mm. 647–650

As previously stated, the Eb is a key tonality in this *Sonata*, and it always precedes or ends relevant passages. Furthermore, the D# is the third grade of B, and the modulation to the III grade of the scale is a feature that Liszt would use successfully in many of his later compositions, where this kind of modulation would be preferred to the more traditional modulation to the IV or the V.

## Coda

Even with the coda, a section that should be easily identifiable, problems of interpretation arise. As *Table 5* shows, there is no agreement with regard to the beginning of this section either. Newman and Walker identify it with m. 681. Longyear and Winklhofer with m. 650. Dömling and Rouard with m. 729. Gut with m. 711. Dömling and Rouard fix the beginning of the coda at m. 729 (*Allegro moderato*), because they probably did not know that it belongs to the new finale that Liszt composed to substitute the virtuoso first version (*Annex III*). Consequently, stating that the coda begins at m. 729 means cutting off a piece of the finale Liszt conceived as a whole, and for this reason it is believed that other solutions are preferable. According to Newman and Walker the coda begins at m. 682. This measure, which is marked *Prestissimo*, marks the beginning of a faster section. It is unclear the reason why they excluded the *Presto* of m. 673, where the first theme is presented again. Therefore, the identification of the coda with m. 682 is formally correct, but in turn it excludes the entire section marked *Stretta quasi presto* (m. 650), whose agogical indication formally identifies the beginning of this quicker tempo passage. It is believed that Liszt intended the mm. 650–710 as the coda section – and the original finale was the perfect conclusion of these “virtuoso years” pages. Another problem arises with m. 710 and its crowned rest, which clearly divides the *Stretta* from the *Andante sostenuto*. The *Stretta* ends with an F# chords; the original finale was a statement of B. Together they were the most classic V-I cadence. Liszt probably thought that such an innovative work could not end with such a naïve finale, and thus he decided to compose a new one. As a consequence of this afterthought, this cadence remained unresolved. Liszt probably did not change this first *Stretta* in order to give the listener the idea of safe harbour. He even restated the *Crux fidelis* theme. But then, instead of an energetic statement of B major, Liszt placed a crown, and he used the dominant of B as the tonic of the *Andante* section. It is true that this new F# passage leads to B, showing then a V-I cadence, but it is also true that here (m. 729) the chords of the right hand make the tonality anything but clear, leaving the perfect cadence unresolved. Consequently, when Liszt erased the original finale, he created a double coda: the first in mm. 650–710, more energetic and clearly pointing to the tonic, and the second in mm. 711–760, which is a negation of the first one, tonally unstable and pointing to the silence from which the *Sonata* arose. In the last segment of the *Sonata* (mm. 729–760), a listener hears all the motivic cells in reverse order: cell 3 in mm. 729–736; cell 2 in mm. 737–742; cell 1 in mm. 749–753. This reminiscence of the beginning emphasises even further the cyclical form of this work.



The long finale is therefore divided into two codas, or a coda plus a finale section, exactly because the manuscript prescribes doing so, and because what happens in mm. 729–760 is something really unique, of which mm. 711–728 are the preparation. In the *Allegro moderato*, the left hand plays the third motivic cell in B minor eight times, while the right hand plays a set of diminished seventh chords related to the second motivic cell, which finally reappear in a varied form in m. 737, and die in m. 743 (*Example 25*).

729 *Allegro moderato*

*p sottovoce*

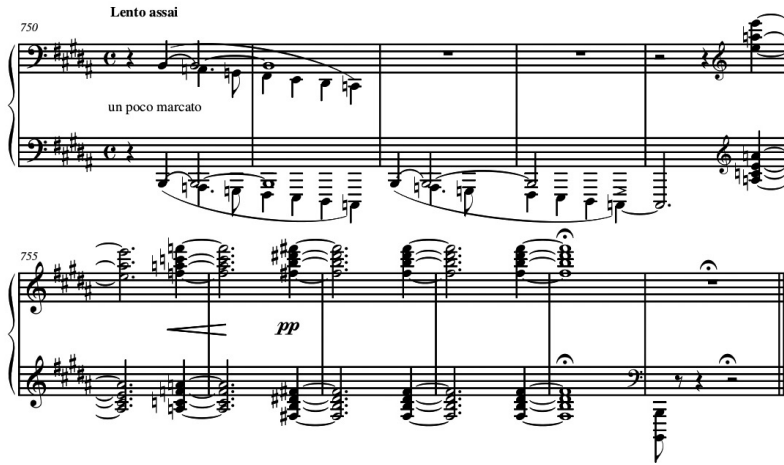
732 *poco cresc.* -----

735 ----- *pp*

Example 25 – B minor Piano Sonata, B pedal, mm. 729–737

From m. 744 the B major chord is interrupted by the G and the G $\sharp$  of the left hand. These Gs clearly recall the beginning of the *Sonata*, even if rhythmically varied. Since Beethoven's sonata op. 111 was the main reference during the analysis, it is possible to suggest one last link between the two works: the G $\sharp$  that emerges in the first half of m. 747 of Liszt's work, sounds like a farewell, exactly as does the C $\sharp$  at the end of Beethoven's C minor sonata. From m. 750 the first motivic cell is exposed starting from B, first at the unison, then the left hand alone. Between mm. 755–756 resound the famous tritone cadence: an F major chord in its first inversion, turns into a B major in its second inversion. The *Sonata* ends with a lonely B played in the left hand in the lowest octave of the piano (*Example*

26). It is of course highly symbolic to end a work with such a theatrical gesture, that is to say: it is not possible to go further because there are no lower notes<sup>87</sup>. The music encounters its physical limits. Liszt brings the music back to silence – where at the beginning, music arose from it – but it is not the same silence as that the beginning. It has turned into a pregnant moment, which will give rise to further music, but whose destiny of silence has already been written.



Example 26 – B minor Piano Sonata, First motivic cell and tritone cadence, mm. 750–760

The measures which close the *Sonata* are the real *coupe de génie*. As stated previously, this last page of music was composed to substitute a previous finale, that was brilliant and magnificent. In a few words, it was typical of the Liszt of the so-called “virtuoso years”. Luckily, Liszt changed his mind and he composed the most beautiful finale possible. If he had not changed his mind and composed an alternative finale, it would have been pretty clear that the coda is in mm. 650–760. But with the new finale two coda coexists: the first exhausts the brilliant and the *grandioso* character; the second brings the listener back to the climate of the beginning. Thanks to the harmonic concatenations the latter does not sound like the beginning, but as the result of a process that has created something else, something that Hamilton describes as «the most

87 The *Neue Liszt-Ausgabe*, from which the musical examples are taken, reports in the last measure an octave ( $B_1 + B_0$ ). The Lehman Manuscript of 1853 reports a lonely  $B_0$ .

inspired tritone cadence ever composed»<sup>88</sup>. Earlier in this section it emerged that the mm. 711–760 are the negation of the former coda. Now it is possible to state that these measures are the conclusion of a process, they are an end. Using the citation at the beginning of this chapter, the sonata «selber sei hier zu Ende, ans Ende geführt, sie habe ihr Schicksal erfüllt, ihr Ziel erreicht, über das hinaus es nicht gehe, sie hebe und löse sich auf, sie nehme Abschied»<sup>89</sup>. In this sense Liszt's *B minor Piano Sonata* is the only closed case among Liszt's productions. When he composed this finale, he felt that he had nothing more to say in this genre, concerning the piano music, and then the term "sonata" disappeared from his vocabulary. What Thomas Mann perfectly described with his magnificent prose, could be translated, and then this finale was the *Aufhebung* moment of a dialectical work. In the *Sonata* everything is in contrast with something else, and these contrasts are abolished here. At the same time, even if the sonata form experienced here a "second death", the dialectical process cannot be stopped, and the Lisztian work therefore represents the beginning of something new, it is the first term of a new dialectical process. Liszt successfully applied the idea of progress to music.

## The role of the symbol

After the analysis of the *Sonata*, it is necessary to make some observations about it, in order to explain which role the symbol plays in the theoretical justification of the formal ambiguity of this composition. Hence, what follows are some general observations which arise quite spontaneously from the analysis of the *Sonata* itself. Further elements about the relationship between form and content in Liszt's piano works will emerge in the next two chapters. For now, it is relevant to point out how both the concepts of ambiguity and of symbol are strictly related to the idea of progress. Because it is this last concept, whose main features were already outlined in *Chapter II* (change of paradigm), which makes the emergence of the symbol as a philosophical horizon possible, in which the idea of ambiguity (multiplicity) finds its place. After the musical analysis, it is now necessary to come back to the theory. During the analysis of the *Sonata*, both as multi-movement and as first movement form, the problem of the multiple interpretations emerged in all its strength. If during the

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88 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: B minor Piano Sonata*, p. 47.

89 See footnote 1.

analysis a musical justification was provided for the different points of view on the sections, now it is necessary to find for them a theoretical justification. Looking at *Table 5* seems clear that it represents a problem, and no one would deny it. It is surprising how much energy has been spent by musicologists in attempt to provide a final word about the correct interpretation of the *Sonata*. They were so focused on the structure of this work that they took it as a model of *Formproblem*, without noting that it is a false problem. Or better, it is a problem when one approaches it with the form in mind that the theorists had conclusively affixed to it. But, as already pointed out, that is not what Liszt did. He was following the “living form” and not the rules. Liszt dealt with the sonata form as if it were not yet set in stone. Consequently, if one expects to find there the categories created by the theorists, then one is looking in the wrong direction. Because here the form is open and ambiguous and, above all, it cannot be fully described by the theoretical vocabulary. If one approaches the *Sonata* from this point of view, then the problem of the form disappears, or, at least, it ceases to be a problem. This last section is therefore an attempt to solve what could possibly be called the primigenial problem.

	Introduction	Exposition	Development	Recapitulation	Coda
Dömling	1–7	8–346	347–?	460–728	729–760
Dommel-Diény	1–7	8–170	171–532	533–710	711–760
Gourdet	–	1–178	179–330	522–640	711–760
Longyear	1–7	8–178	179–459	460–649	650–760
Newmann	–	1–330	331–525	525–681	682–760
Rouard	1–31	32–?	?	533–?	729–760
Walker	1–31	32–330	331–532	533–681	682–760
Winklhofer	–	1–204	205–452	453–649	650–760
Zuckerman	1–7	8–277	278–459	533–672	673–760
Gut	1–7	8–170	171–532	533–710	711–760
Bettoni	1–31	32–330	331–522	523–649	650–760

Table 5 – Synoptic representation of the various analyses of the Sonata<sup>90</sup>

Following this path, it even becomes possible to keep together all the different interpretations, both musical and programmatic. Of course, the solution outlined here does not pretend to solve the problem of the form once and for all. Anyway, it is believed that the following proposal can furnish new theoretical material, from which new analytical approaches to the *Sonata* can occur. *Table 5* above clearly shows the “interpretative chaos” that surrounds the *Sonata*. In the history of music, it is not unusual to have more than one possible interpretation of a work, especially when one deals with modern music: but this huge amount – there are many other interpretations than those listed in

*Table 5* – is undoubtedly something strange for a romantic work. The most common approach to the matter is try to answer the question “who is right and who is wrong?”. It is the most common reaction when one confronts themselves with a huge amount of conflicting data. One tends to answer the question by following their own sensibilities, and this leads to identification of the *correct interpretation*. But, after this first partisan phase, one notes that a different answer can be found. Consequently, it is possible to identify two different and opposite approaches to this chaos: 1) it is possible to defend one’s own personal interpretation against the others, or it is possible to become a partisan of one of the previously existing ones; 2) it is possible to state that they are all at the same time possible and valid.

As already stated, the first option has the advantage of being immediate – in its etymological meaning of not-mediate – but it has the disadvantage of quite automatically leading to a condition of general warfare. One has to defend the “chosen interpretation”, namely the best one, against the others. After a while it becomes clear that this is a dead-end. That does not mean that one has to deny the existence of an interpretation which is closer to one’s personal sensibility, but it does mean that the “chosen interpretation” is neither the only possible one nor the best one. Once one realises that the interpretation of musicologist X is the most suitable for us, but that, at the same time, the interpretations of scholars Y and Z are plausible too, then one realises that what is needed is an explanation of this phenomenon, and not its denial – consequently, one does not have to defend his interpretation against the others, but, quite the opposite, the diverse points of view are the premises, the justification, of the existence of all the individual interpretations. Furthermore, another argument can be raised against the theory of the best interpretation, namely that no one has the authority to state that experienced musicologists such as Gut, Walker, or Longyear, or any other, are wrong or right. This operation is first of all problematic, as all these interpretations are well documented and justified through musical analysis. Furthermore, this approach involves the *ipse dixit* fallacy, and, as Liszt was fighting both against the dull academics and the *formulas*, then it is believed that this approach should be discarded. Secondly, this perspective does not solve the problem, because becoming a partisan of this or that interpretation does not mean that the opponent’s interpretations disappear. They are still there, even if one considers them incorrect or if one simply does not consider them as valid. But no serious analysis would ignore such a relevant element. So, it is possible to approach the matter from another point of view, namely to state that all these different interpretations are *at the same time* possible and valid.

Of course, accepting these numerous different interpretations as plausible creates theoretical problems, which need to be answered with a theoretical

explanation, or, at least, to be described by a concept able to justify them all. As has already emerged, it is believed that the only concept able to embrace several different interpretations at the same time without emptying the meaning of the subject is that of *symbol*. The general features of this concept were outlined in *Chapter II*. Here it is sufficient to remember that the symbol is ambiguous for its own nature. For that precise reason it can embrace different meanings and different explanations, which are all consistent with the subject and whose sum cannot exhaust the meaning of the symbol. Quite the opposite, every new interpretation is a step further toward better comprehension. But the *Sonata* can be regarded as a symbol for two other reasons: 1) its sections (introduction, exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda), or part of them, are at the same time something else, namely they have simultaneously more than one function, and there is more than one explanation. For example, the introduction can be described using as reference all the introduction ever written in the history of music, but it would be still remain something which one cannot describe using the vocabulary of the category “introduction”. Here probably lies the core of the problem, namely the terminological one: how can one describe something whose essence is not definable with the vocabulary at our disposal? It would be necessary to present a continuous chain of explanations whose aim is to clarify themselves word for word – of course, it is always possible to use these terms as “open”; using “open concepts” can certainly turn, for example, the category of “introduction” into something more inclusive, but it would still be necessary to produce a “chain of explanations” to clarify in which sense the word is used. Furthermore, when (as in the case of the *B minor Piano Sonata*), a section works both as introduction and as a part of the exposition, which one of these two terms – even in their “open” use – should one use? The terminological problem should involve a rethinking of the vocabulary of music theory. And this point brings us to the problem of the difference between compositional practice and theory, which brings us to a point where the terminological matter is related to the idea of progress itself. On one hand, music and its languages are progressing, and consequently the vocabulary elaborated to explain it needs to change with it, if it wants to continue to understand the phenomenon. The biggest problem is that the theory can analyse, and then explain, a phenomenon once it has happened. So, the theory comes always *a posteriori*. On the other hand, progress, as a straight temporal line, shows us objects which are under the influence of time (i.e. historical objects), namely they are evolving objects, because their perceivers live in history too. The music of Liszt tried to reproduce this movement, and therefore his *Sonata* changes with every interaction that we have with it, every time showing us some new features in a never-ending process. It is here relevant

to point out the difference between the musical time and the historical time of a composition. The time in the *Sonata* (the musical time) is cyclical – even if, as already pointed out, its inner movement is dialectical, and then it would be better to define its time as a spiral, an evolving line. The historical time of the *Sonata* is a straight line, which goes from its conception towards the future through its historical transformations and interpretations (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*), and it involves all the historical actors; 2) the second meaning is still related to the concept of progress. On the one side, the *Sonata* looks back to the past, to Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, but even Schubert and Schumann. From this point of view the *Sonata* has to be regarded as the outcome of a long sedimentation process, exactly as the open to the past character of the symbol. At the same time, it is open to the future, not just because it is always open to accept new interpretations, but also because, since it acts in history, it will constitute a new tessera of the sedimentation process from which new sonatas will emerge. It is open to the future because its existence guarantees the same possibility of its continuation as a genre.

Concluding, as it is emerged during this chapter, the ambiguity of the form is strictly related to the idea of progress. Because it is the progress itself, as it was defined during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which permits relationships between past and future with an open form which is able to accept the multiple occurrences both of the former and of the latter. But the form itself, even if it is open and ambiguous, remains a limit which imprisons the fantasy of the composer. It remains something that the composers, exactly as the tonality, have to exceed. However, where the tonality can be exceeded quite easily, music without a form is more difficult to imagine. Consequently, after the ambiguity of the form, Liszt faced the impossibility of music without a form. In the two chapters which follow, it will emerge how Liszt tried to solve the matter working in two directions: 1) on the one side he used even more simple forms (A-B-A), with which more freedom was guaranteed; 2) on the other side the ambiguity transfers from the form to the harmonic field. But, as it will emerge, these boundless freedoms would turn into captivity, above all formal captivity, since it is the last element which can still guarantee musical expression – namely, the form becomes more rigid, because only it can promise a sort of formal unity to a harmony which is now completely free from any obligation. Somehow Liszt became a formalist.

## V Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,  
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura  
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte  
che nel pensier rinova la paura!<sup>1</sup>

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1 Alighieri, Dante, *La divina Commedia, Inferno, Canto I*, Mondadori, Milano, 1991, p. 51.





## Introduction

«On Saturday, August 17, 1861, Liszt checked out of the Erbprinz Hotel and set out on foot for the Weimar railway station»<sup>2</sup>. After many years of service to the court of Weimar the decision was made, it was time to leave the city. Walker informs us about the long journey that Liszt made in order to reach his beloved Carolyne in Rome. It took more than two months. He finally arrived in the Eternal City on October 20, 1861. However, retracing Liszt's journey is not relevant here. What is needed first is a brief explanation of the title of the present chapter. The words *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita* are taken from Dante's *Divina commedia*. Liszt used these words already on October 6, 1846, in a letter to the Duke Carl-Alexander, when the pianist decided that it was time for him to leave his virtuoso career to «laisser plein vol à ma pensée»<sup>3</sup>. Thus, it might seem a contradiction to use this same sentence to open a chapter on the *Final Years*, when Liszt was already fifty years old. After the Weimar period, Liszt no longer in the middle of his life, but he, like the Italian poet, had surely lost his way. Consequently, the title is a provocation made in order to question the division of Liszt's life into three periods. If the former two periods are clear definable and identifiable, what happened after Weimar cannot be gathered into just the one homogeneous group, but it would be better to divide it into two smaller parts: the period 1861–1880, and the period 1880–1886. In turn, the first period should be divided into two sub-periods: 1861–1869 and 1869–1880. During the years 1861–1869 Liszt is in limbo: his enthusiasm for the marriage to Carolyne turns, first into disappointment, and then into depression; Liszt stays in Rome without any particular aim or reason. His daughter Blandine dies in 1862, and he tries to find some peace at the monastery Madonna del Rosario near Rome. In 1865, he enters the lower orders. In 1869 he begins his life as a pilgrim. The second sub-period, 1869–1880, is the so-called *vie trifurquée*. Liszt spent his life between Weimar, Rome, and Budapest. Between these two dates the Franco-Prussian war took place, which deeply affected Liszt. His dream of a peaceful Europe was finally broken. Then, the years around 1880 can be seen as a sort of bridge to old age, to the final loneliness and apathy, as proven by this letter to Carolyne of 1877: «Ma difficulté d'écrire augmente et devient excessive – comme aussi ma fatigue de vivre! Sans me plaindre, je souffre souvent d'exister – la santé du corps me reste, celle de l'âme manque!

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2 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years, 1861–1886*, p. 21.

3 Liszt, Franz, *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander Grossherzog von Sachsen*, letter dated 8 October 1846 p. 8.

*Tristis est anima mea!*»<sup>4</sup>. These are all very well-known aspects of his life, and so naturally a clear division into periods does not reflect the reality. Furthermore, focusing on only the piano compositions has the disadvantage of cutting away all the orchestral works. Among them, not only the symphonic poems and the “Dante” and “Faust” symphonies – whose form and aesthetics are anyway connected to the *Sonata* – but additionally even the two oratorios, *Christus* and *Die Legende von der heiligen Elisabeth*, which responded to other musical and aesthetical principles. Here would be an ideal place to open a parenthesis on the role of the oratorios and of the sacred music in Liszt’s aesthetic view, however this would take the discourse too far away from the main topic. In any case, it is necessary to remember that, after the symphonic poems, Liszt saw in the oratorio the music of the future, namely the only genre able to embody the *Ideal der Zeit*. On the other hand, focusing solely on the piano composition presents the advantage of creating an easier path for analysis, because the piano was the privileged instrument for Liszt, and first of all he experimented on his ideas with it. After he spent his years in Weimar experimenting with orchestra, in his later years he came back to the piano. This return had several reasons, which will emerge in the present and following chapters. A relevant number of compositions from the periods just outlined, reflect both the events of Liszt’s life and his change of thought, and, at the same time, they also bring with them all the theoretical features of his previous compositions. It seems clear that it is impossible to separate the life from the works. But, while during the Weimar period the element to which Liszt devoted the majority of his energies was the war in the *Reich der Ideen*, during the *Final Years* his vigour gradually decreased, slowly extinguished by his personal life’s events. Nonetheless, the idea of progress – interpreted as a key concept of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely as a positive force towards the better – does not disappear from Liszt’s mind, not even after the disappointment of Weimar. It changed: sometimes it was oriented towards religious belief, sometimes towards the inward world. In both cases, it can be read as a symptom not only of his personal failure, but also as a symptom of the decline of the bourgeois society of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For that reason, the analysis that follows is chronologically organised, exactly because the individual and the work are inseparable.

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4 Liszt, Franz, *Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, letter dated 15 June 1877, Vol. VII, p. 193.

