ANALYSIS OF EXPRESSIVE ELEMENTS

IN THE *DANTE* SONATA

by

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ABSTRACT

The present document is a reflection upon Liszt's most important piece, the *Dante* Sonata from the cycle *Années de Pèlerinage*. It represents the pinnacle achievement of the Italian Years and it is considered one of the most difficult pieces to play from the standard repertoire. It ranges from virtuosic, brilliant passages to sincerely moving emotional statements. Liszt's musical maturity can be seen evolving through this masterpiece by observing its innovative harmonic structure and formal conception.

The **Introduction** refers to Liszt's musical background and some of his innovative contributions to the pianistic world. The first chapter, **A Foray through Liszt's *Années de Pèlerinage,*** is a brief description of all pieces comprised in all volumes of the cycle. Liszt's literal and figurative pilgrimage is depicted in the miniature pieces through the descriptive passages of nature and beautiful landscapes in the "Swiss Years" while the "Italian Years" reveal Liszt's unconditional admiration for Renaissance visual art and poetry. The climax of *Années de Pèlerinage* is achieved through the *Dante* Sonata. The sonata represents the apex of the entire cycle through its unusual length and through its innovative form: the combination of the sonata elements into a fantasy structure.

The second chapter, **The Origin of the *Dante* Sonata,** clarifies the circumstances of the compositional inspiration and explains the controversy of the piece as related to Victor Hugo's poem. This chapter also suggests that Liszt found Dante as a great inspirational source due to his pilgrimage in Dante's native country and his fervent admiration of the French society who

idolized the Renaissance figure.

The third chapter, **The Form and its Significance,** emphasizes the fantasy elements contained in the sonata. The amalgamation of the main characteristics of the sonata form with the fantasy originates with Beethoven's piano sonata "*Sonata quasi una fantasia*" and continues with Schubert's "Wanderer Fantasy" op.15. Being a rather innovative composer, Liszt processes the idea of cyclic structure, achieving mastery in the *Dante* Sonata by compiling several movements into one. The introduction of a slow section near the midpoint is another innovative element that occurs in the *Dante* Sonata as well as the B Minor Sonata and the *Grosses Konzertsolo.*

The fourth chapter, **A Selective Musical Analysis,** is a detailed analysis of four major musical components: the triton motive, the thematic transformations of the themes, the rhythmical pattern and the harmonic structure. These are the major compositional elements upon which the music is built and which are involved throughout the composition. For the sake of clarity the Analysis does not involve any objective "interpretation" it just present the major elements as they unfold.

The commentary in the **Afterword** defends my personal opinion that the piece possesses a non-programmatic character despite its allusive title *Aprés une lecture du Dante.* Although Liszt started the piece with the idea of a program, he abandoned it within the span of over ten years. The piece rather demonstrates the innovative compositional style of thematic transformation. His ingenious improvisational style and maturity that he reached while finishing the piece reflects the composer's mastery of the form, as illustrated earlier by the incorporation

of fantasy elements into a hybrid sonata form. This reflects Liszt's permanent revolt against old conventional forms and situates him as one of the most progressive composers of the nineteenth-century.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to John Bennett and those who helped and guided me through the trials and tribulations of creating this manuscript. In particular, my family and close friends who stood by me throughout the time taken to complete this piece of work.

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INTRODUCTION

Franz Liszt has emerged as one of the most awe-inspiring figures of the Romantic era. He was a Hungarian pianist, composer, and teacher. In his compositions he developed new methods that anticipated twentieth-century ideas and procedures. Liszt's progressive ideas extended far beyond the nineteenth-century limitations of musical composition and performance.

Liszt was born in the small town of Raiding, formerly known as Doboryán, part of the Austrian region of Burgenland. His mother, Maria Anna Lager, descended from a poor Austrian family and was a chambermaid in Vienna. His father, Adam, an accountant to the estates of Prince Esterházy, was also an amateur pianist, cellist, and singer. Liszt's father was trained for the priesthood at the Franciscan monasteries but "had been dismissed by reason of his inconstant and changeable nature."[1] However, Adam never forgot the Franciscans and named his son Franciscus in their memory.[2]

At the age of six, Liszt began his music lessons with his father. His first public performances occurred at Sopron and Pozsony at the age of nine. The Hungarian aristocrats were so impressed by the young pianist's performance that they offered him 600 florins for six years to enable his musical studies. The family moved to Vienna, and Liszt began his piano studies with Karl Czerny and studied theory with Antonio Salieri.

At the end of 1822 and the beginning of 1823, he attained immense success as a pianist. In the same period he began to write his first compositions. He also met with Schubert and Beethoven during this period—the latter encounter supposedly resulted in the famous *Weihekuß*,

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[1]Alan Walker, et al. "Liszt, Franz." In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/48265pg1> (accessed April 26, 2010).

[2]Ibid.

or “Kiss of Consecration,” in which Beethoven, fascinated by Liszt’s improvisational skills, placed a kiss upon his forehead.[3] The circumstances of the *Weihekuß*, are still nebulous but according to both Beethoven and Liszt’s confession, Liszt proved successfully his skills in front of Beethoven.[4]

In 1823 the family moved to Paris in order to provide the young talented pianist the best education. Unfortunately the director of the Paris Conservatory, Luigi Cherubini, denied his admission. The school requirements did not allow foreigners to study at the school. However, Liszt was introduced to the French elite and soon became the “spoiled pet in the most fashionable salons.”[5] Although Liszt had a few more composition lessons from Ferdinando Paer and Anton Reicha, this period marked the end of his formal training as a pianist.

During the *Glanzzeit* (Glamour period) between 1839 and 1847, Liszt unfolded a virtuoso career unrivaled in the history of performance. He performed over 1,000 recitals all over Europe. Liszt was the first to introduce the term ‘recital’ at a concert in London at the Hanover Square Rooms on June 9, 1840.[6] Liszt became known as the first performer to play whole concerts from memory in their entirety and was the first to play the entire piano repertoire from Bach to Chopin. Also, he was very conscious of the physics of sound and was the first pianist to consistently place the piano so that its open lid faced his audience, better projecting sound across the auditorium.[7]

Liszt was quite innovative. He was very conscious of music’s deep psychological force

[3]Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronical of his Life in Pictures and Documents,* trans. Stewart Spencer (Oxford and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 26.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Joseph Banowetz, ed., *Franz Lizst: An Introduction to the Composer and his Music* (Park Ridge: General Words and Music Co., 1973), ii.

[6]Alan Walker, et al. "Liszt, Franz." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online,* http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/48265pg8#S48265.8 (accessed April 26, 2010).

[7]Ibid.

and the emotional impact of his works far surpassed that of previous artists. He unlocked new dimensions, not only in the world of music, but also in the human perception of the immense impact that this emotional, and mysterious, form of communication could have on humans. Liszt is documented as being the first person to ever attempt using music as therapy after visiting sick and demoralized patients in hospitals.[8]

Liszt also invented the idea of the master class, realizing the importance of a devoted pedagogue. His pedagogic ideals were deeply imprinted in important pianistic figures as Eugen d'Albert, Alexander Siloti, Emil Sauer, Moriz Rosenthal, Carl Pohlig, and others.

Liszt's life was one of extraordinary variety and industriousness. He composed over 1,300 works; he was the author of several books, essays, and articles. He was a passionate writer of letters, a "social lion," a passionate lover, a passionate traveler; yet he was also a remarkable pedagogue, conductor, and one of the best pianists that ever existed. He was a holder of minor orders in the Catholic Church: all this in one lifetime!