## The years 1861–1869: the limbo

Following the failure of the project of his marriage, Liszt is in Rome and his life seems to be diminished. In addition, the Eternal City has no musical life. There are no concert halls, no professional orchestras, and no conservatoire. Perhaps is the city called “eternal” because nothing moves or changes. Everything remains tightly under the control of the Pope. It is possible to state that the only two events that enlivened Liszt’s life were his acquaintance with Giovanni Sgambati and Walter Bache. The first became one of the most famous of Liszt’s pupils in Rome, and with his cooperation he tried to promote German music in the Eternal City. Apparently, this was a very difficult task. In 1867, Kurd von Schlözer, a German diplomat, wrote that «Hier in Rom tut Liszt seit Jahren alles, um die Römer für Mozart und Beethoven zu gewinnen. Auch sein ausgezeichnete Schüler Sgambati ist bestrebt, seine Landsleute in die Tiefen deutscher Musik einzuführen, und dirigierte vor vier Wochen in der Sala Dantesca die *Eroica*, welche das Publikum allerdings nicht ganz zu verstehen schien»<sup>5</sup>. And it was already 1867 (Beethoven composed his op. 55 in 1803–1804). At that time, Liszt was no longer a permanent resident of the city, and he had already been working in this direction for six years. Again, nothing changes in the eternal city. The second pupil, Walter Bache, stayed in Rome for about three years, and, once he came back to England, he started to organise concerts in order to spread Liszt’s music throughout the country. We owe Bache for providing an account of many of the details of Liszt’s life during these troubled years, and to his sister, Costance, we owe her for her English translation of the La Mara edition of the Liszt’s letters. Though Liszt had many friends around him, supporting him, he was only able to find some sense of consolation in religion. And it is no coincidence that during these years he worked on his two oratorios (*Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth* and *Christus*), and on his *Ungarische Krönungsmesse*. Furthermore, he composed a great deal of religious music for piano, orchestra, and chorus. The piano productions of this period do not represent one of the highest moments of the Lisztian corpus, though there are some exceptions, such as the *Isolde Liebestod*, composed in 1867.

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5 Schlözer, Kurd von, *Römische Briefe*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart, 1913, letter dated 2 January 1867, p. 293. Sgambati conducted the third symphony of Beethoven in 1866.

*Waldesrauschen* S. 145/1

In the midst of these events, it seems Liszt looked to his past in search of some relief. It is therefore unsurprising that during the first years of his stay in Rome, he brought to light the two pieces *Waldesrauschen* and *Gnomenreigen*. They are the accomplishment of a commission received when he was still in Weimar. Walker reads the two studies as autobiographical, stating that «they are really nostalgic annotations to the spectacular keyboard pieces of the Weimar period, and even of the *Glanzzeit*, now lost almost beyond recall»<sup>6</sup>. Certainly, a possible interpretation, though, as already pointed out, in following this interpretative line one is tempted to understand the entire production of a composer as autobiographical – at least because they are the result of the activity of a human being, and not of a computer, as Hamilton said. Anyway, it is not relevant here to state whether Liszt's nostalgia was caused by the loss of his virtuoso career, or by the events which took place at the beginning of the decade. In any case, it is Walker himself, who, reporting many quotations, seems to contradict himself. The musicologist reminds us that Liszt's brilliant style did not lie in the past. The most authoritative review is without any doubt the one that Hanslick wrote after Liszt's Vienna recital in 1874:

Mit Jubel begrüßt, tritt Liszt auf, in langem, hoch zugeknöpften Abbékleide, setzt sich ans Piano und giebt dem Orchester das Zeichen zum Anfang der Wander-Phantasie (op. 15) von Schubert. Sein Spiel ist vollendet, wie ehemals, dabei von ruhigerem Geiste und milderem Gemüth erfüllt; nicht so blendend, so packend, aber einheitlicher, ich möchte sagen solider, als das des jungen Liszt gewesen. [...] Liszts Vortrag war frei, poetisch, voll geistreicher Nüancen, dabei von edler, künstlerischer Ruhe. Und seine Technik, seine Virtuosität? Ich werde mich wohl hüten, davon zu reden. Genug, daß Liszt sie nicht eingebüßt, sondern höchstens abgeklärt und beruhigt hat. Welch merkwürdigen Mensch! [...] Für den Liszt von heute ist es eine große Leistung, die er vollbracht hat; und doch that er so unbefangen, als sei das nichts und er noch der Liszt von 1840. Fürwahr, ein Liebling der Götter!<sup>7</sup>

This does not merely suggest that Liszt was still able to play at the same level as his virtuoso reputation implied, and then to further produce *Glanzmusik*

6 Alan, Walker, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years, 1861–1886*, p. 41.

7 Hanslick, Eduard, *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuosen der letzten fünfzehn Jahre, 1870–1885*. Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, Berlin, 1886, pp. 123–125. This is the best evidence that the Viennese critic was a supporter of Liszt as a pianist, but a determined opponent of him as a composer.

at the age of sixty-two, but the quotation is evidence to support the fact that it was his own choice to quit with these kinds of compositions and this kind of life. The time of cheerful Romanticism was over; and not just for Liszt, but for the entire Romantic Generation. In any event, it is undeniable that the *Zwei Konzertetüden* S. 145 still have something in common with the works of his youth. Lest we forget that, if Emile Ollivier survived the loss of his beloved thanks to «hard physical labour», Liszt overcame the death of Blandine with hard intellectual and spiritual labour. And for Liszt, these two pieces were probably a means of escape, so as not to think about his miserable situation. A brief analysis of the first of these studies is necessary at this point, as it possesses some elements which bind it both with the *Sonata*, and with the work which will be analysed later, the *Variationen über das Motiv von Bach* S. 180.

*Waldesrauschen* is an étude, which perfectly responds to the romantic idea of the genre, and it is written as a series of motivic transformations of an original four bar theme (*Example 1*), first exposed by the left hand, starting in the tonality of D flat major. The right hand plays a series of «sixteenth-note sextuplet arpeggios often constructed over non-functional seventh and ninth chords»<sup>8</sup>. Then, at m. 15 the roles are inverted, the left hand plays the sextuplets while the right hand plays the theme (in octaves).



Example 1 – Waldesrauschen, theme, mm. 2–5

The form is very simple and easily recognisable, and it comes directly from Liszt's experience as an études composer: A-B-A'. It is useful to remember



Example 2 – Waldesrauschen, passing notes (Eb-Eb), m. 4

that the series of piano études of 1826 (S136), used the ternary form too. The structure of this piece is very simple. The left hand exposes the thematic material (D $\flat$ -E), and then the right hand repeats it. Through a modulation section B starts, modulating to F, A, and finally to C. At the end of

8 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 164.

this section a modulation brings us back to the tonality of D flat, and to the re-emergence of the first theme. This tonality scheme follows the modulation to the III grade (minor or major). During these years, this feature became a main modulation strategy of Liszt's compositional technique.

The form used by Liszt is anything but new, and it seems to contradict everything he wrote and composed during the Weimar years. Anyway, as Walker points out, *Waldesrauschen* is a nostalgic work, that looks, in what concerns the form, to the past. On the other hand, the past does not just represent a happier moment in Liszt's life, but it is also a fruitful source of inspiration, a place where Liszt looked to find new material. And here another meaning is found for the open to the past character of Lisztian works. He was capable of using the achievements of the ancient masters, giving them new life towards the future. In the next few pages it will emerge how the greatest source of his innovative language was to be found in the music of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, more so than in the unclear concept of *music of the future*. Before moving on, it is necessary to draw attention to two other peculiar elements of *Waldesrauschen*. They are nothing new in Liszt's language, but they begin to assume a new function here, which lies at the basis of the future developments in his style, and which constitute the true basic material of this étude: 1) the seventh and ninth harmonies – the arpeggios «point the way towards the shimmering textures of Ravel's "Ondine"»<sup>9</sup> – 2) the chromaticism and tonal ambiguity – this ambiguity is provided in three elements: a) the modulation to the mediant, avoiding any perfect cadence; b) the continued oscillations between tonalities; c) the chromaticism. This last point is the most relevant. The chromaticism is of course nothing new, neither for Liszt nor for the entire Romantic Generation. But here Liszt confuses the listener by staying on the passing note, which is a sound foreign to the harmony most of the time, and a reduction in staying on the chord tone (*Example 2*), a procedure that recalls the more famous *Tristan Akkord*. But it is the chromatic process, taken to its extreme, which will open the door to the highest point of tonal ambiguity.

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9 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years, 1861–1886*, p. 41.

*Variationen über das Motiv von Bach Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* S. 180



Example 3 – Bach, J.S., Basso from the cantata *Weinen, Klagen* BWV.12

The past is not just a source of formal inspiration, but also a source of content. During his years in Rome and at the monastery on Monte Mario, Liszt deepened his knowledge of the ancient music. The composers of the 16<sup>th</sup> and of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were not merely a source of inspiration for his religious works and a musical relief from his pain, but they were also a source of musical material. Part of Liszt's musical innovation finds its roots in the ancient music. Even the chromaticism principle, largely used by the Romantic Generation and often identified as one peculiarity of 19<sup>th</sup> century music, finds its roots in the past, and precisely in that past which the Romantic Generation had so recently rediscovered: the Baroque. A masterpiece in the use of chromaticism from the Lisztian repertoire is represented by the *Variationen über das Motiv Bach Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* S. 180, composed shortly after the death of Blandine in the second half of 1862. It is most assuredly an autobiographical composition. Indeed, the work is in F minor, «Liszt's key of mourning *par excellence*»<sup>10</sup>, and the chorale placed at the end, *Was Gott tut, das ist wohl getan*, is a sort of resignation to the events of life, which Liszt then tried to justify as a part of God's plan (Liszt's son Daniel died in 1859). But aside from the tragic circumstances from which the composition resulted, Liszt was able to create a magnificent work. It is one of the last piano pieces in which he used a large form. Of course, it does not possess the grandeur of the *Sonata*, but it shares some features with the Weimar composition. The *Variationen* are built upon a basso of Bach, from the cantata of the same name, composed in Weimar in 1714. The melodic line is very simple, and it possesses a chromatic descending movement<sup>11</sup> (*Example 3*).

Liszt takes this motive to build a series of variations, following approximately the same formal structure of Bach's cantata, including a short prelude, the cantata, the *recitativo*, and it closes with the chorale as previously mentioned.

10 Alan, Walker, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years, 1861–1886*, p. 52. Alfred Brendel underlines the grief of this piece, stating that «the work encompasses a wide range of grief, terror and despair. The extended lament which opens the fantasia is entirely given to three-note groups: their declamation recalls the name Blandine». See Brendel, Alfred, *Music, Sense and Nonsense*, p. 212.

11 This chromatic descending movement is of course the so called *passus duriusculus*, itself a symbol of grief.



This work clearly shows that a large form composition is still possible using the variations technique. But, if the *Sonata* represents the heroic Romanticism, here Liszt began his simplification process, which would reduce his music to its fundamental elements. In this work Liszt used both the rhythmical and the harmonic variation, following the same process used in the *Sonata*. However, if the latter can be considered as a multi-thematic work, here Liszt used just one theme, or better, one motivic element, which is a chromatic sequence covering a fourth, from F to C (*Example 4*), and he did not use this to create new thematic material. The transformation of the motive preserves «die diastematische Substanz, oder zumindest der melodische Umriß, [...] während die rhythmische Gestalt modifiziert wird, und zwar manchmal so tiefgreifend, daß es schwer fällt, bei unmittelbarer, nicht durch Lektüre des Notentextes gestützter Wahrnehmung die Herkunft eines Motivs zu erkennen»<sup>12</sup>.



Example 4 – Variationen über das Motiv von Bach, Liszt's bass

There is however a significantly relevant difference between the two works. In the *Sonata* – whose title brings with it a precise vocabulary and therefore a stricter conception of the form – Liszt changed both the key and tempo indications several times, creating this feeling of *Formlosigkeit* experienced by Hanslick. On the other hand, in his *Variationen*, which as a genre gave him more formal freedom, Liszt did not change the key indication until the chorale section – which cannot however be considered a variation, and, consequently, it is possible to state that the whole work has just the F minor/F major tonality – and he used but a few time changes – from the initial  $\frac{3}{4}$ , to  $\frac{4}{4}$ , to  $\frac{6}{4}$ , and to the  $\frac{4}{4}$  of the chorale. Anyway, the rhythmical variation of the motive, gradually makes the writing more dense and even more anxious, until the *recitativo* which is a calm parenthesis before the terrible pedal, which reach its «horrific *fff* climax at m. 312»<sup>13</sup>.

12 Dahlhaus, Carl, *Liszt, Schönberg und die größte Form*, p. 202.

13 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 150.

Andante

ff pesante sf ff pesante sf ff

ff sf sf

### Example 5 – Variationen über das Motiv von Bach, mm. 1–12

Afterwards, the salvation of the diatonic chorale enters. Despite its formal clarity, the *Variationen* are more tonally unstable than the *Sonata*. This means that for Liszt the tonality, as a functional centre and as a unifying element, is no longer useful – his music is no longer built on centrifugal force, which pushes away from the tonic and onto the centripetal force, which pushes back to the tonic. Now, the key signature suggests an atmosphere more than a precise tonality. In the next chapter, how this idea lead Liszt to the dissolution of tonality will be analysed. Let us come back to the *Variationen*, because they are worthy of a brief analysis. The beginning is quite simple and directly shows the compositional procedure. Liszt takes the motivic material (*Example 4*) and exposes it starting from D $\flat$  (*Example 5*). The chord is in its first inversion, so the motive shows its original chromaticism (F-E $\flat$ -E-D-D $\flat$ ). But, instead of following its path till C, and then confirming the tonality of F, Liszt lingers on D $\flat$  – the two cadences of mm. 5–6 and mm. 7–8 confirm the tonality of D $\flat$  minor –, and then he creates a chromatic figure based on the original motive, but this time covering a fifth (D-G), which is repeated twice and at the end collapses on F through a chromatic passage (*Example 6*).

Example 6 – Variationen über das Motiv von Bach, motive in F major, mm. 338–347

Here, as with the *Sonata*, a problem of interpretation emerges. If the formal structure resembles that of Bach, there is a noteworthy difference in the content. So, this prelude-like beginning is, upon closer analysis, neither a prelude (as in the Bach's cantata, which opens with a *Sinfonia*), nor an exposition of the motive, as one would expect from a set of variations. However, it is already a variation of the motive, which is exposed in its original form only at m. 19, and then repeated for a second time. The motive is counterpointed by the right hand since its first appearance, which uses just the head of the figure  $\text{♩} \text{♩}$  but rhythmically varied as  $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$  (mm. 19–20). The procedure is the same as that used in the *Sonata*: exposition of the material in a tonally unstable passage, and eventually confirming the wrong key. Through a chromaticism he reaches the tonic and exposes the theme, while beginning to transform it. The "category" is used freely here. The exposition of the theme and its development are somehow inverted. Somehow Liszt starts to develop his ideas before their exposition. The motive is hidden in a dense chromatic counterpoint, and it passes from the left to the right hand continuously, and is often played in the middle voices. A multitude of themes – using chromaticism, too – grow above or below the motive, and it makes the task of a listener even harder, who expects to clearly hear the developmental adventure of the motive. The acute chromaticism of this work is a direct consequence of the chromaticism of Bach's *cantata*, and «auf der Grundlage des chromatisch fallenden Quartgangs eine Erweiterung der Harmonik bis hin zur vollständigen Durchchromatisierung aller Stimmen, und das heißt auch: bis an die Grenzen dessen, was im Rahmen der Funktions-

harmonik noch möglich ist»<sup>14</sup>. So, the chromaticism becomes a compositional method used to expand the harmonic possibilities of the tonal system. After the long *recitativo* marked *Lento* and in which the word *lagrimoso* appears two times, a section begins (*Quasi Andante, un poco mosso*), marked with the words *dolce piangendo*, further evidence of the biographical influences on this work. The atmosphere here is certainly sorrowful, but it is not as violent as before. Liszt creates a moment of religious recollection here, of meditation. This leads to the *Quasi allegro moderato* in which the previously mentioned pedal begins, and leads the music from the *pp* of m. 247 to the *ff* of m. 312. Then a little coda introduces the chorale *Was Gott tut, das ist wohl getan, dabei will ich verbleiben*. The chorale is bipartite itself. A first one, the *Lento*, is a meditative piece, resembling Bach's chorale and it ends on the chord of F major after several confirmations. With the last chord at m. 339 (*poco a poco più mosso*), the left hand begins a tremolo on a F pedal upon which Liszt inserts the chromatic motive of the beginning, but this time it is used to build a perfect cadence (I...-V-I) to confirm the new tonality of F major (*Example 6*). Then, this figure collapses with a chromatic passage (*Quasi Allegro*) to a chorale like moment, which confirms the tonality with three fermatas on the V, on the IV and on the III-V. It is the beginning of the glorious finale, in which the faith in God and in his plans resonates. The grief expressed by the chromaticism is dissolved here in the brightness of the F major.

This is a final acceptance of God's will. Many commentators have underlined that this work has two main features: 1) the chromaticism, which here becomes a structural element, namely it substitutes the harmonic connections; 2) the psychological/poetical moment. On this last point, one of the first analyses was suggested by Lina Ramann, who wrote in her *Liszt-Pädagogium*: «Aus dem psychologischen Prozeß des ganzen lassen sich Variationengruppen unterscheiden, deren eine „Weinen“, die andere „Klagen“, dann „Sorgen – Zagen“ als ihre seelische Tonika fühlbar machen»<sup>15</sup>. In this view, the chorale is then seen as a distinct piece, that has nothing to do with what precedes, but it is not. Quite often, the transformation of the themes in Liszt's works assume a dialectical character, and it is believed that this work makes no exception. The motive of the beginning represents, through the *Chromatische Quartfall*, grief, moving through several phases and nuances. Then, this sorrowful sentiment goes through the chorale, and it emerges transformed. It is neither a chromatic fall, nor a chorale any longer. The contrast is solved in an ascending diatonic

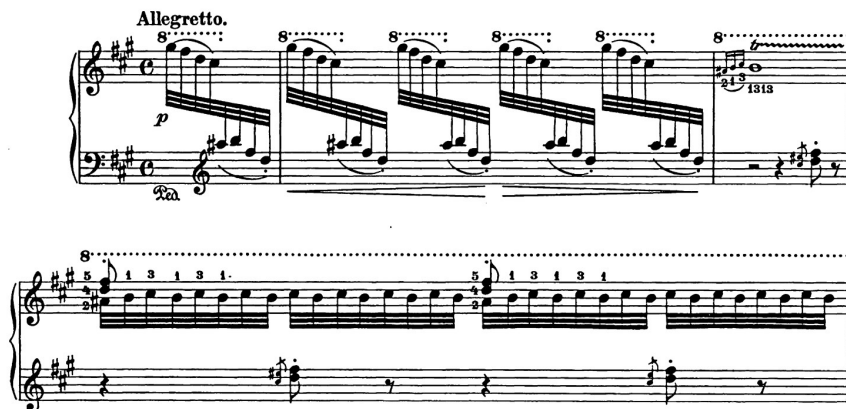
14 Redepenning, Dorothea, *Franz Liszts Auseinandersetzung mit Johann Sebastian Bach*, p. 104.

15 Ramann, Lina, *Liszt-Pädagogium*, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1901, Heft 1, p. 14. Quoted in Redepenning, Dorothea, *Franz Liszts Auseinandersetzung mit Johann Sebastian Bach*, p. 105.

scale. Concluding, the *Variationen* are surely an autobiographical work, but it would be a mistake to label it as a work in which the composer exposes his suffering. Here Liszt used the chromaticism of Bach's motive as an excuse to create a total chromaticism, which is a basis for many of his works, and which gradually led him to an awareness of atonality (with a 19<sup>th</sup> century meaning).

## The Years 1869–1880: the wandering Franciscan

Liszt arrived in Rome with great hope: the marriage to Carolyne. After a few months it became clear that the marriage was, and always would be, just a dream. The death of Blandine shortly after the death of Daniel pushed Liszt into depression, and the situation was worsened by the near desperation of Ollivier. The decade began under the portent of bad omens. And Liszt was clearly, deeply affected; «his sense of boundless optimism temporarily deserted him. He became introspective. His hair turned gray, and on his face appeared the numerous warts with which anybody who has seen photographs of him in later life is familiar»<sup>16</sup>. Liszt needed to escape Rome, and to find a peaceful place where he could find some repose. Therefore, he decided to settle down at Madonna del Rosario, a monastery not far from Rome. There Liszt found his home between 1863 and 1868.

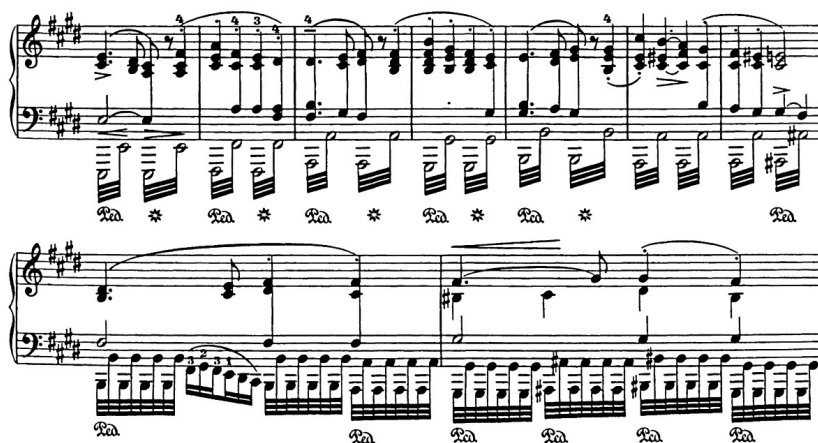


Example 7 – St. François d'Assise: la prédication aux oiseaux. Birds effect, mm. 1–3

16 Alan, Walker, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years, 1861–1886*, p. 54.

In the midst of the nature and tranquillity of this place, Liszt found his balance and his inspiration again, but this time away from the grief of the *Variationen* and from the hallucination of the *Évocation à la chapelle Sixtine*. Indeed, in the peaceful surroundings of the monastery, Liszt gave birth to two works, which are related both to nature and to religion, the two *Légendes* S. 175: *St François d'Assise: la prédication aux oiseaux* and *St François de Paule: marchant sur les flots*.

The works undoubtedly have a psychological interest, but they are above all relevant for the musical effects which Liszt was able to recreate with the keyboard (*Example 7*). In the first *Légende*, a work that «must be regarded as the historical link between Daquin's "Le Coucou" and Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux*»<sup>17</sup>, Liszt shows his ability to recreate the sounds of birds, and to represent their flying and twirling. In the second one, the tremolos and the sixteenth-note triplets are a musical depiction of waves (*Example 8*).



Example 8 – St. François de Paule: marchant sur les flots, mm. 9–17

These two marvellous, descriptive pieces are evidence that Liszt spent his entire life experimenting with all the different timbre possibilities of the piano, as proven by the preface he wrote for the first edition of the two pieces:

[...] Mon manque d'habileté, et peut-être aussi les bornes étroites de l'expression musicale dans une œuvre de petite dimension, appropriée à un instrument aussi

17 Alan, Walker, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years, 1861–1886*, p. 57.

dépourvu que le piano d'accents et de sonorités variées, m'ont obligé à me restreindre et à diminuer de beaucoup la merveilleuse surabondance du texte de la "prédication aux petits oiseaux"<sup>18</sup>.

However, it is in the preface of the second *Legend* that one finds something more interesting and more relevant in the definition of his aesthetics: «Saint François debout sur les flots agités; ils le portent à son but, selon l'ordre de la Foi, qui maîtrise l'ordre de la Nature»<sup>19</sup>. After all he went through, Liszt still shows his faith in progress, even if here the concept partially loses its secular character in favour of a more marked theological and teleological view. Here it seems that Liszt wants to tell us that the same rules that are valid for (religious) faith are also true for the music. And, as St. Francis of Paola walked on water following his path according to his nature, the prophet-composer must do the same. According to this *Weltanschauung*, Liszt had to follow his natural development: it did not matter whether people looked at him as a *Formlosigkeit* composer, he had to follow his path – as Bury wrote (see *Chapter II*), progress is a matter of faith. But progress is also related to Liszt's prophetic conception of artists, where the prophet has no choice but to follow his destiny. Providence and predestination are two concepts that enter into the meaning of progress. And that is what Liszt did, becoming the cause of his own isolation, which was, from his point of view, an inner necessity. If during the 1860s this positive faith in progress and in the composer's mission started to decrease, his work did not stop following these simple but cruel rules: *sint ut sunt out non sint!*, or, as Brendel wrote, Liszt «did penance for a superabundance of notes by carrying music, in his uncompromising and spare late pieces, to the brink of silence»<sup>20</sup>.

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18 Preface to the first *Legend*, *St François d'Assise: la prédication aux oiseaux*, in *Franz Liszt's Musikalische Werke*, ed. Franz Liszt-Stiftung, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1927, II. Pianofortewerke, Vol. 9, p. 62.

19 Liszt, Franz, *St François de Paule: marchant sur les flots*, in *Neue Liszt Ausgabe*, Serie 1, Vol. 10, p. 14.

20 Brendel, Alfred, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 235.

*Fünf kleine Klavierstücke* S. 192

The years between 1861 and 1880 are the ones in which Liszt changed his personality and turned from the “concert man”<sup>21</sup> and combative critic, into an introspective and calm thinker of the keyboard, who brought with him all concerns, both personal and of the century. There is a set of pieces, which were not intended as a cycle<sup>22</sup>, but which are a perfect representation of this parabola, since they were composed between 1865 and 1879: the *Fünf kleine Klavierstücke* S. 192. If Liszt did not intend to create a cycle in the beginning, it is also true that he created a cycle a posteriori. The first piece (January 1865), in E major, is an arrangement for piano solo of the Lied *Gestorben war ich* (S. 308), composed in 1845–46, and which constitutes the basis of his *Liebesträume* No. 2 (S. 541/2; 1850); the second piece (February 1865), in A♭ is a variation on a short chromatic theme; the third (July 1873), and the fourth piece (July 1876), are both in F♯, and, despite three years separating them, they share the same atmosphere. They are not piano pieces, but they are also not drafts, as they are often interpreted<sup>23</sup>, but they are musical impressions. The last piece (July 1879), was probably written «to justify drawing together various earlier pieces into a set (even though it was evidently not a set he intended for publication)»<sup>24</sup>, and this is the only one with an evocative (programmatic) title, *Sospiri*. In confirmation of this view, the fifth piece is based on the harmonies of the previous four (A♭-F♯-E). These five short compositions together, even if they are rooted in the past, possess some of the features of the late works. Above all their shortness, simplicity, and the absence of frills, make of this work a perfect example of the direction of Lisztian research and changes in personality. These pieces were originally intended neither for public performances, nor for printing<sup>25</sup>.

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- 21 Liszt wrote to Princess Belgiojoso that «j’ai osé donner une série de Concerts à moi tout seul, tranchante du Louis XIV et disant cavalièrement au public “le Concert c’est moi”». See Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt’s Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated 5 June 1839, Vol. I, p. 25.
  - 22 Howard, Leslie, *Franz Liszt, The Late Pieces. The Complete Music for Solo Piano*, Hyperion, London, 1991, Vol. 11 (Hyperion CDA66445 [1991]). «The hapless Mme P-N was a friend of Olga von Meyendorff with whom Liszt kept up a lively and copious correspondence and for whom he wrote a number of pieces, including the five album-leaves which have been misleadingly published as if they form some kind of a cycle, whereas they were composed over many years and are quite independent from each other».
  - 23 For example, Ben Arnold describes them as «so short that they seem to be fragments rather than worked-out compositions». See Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 167.
  - 24 Hamilton, Kenneth, *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, p. 153.
  - 25 Liszt himself during a lesson in Weimar told to Göllicher that «such music [*Evocation à la Chapelle Sixtine*] should only be played in private» (Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years*





Example 9a – Gestorben war ich, theme, mm. 4–11



Example 9b – Klavierstück No. 1, theme, mm. 6–13

The first piece of the series, though it does not have a title, is strictly related to the Lied *Gestorben war ich*. It uses the same musical material (Example 9a, 9b), though with some variations. Consequently, it could be argued that it has a programme, and it is represented by the words of Uhland's poem<sup>26</sup>, even if here the music seems to be more a nostalgic commentary on the lost peace of the past, than a programmatic work<sup>27</sup>. Cook suggests that this work may even be a critical commentary of the *Liebesträume* No. 2, and that the opening measures of the first *Klavierstücke* «are not merely a reminiscence of the opening measures of *Libestraum* No. 2 but also a criticism of them: fifty notes

1861–1886, p. 44). The highest point of this distinction between private and public performances is represented by the *Weihnachtsbaum*. In 1881 Liszt gave the first performance of this piece in Rome in the Hotel room of his granddaughter Daniela. «The title page bears the inscription: “First performed on Christmas Day, 1881, by amateurs in Rome”» (Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years 1861–1886*, p. 458).

26 «Gestorben war ich / Vor Liebeswonne: / Begraben lag ich / In ihren Armen; / Erwecket ward ich / Von ihren Küssen; / Den Himmel sah ich / In ihren Augen». Uhland, Ludwig, *Seliger Tod*, in *Gedichte von Ludwig Uhland*, J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, Stuttgart und Tübingen, 1815, p. 39.

27 And these were the years of his troubles with Marie d'Agoult and of the appearance of her novel *Nélida*.

in the 1865 version do the work that took sixty-six in the *Liebestraum*. [...] In this aspect, as in its concision, its lack of rhetoric, and its extreme technical simplicity, *Kleine Klavierstück No. 1* can be regarded as a critical reinterpretation of *Liebestraum No. 2*»<sup>28</sup>. The work opens with an introduction (mm. 1–5) based on a diminished seventh chord (C♭-D♭-F♭-A), which seems to lead to C♯ minor. Instead, a fermata leaves the chord unresolved. At this point it seems clear that Liszt used the unresolved diminished seven chords not only to create tonal ambiguity, but as functional elements. They assume harmonic relevance in the overall structure of a piece. The structure (4+4), as well as the material, is extremely simple: the theme (*Example 9a*), is exposed two times, and then it is twice repeated in octaves. A contrasting section begins at m. 23, and a crescendo leads to the *ff* climax, which corresponds to the words «Den Himmel sah ich» of Uhland's poem. A descending chromatic scale reintroduces the theme, with which a *morendo* reaches the conclusion with a traditional V<sup>7</sup>I cadence. The form used here by Liszt (A-A-B-A) is one of the oldest and simplest musical forms. Liszt probably used this form for the simple reason that he had Uhland's poem in mind, whose theme is love, but such an intense love that it is almost death-like. The lyrics narrate a dualism between physical love, which is likened to a sensation of death, and spiritual love, which opens a door to the absolute. Liszt seems to ignore this contrast, and sets the words of the poet to music as if they were written by a *Minnesänger*. This is the simplest way to set any lyrics to music. However, the use of this form assumes another meaning here, too. The form A-A-B-A contains *in nuce* the principle of variation. Of course, Liszt knew this principle very well and had applied it successfully in several of his works, from the *Sonata* to the *Variationen*; but here it assumes another meaning. The variation technique is no longer used to create large works, but to create small pieces, in which everything is reduced to drafts, impressions; everything is outlined, with no intention to develop it further. The variation itself, as a musical principle, has lost its power. A musical impression has no time to change, because it is just a moment committed to paper. Briefly, the idea of an extended use of the variation is related to the positive idea of progress. Since, as the future will always be better, then the composer reworks his musical ideas in order to create a dialectical movement between them and progress itself. The musical impressions, where variation is limited to very few changes, is related to a negative concept of progress; namely, the composer notes on paper a precise moment and feeling, in order to illustrate for the future generations that they do not have to expect great developments during

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28 Cook, Nicholas, *Rehearings. Liszt's Second Thoughts*, pp. 170–171.

their earthly lives. The harmony is simple, too. The theme goes through very small variations during its repetition, and the B section does not go through great variations, but it presents a simple and not excessive moment of contrast (*Annex I*). The dialectical process of the thematic transformations, which lie at the basis of the sonata form, and which Liszt used several times, is no more than an old memory here. Music is reduced to its essential elements. The ambiguity of these pieces lies in their incompleteness.

The second piece has some features in common with the first, but here Liszt worked with the variation more. The theme is exposed first by the right hand on a carpet of syncopated chords, and then it is restated in octaves. This second time, however, it is used to modulate to the area of G $\flat$  (subdominant of the subdominant). Here section B begins, a brief development based on the head of the theme and alternating between the right and left hands (*Annex II*). It ends with the climax of m. 39 (*fff*), which extinguishes in a diminuendo within two chords, and dies against a rest. A chromatic scale in octaves introduces the last variation of the theme, which, after a series of (diminished) seventh chords, ends on the tonic. The structure of this piece is again A-A-B-A, but here every occurrence of “A” is varied. Furthermore, there is a higher tonal instability, due to the chromatic movement of the theme, which introduces sounds foreign to the harmony.

The third and fourth pieces are often dealt with together, as they are both very short, respectively 24 and 21 measures, and they are therefore both considered more as fragments than as fully fleshed-out compositions. But what makes these two “fragments” two small masterpieces is precisely their inner consistency. For this reason, they will be analysed here individually. Furthermore, one was composed in 1873, and the other three years later in 1876, namely eight and eleven years after the first two pieces. During these years Liszt went through many changes. The first and the second *Klavierstück* arose in Rome, just a few short months before Liszt took the tonsure. This explains the aura of nostalgia which surrounds the first number. The pieces from 3 to 5 were born in Weimar, during the summers Liszt spent there giving piano lessons. Then, between the first two and the last three numbers there is the tonsure, the journeys, the beginning of his *vie trifurquée*, the Bülow-Wagner affair, the Franco-Prussian war, and the subsequent capture of Rome as the final act of the Italian unification. Liszt lived through all these events with great anxiety. In 1870 he could not come back to Rome, because, as the princess Wittgenstein wrote him, the situation was too dangerous, as the troops of Vittorio Emanuele entered the city, and the French army moved out in order to defend their invaded fatherland. But Liszt was, above all, concerned about the destiny of Europe, depending on the outcome of the

Franco-Prussian war. Liszt was definitely a supporter of the idea of a united Europe, on the basis of Kant's theories, but he was chiefly both German and French, and his career was intertwined these two countries, too. Furthermore, in 1861 Carl-Alexander made Liszt his chamberlain. He was then officially a German citizen, and, as chamberlain of Weimar – which entered the war at Prussia's side (even if in *Samariterdiensten*) – he even had a diplomatic role. Conversely, he was «personally acquainted with Napoleon III,» and he «had been decorated by that monarch with the order of Commander of the Legion of Honour»<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, his son-in-law Emile Ollivier was the Prime Minister when the war begun<sup>30</sup>. Several times Liszt expressed his favour for imperial France<sup>31</sup>, and he even expressed grief when he realized that his daughter Cosima repudiated her French side (her mother was the Franco-German countess Marie d'Agoult)<sup>32</sup>, and he hated Wagner for his nauseating «public gloatings over each Prussian victory»<sup>33</sup>. All these events surely changed Liszt's personality, and they lessened his faith in a peaceful humanity. It is therefore no coincidence that the third number of the series appears to be just a musical impression.



Example 10 – Klavierstück No. 3, theme, mm. 1–3

29 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years 1861–1886*, p. 212.

30 For all these reasons, some musicologists stated that Liszt spied for France. See Paillard, Bertita, Harszti, Emile, Wager, Willis, *Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner in the Franco-German War of 1870*, in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1949), pp. 386–411.

31 See Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, an eine Freundin*, Vol. III, p. 203, letter No. 121, dated October or November 1868, and Franz Liszt, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, Vol. VI, p. 263, letters Nos. 240–241, dated [september] 1870.

32 See, for example the entry of her diary of the 10–14 January 1871. She shows no compassion for her old Parisian friends, who were dying under Prussian bombing.

33 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years 1861–1886*, p. 223. Even if the relationship with Wagner was not at its highest point, Liszt composed in 1867, namely in the middle of the Bülow-Wagner affair, his paraphrase on the *Isolde Liebestod* from Wagner's *Tristan*, and in May 1872 when the two composers met again; the quarrel was over.

The *Sehr langsam* appears as a chorale, whose theme is exposed by the soprano voice, and counterpointed by the alto. The harmony is very simple here, and it touches only the I-V<sup>7</sup>-I grades of the scale (*Example 10*). The theme is immediately repeated, but this time Liszt creates a cadence on the V, and there begins the “development”. It is an eight measures section, in which the progression of the two upper voices is counterpointed by the two lower ones. The B section ends with two diminished seventh chords left unresolved. Thereafter, two small codas based on the theme material, lead to the final F# chord. The structure of this piece is again very simple. If Liszt privileged the sonata form to build some of his most elaborate works, such as the *Großes Konzertsolo*, the *B minor Piano Sonata*, to some of his *Symphonische Dichtungen*, during his late years he looked back to the origins, both his own and that of the musical genres<sup>34</sup>, and he elected the form A-B-A (A') as the most suitable for the expression of his feelings – it is furthermore emphasised that the form is the last support, when all the other structural elements are falling apart. The third *Klavierstück* begins in the area of the tonic (mm. 1–3), moves to the dominant (mm. 4–7), creates what could possibly be called a small development (mm. 8–15), and at the end it creates two codas (mm. 16–24) based on the theme in the area of the tonic on a dominant pedal (see *Annex III* for the formal scheme).

Very similar to the third piece is the subsequent number, *Andantino*. It shares the same tonality of F#, and the absence of any harmonic extravagances. The form itself is, like in the previous number, extremely simple, but it deserves a closer analysis anyway, because it recalls some of the composition rules as they were outlined by Antoine Reicha – who, it is worth noting, was Liszt's counterpoint teacher in Paris for about six months, back in 1826<sup>35</sup> – and Marx – who Liszt admired and to whom he dedicated an enthusiastic essay (1855), *Marx und sein Buch: Die Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts und ihre Pflege*. Reicha, in his *Traité de Mélodie* published in 1818, tried to solve the old matter of the definitions of *phrase* and *période*, which had occupied the theorists for a very long time, and he conclusively defined the *période* as a combination of two times four bars.

34 It represents a look at his origin, because, as already pointed out, the A-B-A form was already at the basis of his virtuoso works. But it is also a look at the origin of the musical genres, since the tripartite *Liedform* has its roots in the ancient past.

35 According to Walker the first years of Liszt's stay in France are a half mystery. Aside from his tournée in Europe, nothing else was precisely recorded. Rémy Stricker, for example, said that «le six mois en question ne se situent pas forcément en 1826 [...]. Liszt est revenu à Paris avant son départ pour l'Angleterre en avril 1827, et puis en juillet de la même année. Rien n'interdit de penser que les leçons avec Reicha ont pu reprendre pendant ces moments-là, voire plus tard en 1827 et 1828». See, Stricker, Rémy, *Franz Liszt et Antoine Reicha*, p. 12.



Example 11 – Klavierstück No. 4, theme, mm. 1–4

Marx, some years later, in his *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (1837–1847), described the *Periode* as the symmetrical construction of an antecedent and a consequent, as well as the correspondence of the two cadences between them. This little piano piece is then a return to the past and to the simplicity of the form. After so many years spent fighting it, Liszt seems to give up the battle. But this is not a victory of “formalism”, namely it does not mean that the form must govern the content; as briefly pointed out at the end of the previous chapter, the simplicity of the form is the last element able to keep the musical ideas together after the Weimar period. Therefore, during these years Liszt needed to come back to these simple constructions in order to understand how to capture in music the impression of a moment. Under this light, the fourth piece of the *Klavierstücke* begins with the repetition of a 2+2 (antecedent + consequent) measures theme (Example 11), followed by an 8 measures development (see Annex IV). The result is then a  $[(2+2)+(2+2)]+8$  structure, which is a perfect symmetrical construction which responds to both Marx’s and Reicha’s rules. The development ends with a simple, diatonic, descending F# scale in thirds, which in turn leads to two codas based on the consequent of the theme. These simple constructions employed by Liszt both in number 3 and 4 of the series, are at the basis of his late works, where the tonal harmony and its functional role is dissolved. In its place, very simple forms and themes (or motives) work as the last support of the music. During the Weimar years Liszt worked against the form to express his ideas. Working against the form means simultaneously working against the tonal harmonic concatenations. And this process, combined with an increasing use of chromaticism – which is both cause and consequence of this movement – lead Liszt to the border of tonality. But when tonality, and the fight against it, are no longer possible, the composer discovers that he has no other functional material upon which he can write his music. Consequently, the return to the old and simple forms, as with the variation (as principle), or the *Liedform*, appear to be a last chance to create.

The last piece of this cycle is probably the most famous, and often confused with the étude *Un sospiro* (S. 144/3), and certainly the most articulated with its 86 measures. It is also the only one which has an (explicit) evocative title, *Sospiri*. Indeed, the melodic figure is a musical depiction of the «inspiration and exhalation

of air associated with the act of sighing; furthermore, the gesture is presented in three successive sections, each of which ends with a descending half-step(s) (mm. 10, 22, 48) marked *un poco rallentando*, drawing attention to the rhetorical “sigh” figure used by musicians since the Baroque.<sup>36</sup> But what is relevant in this work is not the rhetorical language or the depiction of the breathing of a sighing person. The aspects most worthy of focus are two: the variation technique and the seventh chords. Liszt had already proven his ability to build variations starting with only a few materials. Here there is further evidence of his ability. The motivic cell, exposed in the first two bars, consists of a double movement, a descending step and an ascending minor third. This movement is repeated then a half step higher in a progression from Ab to Db, configuring a perfect fourth. This progression is sustained by a few chords in the left hand, which are in any case extremely relevant, because they create, together with the right hand, a harmonic progression based on the diminished seventh chords (*Example 12*).

Andante

espressivo

*p*

Seventh chords relationship

Example 12 – Klavierstück No. 5, diminished seventh chords progression, mm. 1–10

This ten measures introduction, which at the same time assumes the role of an exposition, exposes the material that Liszt would use: the motivic cell, the intervals, the diminished seventh harmony. The motivic cell enters at m. 11 in Ab, and is used as an interrupted cadence from the second inversion of the C minor VII<sup>7</sup>. The introduction is not just a chromatic progression of

36 Pesce, Dolores, *Liszt's Final Decade* p. 93.

diminished seventh chords, but it is a clear example of tonal ambiguity. It, as a deliberate act, becomes a fundamental feature of the late music of Liszt. The meanings – as Merrik points out, there are more than one interpretation of the “C major” compositions – of the music written without any key signature is a matter of debate in the introduction of the next Chapter. The first and the last diminished chord (B-D-F-A $\flat$ ) give us the idea that these first measures are in C minor. The last chord is a VII $^7$  in second inversion which does not resolve, but instead leads to the A $\flat$  major, which begins the variations. The scheme of this composition is very simple. After the exposition, the theme is exposed twice in A $\flat$ ; then, through a bridge built on diminished harmonies, it is exposed a second time a step down in G $\flat$ . A further progression based on diminished harmonies is brought to the repetition of the measures 11–30, but this time the theme is exposed in octaves, and there are some little variations in the melodic figures. It ends with a progression which leads to the development (mm. 63–77). This section, which again has no key signature, is a modulation from E major to F $\sharp$ . The last 8 measures play with the diminished seventh of the beginning (B-D-F-A $\flat$ ) in the left hand, while the right hand plays A $\sharp$  and A $\flat$  in octave (*Example 13*). So, this finale presents us with the idea of a cyclical work, a form already used with success, and it is tonally ambiguous. These two features are fundamental to understand the beginning, which is not just a harmonic progression on diminished seventh chords, but is a game between A $\flat$  and A $\sharp$  harmonies. In this work, it is possible to see all the achievements of the Weimar period, but compressed into a small form instead of being worked out into a large-scale form. Furthermore, here Liszt adds chromaticism and uses it to create harmonic connections – a procedure which was not so well defined during the Weimar years.