Années de Pèlerinage represents a landmark in Liszt's life. It serves as the evolving 'spiritual' path as a composer. In the span of over thirty years (from 1835 when he composed the very first piece of the album until 1867 when Liszt wrote the last piece), he brought more stylistic diversity than in any other cycle or piano piece. The album comprises a total of twenty-six pieces, each bearing different influences, from spiritual, religious, and literary inspirational sources. One of the most important characteristics of the pieces is the lack of virtuosic exhibition that many people associate with Liszt's music. Actually, through its various innovations regarding form, programmatic character, unusual and harmonies, the whole cycle conveys a profound intellectual, emotional, and spiritual impact.

[8]Rich DiSilvio, "Commentary & Bio on Liszt" (1996). Available from: DV Books http://www.dvista.com/OTHER/franzliszt2.html.

CHAPTER ONE

A Foray through Liszt's *Années de Pèlerinage*

Did the word "*pèlerinage*" have any special significance for Liszt as man and musician? Most dictionaries would define "pilgrimage" as a journey of a pilgrim, one to a shrine or a sacred place. The second edition of *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* defines it as "the act of journeying or wandering as an exile, traveler, or especially as a devotee seeking a shrine or a place sacred because of associations."[9] This assertion seems to coincide with several aspects of Liszt's traveling, especially to both the first and second book of *Years of Pilgrimage*.

In many aspects, these books depict his life through their connection with particular times, places, and people, but mostly, they illustrate his stylistic and developmental attitude as a composer. "An enormous amount of his music was confessional—in a way, the autobiography he didn't write. It all seems to be there: landscapes observed; airs heard; erotic and religious experience; poetry and history; treasures and trash. It wouldn't be hard to draw a picture of his life from the music alone."[10]

The theme of pilgrimage had become rather popular to readers during that period of time. Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* are just some examples of literature circulating among the elite society. Liszt became the first well-known composer to truly foster this theme. Thus

[9]Karen Sue Wilson, *A Historical Study and Stylistic Analysis of Franz Liszt's "Annés de Pèlerinage"* (Dissertation: University of North Carolina, 1977), 15.

[10]Eleanor Perényi, *Liszt. The Artist as Romantic Hero* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1974), 43-44.

far, research has unveiled no evidence to the contrary.[11] A contemporary of Liszt, Austrian composer and pianist, Leopoldine Blahetka (1809-1885), reflecting upon her travels, wrote "*Souvenir d'Angleterre,"* written for piano and orchestra or string quartet. However there is no evidence whether the piece was written before or after *Années de Pèlerinage*.[12] Nevertheless, the idea of picturing travels through musical composition is detected in works dating as far back as the early Baroque period; however, examples are rather scarce and obscure. Alessandro Poglietti introduced a piece entitled *Aria Allemagna* containing twenty variations. Some of these variations include the following descriptive titles: "Bohemian Bagpipe," "*Holländisch Flagolett*," "*Bayerische Schalmei*," "Hungarian Fiddles," and "Styrian Horn."[13] Another example of Baroque music with a "travel" program is Carlo Graziani's cello sonata in A Major, "*Il viaggio da Berlino a Breslavia con l' affetuoso ricevuta*" and "*La Partenza di Roma a Napoli*," by Jean-Noël Hamal (a Belgium composer who wrote this piece during his journey to Italy).[14] Although these pieces may have influenced Liszt in his development of the pilgrimage theme, there was no greater influence than that of his muse, Marie Catherine Sophie de Flavigny.

Liszt's muse was known as Marie Countess d' Agoult because she was already married to the Count Charles d' Agoult when she met Liszt. The Countess was twenty-eight years old and already had two daughters while Liszt was only twenty-two and of lower middle-class origin. By that time he was "a paid servant of the society into which the Countess had been born and which had engaged him to play"[15] The Countess's maturity, charm, intellectuality, spirituality, and promise of financial security seemed extremely alluring to the young, impetuous Liszt. Marie,

[11]Wilson, *A Historical Study and Stylistic Analysis*, 15.
[12]Ibid., 16.
[13]Willy Apel, *The History of Keyboard Music to 1700*, trans. and rev. Hans Tischler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 568.
[14]William S. Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 790.
[15]Ronald Taylor. *Franz Liszt*: *The Man and the Musician* (London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 40-41.

cornered by a boring marriage, was captivated by the brilliant and impulsive originality of the handsome, young pianist, flooding her world with a glaring new light, a light composed of progressive ideals of love and personal freedom. In this relation there was a promise of liberation and new meaning, and, against all rational arguments, she was ready to sacrifice her position, privilege, and family. What they had to offer each other was too exciting to ignore, too precious to refuse. Marie's twinges over what she was leaving behind could not outbalance the joys that a beckoning future promised. "'From the first moment I loved you,' Liszt said '...and felt what that love was and what it was going to demand. I trembled for you. I decided to leave you. But now I see what I have done...I shall not let you languish and perish in this misery. I too have a thirst for life!' "[16]

The Swiss Years

To live in Paris under these circumstances was impossible hence in the spring of 1835 the young couple decided to leave Paris, to run away, and decided to take their first journey together to Switzerland. First, they went to Basel, moving to Geneva shortly thereafter. In December, their first child, Blandine, was born. The time spent in Switzerland with Marie resulted in Liszt's first major piano cycle, *Album d' un voyageur,* composed between 1835 and 1838. The idea for this title derives from *Lettre d'un voyageur* (*Letters of a traveler*), written by his close friend, George Sand. This diverse collection of fifteen letters is described as being "fragments of diaries,

[16]Ibid., 42.

[17]Julia Peslier, *"Les Lettres d'un voyageur de* George Sand*: une poétique romantique''* (2007). Available from: Université Stendahl—ELLUG <http://www.fabula.org/actualites/article20863.php>

travelogues, essays on aesthetics, politics and morality."[17] The first publication of the cycle occurred in 1842 and the album was divided into the following three parts:

Book I: ***Impressions et poésies***

1. *Lyon*
2. *Le Lac de Wallenstadt*
3. *Au bord d'une source*
4. *Les cloches de G******
5. *Vallée d'Obermann*
6. *La chapelle de Guillaume Tell*
7. *Psaum*

Book* II: *Fleurs mélodiques des Alpes

1. *Allegro*
2. *Lento*
3. *Allegro pastorale*
4. *Andante con sentimento*
5. *Andante molto espressivo*
6. *Allegro moderato*
7. *Allegretto*
8. *Allegretto*
9. *Andantino con molto sentimento*

Book III: ***Paraphrases***

1. *Ranz de vaches [de F. Huber] - Aufzug auf die Alp - Improvisata*
2. *Un soir dans les montagnes [de Knop] - Nocturne pastorale*
3. *Ranz de chevres [de F. Huber] - Allegro finale*

Of its three books, just the first volume, *Impressions et poésies*, formed the basis of the initial "Swiss" volume of *Années de Pèlerinage,* incorporated into its final form in 1850. Omitting "*Lyon*" and "*Psaume*," all of the other pieces from *Impressions et poésies* were revised and

included into the first book of *Années*. "*Eglogue*" and "*Orange*" are the only two pieces written for the first book of *Années* that are unrelated to *Album d'un voyageur.* The enigmatic title "*Les cloches de G*****'' receives the adjustment to "*Les cloches de Genève.*"[18]