Example 13 – Klavierstück No. 5, coda, mm. 79–86



*Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este, Threnodie (II) S. 163/3*

As has already emerged, the years 1861–1876 (1880) were a period during which Liszt's piano compositions tend to become even shorter. The form crystallises in its simplest application, while all of what remains falls apart and is reduced to its essential elements. Anyway, during this same period, Liszt still composed some works utilising the large form, such as in the case of *Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este, Threnodie (II) S. 163/3*. It is part of the last book of his *Années de pèlerinage*, a work which would deserve more attention, since it covers almost all Liszt's life, from the first love escape with Marie d'Agoult until his retirement in Rome. It is therefore not only a biographical document, but it is also a precious document on the evolution of his compositional style. Liszt conceived this piece in 1877, namely one year after the fourth *Klavierstück*, the shortest of the cycle. This is evidence that at the end of the 1870s Liszt still had the energy to compose a large scale piece – the *Threnodie (II)* is 244 measures – which is, furthermore, entirely based on a two bar motivic cell. Moreover, in this composition the character of the Weimar period still resounds, even if the atmosphere is without a doubt darker. The variation technique is applied here to the achievement of the 1860, namely chromaticism, homophonic melodies, and tonal instability. The complexity of the harmonic and motivic constructions create a contrast with the extreme simplicity of the form, as Arnold points out. The work shows a clear A-B-A' structure (*Annex V*). Nevertheless, this work is proof that Liszt was changing his compositional praxis. If during the 1850s this change was due to an inward necessity – as he explained in his *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, and as already pointed out in *Chapters III and IV* –, now the change was due to an outward necessity, namely the music itself asked for a clearer form, because nothing else but form remains to keep the music together. A closer look at this work can explain how deeply Liszt's mind was changing.

The exposition begins with a «Tristanesque five-note cell suggesting E minor and characterized by a drop of a perfect fifth followed by a rising chromatic



Example 14 – *Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este*, mm. 1–3

passage»<sup>37</sup> (*Example 14*). The fragment is repeated then a second time starting from G, and, after a pause, begins a homophonic passage, which is often described as composed of «two falling tritones and ascending minor seconds»<sup>38</sup>, but it is actually something more interesting, and a main feature of Liszt's late music (of the 1880s). Of course, the tritone is a main characteristic, both in this work and in the late compositions, but here it is the result of another “deconstruction process”. Measures 6–10 are not just a simple homophonic passage with a tritone jump, but they are evidence that the late works of Liszt are mainly built upon harmonies and harmonic relationships. Liszt shifted the harmony from the vertical to the horizontal dimension, so the melody is actually the result of the unfolding process of the harmony, as shown in *Example 15a* and *15b*.

E chord

Seventh Harmony

Anacrusis/m. 1      m. 3/4

Example 15a – Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este, analysis of the introduction, mm. 1–6

Seventh Harmony

m. 6/7      m. 8/9

Example 15b – Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este, analysis of the progression mm. 6–10

37 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 143. The passage certainly resembles the opening passage of Wagner's *Tristan*, but, as Searle points out, «Liszt had already anticipated this phrase in the song *Ich möchte hingehn* in the early 1840's, long before Wagner embarked on *Tristan*» (See Searle, Humphrey, *Liszt's final period (1869–1886)*, p. 72).

38 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 143.

In *Example 15a*, it clearly appears that from the cadences of mm. 1–2 and mm. 4–5 the E minor chord emerges. Less evident is the seventh harmony of the passage. The seventh chord C-E-G-B is a key harmony, since it is resolved, in the progression (*Example 15b*) in the C#-E-G-A# diminished seventh chord. Namely, Liszt uses a seventh harmony as resolution of a seventh harmony. The diminished seventh chord emerging from the progression is used as cadence on the V of E, but in the repetition (mm. 16–29) the C# and the A# are enharmonically intended as Db and Bb, and then used to modulate in Db, with which the “exposition” begins. This process is List’s penultimate deconstruction. The harmony then, no longer occupies only the vertical dimension in music, but it becomes the horizontal dimension, too.

The last innovation brought about by Liszt in his late compositions finds its origin in his virtuosity and dramatic character. In many of his transcriptions, Liszt used the tremolo in order to recreate the sound of an orchestra – see, for example, the opening measures of *Isolde’s Liebestod* paraphrase. In many of the compositions of the first period he used the tremolo to underscore the dramatic passages, or to recreate orchestral timbre, or to reproduce natural sounds or atmospheres, and he did the same in his works of the period 1861–1876. However, the tremolo has also another meaning and another direction in addition to the one just exposed. In the cycle *Année de pèlerinage, troisième année*, for example, only the first number (*Angelus*) does not have a tremolo passage. It is of course because this cycle «best demonstrates Liszt’s twofold preoccupation with faith and death»<sup>39</sup>.



Example 16 – Aux cyprès de la Villa d’Este, tremolo, mm. 162–166

The second *Thrénodie* makes no exception, and the tremolo appears in one of the most dark and dramatic moments (mm. 162–175; the theme at m. 168 is marked *dolente*). The tremolo is of course one of the best tools which a composer possesses to emphasise dramatic moments, such as the those outlined

39 See Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 141.

by Arnold. But it is also the best tool to destroy music's last barrier – which is, moreover, related to the problem of death – namely, rhythm. Of course, what falls apart is not the rhythm itself – which is articulated by the *p marcato* of the left hand – but its clear division in measures. Beethoven had already marked the path of this evolution with his last piano sonata. The *Arietta* of the op. 111, for example, opens with an *Adagio molto semplice e cantabile*, and then the theme is varied per diminution until the end, where a trill begins (m. 160). Upon it we again hear the theme, but this time deprived of its metrical division, because the trill transcends the space of the measure. Something very similar happens in Liszt's late works (*Example 16*). The tremolo, alongside its dramatic role, becomes a means through which the rhythm is no longer clearly perceived, creating a sort of a-spatial and a-temporal background sound. Harmony, melody, rhythm, form, everything seems to fall apart. If Liszt was aware of this direction taken by his work, or whether it was simply the natural outcome of his isolation and disappointment, will be the matter at the heart of the next chapter.



## VI *Sint, ut sunt, aut non sint!*

### The late piano works and the *Music for the Future*

Der Schwer gefasste Entschluss

Muss es sein? Es muss sein! es muss sein!<sup>1</sup>

«Ich habe gefunden», sagte er, «*es soll nicht sein.*»

«Was, Adrian, soll nicht sein?»

«Das Gute und Edle» [...] «was man das Menschliche nennt, obwohl es gut ist und edel. Um was die Menschen gekämpft, wofür sie Zwingburgen gestürmt, und was die Erfüllten jubelnd verkündigt haben, das soll nicht sein. Es wird zurückgenommen. Ich will es zurücknehmen»

«Ich verstehe dich, Lieber, nicht ganz. Was willst du zurücknehmen?»

«Die Neunte Symphonie», erwiderte er. Und dann kam nichts mehr, wie ich auch wartete.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Beethoven, Ludwig van, String quartet No. 16 op. 135,

2 Mann, Thomas, *Doktor Faustus*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 2007, pp. 692–693.



## Introduction

[...] la fatigue de l'âge et je ne sais quelle tristesse intérieure, fruit d'une trop longue expérience, augmentent et me rendent les exhibitions de ma personne en public fort pénibles. [...] Mon petit bout de célébrité me pèse singulièrement – mais c'est une impasse tyrannique! Je ne voudrais plus que travailler, et prier dans mon coin – introuvable, paraît-il!<sup>3</sup>.

Dans le mouvement perpétuel de mon existence, il entre beaucoup de monotonie, même la musique ne m'offre quelque variété qu'à de rares intervalles. Sans être blasé, je ressens une extrême fatigue de vivre encore!<sup>4</sup>.

The last years of Liszt's life surely were not his happiest, but neither were they a waste of time<sup>5</sup>. The penultimate decade of the century opened with an accident: Liszt fell down a flight of stairs in his home in Weimar. This «traumatic entry into old age»<sup>6</sup>, as Walker described the episode, was inserted into music by Liszt in his composition *Unstern!* An autobiographical work, again. Actually, the compositions of the post-Weimar period were (almost) all autobiographical. Basically, everything Liszt composed after 1860 is considered by researchers as a commentary on or of his life and situation. The events of his life are then looked at as the reason why he composed, and they are therefore regarded as if they were the programme, the content of his compositions. But this is certainly not a novel idea for Liszt. Almost all his compositions sprung forth from the events of his life; when he met Lamennais he worked on his *Harmonies poétique et religieuse*; his travel impressions gave rise to the *Années de pèlerinage* – which are a gauge of his changing feelings and thoughts, since they accompanied the composer throughout his entire life – and so on. Furthermore, as Hamilton writes and as has already emerged in the previous chapters, to state that a composition is “biographical” obviously infers that it

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3 Liszt, Franz, *Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, letter dated 14 February 1880, Vol. IV, p. 275.

4 Liszt, Franz, *Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, letter dated 8 March 1881, Vol. IV, pp. 311–312.

5 See Raabe, Peter, *Franz Liszt*, Cotta, Stuttgart und Berlin, 1931, Vol. 1 p. 210–211, where he wrote: «Er hat auch in dieser Zeit noch manches bedeutende Werk geschaffen, aber dem letzten großen Abschnitt fehlt doch das, was sonst gerade das Kennzeichen seines Wirkens gewesen war: der Schwung. Die Schwungkraft hatte Liszt in den Stand gesetzt, planmäßig seine gewaltigen Reformarbeiten durchzuführen: die Umgestaltung der Klaviertechnik, das Zeigen der Virtuosenkunst, das Beleben der Programmmusik, das Freilegen des Weges, den Wagner ging. Jetzt fehlte ihm die große Aufgabe, und sein Leben zerflatterte».

6 Walker, Alan, *Liszt, The Final Years 1861–1886*, p. 403.



was written by a human being and not by a computer. In any case, undeniably the late compositions are strictly related to the events of Liszt's life. However, the point is, as was asked at the end of the previous chapter, how extensive was the influence of personal circumstances on his works? Namely, is there a direct correlation between his disappointment, his frustration, and the increasing use of chromaticism, augmented triads, and seventh, diminished seventh, and fourth harmonies? To which point, are the events of his life the programme of his music? It is certainly possible that Liszt, who was living in a state of depression, was searching for new dark timbre to express his grief, but it is not possible to reduce his achievements to a peculiar, and furthermore temporary, psychological condition. This is even less plausible when one traces these compositional procedures back to the 1830s and 1840s, namely when Liszt was at the peak of his virtuoso career and of his fame, a period during which, even if he sometimes complained about his situation, his life was quiet and successful. Hence, Liszt's works are inseparable from his biography, but on the other hand, one has to be cautious not to excessively stress this relationship. The so-called "experimental idiom"<sup>7</sup> of his late works is definitely related to Lisztian biography, but not because they are the musical outcome of these catastrophic events, but because they are the outcome of a precise theoretical thought, the result of a choice Liszt made at the beginning of his career in France, when he came into contact with the 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural world: «all experiences which shaped Liszt's emerging beliefs in the proselytizing mission of the modern artist, and, in turn, influenced the distinctive forward-directed thrust of his late music»<sup>8</sup>. For that reason one has to consider most of his works composed between 1860 and 1886 as autobiographical in their intention (programme); but the form, the structure, the harmonies Liszt used are the result of a precise aesthetic thought, which reached its extreme during his later years. Though, these compositions had to appear as they do, not because of the programme, but because of the necessity. And this necessity follows the same programmatic intent stated in the previously quoted letter to Luis Köhler in 1856: «[...] bitte ich nur um die Erlaubnis, die Formen durch den Inhalt bestimmen zu dürfen, und sollte mir diese Erlaubnis auch von Seiten der hochlöblichen Kritik versagt werden, so werde ich nichtsdestoweniger getrost meinen bescheidenen Weg weiter gehen»<sup>9</sup>. And Liszt, after the Weimar period, did not distance himself

7 The expression was coined by Allan Forte in his essay *Liszt's Experimental Idiom and Music of the Early Twentieth Century*.

8 Todd, Larry R., *The "unwelcome guest" regaled*, p. 94.

9 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Vom Paris bis Rom*, letter dated 9 July 1856, Vol. I, p. 225.

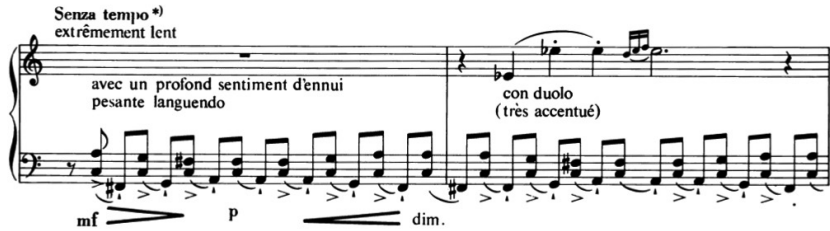
from this statement, quite the opposite: he radicalised his position. The motto *Sint, ut sunt, aut non sint!* becomes a totalizing *Weltanschauung*, and it does not matter whether this life rule creates a personal desert around him, because Liszt *kann warten!* So, the point of view is now inverted. It is not Liszt's isolation that produced these strange works, which according to this view are to be regarded as the outcome of a lonely person, who lost contact with reality. Quite the opposite, the condition of loneliness and isolation in which Liszt found himself is the consequence of his radicalisation of thought, of his belief in progress. The word "isolation" does not imply that Liszt lived as a monk in a monastery – neither did he live like a monk when he actually was in a monastery – and that he was not aware of the productions of his contemporaries. Quite the opposite. As already noted, Liszt was one of the most aware composers of his time and of his historical position, so it is impossible to think of Liszt as separate from society and from its influences. Furthermore, as Gregor reminds us, he was a «very public figure during his late years», again itinerant and «offering master classes for no fee in Weimar, Rome, Budapest, serving as honorary president of the annual *Tonkünstler Versammlung*, and remaining the go-to person when funds needed to be raised for a cultural works project». At any rate, he was probably stuck in this situation and he «could not avoid such influences»<sup>10</sup>. During his entire life Liszt lived only two moments of complete isolation: as a young man as the result of a nervous breakdown, following the forced separation from Caroline de Saint-Cricq; and during the years he spent at Madonna del Rosario, as a consequence of his personal grief and frustration – though he was not completely isolated, as several times he visited Rome and Carolyne, and he sometimes received visitors.

It is worth remembering that Liszt did not only experiment with new musical solutions and combinations in his later years, but throughout the entirety of his life. Consequently, the expression "experimental idiom" could be used to describe his works outright. The source of his late language can be found in the compositions of his youth, and from his interest in sacred music of the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>11</sup>, in Gregorian chant, and in Bach, interests that grew stronger during the 1860s. For Liszt, the past is an inestimable source of new advancements, and he analysed the heritage of the ancient masters in order to «lancer mon javelot

10 Gregor, Jonathan, *Stylistic Reconstructions in Liszt's Late Arrangements*, p. 204.

11 S. Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt: The Final Years, 1861–1886*, pp. 35–36 «On Sundays he regularly visited the Sistine Chapel "to bathe and steep my mind in the dark waves of the *Jordan* of Palestrina," an indication of his increasing interest in the church music of the sixteenth century».

dans les espaces indéfinis de l'avenir»<sup>12</sup>. By 1833, in a letter to Marie d'Agoult, he had already defined his *Harmonies poétique et religieuse* S. 154 «ma petite harmonie lamartinienne sans ton ni mesure»<sup>13</sup> (Example 1). Liszt removed the two flats from the key signature, in this way creating the *sans ton*, just before the publication in 1835, and he even removed the «time signature and regular barring»<sup>14</sup>, thus creating a «*sans mesure*» work.



Example 1 – Harmonie poétique et religieuse, mm. 1–2

This is a clear sign that his research toward the dissolution of the tonal system, intended as a system of rules, had already begun. However, according to Merrik, one need not to label this gesture, of erasing the key and time signatures, simply as an act of rebellion, as it has a profound aesthetic meaning. Liszt erased «the signature *per se* [...] in other words, he left an empty space. In this way he created an additional meaning for the blank signature. Whereas a signature normally has two meanings [...] the blank signature in Liszt came to have three meanings. The first [...] signifies C major; the second [...] signifies A minor; the third is the one at the beginning of the *Faust Symphony*, where the music is not in either C major or A minor, and as such, bears no relationship to the traditional meaning of the signature»<sup>15</sup>. Namely, Liszt's research from the very beginning was oriented towards non-tonal methods of composing.

Before entering into an analysis of the piano works composed between 1881 and 1885, two more general aspects of Liszt's music have to be considered. The idea of music *sans ton* emerged during Liszt's youth, and was refined throughout

12 Listz, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*, letter dated 9 February 1874, Vol. VII, p. 58.

13 Liszt, Franz, *Correspondence de Liszt et de Madame d'Agoult*, Vol. I, Paris, 1933, letter dated 30 October 1833, quoted in Merrik, Paul, *Liszt's sans ton Key Signature*, p. 283.

14 Merrik, Paul, *Liszt's sans ton Key Signature*, p. 283.

15 Merrik, Paul, *Liszt's sans ton Key Signature*, p. 285.

his entire life right up until his final work, the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*. As already seen, his music can also be considered *sans mesure*, because of his extensive use of the *recitativo* and *recitativo*-like sections, and of trills. These innovations, which Liszt brought about in his late compositions, are often looked at as the starting point of early 20<sup>th</sup> century “atonal” music. This is a historical and undeniable fact: no one can refute the relationship between Schönberg, Bartók, Debussy, Scriabin and many other modern composers, and Liszt. But the fact that their language is based on some of the Lisztian innovations, from which they started to create their own styles, does not mean that we can «work backwards historically and label Liszt’s creations from the last quarter-century of his life in terms of their ability to intimate the movements of impressionism, minimalism, and especially atonality»<sup>16</sup>. And the reason is historically explicable: where the composers of the 20th century resemble that inspiration found in Liszt’s music, and not vice versa. For that reason, an analysis of Liszt’s late piano compositions is particularly challenging, because one tends to approach them using analysis techniques which were developed for atonal music. However, one is not dealing with atonal music here – not in a 20<sup>th</sup> century sense, at least – but with music that was still conceived within the tonal system, that was at the same time fighting against it, and that was moving towards something that was as yet undefined (not tonal, but also not a-tonal). During this period, music was experimenting with its highest degree of freedom, because it was free from the rule of the tonal system and, at the same time, it was still free from the rules of a new system yet to be. Hence, this freedom, this absence of any precise definition or musical category, in one word: its ambiguity, represents the highest value of this music. Of course, Liszt’s path does not represent the directions taken by the entire Romantic Generation, but it is one possible direction, one possible answer to the questions of the time. The chromaticism, the whole tone scales, the diminished harmonies, the fourth harmonies, the augmented triads, and the “emancipation of the dissonances” – namely, that dissonance no longer represents a moment, a passing harmony, but becomes a fundamental moment, until it assumes what could possibly be called the “tonic role”, i.e. it becomes a functional element – all this is brought about by Liszt, beyond the limit of tonality. Again, this material did not suddenly appear in Liszt’s hands, but came from the past. It is the result of a long sedimentation process. For example, the augmented triad had already been used by Liszt in several of the works of his youth, but it started to assume a new role in his *Petrarch Sonnet 104* (Example 2), composed in 1841. Here «the augmented

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16 Kregor, Jonathan, *Stylistic Reconstructions in Liszt’s Late Arrangements*, p. 203.

triad enjoys a new independence: here it functions as an expressive substitute for the secondary dominant, C major, or V/vi»<sup>17</sup>. Göllicherich tells us that when one of Liszt's scholars played the *Sonnet*, the master himself emphasised the relevance of the augmented triad saying that «Wagner hat diese Akkorde in seinem Venusberg angewendet – also etwa 1845 – zum ersten Male aber sind sie hier geschrieben von mir im Jahre 1841»<sup>18</sup>. Aside from the rivalry between Wagner and himself, from this quotation the awareness with which Liszt used this material arises. Furthermore, it creates a link between the young virtuoso and the old monk, and, on the one hand, it erases the idea of an “experimental idiom” in his late compositions, and, on the other, it erases the idea that Liszt's production lacks for coherence and cohesion once and for all.



Example 2 – Petrarch Sonnet S. 270/1, mm. 45–48

## *Es muss sein!* The late piano works

As Alan Walker expressed, 1881 represents a major turning point in Liszt's life. Firstly, his fall at the Hofgärtnerei, and then a series of further health complications and an annoying controversy with the European Jewish community – engendered by the “revision” Carolyne made of his book *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie* – caused a deterioration of the relationship between Liszt and the exoteric world. This is then further indication that the man Liszt was misunderstood, and, as a consequence, he further increased his isolation: «je m'entêtais à rester tranquille dans mon coin, sauf à y travailler de devenir de plus en plus incompris»<sup>19</sup>. The frustration of his later years is described by the composer himself in a letter to Lina Ramann dated 9 February 1883, in

17 Todd, Larry R., *The “unwelcome guest” regaled*, p. 98.

18 Göllicherich, August, *Franz Liszt*, p. 21.

19 Liszt, Franz, *Briefe an eine Freundin*, letter dated 6 December 1863, Vol. 3, p. 170.

which he wrote: «Wie Sie wissen, trage ich eine tiefe Trauer im Herzen; sie muß hie und da in Noten ertönend ausbrechen»<sup>20</sup>. So, to conclude the subject of the previous paragraph, the compositions of the late years are unquestionably autobiographical. However, if the events of his life are doubtless the reason for the dark content and atmosphere of these works, they are not the foundation of Liszt's choice of musical material.

## The methodological question

Before entering into the investigation of some of the late piano compositions, it is necessary to open a brief parenthesis concerning the methodological question. It has already emerged, that Liszt's late works are perfectly consistent with some of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century theories, and that they can therefore be used to analyse his music. But exactly because these compositions are often described as atonal, it is also possible to analyse them with theories which are usually applied to 20<sup>th</sup> century music. This approach can be regarded as anachronistic, and actually it is, but it also brings to light at least two new elements: 1) it shows that a continuity exists between 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century music, and above all that atonalism did not appear out of nowhere, but that it was the outcome of some theories and musical practices, Liszt's among them; 2) it can illustrate some features that would otherwise remain undiscovered with the 19<sup>th</sup> century approach alone.

One of the pioneers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century approach in terms of what concerns Liszt's music is Allen Forte who, in his article *Liszt's Experimental Idiom and Music of the Early Twentieth Century*<sup>21</sup>, analyses Liszt's *Nuages gris* using his pitch-class theory, an approach, which by his own admission «was developed with a specific musical repertoire in mind, the atonal (non 12-tone) music of the first part of the twentieth century»<sup>22</sup>. However, the aim of his article is not merely to show that it is possible to apply his pitch-class theory to Liszt's later music (*Unstern!* is also briefly analysed), but that it is also possible to apply it to the compositions of the pre Weimar period – Forte provides an analysis of the piano piece *Valle d'Obermann* (1855), the symphonic poem *Hamlet* (1858), the *Faust-Symphonie* (1854–57), and other works. Against this approach it could

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20 Ramann, Lina, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, footnote No. 8, p. 470.

21 Forte, Allen, *Liszt's Experimental Idiom and Music of the Early Twentieth Century*, pp. 209–228 (s. bibliography).

22 Forte, Allen, *Pitch-Class Set Analysis Today*, p. 33.

be said that in reading Forte's analysis of these works one has the impression that Liszt composed these pieces using series and pitch-classes. Liszt's language is of course highly innovative, though it is still moving within the boundaries of the tonal system, even as he challenges its rules. It is true that some kind of serialism is already involved in his early compositions – as previously observed in the analysis of the *B minor Piano Sonata* – but one need to call this process serialism, because this is something that would only be theorised some decades later. For this reason, and for the purposes of this dissertation, an approach which still uses the old vocabulary of tonal music is preferred. Certainly, this language was already too old for Liszt himself, but it was this vocabulary that he had at his disposal, and which constituted his horizons. Possibly, an analysis of Liszt's music through the 20<sup>th</sup> century techniques means to admit that he composed *music of (from) the future*, and not *music for the future*<sup>23</sup>. However, it is exactly here, where tonal vocabulary is insufficient to explain the music, that the pitch-class theory can be useful: «[...] informal designations such as “diminished triad” and “augmented triad” [...] may imply certain tonal functions, whereas pitch-class set names are neutral. In addition [...] there are many harmonic formations in the composer's experimental music that lack any such familiar traditional names. in such cases the use of pitch-class set names is not only a convenience, but perhaps also a necessity»<sup>24</sup>. For example, during the analysis of *Nuages gris* which follows, it will emerge that the entire piece is based on the I-V (tonic-dominant) relationship. Since in *Nuages gris* there is neither a clear tonality nor cadences which could confirm it, it could be confusing to speak of a tonic-dominant relationship, as they have specific tonal meanings. In conclusion, the pitch-class set theory is useful to fill what the tonal vocabulary lacks, to have more neutral terms at one's disposal, and to bring to light sonorous relationships that would otherwise remain undetected. For the reasons previously explained, the musical analysis of Liszt's late works does not imply the pitch-class set theory in this dissertation, as Liszt's work «represents a systematic *expansion* of the *traditional* voice-leading and harmonic models, an expansion that incorporates, as basic harmonies, sonorities (pitch-class sets) that are not part of the *central* syntax of tonal music, but that *derive*, in the most extreme instances, from a process of accretion to the augmented

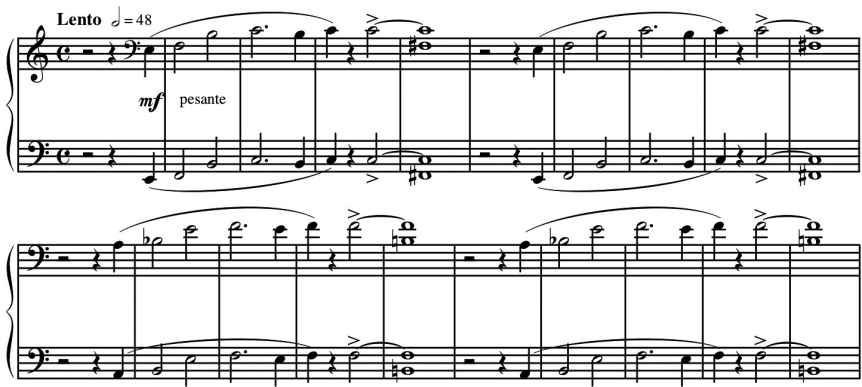
23 Aside from the war between progress and reaction, aside from the propaganda, Liszt's aim was to launch his «javelot dans les espaces indéfinis de l'avenir» (see footnote 11), namely to give material to future innovations.

24 Forte, Allen, *Liszt's Experimental Idiom*, pp. 211–212.

triad and the diminished triad, [...]»<sup>25</sup> and for this very same reason an analysis which uses the old tonal vocabulary is still possible, and perhaps philologically more appropriate.

### *Unstern! – Sinistre* S. 208

The first work here analysed is *Unstern!* (*Annex I*). The title «indicates misfortune – an evil or unlucky star – and Liszt portrays this sentiment graphically in the first eighty-two measures»<sup>26</sup>. With its 146 measures, it is one of the largest among the elegiac compositions of the late period, and it is based on tritones and augmented harmonies. Of course, here the tritone is used as a symbol of evil, in addition to the dotted rhythm which begins at m. 21. In this case Liszt's music is highly symbolic. The form of this piece is quite simple. However, as has previously emerged from the analysis of the *Fünf Klavierstücke*, even if this work can be described as a musical impression, it does not lack in internal coherence. The shortness and the formal simplicity, actually hide an extremely complex process of composition, in which nothing is left to chance. The work is formed from four different segments plus a coda: mm. 1–20 exposition (A); mm. 21–52 first variation (B); mm. 58–83 second variation (C); mm. 84–116 chorale; 117–146 coda (D).



Example 3 – *Unstern!*, exposition, mm. 1–20

25 Forte, Allen, *Liszt's Experimental Idiom*, pp. 227. Italics are mine.

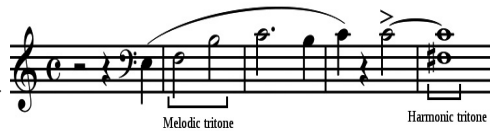
26 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 168.





ence with the beginning. After this general introduction it is now necessary to delve deeper into some of the elements of this composition.

The work begins with a rest, during which the tension is (in the first measure at least graphically) accumulated, and from which a *mf pesante*, the motive which constitute the harmonic material, arises (*Example 4*): a melodic tritone in m. 2, and a harmonic tritone in m. 5. The first five measures are



Example 4 – Unstern!,  
Melodic and Harmonic tritones, mm. 1–5

then repeated once again starting from E, and then restated twice starting from A, videlicet a fourth higher. The first variation (*Example 5*), which opens section B, begins at m. 21 with a dotted rhythm ♩.. ♩ which is nothing else but a contraction of the original ♩.. ♩ (m. 3). Further evidence that everything in this work is a direct result of calculation is given by the left hand, which begins at m. 22 (with a rest) in what seems to be a new melodic figure. Closer analysis reveals that it is actually a «rhythmisch [...] „ausgefüllte“, nivellierte Variante des Einleitungsmodells, mit dem es den „Umriss“ teilt»<sup>29</sup>.



Example 5 – Unstern!, development I, mm. 21–28

So, the first variation is then rhythmical. But there is a further link to the *Ur-motive*, less evident than the rhythm. The movement of the left hand with the G# of the right hand creates a “melodic” augmented triad (m. 23 E-G#; m. 24 C-G#), which ends at m. 25 with the harmonic augment triad in its first inversion (E-C-G#). Now, this augmented triad is related to the tritone of the beginning. Firstly, it follows the same scheme: melodic exposition, and then harmonic realisation; and secondly, both the tritone and the augmented triad have a common source: the whole tone scale (*Example 6*).

29 Kabisch, Thomas, *Struktur und Form im Spätwerk Franz Liszts*, p. 183.

From this construction how Liszt used an *Ur-motive* emerges, already containing all the material, to build the piece. This is a technique he had already used in the past. But here there is something more and, if one looks closer, one notes that this original motive is in turn based on an original source (*Ur-gestalt*)<sup>30</sup>: the whole tone scale. It constitutes the background of the entire work – and it is no coincidence that the last measures emphasise both the tritone and the whole tone scale. The figure of mm. 21–28 is then repeated a half step higher. At m. 37 a new repetition, another half step higher, does not end with the chords passage, but instead moves another half step higher closing this chromatic progression of augmented triads: C-E-G<sup>#</sup>; C<sup>#</sup>/D<sup>b</sup>-F-A; D-F<sup>#</sup>-A<sup>#</sup>; E<sup>b</sup>-G-B (*Example 7*).



Example 6 – Unstern!  
Wohle tone scale material



Example 7 – Unstern!, development I, augmented triad progression



Example 8 – Unstern! Climax I,  
derivation from the whole tone scale  
mm. 45–46

The progression leads to the first climax of the work – as there is a development section which consists of two subsections, there are two climatic moments – at m. 45. The extreme dissonant chord is a result of the superimposition of the A-D<sup>#</sup>-F-A and B-D<sup>#</sup>-F-B chords, in which what is relevant is neither the second interval A-B, nor the diminished third D<sup>#</sup>-F, but the fact that these chords are the super-

30 The Words *Ur-motive* and *Ur-gestalt* are to be taken for their literary value, that of original motive – which consists of melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, profiles, and that is varied during the work –, and that of original figure – from which the material of the original motive derives, in this case the whole tone scale.

imposition of two tritones, A-D# and B-F, both based on the whole tone scale (*Example 8*) that follows in the left hand, and in which this tritone relationship is repeatedly stressed (*Example 8a*).



Example 8a – *Unstern! Climax I*, tritone relationship (A-D#) and whole tone scale, mm. 46

The whole tone scale leads to the second variation, where an F dramatic tremolo pedal sustains another augmented triads progression covering two octaves (C<sub>3</sub>-C<sub>5</sub>), and, starting at *p* and *poco a poco crescendo*, it reaches the second terrible climax of the work, which is a synthesis of the material used in the first variation. There, an augmented triads progression leads to a tritone climax, here the augmented triads progression leads to an eight measure *fff* climax which is the result of the superimposition of the augmented triad C-E-G# – which is the augmented triad with which Liszt begins the first variation – with the B-F tritone (*Example 9*).



Example 9 – *Unstern! Climax II*, m. 71

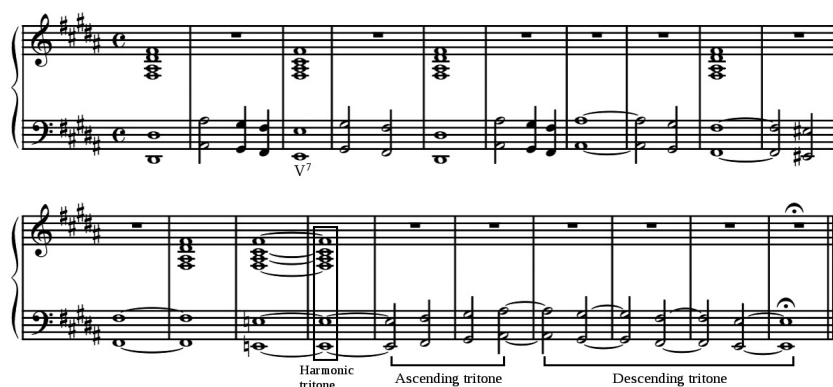
Until this second climax, Liszt had literally assembled the music from the first humble harmonic elements, to the complex tritones construction. After this moment he begins to disassemble it, in order to bring it back to its source, the silence. From this point of view it is possible to suggest that one of the most important principles of tonal music is still fully operative, the centrifugal and centripetal forces. Liszt built this piece starting from silence and then using what could be called a sedimentation process, he creates an *fff* climax summa-

rising all the previous elements, then from there he returns to the silence. The extremely dissonant climax is disassembled by Liszt moving just one voice at a time and at just a half step, and through the removal of the dissonant material (Example 10). First the left hand removes the tritone descending from B to B $\flat$  (m. 78); consequently just the augmented triad harmony remains (m. 79–82), with an added F, which is then enharmonically intended as an E $\sharp$ , and used as the link between this dissonant augmented harmony and the perfectly tonal C $\sharp$  chord (V of the V) of m. 84, of the quasi organo chorale in B major.



Example 10 – Unstern!, climax and disassembling process, mm. 77–84

The chorale (*Annex II*) is preceded by a long rest, which occupies the entire m. 83. This measure has a double role. On the one hand, it is clearly a division between the evil atmosphere of what preceded, and the religious and perfectly tonal climate of the chorale. On the other hand it creates a surprise effect. After the development section with its two variations, and after so many collected dissonances, one expects the return of the original motive and a conclusion, as a normal cyclical work would. Liszt postpones this conclusion adding a chorale, whose role is to reduce the tension – it is in fact the only passage with tonal chords and that is written with a precise tonality, B major. However, his purpose of a stable tonal section is invalidated after a few measures. First of all because the chorale is still related to the rhythm of the *Ur-motive*: it repeats the structure ♯♭ | ♭ | ♭. ♭ | ♭ four times, which is a variation of the rhythmical model ♯♭ ♭ | ♭ | ♭. ♭ | ♭ from the beginning. Furthermore, the rhythm ♭. ♭ is associated with the demoniac movement of m. 21 ♭. ♭. Secondly, because the chorale is interrupted by a monodic chromatic scale at m. 104, which is repeated a second time at m. 113.



Example 11 – Unstern!, coda, mm. 127–146

The chorale begins again (m. 117) with what seems to be a cadence, hidden in the middle of a chromaticism, which remains unresolved anyway. At m. 127 the coda begins in the area of the subdominant. At this point, Liszt plays in the right hand with the III and V grade chord, and in the left hand with a whole tone scale. Even if he does not change the key signature, the five sharps are more related to the whole tone scale (*Example 6*) than to the tonality of B major. Or better, in the left hand the sharps are related to the whole tone scale, while in the right hand to the B major key. In this battle between the two, the tonal chords of the right hand sound like old memories, gradually leaving all the space to the hexatonic scale (*Example 11*).

The superimposition of these two elements create something interesting. What seems to be a V<sup>7</sup>, the chord F<sup>#</sup>-A<sup>#</sup>-C<sup>#</sup>-E, after which one would be right to expect its resolution on the I, is instead used to create a tritone cadence. What is it relevant in the V<sup>7</sup> chord, is the fact that the seventh (E), is used in the bass to harmonise the chord, and it has a tritone relationship with the third of the V chord (A<sup>#</sup>). The last six measures are occupied by a monody in the left hand – which, rhythmically is derived from mm. 22–25 –, which stresses this relationship, stating twice the tritone, once ascending E-A<sup>#</sup>, and once descending A<sup>#</sup>-E. Concluding, it could be stated that this is a cyclical work: it opens with a tritone, first melodic, then harmonic, and it returns to a tritone, which appears here with inverted relations: first a descending melodic tritone, then a harmonic one. The complex formal construction which emerged from this analysis, should be enough to answer the accusations of *Formlosigkeit* posed against Liszt by his opponents. It is self-evident that in Liszt, even in these pieces of but a few minutes playing, form governs everything. The main problem is that Liszt did not use an immediately recognisable form, and that he used a

high dissonant and non-tonal language. Therefore, the form and the motivic relationship are not immediately identifiable just by listening, but they require multi-level analysis.

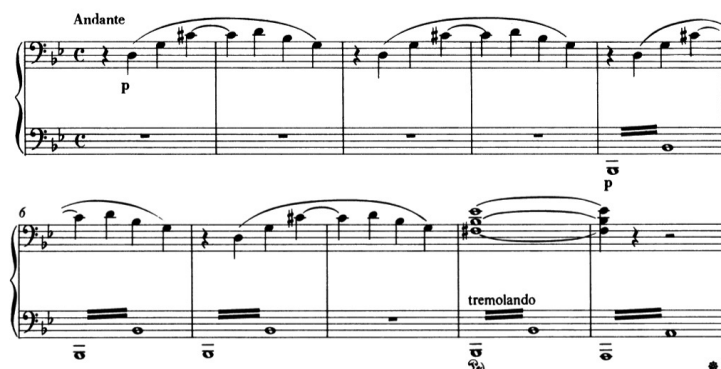
The programmatic interpretation of this work deserves but a few words. *Unstern!* is the representation of sorrow and grief in its first part, and, in its second part, it represents the religious explanation for, and the recognition of this grief (chorale). But the fight between the tritone and the tonal chords of the last measures seem to tell us that the grief (tritone) cannot be erased from our lives, but can only be relieved – by religion, according to his view. The result is a tritone which sounds less demonic, after its passage through the light of the chorale.

### *Nuages gris* S. 199

*Unstern!* is of course a work that evokes an extremely dark atmosphere, and it is strictly related, both from a musical and programmatic point of view, to another work of 1881, *Nuages gris* S. 199 (*Annex III*). This brief piano piece was composed soon after the aforementioned fall down the stairs at the Hofgärtnerei, which caused Liszt's subsequent depression due to a very long and painful recovery. The work is a 48 dissonant measures work, but one in which the relationship to a more conventional use of the classical tonality is still perceptible. Kramer states that this work «consists of alternating passages in the two paradigms, first Classical, then Romantic, creating a structural dissonance [...]. Here, [...] the Classical tonality is severely attenuated, at times barely recognizable, while the Romantic tonality is equally extreme, utterly bare of presentational elements with Classical affinities»<sup>31</sup>. *Nuages Gris* has a key signature (2 flats), and already from the first measures it clearly shows its relationship to the tonality of G minor, whose triad is prepared through a melodic passage based on a series of fourth intervals (*Example 12*).

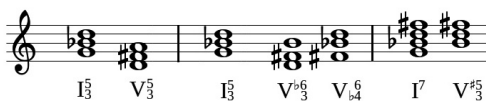
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31 Kramer, Lawrence, *The Mirror of Tonality*, p. 203.



Example 12 – Nuages gris, mm. 1–10

Kramer identifies the tritonal dissonance of the first half of the theme (m. 1) as the reason for the tonal ambiguity, which is solved in the «second half» (m. 2), where «a falling phrase spells out the chord of G minor, [...]»<sup>32</sup>. The tritonal dissonance is of course destabilising, but its C# it's even more of the upper note of the triton. It is an implicit dominant in the horizon<sup>33</sup> of G minor. As already emerged, during his late years Liszt was trying to reduce the music to its simplest terms. Under this light the passage G-C#-D can be read as a condensed, but ambiguous cadence I-V-I. Its ambiguity lies on the fact that the C# can be regarded both as a VII<sup>7</sup> of D, as a V<sup>7</sup># of G, or even as a hint to the A major triad, namely the dominant of D. As often happens in Liszt's compositions, the beginning already exposes the musical material of the entire piece, in this case the relationship between the I and V grade. But this relation, which lies at the basis of most of the tonal music, cannot be used by Liszt in its traditional application, namely to build the perfect cadence V-I. Instead, in order to create tonal ambiguity – which is to be intended as a compositional technique –, he uses the augmented triad on the V, creating in this way a dominant chord which has two sounds in common with the I grade of the scale: D-F#-Bb; G-Bb-D. It is clear that the harmonic concatenations that arise from this use of the V-I relationship are highly ambiguous, because one cannot be sure if the chord is actually a



Example 13 – Nuages gris, I-Vaug relationship

32 Kramer, Lawrence, *The Mirror of Tonality*, p. 203.

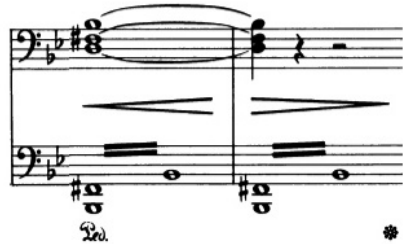
33 See the previously quoted article from Lawrence Kramer for an explanation of the term.



I or a V grade. The tonal power of the perfect cadence, and consequently its meaning, is here abolished (*Example 13*). Both the I and the V grade are no longer recognisable. This is a perfect example of what a-tonal means.

The pedal (mm. 5–20) is then evidence of this relationship/ambiguity, touching both the note B $\flat$  – the common note of the I and of the augmented V – and the note A – the fifth of the V triad. Upon this pedal Liszt creates an augmented triad progression descending from C to G, a process already used in *Unstern!*, but which here is shorter and less distressing. This progression ends on the augmented triad, on the V (*Example 14*).