The *Première Année: Suisse* (The First "Swiss" Year) of *Années de Pèlerinage* in its final revised form contains the following pieces:

1. *Chapelle de Guillaume Tell* (William Tell's Chapel)
2. *Au lac de Wallenstadt* (At Lake Wallenstadt)
3. *Pastorale* (Pastoral)
4. *Au bord d'une source* (Beside a Spring)
5. *Orage* (Storm)
6. *Vallée d'Obermann* (Obermann's Valley)
7. *Eglogue* (Eclogue)
8. *Le mal du pays* (Homesickness)
9. *Les cloches de Genève: Nocturne* (The Bells of Geneva: Nocturne)

All these short pieces are labeled as character pieces, pieces based upon an exclusive idea or a program. The term, a literal translation of the German *Charakterstück*, is used to classify a full range of nineteenth-century piano music. Character pieces are distinguished features of the Romantic period and are "expressing either a single mood (martial, dream-like, pastoral) or a programmatic idea defined by its title."[19]

An innovative example of the form with its association of music with nature is "*Au bord d' une source"* (Beside a spring). It is an aural representation of water that Liszt accomplishes through "effectiveness of rapid and clearly articulated figuration" in the high register of the

[18]Kenneth Hamilton, *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68-69.

[19]Maurice J.E. Brown, "Characteristic piece." In *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/05443?q=character&search=quick&source=omo_gmo&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit (accessed May, 13, 2010).

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piano, a technique which is later emulated by the Impressionists, especially Ravel.[20]

The folklore element is accentuated in "*Eglogue"* and "*Pastorale."* Most of the melodies are Swiss traditional tunes, but Liszt ornaments these tunes by adding melodic motions in parallel thirds and sixths, dance-like rhythms, and exposes the drone-bass. Another pastoral element, the "yodel," is utilized in "*Le mal du pays"* ("Homesickness"). The 1855 publication of *Années* presents an excerpt from the French writer Etienne Pivert de Sénancour's novel *Obermann* mentioning the "melancholy yodeling songs of the Swiss mountaineers."[21] In this piece, Liszt uses the traditional Swiss *Appenzell ranz*, a form of yodeling prevalent in the northeastern region. In the "*Chapelle de Guillaume Tell"* ("William Tell's Chapel") the heavy chords in dotted rhythm are associated with grandeur while the intense fanfare-like gestures and chromatic octave runs in the bass suggest battle. *"At Lake Wallenstadt"* resembles a barcarolle, a boatmen's song. The description of the lake is accomplished through the use of bell-like effects and the melodic lines are reminiscent of a Chopin nocturne.

Vallée d'Obermann

In his pilgrimage, Liszt was impressed by the beautiful Swiss landscape, the mountains, the lakes, but moreover, he had as a guide the principal figure Obermann of Sénancour's novel. Liszt seems to emulate the work's protagonist, a "distraught individual who flees Paris to wander, mainly in Switzerland, eventually settling in an isolated mountain valley."[22] The impact of the story was so great that "*Vallée d' Obermann"* became his most ambitious project. It is larger than the other pieces of the set, and it represents the essence of the "Swiss" album. Further evidence

[20]F. E. Kirby, "Liszt's Pilgrimage," *Piano Quarterly* 23/89 (Spring 1975), 19
[21]See J. da Motta's preface to his edition of the *Album d'un voyageur*, Series II, vol.4, pp. III-IV.
[22]Kirby, "Liszt's Pilgrimage," 17.

found in the first publication of *Première Année: Suisse* suggests the title character's influence upon Liszt. The 1855 Schott edition contained two excerpts from the novel, including a quotation from a narrative poem, Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.* The following quotation states the mood of Obermann in terms of the inner conflicts of Byron's character:

> Could I embody and unbosom now
> That which is most within me, --could I wreak
> My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
> Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,
> All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
> Bear, know, feel and yet breathe --into one word,
> And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;
> But as it is, I live and die unheard,
> With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.[23]

An illustration of Kretschmer's conception of "*Vallée d' Obermann*" follows the excerpt; however, Liszt found the image "inappropriate."[24]

[23]Zeynep Ucbasaran, "Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor" (2006). Available from: Seven South http://www.sevensouth.com/recordshop/Ucbasara/03.php.

[24]Kirby, "Liszt's Pilgrimage," 18.

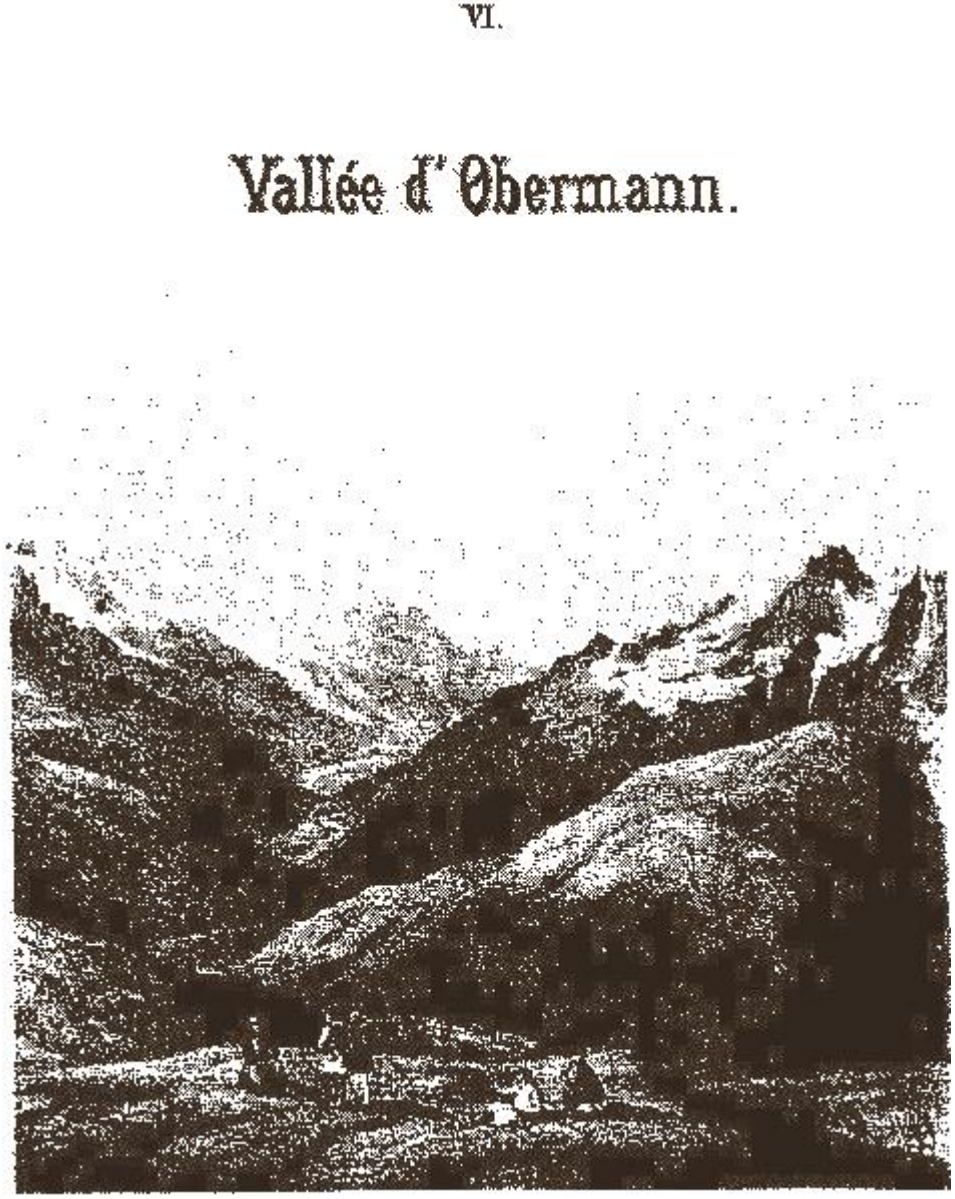

Figure 1. Kretschmer's conception of "*Vallée d' Obermann*."[25]