The mm. 25–44 are almost identical to mm. 1–20. In this A' section Liszt exposes the motive in the left hand, but at the same pitch as the beginning, while the right hand plays a new motive based on the ambiguous cadence V-I. In mm. 33–43, the pedal of mm. 9–20 is replaced by an arpeggio of the augmented V, while above it he builds a whole chromatic scale from F $\sharp_4$  to F $\sharp_5$ . This F $\sharp$  works as a leading note and, after a rest, it rises



Example 14 – Nuages gris,  
Augmented triad, mm. 19–20

to the tonic chord with the Picardy third. In these last two bars, the left hand plays a chord (A-E $\flat$ -G-B $\flat$ ) leaving its dissonances unresolved, and giving an atmosphere of ambiguity and suspension to the tonal conclusion. According to Zdenek, Liszt ends the piece in this way because «the high level of dissonance at the specified Andante tempo engenders a banal, almost ridiculous effect in a resolution to a simple triad. The Picardy third only accentuates the problem. However, since the crucial leading-note resolution does end the piece, Liszt is free to retain other dissonances. His solution is ingenious in that it provides the necessary tonal closure and yet retains the aura of mystery that pervades the entire piece»<sup>34</sup>. On the other hand, Kramer read this conclusion as an imitation of «the tonal maneuver, presenting an atonal analogue to stepwise resolution and situating that presentation in an atonal horizon [...] thus forming a new mirror on the “other side” of Romantic tonality. Reading the problematic chord as an unresolved *atonal* formation, Liszt resolves its F $\sharp$ s to G, just as if he were moving from leading tone to tonic, but he keeps the E $\flat$  and the A in place. The

34 Zdenek, Skoumal, *Liszt's Androgynous Harmony*, p. 64.

result, of course, is that celebrated whole-tone chord which closes the piece, a *nuages gris* spread over the horizon of tonality»<sup>35</sup>

What is most interesting in this work is its form, which is a simple A-B-A'. The sections A and A' have already been analysed. The B section – which works as a sort of development, because of its morphological and syntactical affinity with the A section – is reduced to four measures. It is possible that in this work Liszt is dealing with simplifications: the evergreen relationship V-I is simplified and it is consequently reduced to its basic elements, and the B section – usually a relevant part in the A-B-A' form because of its contrasting character – is reduced to a simple (and ambiguous) modulation. The simplification of this section is easy to explain: there is no need for a section which moves away from the tonic, since there is no tonic, and there is no longer a reason to build a tonally unstable or contrasting section. Outside the tonal system there are no necessities, except for those of the composer.



Example 15 – *Nuages gris*, B section, mm. 21–24

The measures 21–24 (*Example 15*) are composed of the repetition of a two measures motive (2+2). This is rhythmically related to the beginning. The rhythm ♪♪♪♪ of mm. 21–21 is directly derived from the rhythm ♪♪♪♪ of mm. 1–2. Furthermore, the section is not only rhythmically related to what precedes, but also melodically and harmonically, as it contains both the fourth interval, and the third Bb-G, which is the basis of the opening motives. Harmonically, it is again a game between the V and the I of G minor, but, as with every contrasting section, it contains even a centrifugal force. The passage Bb-C#-D, clearly evokes the area of D minor, which is the minor V of G – this modulation to the V is another link to the classical paradigm. For their brevity, the late piano pieces are strictly related to the *Fünf Klavierstücke*, and they share with them

35 Kramer, Lawrence, *The Mirror of Tonality*, p. 205.

the simplicity of the form, too. But, if there Liszt was still working with the tonal system, here he stretched its borders – deriving functional connections from intervals, harmonies, melodies, rhythmic profiles, etc. – until it sounded unrecognisable.

### *La lugubre gondola* S. 200/1

The year 1881 was certainly not one of the happiest of Liszt's life, and the two works analysed above are clear evidence of that. Nevertheless, even during these hard times, Liszt showed his double personality, and he gave birth to more positive compositions, such as his last symphonic poem *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*, which with its evocative subtitles underlines his view on the phases of human life: *Die Wiege, Der Kampf ums Dasein, Zum Grabe: die Wiege des zukünftigen Lebens*. Although the programme of this work is the dichotomy of life/death, and although from it Liszt's distrust of human beings clearly emerges, those who have to fight for their right to be, the overall atmosphere of this symphonic poem is relatively bright. The finale, although it is related to the two previous parts, can be regarded as a hymn to the future, an act of faith in future life, which is not only to be intended in a religious way – we will find eternal peace in heaven – but also in a secular way – the artist will find recognition of their value after their death. In the same years Liszt gave birth to his last piano paraphrase from Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*. Arnold, states that Liszt might have chosen this work because of a certain «affinity with Doge Simon – both men had been acclaimed heroes in their own day and way, and each had had serious problems with his daughter. What better identification, then, than Liszt would shape his piece around the opera's closing scene in which the dying Boccanegra blesses his daughter's marriage»<sup>36</sup>. Anyway, concludes the musicologist, it is a «modest, sober, and subdued piece with no hint of the former virtuoso in its writing»<sup>37</sup>. It is true that there one finds no trace of said former virtuoso, neither in the last paraphrase, nor in the last symphonic poem – even if the middle section, *Der Kampf ums Dasein*, resemble the old gritty Weimar period. But it would be a mistake to search for the old virtuoso in these works. The last paraphrase, for example, is an intimate work, which was probably conceived more for him and his inner circle than for the concert halls. Nevertheless, it still has some virtuoso passages which recall the early

36 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 188.

37 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 189.

career of Liszt, exactly as other piano works of the late period do, such as the *Csárdás macabre* S. 224, the two *Csárdás* S. 225, or the *Mephisto Waltz No. 3* or the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*. Consequently, it could possibly be stated that it is not completely true that there is no virtuosity in Liszt's late music. It would be better perhaps to state that there is a different idea of it. During the so-called *Virtuoso Years*, the virtuosity was what the concert halls demanded; it was the birth of the solo performer and of the modern recital (begun with Paganini and Liszt). But already around the middle of the century, namely when Liszt was in Weimar, the public's tastes had started to change. Virtuosity for virtuosity's sake is something peculiar to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, something which was annoying the more cultivated listener of the late century. Therefore, this kind of virtuosity was abolished in Liszt's late music; not just because it was no longer the composer's aim to amaze the public, but above all because it was no longer requested (by the public and by the musical material itself). The brilliant pianism of the 1830s would have been anachronistic in the 1880s. Anyway, the lonely and meditative composer lives side by side with the public and virtuoso Liszt, whose social life brought him everywhere in Europe. However, even if some "cheerful" compositions saw the light during these last years of activity, it is also true that Liszt reached higher peaks with his mourning or elegiac compositions, such as *La lugubre gondola* (Annex IV).

Liszt composed this work in Venice in 1882, and, as he himself confessed, it was a sort of presage: «wie aus Vorahnung schrieb ich diese Elegie in Venedig, 6 Wochen vor Wagner's Tod»<sup>38</sup>. The title of this work is not a premonition, but the funeral processions of gondola Liszt saw from the windows of his room at Palazzo Vendramin, along the Canal Grande. In the background, the city of Venice, which was once the source of magnificent thoughts, and was now a dark scenario of death. The structure is again tripartite and very simple, even if, a closer analysis reveals the emergence of an alternative interpretation, due to the harmonic ambiguity. The first tripartite structure divides the piece as follows: section A, mm. 1–38; section B, mm. 39–76; section C, mm. 77–120. This is valid if one analyses it starting from the harmonic construction: section A is in D $\flat$  minor; section B is in B minor; section C is in A minor<sup>39</sup>. This tonalities progression descending of a second major creates the beginning of a whole tone scale. As already seen, the whole tone scale can be regarded as

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38 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Von Rom bis an's Ende*, letter dated 8 June 1885, Vol. II, p. 381.

39 The explanation furnished by Skoumal Zdenek in his analysis of the work seems to be more exact than the interpretations which see F minor as the main key of the work. See Zdenek, Skoumal, *Liszt's Androgynous Harmony*, pp. 64–67.

the theoretical background of both the tritone and the augmented harmonies, and the subsequent morphological analysis of the piece will show that the augmented harmonies and the tritones are at the basis of its structure. Consequently, if one assumes that the work is a sequence of three tonalities, Db-B-A, then it emerges that the work is based on a «large-scale use of V»<sup>40</sup> with the augmented fifth. Hence, this work can be analysed as a tripartite piece based on three augmented triads: C-E-A $\flat$ ; D-F $\sharp$ -A $\sharp$ ; C-E-G $\sharp$ /A $\flat$ . This analysis not only confirms the division into three sections, but it also explains the section B as a minimalistic development between the two augmented triads built on C. Nevertheless, a closer analysis of the last section and of the G $\sharp$  (C-E-G $\sharp$ ) which comes back to the initial A $\flat$  (C-E-A $\flat$ ), shows an alternative tripartite structure: mm. 1–38 section A; mm. 39–76 section A $\sharp$ ; mm. 77–94 section B; mm. 95–120 section A $\flat$ . Section A $\sharp$  is the exact copy of A, transposed just a step lower. Section A begins with the augmented triad E $\flat$ -C-A $\flat$  used as an augmented V of D $\flat$ . On this arpeggio Liszt inserts a melody based on an ascending sixth jump (C-A $\flat$ ; C-A $\flat$ ), that descends again to C, following the D $\flat$  scale, but avoiding the tonic in favour of the leading note C. But the descending scale is in turn divided into two moments, each covering a tritone (A $\flat$ -E $\flat$ ; G $\flat$ -C). Furthermore, it begins with a sixth jump (C-A), as in measure 3, and the descending scale covers the interval A-C, which is the same interval of mm. 3–4 (*Example 16*). To this double fall – which is to be considered more as a symbol of grief (*chromatische Quartfall*), than a symbol of the demonic – answers an ascending minor forth (B-E $\flat$ ), which falls again to the leading note through a tritone descending jump (see *Annex IV*).



Example 16 – La lugubre gondola, mm. 6–11

At m. 19 the tonic upon which the treble plays a chromatic scale appears, which erases the tonic atmosphere. A bridge (mm. 30–37) leads to the leading note of B minor. A fermata creates a clear division between section A and its repetition in a new tonality (A $\sharp$ ). The interesting features of this work are all in the last

40 Zdenek, Skoumal, *Liszt's Androgynous Harmony*, pp. 64.

section, which is, as already said, divided into two different parts. Section B begins with a tremolo in the left hand (C-G#). As the two preceding sections, this beginning underlines the leading note G# too, namely the augmented fifth of the C triad. Afterwards a very short development section begins which is a recapitulation of the material of A and A' (*Example 17*).

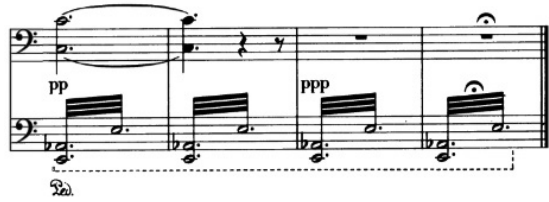
Example 17 – La lugubre gondola, development, mm. 77–94

The left hand plays a tremolo, which descends chromatically from C to Ab – recalling the C-E-Ab augmented triad – while the right hand plays a variation of the motive from the beginning. The result is a progression based on the augmented triad of the A section C-E-Ab, which is written here as the augmented dominant of A minor, with G# instead of Ab, which through the augment triad B-[D#]-G, reaches the Bb-[D#]-F# of the A' section, and through a last chromatic movement (A-[C#]-F), comes back to the first augment triad (C-E-Ab). So, the development works both as the end of the key progression (Db-B-A), and as the recapitulation of the A and A' sections.

Section	A	A'	B (development)	A''
Aug. triad harmony	C-E-Ab	D-F#-A#	C-E-G# + Bb-[D#]-F# + C-E-Ab	C-E-Ab + E-Ab
Bass movement	E	D	C-B-Bb-A-Ab	Ab-E

Table 1 – La lugubre Gondola, formal scheme

The interpretation of mm. 77–94 as a development which brings us back from A minor to the Db is supported by what happens in the last 26 measures. First, at m. 95 the left hand begins a tremolo with an Ab, hardly explicable as the leading note of A minor. Secondly, the right hand repeats in octave the mm. 3–18 of the beginning, but instead of ending on the tonic, this time Liszt preserves the tonal ambiguity, and the piece ends on the augmented triad C-E-Ab, which is deprived, in the last three measures, of the tonic, in this way increasing the ambiguity (*Example 18*).



Example 18 – *La lugubre gondola*, finale,  
mm. 117–120

Until this point, in the works analysed here, the tremolo only had a dramatic role. In *La lugubre Gondola*, it is used to create an ambiguous harmonic background on the one side, and then, from m. 109, to cancel the rigid bars division. The last four bars are to be played *pp* first and then *ppp* in the lowest octave of the piano. This creates a grumbling effect in which the rhythm becomes something vague. Furthermore, it reminds us of the functional use of silence, a typical feature of the Liszt's late piano works. The augmented triad, the dissonance, is left unresolved, and it vanishes into the silence, the last musical tool able to solve the contradictions of a system based on dissonances.

### *Bagatelle sans tonalité* S. 216a

Most of the work composed in the years 1881–1885 are of the same elegiac substance: *Schlaflos*, *En rêve*, *Trauer Vorspiel* und *Trauermarsch*, all share an expression of grief and anguish. But Liszt exhibits his double nature until the end and, alongside with his elegiac compositions, one finds several works which present the «diabolical farces of the vieillard terrible Liszt»<sup>41</sup>. Among them the previously quoted *czárdás*, the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*, the *Mephisto Waltzes* Nos. 2, 3, and 4. These works, even if purified of the excesses of the *Virtuoso Years*, are a link to the “demoniac” compositions of his youth, creating a curious contrast with his cassock. Even his life shows a cyclical structure. However, the *Bagatelle* occupies a special place among them, because it marks Liszt's last achievement,

41 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 26.

namely the aesthetic recognition of the possibility of a music without (a specific) tonality. Many scholars emphasise that this work need not be intended as atonal in a Schönbergian sense. These kind of assertions state the obvious, for at least a simple reason: Liszt is not Schönberg, and the two lived in two different centuries. Nevertheless, it is not redundant to remember that, due to the tendency of many musicologists to approach the late works of Liszt using 20<sup>th</sup> century analysis techniques, as already pointed out in the previous paragraphs of this chapter. Furthermore, these kinds of analyses in which Liszt appears as a sort of time traveller, miss a fundamental point, namely that the kind of atonalism involved in Liszt's works does not just concern the late compositions, and that it is a manifestation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century theories about new harmonic possibilities. From this point of view, the *Bagatelle* is extremely relevant since it is the last and most natural result of an experimentation process which had already begun in 1833 with the previously quoted letter to Marie d'Agoult (see footnote 13). But, if in his first version of the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* the absence of any key and time signature could be ascribed to the category of experimentation or labelled as an attempt to better follow the poetical intentions – it is a recitativo-like piece. Furthermore, its revisited version of the Weimar period (S. 173) possesses time signatures, even if they often change and swing between 5/4, 7/4, 4/4, and a *sans mesure* section. In the *Bagatelle*, the idea of atonal music is supported by several compositions which work as a theoretical background. Furthermore, they are all based on 19<sup>th</sup> century theories which were well known to Liszt. In 1833, the mountebank character of Liszt created a deep spiritual work involving an experimental technique, and in 1885 he created an extremely cogent work and hid it behind the title *Bagatelle*<sup>42</sup>.



Example 19 – *Bagatelle sans tonalité*, mm. 1–13

42 Which means a trifle, thus a short unpretentious instrumental composition (Oxford Dictionary of Music)



From its beginning, the *Bagatelle* (Annex V) shows a relationship to both the *Second Mephisto Waltz* and the *Mephisto Polka*. This relationship is analysed in Berry's article *The Meaning(s) of "Without": An Exploration of Liszt's Bagatelle ohne Tonart*<sup>43</sup>, and here it is just relevant to note that the musical material with which Liszt composed his *Bagatelle* comes from these two works, probably as a result of an improvisation on the two motives<sup>44</sup>. Its structure is therefore very simple, and largely based upon a few variations on the material of the exposition. This feature supports the idea of this work as an improvisation, since it lacks any elaborated motivic and harmonic construction, which were key elements in the elegiac pieces previously analysed.

The work is clearly bipartite: the first part (mm. 1–85) consists of an exposition (mm. 1–8), followed by the elaboration of its material (11–56), and which ends with a coda (mm. 57–85), followed by a free passage marked *quasi cadenza* (m. 86). This bridge introduces the second part (mm. 87–183), which consists of a repetition of the first part enriched with some new elaborations (mm. 87–176), followed by a coda (mm. 177–183). Since it is a highly repetitive work, the analysis of the first part will be sufficient to illustrate the relevance of the theoretical elements working in the background of this piece. The introduction covers 8 measures ([2+2]+[2+2]; *Example 19*), and they are based on the fourth interval: a perfect fourth and an augmented fourth in mm. 1–4 (antecedent); an augmented fourth and a diminished fourth in mm. 4–8 (consequent). The two sections are related by the tritone interval B-F of the antecedent, which appears in its retrograde at the beginning of the consequent. Measure 9 clearly divides the exposition from the variations, which are anyway related to the exposition by the interval C#-F, melodically enriched with the notes D-E. This derivation technique is the same at the basis of more elaborated works, such as the *Sonata*. The first elaboration of m. 13–20 is related to the exposition, too: 1) mm. 13–16: the right and the left hand harmonically recreate the melodic interval of the beginning (E-B; B-F[#]); 2) mm. 17–20: the left hand plays first the C#-G, and then C#-F#, which is the harmonic translation of the melodic movement of the consequent; 3) in the same measures the right hand, covering the interval E-A, creates chromatic variations of m. 10, which is in turn based on the last part of the consequent (*Example 20*).

43 Berry, David Carson, *The Meaning(s) of "Without": An Exploration of Liszt's Bagatelle ohne Tonart*, in *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2004, pp. 230–262.

44 Berry, David Carson, *The Meaning(s) of "Without"*, p. 234. «One might imagine that Liszt largely improvised the piece, while sitting at the piano and recalling the openings of the *Second Mephisto Waltz* and the *Mephisto Polka*».

Example 20 shows a musical score for a piano piece. The main score is for measures 13-20, marked *p* (piano) and *scherzando*. It features a series of sixteenth-note patterns in the right hand and block chords in the left hand. Below the main score, three specific motifs are identified:  $\alpha$  (measures 13-14),  $\beta$  (measures 17-18), and  $\gamma$  (measures 10-11). Each motif is presented in both treble and bass clefs.

Example 20 – Bagatelle sans tonalité, motivic relations, mm. 13–20

The second elaboration of the exposition material begins at m. 25, and it follows the same scheme of the previous measures. Measures 37–56 are a further elaboration based on  $\alpha$  and  $\gamma$  of *Example 20*. The coda (mm. 57–85) is a progression which moves chromatically from C# to F, underlining again the unity of the motivic material. The cadenza itself is related to the beginning of the work, since every quadruplet covers an augmented fourth (*Example 21*). The motivic analysis is of course useful, but it cannot say anything else about the relationship between the different sections. And since this work is the result of an improvisation, it is not surprising that it shows motivic unity. What such an operation does not bring to light is the theoretical background which makes the emergence of this work possible.

Example 21 shows a musical score for a piano piece, specifically the 'quasi cadenza' section starting at measure 86. The score is marked *ms.* (mezzo-soprano), *m.d.* (mezzo-dolce), and *p leggierissimo* (pianissimo). It features a series of sixteenth-note patterns in the right hand and block chords in the left hand.

Example 21 – Bagatelle sans tonalité, quasi cadenza section, m. 86

During the analysis of *Unstern!* first, and then of *La lugubre gondola*, two works in which the tonality is anything but clear, it emerged how Liszt used alternative functional elements as substitutes for tonal harmony (whole tone scales, augmented fourths, diminished sevenths, tritones). So, it seems strange that the

*Bagatelle* seems to be missing any kind of functional element – as previously noted, the motivic relations are not strong enough to be considered functional elements. The work appears as a sequence of diatonic and chromatic dissonant passages. Neither the tritone, nor the augmented triad, nor the diminished harmony, govern the work. Apparently, Liszt wrote a meaningless work, to which he gave the title of *Bagatelle* because, in the end, it was nothing more than a joke. Of course, it is quite the opposite. The *Bagatelle* represents a culmination of Lisztian research, and at the same time it is an explanation of the expression *sans tonalité*, which does not mean that the works without a key signature have to be analysed using the pitch-class set theory, or any other 20<sup>th</sup> century method of analysis, but that they have to be analysed using the tonal system itself, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century theories. The analysis of Berry is enlightening:

In the monophonic intro [...], observe the prominence of the tritone notated as B-E, a token component of Weber's dominant-seventh chord. Interpreted as B-E, the interval implies G<sup>7</sup>, or V<sup>7</sup> of C; interpreted as B-E#, the interval implies C#<sup>7</sup>, or V<sup>7</sup> of F#. The other note in the initial measures is E#, which belongs to C major but not F# major; thus, implications of tonic C are strengthened initially. But when C# is added, beginning in m. 6, it intensifies the implication of V<sup>7</sup> of F# by suggesting its fifth scale degree. Although there is some shift in the tonal-implication continuum from C to F#, both are evoked due to the *Mehrdeutigkeit* of the tritone, and the passage remains equivocal as to key»; «In m. 13, G<sup>7</sup> is formed by the harmony-melody combination, suggesting V<sup>7</sup> of C. But if the tritone is reinterpreted as B-E#, we have an altered C#<sup>7</sup>, or V<sup>7</sup> of F#. [...] Note that two of these interpretations, V<sup>7</sup> of either C or F#, correspond to the implications of intro1 and so might be considered more contextually reasonable. Nonetheless, the main point is that there is still no confirmation of these keys. Measure 14 problematizes matters by inflecting F to F# [...]. Now we have a major-seventh tetrad, which suggests <sup>IM7</sup> of G or IV<sup>M7</sup> of D. G is the key most closely related to the prior C implications. Neither G nor D, however, offers one of the resolutions expected of the harmonies in the prior measures, which since the beginning seem to have been insinuating the keys C and/or F#<sup>45</sup>.

For that reason, it is possible to analyse this work using chords and chord relationships taken directly from the tonal system. Nonetheless, even this kind of approach seems to be unsuccessful, as the result of Berry's efforts is that «it remains uncertain which of the competing three key orientations – D, B, or

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45 Berry, David Carson, *The Meaning(s) of "Without"*, pp. 242–243.