"*Vallée d' Obermann*" is significant in Liszt's evolution as a composer. It exhibits a vast expansion of compositional range and presents daunting passages, making it the most difficult piece to perform in the cycle. Most importantly, he develops the principle of thematic transformation (borrowed probably from Berlioz's symphonies). This procedure became one of the most important elements in Liszt's compositional style. Whereas the other pieces of the cycle

[25] Kirby, "Liszt's Pilgrimage," 18.

are free in form, this piece, although not subscribing to the "classical" form, is sectional. The piece starts with a lyrical theme in E minor, evoking emotions of ardor and yearning. The transition of the middle section, although written in the tonality of C Major, paints a desolate and melancholy picture. After a stormy passage featuring trills and tremolo, noted "*recitativo*," the prime theme returns in E Major, reaches the climax while still maintaining those aforementioned emotions from the first lyrical theme, and the piece ends abruptly.

The Italian Years

Liszt's own pilgrimage is particularly interesting because, inspired by characters of fictitious works like Goethe's Wilhelm Meister and Sénancour's Obermann, it represents the attempt to "turn art into life… to take unto himself the experiences of these literary figures, to enact them in his own life, and to turn them back into art, in the form of musical compositions."[26] There is no better way to describe the deep emotions of the composer or to explain the significance of these particular pieces and their inspiration than the composer's own words as follow:

> I have latterly traveled through many new countries, have seen many different places, and visited many a spot hallowed by history and poetry; I have felt that the varied aspects of nature, and the different incidents associated with them, did not pass before my eyes like meaningless pictures, but that they evoked profound emotions within my soul; that a vague but direct affinity was established between them and myself, a real though indefinable, a sure but inexplicable means of communication, and I have tried to give musical utterance to some of my strongest sensations, some of my liveliest impressions.[27]

[26]Kirby, "Liszt's Pilgrimage," 17.
[27]From the preface to *Album d' un voyageur*, and later the "Swiss" volume of the *Années de Pèlerinage*.

Whereas the first book of *Années* is associated with nature, the Italian volume is related to the arts and draws its inspiration from some the most important Renaissance figures such as Dante, Petrarch, Raphael, and Michelangelo.

Regarding the compositional technique, Liszt's model was the French and Italian opera, mostly comprising arias with "the same principles of melodic organization."[28] Usually there is a primary melody and accompaniment that feature patterns of figuration that derive from unusual harmonic progressions.[29] Although there are repetitive patterns in the accompaniment, the exaggerated figuration and embellishments give it a unique shape. Sometimes these accompanimental figures are endowed with extreme virtuosity: arpeggios, scales, and the typical Lisztian octaves. With regards to the formal structure, all of these pieces are freed from the traditional formal scheme. They are mostly sectional, not following the traditional ABA or sonata form except for the *Dante* Sonata.

The second book contains the following pieces directly related to the poetry of early Italy and to the visual arts:

1. *Sposalizio*
2. *Il penseroso*
3. *Canzonetta del Salvator Rosa*
4. *Sonetto 47 del Petrarca*
5. *Sonetto104 del Petrarca*
6. *Sonetto123 del Petrarca*
7. *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*

VENEZIA E NAPOLI (Supplement for the second year of *Années de Pèlerinage*)

I. *Gondoliera*
II. *Canzonetta*
III. *Tarantella*

[28]Kirby, "Liszt's Pilgrimage," 1.
[29]Ibid.

The literary and artistic sources Liszt encountered during his journey across Italy deeply influenced his role as composer and his creation of *Années de Pèlerinage.* The Italian cycle follows Liszt's itinerary from Milan, through Venice and Florence, and to Rome. At the end of the Napoleonic era, these cities were notorious for harboring political and social exiles. Italy, "the Paradise of Exiles," as Shelley described it, offered the impetuous young man a new start, a new opportunity to "define his artistic identity as an expatriate in a foreign land."[30] Taking Byron as a model, he created for himself the persona of a "lone pilgrim, an intellectual poet whose travel across Switzerland served as the scenic prelude to a full artistic awakening in Italy."[31] Having chosen Italy as his new adoptive country and acting upon Byron's descriptive language of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the young artist mentions in a letter to his friend, George Sand:

> It behooves an artist more than anyone else to pitch a tent only for an hour and not to build anything like a permanent residence. Isn't he always a stranger among men? Isn't his homeland somewhere else? Whatever he does, wherever he goes, he always feels himself an exile. He feels that he has known a purer sky, a warmer sun, and nobler beings. He must sing and move on, pass through the crowd, scattering his works to it without caring where they land, without listening to the clamor with which people stifle them, and without paying attention to the compatible laurels with which they crown them. What a sad and great destiny it is to be an artist![32]

These were the sorrows of a man in great isolation and insecure about his future. Adding to this lack of self-confidence, another event keeps him demoralized; Sigismond Thalberg had arrived to Paris and was soon acclaimed "*le premier pianiste du monde*" (the world's best pianist). In addition to being renowned for his pianistic skills, Thalberg was valued as a

[30]Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley, ed., *Franz Liszt and his World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Charles Suttoni, trans., annot., *Franz Liszt: An Artist's Journey* (*Lettres d'un bachelier ès musique, 1835-1841*) (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1989), 28.

composer, something that Liszt couldn't claim at that point.[33] By publishing a "somewhat malicious review of Thalberg's music" in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* Liszt infuriated the critics and turned himself into a "pariah in Parisian musical politics."[34] Feeling as an oppressed artist, he confesses to George Sand that Italy is the perfect place of asylum for "poets" and those who "suffer and sing":

> Italy! The foreigner's steel has scattered your noblest children far and wide. They wander among the nations, their brows branded with a sacred curse. Yet no matter how implacable your oppressors might be, you will not be forsaken, because you were and will always be the land of choice for those men who have no brothers among men, for those children of God, those exiles from heaven who suffer and sing and whom the world calls "poets." Yes, the inspired man--philosopher, artist, or poet--will always be tormented by a secret misfortune, a burning hope in your regard. Italy's misfortune will always be the misfortune of noble souls, all of them will exclaim, along with Goethe's mysterious child: DAHIN! DAHIN![35]

"Sposalizio"

As a restless pilgrim in search of inspiration, Liszt's first major stop was in Milan. During his tour of the city he was impressed by Italian culture, especially by its museums, painting, and architecture. Liszt admired the Renaissance paintings found in the Brera Museum, but one in particular touched his heart: Raphael's *Sposalizio,* "The Betrothal of the Virgin."