F# – is the most reasonable. Confirmation is not forthcoming in mm. 23–25, in which the ambiguous B-F tritone is stripped of other harmonic indicators and filled with passing tones<sup>46</sup>. But the coda (mm. 57–85) and the cadenza (m. 86), represent what seems to be the catastrophe of this theory:

Here [mm. 79–85] Liszt projected a G# diminished-seventh chord, which can represent V 7 in four keys: A, C, E#, or F# [...] An enharmonic form of the G# diminished-seventh chord is then stated melodically in cadenza1 (m. 86). But this cadenza [...] is embellished in a way that produces a complete octatonic collection. [...] the octatonic collection undermines the prior key insinuation, because each of the four potential keys (A, C, E#, and F#) intersect with the octatonic in exactly five of their seven notes. In this passage there is “true” *Mehrdeutigkeit*: all four keys seem to be implied with equal weight<sup>47</sup>.

Here lies the theoretical relevance of the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*. The title of the work suggests that it is written “without tonality”, but it does not mean that it is a-tonal, but that it does not show any *precise* tonality, and at the same time it also shows many hypothetical dominants, which in turn remain unresolved. That is the reason why Liszt avoided any key signature, not to erase the tonality, but to involve the idea of a poly-tonality (*ordre omnitonique*). For that very reason, this music is not a-tonal at all – in the sense that it does not possess any tonality and, therefore any comparison with 20<sup>th</sup> century atonalism is to be excluded. As already expressed, it possesses (potentially) all tonalities. Consequently, instead of the word atonal one should prefer the term poly-tonal. However, this latter definition itself is related to Schönbergian world. There is a word that is either more precise or more appropriate to describe the atonal music of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he term *a-tonical*, because in the concatenation of chords, Liszt always avoided any (perfect) cadence on any I grade. Furthermore, it is *a-tonical* in the sense that there are no centrifugal and centripetal forces, which push away from and lead back to the tonic. Of course, that does not mean that there are no consonant tonic chords. For example, mm. 37–44 show a clear V-I cadence in D, but there the V is expressed as V<sup>b9</sup>, and the I is actually a I<sup>#5</sup>. Consequently, even the most traditional V-I cadence is filled with ambiguity. Of course, the ambiguity is the result of the multiple interpretations intrinsic in the symmetrical structures (tritones, augmented triads, diminished sevenths) used by Liszt. From this last statement a question arises: if Liszt’s atonal music

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46 Berry, David Carson, *The Meaning(s) of “Without”*, p. 244.

47 Berry, David Carson, *The Meaning(s) of “Without”*, p. 245.

should not to be regarded as an anticipation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then, is there any 19<sup>th</sup> century theory that could be used to justify Liszt's use of these new structures, which led him to avoid the old and safe rules of the tonal system, and to create compositions in which the principle of *Mehrdeutigkeit* is clearly involved?

## The theoretical background

From the analysis of some of the late piano works, it has clearly emerged how ambiguity was a sort of creative principle for the late Liszt. The ambiguity of the harmonies he used, which is at the basis of multiple interpretations of them, created many troubles for the musicologists who tried to solve the problem of the origin of this new compositional style from many different points of view, including the application of the 20<sup>th</sup> century categories to these strange compositions. As previously stated, trying to approach Liszt's late works using the 20<sup>th</sup> century techniques gives rise to two problems: 1) the 19<sup>th</sup> century theories risk being ignored, creating in this way a sort of historical gap between the tonal theories and the emergence of the atonality, which therefore seems to appear out of nowhere; 2) Liszt's production appears as be bipartite: with the works of the youth and of the Weimar period on the one side – tonal and virtuosic – and with the late works on the other – atonal and meditative<sup>48</sup>. As already explored, the idea of a music *sans ton ni mesure* had already occupied Liszt's mind in the 1830s, precisely in 1834, the year in which he composed his first version of the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*. If the philosophical atmosphere in which the work came to life is clear – it was finished during his stay at La Chênaie, a period of intense reading and discussion with his mentor Lamennais, and is dedicated to Lamartine – less clear is the musical background which gave Liszt the idea for such a composition. It is remarkable how so many scholars focused on the “programme” of this work, ignoring the theories which support the piece. Too often the relevance Liszt gave to the content, to the poetic inspiration of his music, redirects attention towards the programme. For

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48 That does not mean that this anachronistic approach is useless. It could be helpful to look at Liszt's compositions from another point of view, and consequently, to grasp some new details. Anyway a 20<sup>th</sup> century approach to Liszt's work is more useful to the 20<sup>th</sup> century works themselves, than to Liszt's compositions. In this case, the approach is to be numbered among the attempts to identify the prodromes of atonalism.

that reason, the “strange language” used by Liszt becomes understandable as a consequence of a compositional technique that ignores both the forms and the rules of the tonal system in favour of the poetical intent, assigning to the words much more power than they actually had. All too often it is forgotten that Liszt attended the public lectures that François-Joseph Fétis gave in the summer of 1832, at the University of Paris. The content of these lectures was reported weekly in the *Revue Musicale*. Furthermore, Liszt and Fétis exchanged a lot of correspondence about musical theory over the years. Ignoring these facts, Fétis is often regarded as a conservative by many musicologists because of his endorsement of Thalberg in the Thalberg-Liszt battle – that means that he was «an intrepid critic of all innovative music»<sup>49</sup> – but he was actually one of the most relevant innovators in the field of music theory. Walker wrote that it is «ironical that these modern-sounding pieces [Alkan’s *Douze Études dans tous les tons mineurs* op. 39] are dedicated to the arch-conservative Fétis!»<sup>50</sup>. On the one side, it is impossible to deny that the critic had conservative musical tastes, but, on the other, that he was also the father of an innovative musical theory, the so-called theory of the *four orders* – a theory of musical development, in which the last stage of the process is represented by the extensive use of dissonances. Under this light, Alkan’s dedication to Fétis appears much more understandable. Furthermore, Liszt himself was perfectly aware of the double attitude of the critic<sup>51</sup>, and still in 1867 stated that «De tous les théoriciens qui me sont connus Mr Fétis est celui qui le mieux pressenti et défini le progrès de l’harmonie et du rythme en musique; [...]. Selon sa théorie l’art doit progresser, se développer, s’enrichir, revêtir des formes nouvelles; mais en pratique il hésite, regimbe, – et à tout le moins exigerait que la “transformation” s’opérât sans guère déranger les habitudes prises et de manière à charmer d’emblée toutes gens»<sup>52</sup>. Fétis divided the history of music into four periods: 1) the first one, which is called *ordre unisonique*, is the period of the «harmonie consonnante d’un seul ton»; 2) the second, or *ordre transisonique*, began with «la découverte

49 Mórícz, Klára, *The Ambivalent Connection between Theory and Practice in the Relationship of F. Liszt & F.-J. Fétis*, p. 399.

50 Walker, Alan, *The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847*, p. 186.

51 It is worth remembering that if Fétis and Liszt were enemies during the 1830s – because of the harsh criticism with which the first described the public performances of the latter –, during the 1840s the relationship between the musician and the critic began to become more friendly. This change can easily be explained: Liszt’s aim was to become a composer, and he needed therefore both the support of the critic and the ideas of the theorist.

52 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt’s Briefe, Von Rom bis an’s Ende*, letter dated 8 November 1867, Vol. II, p. 112 (italic is mine).

de l'harmonie dissonante naturelle par Monteverde [*sic*], parce que le rapport de la septième note de la gamme avec la quatrième [...] donna naissance à la note sensible»; 3) the third is the *ordre pluritonique*, in which «les deux harmonie consonnante et dissonante, donna naissance à un autre ordre d'idées», giving to a «même accord *plusieurs modes d'affinités*; des lors, mélanger de plusieurs tons»<sup>53</sup>. According to Fétis, this is the order of 19<sup>th</sup> century music; which means that ambiguity – intended as multiplicity – is an intrinsic feature of the music of that century; 4) the last *ordre*, the *omnitonique*, is that one of the *enharmonie transcendante*<sup>54</sup> – which is what Liszt tried to realise in his late piano works piano works:

«La multiplicité des altérations résultant d'un accord modifié par des altérations collectives permet, [...] de le mettre en relation tonale avec toutes les gammes, dans leurs deux modes. Alors il est évidente que la musique est entrée par l'harmonie dans un ordre final de tonalité qu j'appelle *omnitonique*. [...] Enfin, s'il doit remuer des passions ardentes, ou exprimer des sentiments d'une profonde mélancolie, l'ordre omnitonique lui ouvre l'infini de ses ressources»<sup>55</sup>.

There is evidence that Liszt was interested in these theories, evidence of a musical kind. He composed a little piece around 1844 with the title *Prélude omnitonique* S. 166e, which, far from being an articulated composition is «rather a short, quasi-improvised flourish of indeterminate tonality [...], which has the resulting advantage that it can be used as a prelude or transition to a piece in any key»<sup>56</sup>. Even if it is not an extended or a fully worked-out composition, Liszt used the theories of Fétis in a most useful manner for his purposes. In 1844, Liszt was still living his virtuoso period, and then he applied the *omnitonique* theory to his recitals, creating a prelude which was able to connect pieces written in any tonality. This little work is then a sort of improvisation scheme. But his interests in the theories of Fétis are also proven by other, more worked-out compositions, such as the previously mentioned *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*. As Fétis wrote, the *ordre omnitonique* can be used to express the

53 Fétis, François-Joseph, *Cours de Philosophie musicale et d'Histoire de la Musique, Septième leçon*, in *Revue Musicale*, No. 24, 14 July 1832 (italic is mine).

54 Fétis, François-Joseph, *Traité complet de la théorie et de la pratique de l'harmonie*, p. 183.

55 Fétis, François-Joseph, *Traité complet de la théorie et de la pratique de l'harmonie*, p. xlix-l.

56 Hamilton, Kenneth, *After the Golden Age, Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 121. The *Prelude omnitonique* was published in Short, Michael, Michael Saffle, *Compiling Lis(z)ts: Cataloging the Composer's Works and the 'New Grove 2' Works List*, in *Journal of Musicological Research*, No. 21, 2002.

sentiment of profound melancholy. But the *enharmonie transcendante* is not the only innovative element of Liszt's music, and Fétis while perhaps the oldest is not the only theoretical source. However, his theory is surely extremely relevant to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because of the prominent role assigned to the leading note and to the diminished seventh harmonies. Unsurprisingly, Liszt used the diminished seventh extensively in his *Sonata*. As already seen, it was published in 1854, but drafts date its foundation back to 1849. Then, in the same years one of the most active supporters of the *Neudeutsche Schule* published two treatises: *Der übermässige Dreiklang* (1853), and *Der verminderte Septimenakkord* (1854). Carl Friedrich Weitzmann «sent a copy of his augmented triad monograph and requested that Liszt accept the dedication of his forthcoming tract on the diminished seventh chord»<sup>57</sup>. Because of the simultaneity of these publications and of Liszt's *Sonata*, it is unclear who influenced who. Mórícz states that «Liszt's harmonic innovations were the basis of Carl Friedrich Weitzmann's harmonic concept, which was elaborated in his book “*Der verminderte Septimenakkord*”, dedicated to Liszt»<sup>58</sup>. That could be possible, but it is also true that the extensive use of the augmented triad in Liszt's *Faust-Symphonie* could be a derivation of Weitzmann's theories. Even more relevant were Weitzmann's new theories for Liszt's late compositions. On 1 January, 1859 the *NZfM* published the fiftieth volume of the journal and the publishers decided to celebrate the event by proposing a contest entitled: *Erklärende Erläuterung und musikalisch-theoretische Begründung der durch die neuesten Kunstschöpfungen bewirkten Umgestaltung und Weiterbildung der Harmonik*<sup>59</sup>. Weitzmann won the contest<sup>60</sup> and «although the essay was relatively wide-ranging in its musical topics, central themes regarding the newer harmonic practices included how enharmonic relations enable a composer to “bring the most distant tone relations together into connection”; how diatonic and chromatic displacements of chord members have fomented “an unendingly large number of new chords and simultaneities”; and how chords [...] were now relatively liberated in terms of the other chords to which they could progress»<sup>61</sup>.

57 Berry, David Carson, *The Meaning(s) of “Without”*, p. 250.

58 Mórícz, Klára, *The Ambivalent Connection between Theory and Practice in the Relationship of F. Liszt & F.-J. Fétis*, p. 420.

59 Brendel, Franz, *Zur Eröffnung des 50. Bandes*, in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, C.F. Kahnt, Leipzig, 1859, Vol. 50, Nr. 1, pp. 1–4.

60 Weitzmann's essay was published with the same title as the contest in the 52<sup>nd</sup> volume of *NZfM* in 1860.

61 Berry, David Carson, *The Meaning(s) of “Without”*, p. 252.



The theories elaborated by Fétis and Weitzmann are surely diverse – at least because the first saw his *ordre omnitonique* as «the final stage of music’s potential», beyond which «there is nothing more for these combinations»<sup>62</sup>, where the second saw his theories just as the «Möglichkeit der Bildung einer unendlich großen Anzahl neuer Accorde und Zusammenklänge»<sup>63</sup> – though they both deeply influenced Liszt. Both theories point out how the diminished and the augmented harmonies, the enharmonic interpretations of the chords, and the extensive use of chromaticism can give birth to a music which can no longer be described as tonal (as a system), and in which the ears of the listener are no longer able to clearly identify the tonality. The analysis of some of the works in which these new compositional techniques were applied, reveals that the music had acquired a new feature: ambiguity. But this ambiguity is the consequence of multiple possible interpretations of every single chord and note. It is what Fétis described as «La tendance vers la multiplicité, ou même l’universalité des tons dans une pièce de musique»<sup>64</sup>. Weitzmann was aware of this multiplicity too when he wrote that «Aus der ganz gleichen Konstruktion der Grundlage und der Umkehrungen des verminderten Septimenakkordes entsteht, wie gesagt, die eigenthümliche *Mehrdeutigkeit* desselben»<sup>65</sup>. The relationship between Liszt and the two theorists is undeniable, as well as Liszt’s interest in the musical means to circumvent tonality – which was in any case an *Ideal der Zeit* for a portion of his contemporaries – and, more in general, his interest in the application of the concept of *Mehrdeutigkeit* to all musical elements.

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62 Berry, David Carson, *The Meaning(s) of “Without”*, p. 255.

63 Weitzmann, Carl Friedrich, *Erklärende Erläuterung und musikalisch-theoretische Begründung der durch die neuesten Kunstschöpfungen bewirkten Umgestaltung und Weiterbildung der Harmonik*, in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, C. F. Kahnt, Leipzig, 1860, Vol. 52, No. 9, p. 75.

64 Fétis, François-Joseph, *Traité complet de la théorie et de la pratique de l’harmonie*, p. 195. «La tendance vers la multiplicité, ou même l’universalité des tons dans une pièce de musique, est le terme final du développement des combinaisons de l’harmonie; au-delà, il n’y a plus rien pour ces combinaisons».

65 Weitzmann, Carl Friedrich, *Der Verminderte Septimenakkord*, p. 14. *Italic is mine*.

# VII Conclusion



## *Mehrdeutigkeit* as the new paradigm<sup>1</sup>

The path followed to trace the present dissertation needs a last recapitulation, granting a last comprehensive view of all the topics analysed in the two parts, which would otherwise seem to be just two separate sections. The first part has the double function to recreate the 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural atmosphere in which Liszt grew up. At the same time, it serves to expose Liszt's pantheon. This pantheon has to be divided into two groups. On one side the musicians and the music theorists; on the other side the men of letters, philosophers, writers, etc. This division is necessary because the former created the basis and the theoretical justifications which were able to support Liszt's innovation in the field of music, while the latter created the conditions in which such musical development was possible. Namely, all the theories on progress, on evolution, on the education of the human race, etc., represent the fertile ground upon which new musical theories and new musical language were possible. The primary condition of the emergence of the first, as well as of the second, is the changing of the paradigm which happened between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the "category" to the "symbol" paradigm, as explained in *Chapter II*. Consequently, it is possible to state that the philosophical atmosphere in which Liszt grew up is the necessary condition without which it would not be possible for him to have developed a progressive thought. And, at least partially, this philosophical pantheon was already formed in Paris during the 1830s. But the dedication of his works to writers and philosophers, and the programmes, and the evocative titles he assigned to his compositions, are deceptive, because one has the impression that the origin of his innovative language is to be found in the literary works he took as "inspiration", rather than in the musical treatises. From this point of view the idea rose that Liszt destroyed the musical form because he was following the literary form. Consequently, the idea rose that the language of the tonal system was useless to him, and that, following the suggestions of the formalists, Liszt had to use a literary text to give his formless works a form, a structure. This idea, which is true for some compositions of

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1 The term *Mehrdeutigkeit* has more than just one translation, and that is the reason why during the present dissertation it was translated sometimes with ambiguity, and other times with multiplicity, or polysemy. This last term seems to be the most appropriate in this case. Nevertheless from it does not emerge the idea of ambiguity, which is an intrinsic feature of what is polysemic. For that reason during the present work it was preferred to use equally the three terms, because each of them describes a different nuance of the same phenomenon, namely the change of paradigm of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which lies at the basis of a symbolical conception, which is in turn the reason of the emergence of the polysemic theories in music.

the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is far from the reality, because Liszt used the programme with another purpose, probably to hide his more radical work of de-construction of the musical forms. This element already emerged in the previous chapter, but it is here useful to state again that the form in the late piano compositions – and, consequently, in the entire production of Liszt – assumes a prominent role. Liszt, with his aesthetic of the content seemed to care more about the form than Hanslick. For example, the first version of the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, briefly discussed above, is dedicated to Lamartine. Those who approach this work naturally tend to read it either as a strange experiment – which apparently leads nowhere since Liszt never again composed a work *Senza tempo* –, or as an attempt to set to music to Lamartine's verses. It is to believe that the programme of Liszt's work is contained in the words he reported as commentary to the first edition:

Il y a des âmes méditatives que la solitude et la contemplation élèvent invinciblement vers les idées infinies, c'est-à-dire vers la religion; toutes leurs pensées se convertissent en enthousiasme et en prière, toute leur existence est un hymne muet à la Divinité et à l'espérance. Elles cherchent en elles-mêmes, et dans la création qui les environne, des degrés pour monter à Dieu, des expressions et des images pour se révéler à elles-mêmes, pour se révéler à lui: puisse-je leur en prêter quelques-unes!<sup>2</sup>.

Especially relevant are the words *puisse-je leur en prêter quelques-unes*. Liszt is speaking here to the contemplative men who seek images and expressions with which to reach the Divine. Liszt did not take the programme *from* the poem of Lamartine, but he created a work with the same intentions; he tried to render this idea in music. That is the reason why he quoted from the *avertissement* and not directly from a poem. But, anyway, this is the poetical and declared intention of the work. Liszt intended his music as a social art, and therefore it had to possess a scope. In this case Liszt tried to provide a meditative means to help people to “ascend to God”. But the musical elements are neither derived from, nor related to Lamartine's poem. Liszt composed this work around 1833–34, namely during the period in which he attended Fétis lessons, as already discussed in *Chapter VI*. That does not mean that the programme is useless to the musical analysis, but it is surely not to be regarded as the primary or unique source. The philosophical and the musical world are interrelated and interdependent. This example served to underline again that the first and the

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2 Lamartine, Alphonse de, *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, Hachette, Paris, 1918, p. II.

second part of this dissertation are not to be regarded as two separate sections, the first regarding Liszt the intellectual, and the second Liszt the musician. Nevertheless, the two parts are not to be regarded as separate and independent, but as the two faces of the same coin, the unity in the multiplicity. This is the theoretical approach which is to be followed to analyse Liszt's achievements in the field of piano compositions between the *B minor Piano Sonata* and the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*. This dissertation, to better follow this path, is built upon a cyclical structure. From the theoretical background of *Part I* it concludes its second part again with a theoretical background, which is related to the first, since the construction of the late compositions are related to the music theories of the 1830s. Consequently, to understand the late production one has to come back to the beginning. Through this backwards movement the first of Liszt's productions assumes another character; namely, it appears clearer that the entire production of the Hungarian composer – even if at first glance it seems to be fragmented, and sometimes even incoherent – shows that he was following a precise aesthetic ideal. The analysis of the late works, brings us back to the figure of Fétis and to the 1830s to travel the path again, but with a new perspective in mind. Namely, the path from the *Sonata* to the *Bagatelle* is a route toward the future. But once the late piano works are reached, then the first works of Liszt assume another meaning. From the brevity and the simplicity of the form of the *Final Years* emerge the constitutive features of Liszt's music, elements which were already present in his early compositions, even if in other ways. Hence, through the late piano music one reaches a better comprehension of the youth composition, which under this new light make the path followed by Liszt clearer and, consequently, the late works more understandable. From this bidirectional movement Liszt's unity of thought emerges. It is suggested that this is the only solution through which to provide a complete view of Liszt's life and achievements, because his own life could be considered as a cyclical work, or better, a representation of his idea of progress. And his life and his idea of progress can even reply to the accusation of a lack in systematic thought presented against Liszt. Already during the 1830s Heinrich Heine accused him of being a confused mind unable to choose a side<sup>3</sup>. He was just the first of a series of intellectuals and musicologists who accused Liszt of being uncultivated. But a closer analysis returns us a different idea of Liszt. It is surely true that his interests covered many different and sometimes incompatible disciplines and theories, but he used them to support his own ideas. The point of view is

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3 See the beginning of the paragraph *Different religions: Saint-Simon and Lamennais* in *Chapter II* of the present work.

hence overturned. Liszt does not appear as a confused mind who quoted from this or that philosopher, poet, or prophet because he had no ideas on this or that topic. Liszt quoted from them because he was fascinated by their ideas, because they were a more worked-out version of his own. Then, the chapter on the idea of progress shows how Liszt was affected by many different theories on progress, but it even shows how he merged them to expose his own views on society, on music, etc. The quotations from some of the writings of the 1830s are the best evidence of this, and they prepare the theoretical ground for the more relevant essay on Berlioz. There the idea of multiplicity clearly emerges, because many different arguments are exposed from different points of view. The formal scheme of the essay is the connection between the theoretical part and the music analysis part, with the *B minor Piano Sonata* as a noted treatise on the idea of multiplicity, multiplicity of interpretations of the form: *Mehrdeutigkeit*. And the symbol, which is used here to explain the “interpretative chaos”, is nothing more than the philosophical justification of the idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit* in music. It is believed that this is evidence of the close relationship between the philosophical and the musical discourse. The reflection on the symbol – which is itself possible thanks to the reflections on the idea of progress, since it is something historical, and it is the result of a sedimentary process, namely a cumulative process oriented towards the future, and, at the same time, open to the past – opens the door to a positive perception of the concept of ambiguity. And then the theories of Fétis and Weitzmann based on the ambiguity (multiplicity) of some harmonies find their theoretical support, their historical and philosophical justification. Liszt found all the material for his *Zukunftsmusik* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the path illustrated by his compositions is perfectly consistent with all these theories. His compositions, and not his writings, are the answer to the accusations of a lack of systematic thought. They can appear as a sequence of different genres and forms, or as a sequence of compositions without any precise direction, but it is exactly this ambiguity that is main feature of these works. And they are ambiguous both because of the philosophical idea of the unity in the multiplicity, and because of Liszt’s attempt through his music to answer the aesthetic questions which arose at the end of the classical period. Liszt, as he told us in his essay *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, thought that the artist has to reach the «Ideal ihrer Zeit»<sup>4</sup>. That means that the composer has to use his musical material to answer the questions of his own time. This kind of relationship could not be anything but dialectical, since society is progressing. So, music has to confront itself with a

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4 Liszt, Franz, *Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie*, 1882, p. 51 (s. footnote 141 at page 156).

society which is constantly progressing, and to fulfil its task – namely, to reach the *Ideal der Zeit* – music has to constantly change (progress). This is nothing other than a dialectical process in which music, confronting itself with society, sublates every dichotomy.