Raphael's work is based on a story mentioned by Saint Jerome in the apocryphal *Protevangelium* and in Jacobus of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend). The story recounts when Mary, having reached the age of marriage was told, along with "all the unmarried

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[33]Dana Gooley. *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23-24.

[34]Gibbs and Gooley, *Franz Liszt and his world*, 7.

[35]Suttoni, *An Artist's Journey*, 14-15. The final line is a reference to Mignon's song from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*:"Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühn?...Dahin!Dahin! Möcht' ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter, ziehn." (Do you know the land, where the lemons bloom?...There! There! Do I wish to move, with you, o my beloved.).

descendants of David," by the highest priest to fetch a wooden rod and bring it to the Temple of Jerusalem. When they arrived, "the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and caused Joseph's rod to blossom." This was God's sign for Joseph that he was the one destined to be Mary's husband.[36] There is no doubt that Liszt was aware of the story and was struck by Mary's appearance in the painting. Her delicate, feminine posing gave her "the appearance of a classical muse."[37] The transcendental significance of God's blessing and Mary's veneration might have enlightened Liszt to choose to name his first piece in the second year of *Années,* "*Sposalizio.*" This is one of the most glorious, sacred pieces from the album.

[36]Gibbs and Gooley, *Franz Liszt and his world,* 12.
[37]Ibid.

Figure 2. Raphael's *Sposalizio*, "The Betrothal of the Virgin."[38]

The opening four measures present the thematic material in the key of E Major that

[38]Raphaello Sanzio, *Sposalizio*(image), Available from: The Yorck Project: *10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei.* DVD-ROM, 2002. ISBN 3936122202. Distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raffael_098.jpg> (Accessed 21 May 2005).

penetrates the entire piece. The second thematic material appears in a new key of G Major in m. 38. Liszt combines this new theme in m. 77 with the first thematic material and reaffirms them by their consolidating in the key of E Major. Thus, "just as the two visual planes of Raphael's canvas are united through converging perspective lines, the two aural planes of Liszt's composition are here brought together in a capitulatory synthesis."[39] Toward the end of the piece, it can easily be observed that Liszt anticipates Debussy's E Major Arabesque:

Figure 3. Example No.1. Liszt's *Sposalizio* [40]

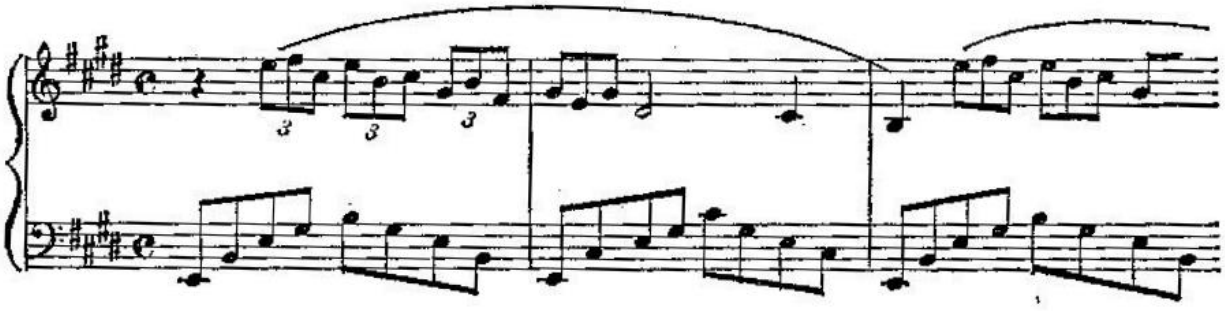


Figure 4. Example No.2. Debussy's "Arabesque"[41]

[39]Joan Backus, "Liszt's '*Sposalizio*': A Study in Musical Perspective," *19th Century Music* 12/2 (October 1988), 181.
[40]Alan Walker, ed., *Franz Liszt: The Man and his Music* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., Inc., 1970), 121.
[41]Ibid.

"Il Penseroso"

Like a restless wanderer Liszt continued to look for new inspirational sources. This time he was searching through the art galleries and churches of Florence. In the Medici Chapel in the Basilica of San Lorenzo, Liszt discovered *Il Penseroso,* Michelangelo's visual depiction "of the contemplative man versus the man of action."[42] Here in the Medici Chapel there are two tombs facing each other, one was contrived for Giuliano de Medici, and the other for Lorenzo de Medici. Michelangelo conceptualized the two figures as two distinguished types: Giuliano represented the active, extroverted personality, while Lorenzo symbolized the pensive, introverted type. Michelangelo portrays *Il Penseroso* as a man absented from the world and its concerns. This may be observed by the "helmet and furrowed brow shadow his feature;" and how his arm "rests on a closed cashbox" while his index finger is covering his mouth "in a gesture of silence." The cashbox is ornamented with a bat, "a popular symbol for melancholia."[43]

[42]Gibbs and Gooley. *Franz Liszt and his World,* 18.
[43]Ibid.

Figure 5. Michelangelo's *Il Penseroso*, located in Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo, Florence, Italy.[44]

Liszt was intrigued by the sumptuous statue and integrated it as the subject for his second piece of the second cycle. In 1858, when "*Il Penseroso"* was published, it was coupled with Michelangelo's quatrain:

Caro m'e il sonno, e più l'esser di sasso	Dear to me is sleep; and more dear to be made of stone
Mentre che'l danno la vergogna dura.	As long as there exists injustice and shame.
Non veder, non sentir m'è gran ventura;	Not to see and not to hear is a great blessing to me;
Però non mi destar, deh!	Therefore, do not disturb me!
Parla basso!	Speak softly![45]

[44]Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Il Penseroso* (image), Available from: Standing at the Gates <http://blogs.princeton.edu/wri152-3/f05/bgreeley/classical_works.html>.

[45]Gibbs and Gooley. *Franz Liszt and his World*, 20.

These verses, full of animosity, which made an oblique reference to the ongoing breakdown of the Florentine Republic, were a reaction to Giovanni Battista Strozzi the Elder, one of Michelangelo's contemporaries whose politics he despised.[46]

Musically, Liszt conceived *"Il Penseroso"* in a somber mood: *Lento marcia funebre*. The piece is stark, with a grave character, lacking any pianistic ornamentation. Although the piece is only two pages long, it can't be perceived as a "miniature" piece due to its tragic character.[47] The repeated dotted rhythms are constant throughout the piece. The sequence of the opening motif underlines the diminished triad E-G-B♭ in the first section. The second part adds more varied material: the left hand moves monotonously in eighth notes in a very low register, bringing even more darkness to the piece. The sequential passages in mm.33-39 "are anticipatory of Wagner's chromatic writing."[48]