The idea of progress is fundamental to the development of the idea of multiplicity. After the Middle Ages, the figure of man was put at the centre of the universe. That means not only that man is the measure of everything, but even that the man of the present is at the centre of history, which is consequently seen as a closed category. This was of course a reaction to the dark years of the Middle Ages. It was a common idea at that time, that the past is to be forgotten because it is synonymous with obscurantism; it is, and it has to stay, in the past. In turn, the present is a re-birth. However, a rebirth is only possible if the past is erased. The ancient civilisations were either primitive or ignorant, and only the man of the present possesses real knowledge and wisdom, the right to rule everything. Therefore, is the future not even a matter of investigation, since the present is, the *hic et nunc*, the stage upon which humanity is acting? With the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the paradigm changed, and the past acquired a new role – it is no coincidence that during this period many philosophers and thinkers of the Middle Ages were rediscovered in addition to those of antiquity, and that something very similar happened in the field of music with the rediscovery of so-called “ancient music”. This change in the paradigm was possible thanks to a new concept of history and time, namely the idea of progress. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century a seemingly infinite number of diverse theories on progress were developed, but the most common ones looked at it as a process which began somewhere in the past and that moved towards the future. Now, the ideas on the beginning and the end of the process are various, some involve the figure of a God, some not; some see no beginning and no end, etc. Aside from that, what is relevant is that the concept of present changes in these views, since it is not a category any more, a static moment, but it is a movement, and a movement which has a precise direction. Consequently, it seems clear that if we are acting in a present which is a movement towards the future, our current actions affect the future. But if this is so, then the actions made by our predecessors affected our present. We are now what our ancestors wanted to be. Furthermore, the ancient civilisations are neither primitive nor ignorant, but they represent the beginning of human knowledge, without which our achievements were not possible. Here the idea of progress arises as a cumulative process. At the same time these new ideas weakened and strengthened the role of the present: on one side the present is the result of the actions of the past. Therefore our condition of wealth derives from what our forebears did, and we have no merit in it. The past assumes then



a more prominent role than the present; but, on the other side, the present was strengthened, because what we do now has the power to influence future generations, and it is therefore the responsibility of the present to create a better world. The current human condition is more understandable through an analysis of what humans have done in the past. To comprehend the past means understanding the present, and this is necessary in order to direct our actions for the future. Under this light the division of the historical time into three categories (past, present, future) loses its significance, since it is an incessant flow. For this reason, it was necessary to find another “formal scheme”, more suitable than that of category, which could explain our perception of reality. The symbol seems to be the most suitable concept, because, exactly as this new conception of time, it is both open to the past and to the present<sup>5</sup>, and it is therefore able to explain the reality between tradition and innovation, heritage and new discoveries. But, as has already been pointed out, the main feature of the symbol is its ambiguity, and it is even the most relevant point in this dissertation, since ambiguity is the basis of the idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit*. Is reality somehow ambiguous, so as to confirm the exactitude of the theory according to which the symbol is the new paradigm of the 19<sup>th</sup> century? The answer is affirmative, and for two reasons: 1) the present, from a historical point of view, is ambiguous; if past and future are clear concepts, present is something undefinable with its fluctuations between past and future. It is neither the first, nor the second, but it is both – actually present is not static, then the present cannot “be”, but it is movement, the present is unfolding; 2) to comprehend the present one has to understand the past; but the past does not have just one explanation. And the same is true for the future. Hence, the present is the result of all these multiple interpretations of the past, but it is not reducible to them, and it is open to an infinite number of future developments.

The ambiguity in music finds its source here. The seventh harmonies, the augmented triads, the tritones, are ambiguous in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because they no longer belong to the category of the “to be resolved dissonances” – the same harmonies were not ambiguous during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, because they perfectly fit this category –, they now exceed this category becoming self-subsistent – and this is the reason why one can speak of a process of liberation of the dissonances. Analysed through a historical point of view, one might say that these harmonies have a past, from which arose multiple interpretations of them, some of which led to the idea of a concatenation of unresolved harmonies, which implies the ambiguity in music. The same process will be the basis of future improvements.

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<sup>5</sup> See *Chapter II*.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century would remain incomprehensible without the idea of progress and its related concepts of symbol, ambiguity, and multiplicity. And without this theoretical apparatus, the figure of Liszt would be even less comprehensible, since he was not just a perceptive observer of the world – his interests covered science, literature, history, philosophy, etc. – but he was, probably above all, a historical composer, an immersed in history composer – the historical awareness of Liszt has already been discussed in this dissertation. Therefore, to deprive his figure of the socio-cultural context would mean to possess a limited understanding of his works, would mean to comprehend the notes, not the music. Liszt is ambiguous, is multiple, and these are the ideas that one has to keep in mind when one is approaching his compositions. Namely, one does not have to expect to find the answers therein, but rather questions – the œuvre of Wagner affirms “that is, and it can be just like that”; Liszt’s corpus problematise music, and at the same time ask a question of the future “did I create something good?”

It is clear that the three phases analysed in the second part of this dissertation would not be possible without the theoretical apparatus of the first part. Consequently, these three phases (*Sonata – Klavierstücke*, *Aux cyprès de la Villa d’Este* – the late piano works) are a representation of this progress process. With the *Sonata* the form is under investigation, and it shows major ambiguities, while the tonality, although unusually employed, is still relatively stable. The symbol – as a fundamental element of the progress – is necessary to understand the problem of the form, which, exactly as the concept of “present” previously discussed, fluctuate between the past – preserving some of its aspects –, and the future – namely, what it is yet to become, and anticipating some elements of its evolution. As a consequence of this approach, the form of the *Sonata* does not represent a problem because it does not fit the classic formal scheme any more, but it is problematic because it is ambiguous, because it is moving between what it was, and what it will be. And this poses a matter of interpretation, which is firstly a *terminological* problem. Here the necessity of a “symbolical” analysis arises, since the vocabulary of the sonata form can only partially describe the work, because there is always a “further”, something that this vocabulary cannot describe. But at the same time, here the awareness that every new interpretation brings us a little closer to the comprehension of this ambiguous composition occurs. The middle phase of the *Klavierstücke* and of the *Aux cyprès de la Villa d’Este* show us how the idea of multiplicity moved from the form to the content. This transition is necessary and somehow mandatory, since the idea of a harmonic sequentiality governed by precise rules is lacking. Without the form and without the harmonic concatenations the musical discourse seems to be impossible. It is for this reason that it is necessary to respond to the high tonal

ambiguity (multiplicity) with a simple form, which on one side is able to work as a container for the musical expression, and on the other side does not imprison it in pre-established constructions (formulas). And, if the *Klavierstücke* can be regarded as a first example of musical expressionism – their brevity resembles that of the Schönberg *Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke* –, *Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este*, this shows us how multiplicity can still be used to give birth to large works, still exploiting one of the simplest musical forms (A-B-A). But this middle phase inevitably leads to the final phase of Liszt's productive activity, where multiplicity starts to become impossibility. The composer has at his disposal an infinite number of possible possibilities, and they in turn force him to make a choice, which is in turn the unfreedom of freedom. Hence, if every note, and every chord, can be followed by every other note or chord, the composer has to execute a choice, a choice which is a limitation of the freedom, and which is consequently to be regarded as a violent act, which is furthermore not supported by any theoretical rule. The form, which is reduced to its primordial element, becomes the container for an act of violence, for a choice, hidden behind the concept of the composer's necessity, which confines the multiplicity, the universal, into one peculiar manifestation, where it is nonetheless still possible to find a trace of the universal. *Mehrdeutigkeit* is not only one of the key concepts through which it is possible to analyse the corpus of Liszt, but it is its own limit. Ambiguity lies at the basis of the sense of confusion and disorientation typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it was to this development that Liszt contributed greatly, because with his music he undermined the most important principle of music: contrast. The Lisztian process of construction-deconstruction of music, retraces the same centrifugal-centripetal process of more traditional music. However, in his works the whole process is based on even thinner and subtler, almost vanishing, elements (intervals, harmonies). The construction process based on a cumulative development which sustained music for centuries, falls apart here. The opposites flatten; the contrasts between sound and silence, between consonant and dissonant, become even more feeble, till they tend towards uniformity. In this uniformity, where everything has its specific weight, the extreme freedom has silenced the composer. It is the absence of any limit, of any rule that makes the music quiet. This is the beginning of a crisis, which would later emerge during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the clearest examples of which is Schönberg. And it was exactly because he himself experienced this impossibility, that he tried to create a new system, even more rigid than the tonal one, because music needs limitations to find its expression – or better, music needs limitations to fight against in order to find its way to life. Liszt was just lucky enough to live till the period of extreme freedom, just before the fall.

## ANNEXES



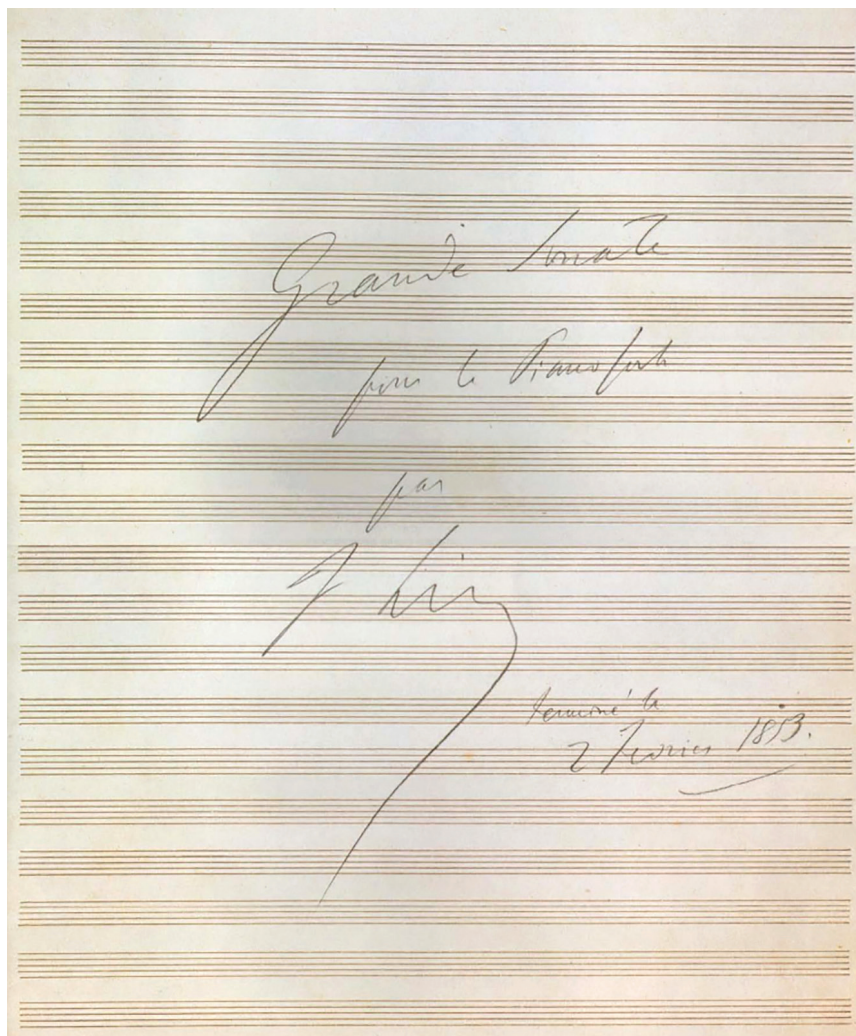
## Annexes Chapter II – On the idea of progress

Annex I – Zurbaran, Francisco de, *Bodegón con cacharros*, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid



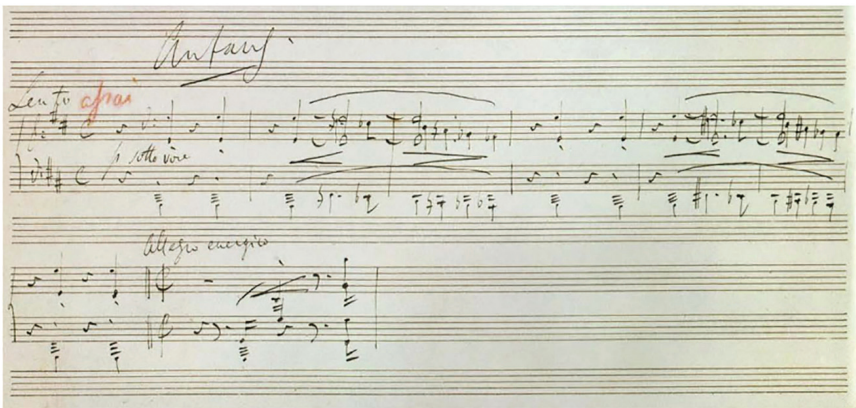
## Annexes Chapter IV – The B minor Piano Sonata

Annex I – B minor Piano Sonata, Manuscript, Cover page



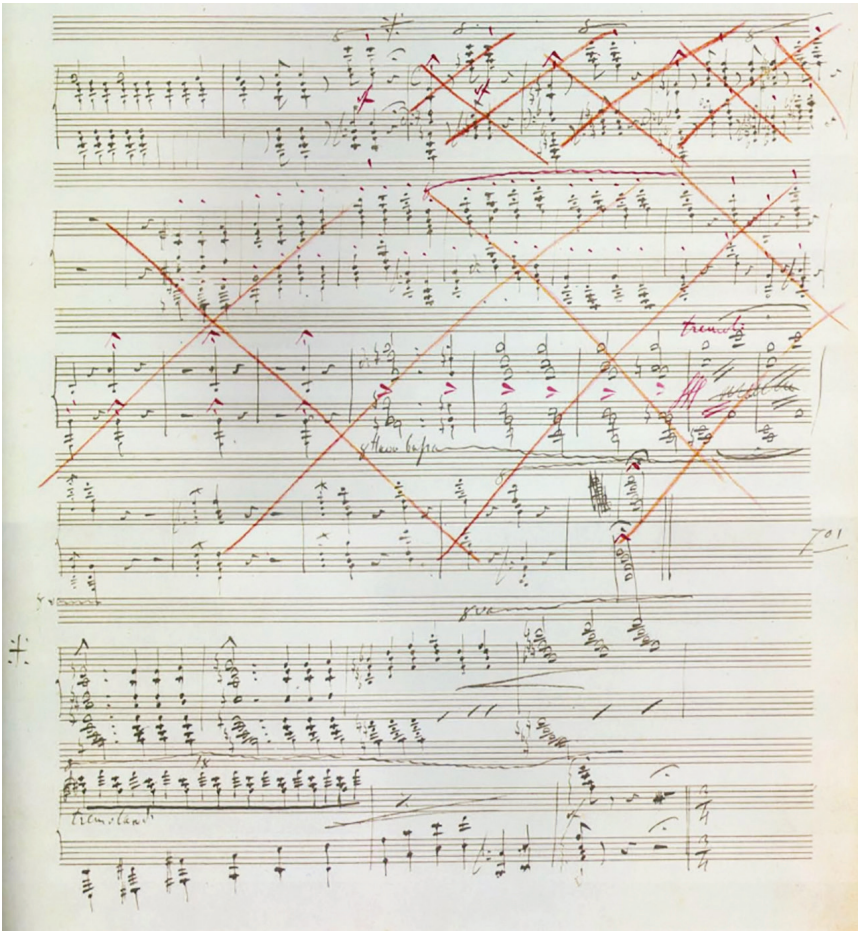


Annex II – B minor Piano Sonata, Manuscript, Motivic cells, mm. 1–17





Annex III – *B minor Piano Sonata*, Manuscript, Original finale



Annex IV – *Großes Konzertsolo*, Finale, mm. 388–418

Allegro con bravura

388 ff

391

395

399

403

407

413

Annex V – Ludwig v. Beethoven, *Piano Sonata* op. 111, Recapitulation, mm. 85–94Annex VI – *B minor Piano Sonata*, Recapitulation, mm. 522–534

522

ff

526

cresc.

529

rinforz.

ff

532

sempre f ed agitato

tr

marcato

Annexes Chapter V – Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita

Annex I – Klavierstück No. 1, Development-like section, mm. 23–37

23

*p*

*cresc. molto*

*tre corde*

31

*ff* *ten.* *ten.* *ff* *ten.* *ten.* *ff*

35

*dim.*

*rall.*

*Più lento*

*espr.* *ten.* *pp* *ten.* *pp*

Annex II – *Klavierstück* No. 2, Development-like section, mm. 27–40Annex III – *Klavierstück* No. 3, Formal scheme, mm. 1–24

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented on two staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 6/8. The first staff contains two measures of music, labeled A and B. Measure A is a half note chord (F#, C#, G#) followed by a quarter note chord (F#, C#, G#). Measure B is a half note chord (F#, C#, G#) followed by a quarter note chord (F#, C#, G#). The second staff contains two measures of music, labeled A'. Measure A' is a half note chord (F#, C#, G#) followed by a quarter note chord (F#, C#, G#). Measure B' is a half note chord (F#, C#, G#) followed by a quarter note chord (F#, C#, G#).



Annex IV – *Klavierstücke* No. 4, Formal structure, mm. 1–16

The musical score for 'The Four Seasons: Spring' by Vivaldi is presented in a standard musical notation format. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Andantino'. The score is divided into measures 4 through 13. Measures 4-5 are marked 'p semplice (espressivo a piacere)'. Measures 6-7 are marked 'Antecedent' and 'Consequent'. Measures 8-9 are marked 'Development'. Measures 10-11 are marked 'un poco riten.'. The score includes a key signature change to G major (one sharp) and a tempo change to 'un poco riten.'.

Annex V – *Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este*, Formal scheme (from Ben, Arnold, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 144)

Measures	Section	Theme/ Motive	Key	Comments
1–30	Introduction	x		fragmented, long pauses
30–38	A	A	D $\flat$ major	
39–46		A	C minor	
47–59		A	B $\flat$ major	
53–60		A	B $\flat$ minor	
61–67	Transition	x		
68–75	B	B	F $\sharp$ major	diatonic, harp-like
76–95		C		
96–105		x'	F $\sharp$ minor	
106–115		B	A major	
116–135		C		
136–145		x'	A minor	
146–153		B	C major	
154–161		C		
162–169	A'	A'	D $\flat$ major	theme in bass
170–177		A'	C minor	
178–184		A	B $\flat$ major	Exactly like 47–53
184–191		A	B $\flat$ minor	Exactly like 53–60
192–207	Coda	x''		
208–225		B and x		Combines B and x
226–240		B	E major/C $\sharp$ minor	
241–244		x		unaccompanied

Annexes Chapter VI – Sint ut sunt, aut non sint

Annex I – *Unstern!*, mm. 1–36

98

UNSTERN! – SINISTRE

*Lento*  $\text{♩} = 48$

*mf* *pesante*

9

18 *ten.* *ten.* *marcato*

25 *marcato*

Ossia

31 *Ossia*



Annex II – *Unstern!*, Chorale, mm. 79–146

The musical score is written for piano and features a variety of textures and dynamics. It begins with a *Sostenuto* marking and a *mp* (mezzo-piano) dynamic. The first system (measures 79-84) shows a complex texture with many beamed sixteenth notes in the right hand and a more rhythmic bass line. The second system (measures 85-94) is marked *quasi organo* and features a sustained, block-like texture in the right hand with a simple bass line. The third system (measures 95-103) continues the *quasi organo* texture. The fourth system (measures 104-113) introduces a more melodic line in the right hand with a *p* (piano) dynamic. The fifth system (measures 114-118) continues this melodic line. The sixth system (measures 119-127) features a dense, sustained texture in the right hand. The seventh system (measures 128-136) continues this dense texture. The final system (measures 137-146) concludes with a sustained texture in the right hand and a more active bass line. The score includes various musical notations such as beamed sixteenth notes, sustained chords, and dynamic markings.

TRÜBE WOLKEN – NUAGES GRIS

Andante

p

p

tremolando

6

11

17

DIE TRAUER-GONDEL Nr. 1  
LA LUGUBRE GONDOLA No. 1

71

Andante marcato

mf

sempre legato

una corda

6

12

18

sempre legato

24

30

4. MEPHISTO-WALZER  
Bagatelle ohne Tonart — Bagatelle, sans tonalité

Allegretto mosso  $\text{♩} = 160$

7 *poco a poco dim.* *p scherzando*

14

18

23 *sempre p leggiero e scherzando*



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