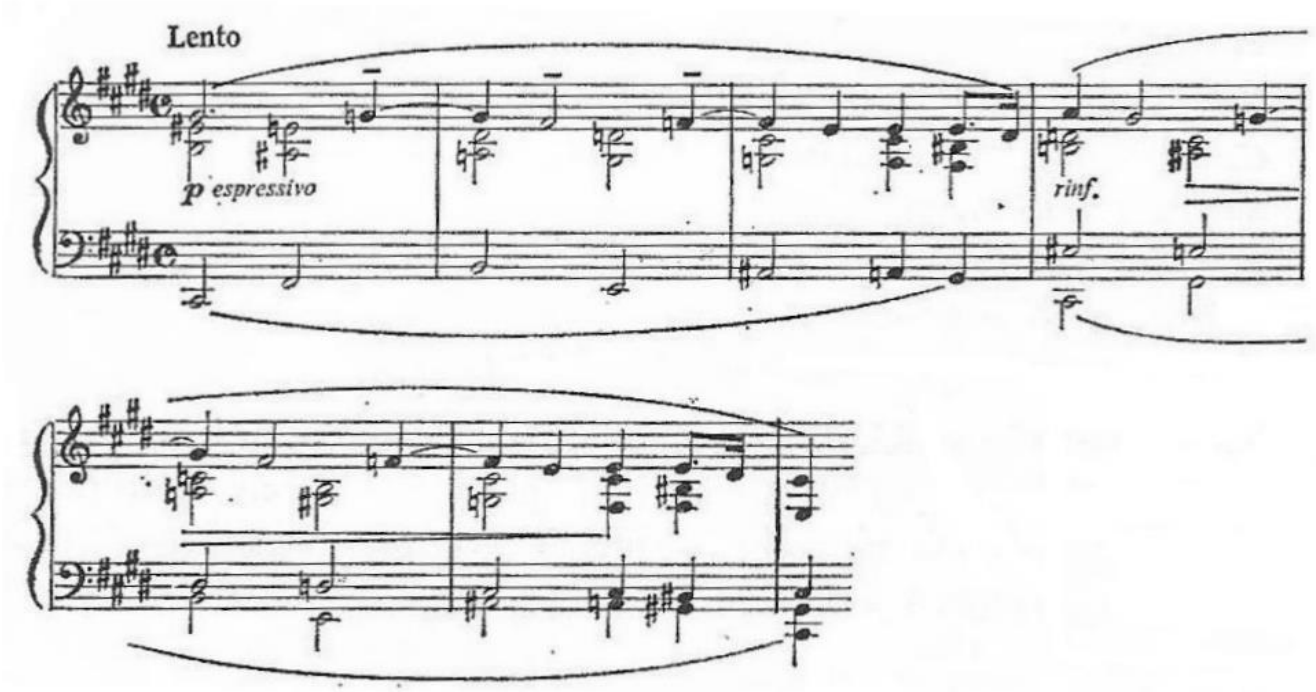


Figure 6.sequential passages.

[46]Ibid.
[47]Walker, *The Man and his Music*, 122.
[48]Ben Arnold, *The Liszt Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 84.

The last statement of the theme, although still in the right hand, is brought up in the middle voice and in the original tonality, C# minor. Years later, Liszt reused material from this austere piece and also recycled it for "*La notte*," the second of his *Trois Odes Funèbre* which he designated as his own requiem.[49]

Another Renaissance figure that inspired Liszt in composing his next piece of *Années* is Salvatore Rosa. He was a multi- talented: a satirist, a painter and a composer. He was a member of the Florentine elite which included philosophers, poets, painters and scientists. He had become a model of the top artist: "a noble exile and enemy of tyranny" due to his participation in a folk rebellion against the Spanish in Naples.[50] As a musician, Rosa's biographer, Lady Morgan, affirms that he had cultivated a new compositional style "called *la musica parlante* (speaking music) that proved to be *Il cantar che nel animo si sente* (the singing that one feels in the soul)."[51]

Liszt was so fascinated with this man that presumably he used Rosa's self-portrait as a model for his own portrait, painted by Henri Lehmann. Rosa's self-portrait illustrates an authority figure with "confidence as both an artist and an intellectual."[52] Lehmann captured in Liszt's portrait a similar temperament that exudes great confidence. That self-trust that radiates from Rosa's portrait is described in the following "*Canzonetta*":

Vado ben spesso cangiando loco	Often I change my location,
Ma non si mai cangiar desio.	But I shall never change my desire.
Sempre l'istesso sarà il mio fuoco	The fire within me will always be the same.
E sarò sempre l'istesso anch'io.	And I myself will also always be the same.

[49]Walker, *The Man and his Music*, 122.
[50]Gibbs and Gooley, *Franz Liszt and his World*, 21.
[51]Gibbs and Gooley, *Franz Liszt and his World*, 21.
[52]Ibid.

Liszt composed the "*Canzonetta"* in 1848 without being aware of his true inspiration for the piece—the author was actually Giovanni Battista Bononcini. The truth was revealed decades later through Alan Walker.[53]

Although it is the least significant and most seldom played piece in the album, it retains a certain charm through its dance-like nature. It is a mono-thematic work, comprising strophic variations going from A Major to F♯ minor and returning to A Major with a codetta at the end. What is unusual about this piece is that Liszt published the text over the notes of the score throughout the entire piece to underline the symbiosis of text and music. The intertwining of music and text is easy to observe; the rhythmical pattern is continuous from the beginning until the end of the "C*anzonetta"* and the mark on the beginning of the score of is "*Andante marziale*." The martial melody is reminiscent of the firm character of Rosa and matches perfectly with the "desire" and "fire" that "will always be the same."

"The Petrarch Sonnets"

Rome was the climactic stage of the second Italian year:

> The beautiful in this special land became evident to me in its purest and most sublime form. Art in all its splendor disclosed itself to my eyes. It revealed its universality and unity to me. Day by day my feelings and thoughts gave me a better insight into the hidden relationship that unites all works of genius. Raphael and Michelangelo increased my understanding of Mozart and Beethoven; Giovanni Pisano, Fra Beato, and Il Francia explained Allegri, Marcello, and Palestrina to me. Titian and Rossini appeared to me like twin stars shining with the same light. The Colloseum [sic] and the *Campo Santo* are not as foreign as one thinks to the *Eroica* Symphony and the Requiem. Dante has found his pictorial expression in Orcagna and Michelangelo, and someday perhaps he will find his musical expression in the Beethoven of the future.[54]

[53]Ibid., 23.
[54]Suttoni, *An Artist's Journey*, 186.

"*Tre Sonetti di Petrarca"* (Three Petrarch Sonnets) was originally written for high tenor voice and piano and subsequently transcribed for piano. The first version published by Haslinger in 1846 placed the pieces in the following order: 104, 47, 123. They were initially in the key of A♭ Major. In the second printed version of *Années* in 1850, they were arranged chronologically: 47, 104, 123.[55] This fusion of text with piano transcriptions was an early, great accomplishment for Liszt. "My mission, as I see it, is to be the first to introduce poetry into the music of the piano with some degree of style."[56] The three sonnets are contrasting and trace the violent disturbance brought on by "Petrarch's contemplation of woman sublime." The woman to whom Petrarch refers is Laura. Liszt included her name in the text of the second sonnet. She is a vestal: she "blesses the artist-poet with divine inspiration."[57]

The three sonnets are among the most lyrical of Liszt's piano works. The first transcription begins with the confession of the poet that "two beautiful eyes" charmed him. Liszt conveys this in music perfectly. Each note is marked *tenuto*, there are rests before the musical phrases, and the fermatas that follow suggest that he's sighing, and longing and for his desired woman ("*mia Donna ...E i sospiri, e le lagrime, e'l desio"*).

"*Benedetto sia il giorno*" is a song of thanksgiving for the joy and pain of first love.[58] The beginning of the piece calls for special attention: the prefatory motif is introduced by a prolongation of an A Major chord so that a third relation is instituted with the D♭ tonic. In addition, the melodic gesture A-B♭♭-A♭-B♭-A♭ is later reinforced by a linear statement before the final tonic conclusion.

[55]Preface of the Second Year from *Années de Pèlerinage.* 1/7 (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1974).
[56]Countesse D'Agoult, *Mémoires*, ed. Daniel Ollivier (Paris, 1927), 165.
[57]Gibbs and Gooley, *Franz Liszt and his world*, 28.
[58]Walker, *The Man and his Music*, 123.

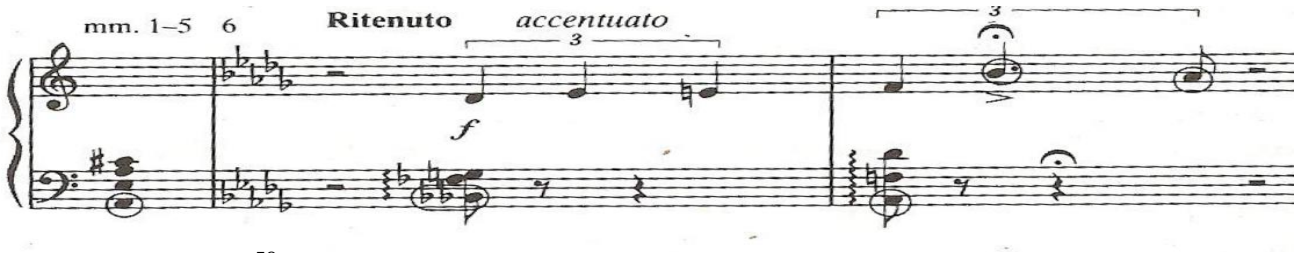


Figure 7. Example 3.a.[59]

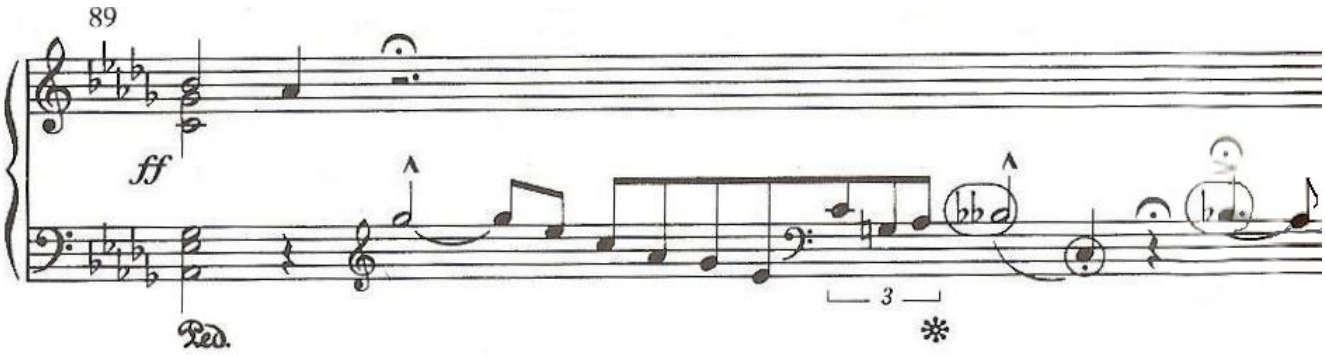


Figure 8. Example 3.b.[60]

"*Sonnetto 104*" is one of the best known and the most virtuosic of the sonnets. It is extremely lyrical and expressive, and the music speaks for itself. The music reflects the meaning of the lyrics. The lyrics are quite ominous, including words and phrases such as "fear," "grief," and "hate both life and death." Also, it conveys the feelings that a lover has when he "flies o'er heaven." The poetry reveals the sense of fatality of the inamorato: "this is my state, my lady, thus I am because of you." Through his very melodic and improvisational passages, Liszt "makes the piano soar like a bird."[61] This sonnet is the most played of the three.

"*Sonetto 123*" begins with the phrase "*Io vidi in terra*," once again depicting the veneration for his beloved one. The man is overwhelmed by the one with "two bright eyes,

[59]R. Larry Todd, *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 404.
[60]Ibid.
[61]Walker, *The Man and his Music*, 123.

which many a time have put the sun to shame."[62] From the beginning, the *lento placido* tempo (slow and calm) introduces a wandering, ever-changing atmosphere; from the first diminished chord through the next fourteen measures, the harmony never cadences but floats in gentle anticipation. The melody has an improvised, pastoral quality "like the declarative Italianate song with a free, *rubato* rhythm of a village ballad singer."[63] In the final section, the music reprises much of the introductory material but still there is no cadence. At the very last five measures before the end, two alternating chords (A♭ and E Major ninth) hover over a repeating enharmonic pedal point (A♭=G♯) quietly bringing the piece to a close.

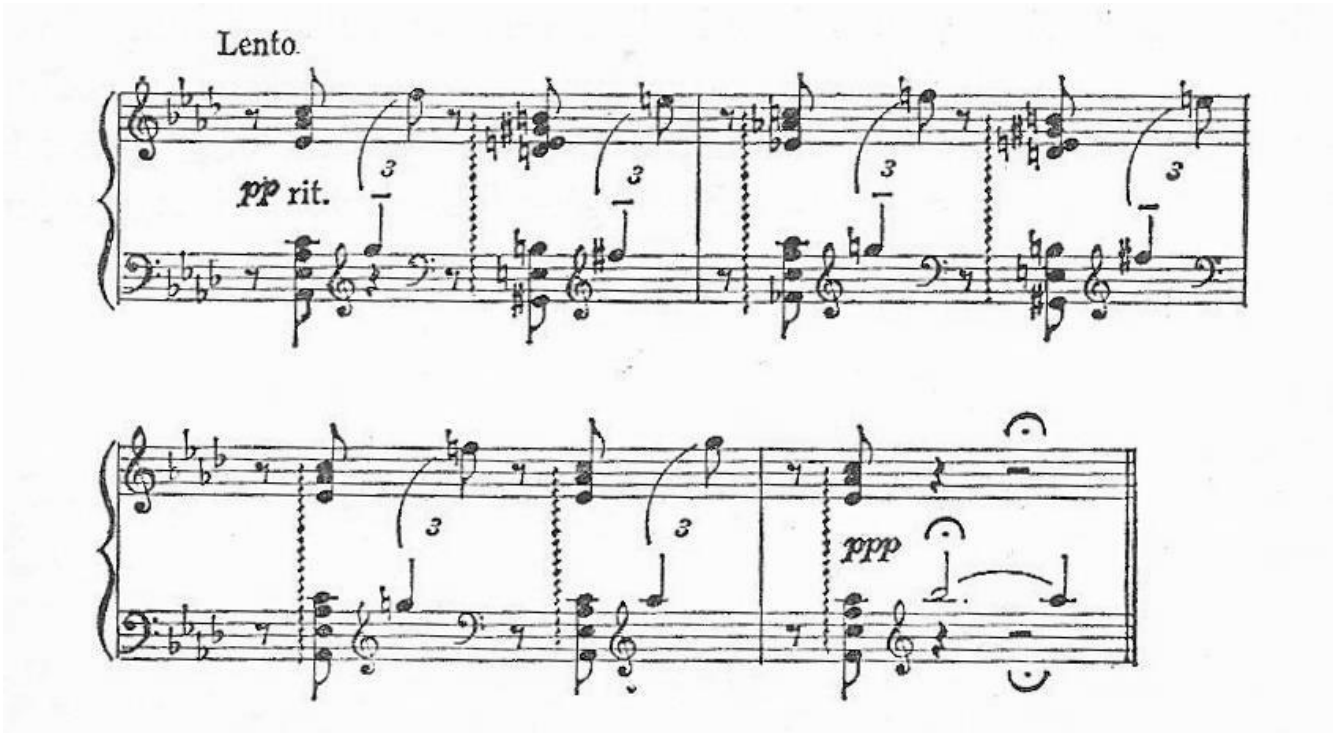


Figure 9. Ex. 4.

[62]*Lionel Salter*, "*I' vidi in terra angelici costumi* (I beheld on earth angelic grace)" (2003). Available from: The Lied and Art Song Texts Page <http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=12664.

[63]"Review." Available from: Answers.com <http://www.answers.com/topic/sonetto-del-petrarca-no-123-i-vidi-in-terra-angelica-costumi-ii-for-piano-ann-es-ii-6-s-161-6-lw-a55-6>.

The *Dante* Sonata

The *Dante* Sonata represents the climactic point of the entire cycle. It is the most outstanding piece from the entire cycle, due to its great length and complexity. Although written during the same period as the other pieces from the album**,** the final version was printed twenty years later than the Italian period.

As the title of the work suggests the inspiration for the piece was Dante Alighieri, a remarkable figure of the Middle Ages. However, Dante was not the only inspirational source for the Sonata. Liszt's contemporary, the French writer Victor Hugo, wrote a poem entitled "*Après une Lecture de Dante*" that inspired Liszt to write his Sonata. Although this Sonata seeks to portray scenes from the *Divine Comedy*, the piece follows only a general narrative plan, unlike the other pieces from *Années de Pèlerinage.* Liszt deliberately related the piece to the poem without citing it directly because, like Hugo, he wanted to offer "his personal response to Dante's work."[64]

Contrasting to the other pieces from the Italian volume is Liszt's new idea about the sonata and fantasia forms that contributes to the innovatory nineteenth-century piano sonata form. He approaches the sonata form from the principle of recycling material in a continuous, one movement form. Another distinct feature in his work is the use of the tritone figure as part of the primary thematic material that recurs at major structural points. Those two crucial aspects in Liszt's compositional approach in the *Dante* Sonata will be discussed thoroughly in the following chapter.

[64]Gibbs and Gooley, *Franz Liszt and his World,* 30.

The linkage between all pieces from the Italian album relates to the fundamental topics of human existence: love and death. Love, or the conception of "woman sublime," dominates "*Sposalizio*," "*Canzonetta*," and all three *Petrarch Sonnets* while death is emphasized in "*Il Penseroso*" as well as in his other piano works written in 1839—"*Malédiction*" and "*Totentanz.*" Liszt's reflection upon love and death was in accordance with current fashions in the Romantic period. The Romantic age praised ideal love and placed it beyond and outside the ordinary range of human experience or understanding. In this second volume, Liszt apparently sought to indicate the relationship between an earthly and transcendent existence. Most likely, "*Sposalizio*" and the *Dante* Sonata embrace this point of view. Raphael's *Sposalizio* portrays the Virgin in the "most human of actions," yet with behavior that has been seen as "celestial and divine." In the musical description of the *Dante* Sonata there are some hints pointing to the *Inferno* where Dante faces the afterlife "in its most horrible form; the message conveyed is that man's early transgression will be dealt with in the afterlife."[65] In major points, Liszt's sonata also suggests the "power of love" through Dante's muse, Beatrice, who becomes the mediator between the poet and God. The "*Canzonetta*" also pertains to the idea of love; however, it refers exclusively to the profane love, the feeling, the desire, and "emotions of physical love." The same idea saturates the sonnets. Significantly, Liszt places the sonata after the "Sonnets" to follow an "expressive purpose." The onward motion accents "transcendent experiences that are related to the human experience of love."[66]

The unity between the sonata and the preceding three pieces is clearly revealed, not just through the literary topics, but also through an evident cyclic architectural plan; the pieces extend a series of ascending and descending third relationships. The *Dante* Sonata again shows a

[65]Todd, *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, 403.
[66]Ibid.

close relation to the preceding sonnet, the "*Sonnetto123*" in particular, where the final pitch, A♭, functions as a reinforced enharmonic leading tone (G#) to the very first note of the sonata, which begins on an A dominant chord.[67]

Sposalizio	***Penseroso***	***Canzonetta***	***Sonnets***			***Dante***Sonata
			47	*104*	*123*	
E	**c♯**	**A**	**D♭**	**E**	**A**	**d/D**

Figure 10. Tonal relationships.

Appendix to the Second Year of *Années*

One year after the publication of the second book, Liszt brings to the public an appendix to the Italian album entitled *Venezia e Napoli.* This supplement is published in the Schott edition of 1861.The set of the three pieces bears a different character than the other pieces from the Italian book. They are written under a strong influence of opera and folk songs. Revision was very common in Liszt's compositional style. Therefore, Liszt released an old set of pieces written in 1840 under the collective style (S 159)--*Lento, Allegro, Andante placido,* and "*Tarantelles napolitaines."* When Liszt revised the collection, he reduced the set to three pieces to be played without pause. The first two pieces from the collection were put away unrevised. Liszt later recast the *Lento* in his symphonic poem *Tasso.*[68]

The three pieces from the set are based on pre-existing themes. The first, "*Gondoliera*," is based on Rossini's "*Canzone del Cavaliere Peruchini*" and "*La biondina in Gondoletta*," the second piece, "*Canzone*," is based on "*Canzone del Gondoliere (nel 'Otello') di Rossin*," and the

[67]Todd, *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, 403.
[68]Arnold, *The Liszt Companion*, 88.

third, "*Tarantella*," is a transcription of a Neapolitan song by Guillaume Louis Cottrau.

The third book of *Années* was completed almost four decades later. Composed between 1867-1877 and published in 1883, the pieces were written while Liszt was traveling on a regular basis to Budapest, Weimar, and Rome. Hence they were inspired by Italian places: "*Aux cyprès de la Villa d' Este I: Thrénodie*" ("To the Cypresses of the Villa d'Este I: Threnody") "*Aux cyprès de la Villa d' Este II: Thrénodie*" ("To the Cypresses of the Villa d'Este II: Threnody"). These pieces depict a park in Tivoli near Rome notable for "their beautiful cypress trees and the ceaseless play of their hundreds of fountains."[69]

The last album of the *Années* is rather a spiritual journey. It describes Liszt's reflection on death and consolation through religion and culminates in his expression of personal loss and longing for his homeland. The reflection on death is described through the four pieces of the album: "*Angélus! Prière aux anges gardiens*" ("Angelus! Prayer to the Guardian Angel"), "*Sunt lacrymae rerum/En mode hongrois*" ("There are Tears for Things/ In the Hungarian Mode"), "*Marche funèbre*" ("Funeral March"), "*Sursum corda*" ("Lift Up Your Hearts"). The virtuosity is lacking with the exception of "*Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d' Este*" ("The Fountains of the Villa d' Este") which demands much sensibility and dexterity from the performer. Liszt's "*Jeux d'eaux"* foreshadows Ravel's "*Jeux d' eau"* through its impressionistic atmosphere and realization and constitutes the masterpiece of the set.

In sum, the "Pilgrimage Years" represents the first real manifestation of Liszt as a composer. The depiction of nature, of landscapes, the engagement of art and literature, the spiritual journey, all combined with the musical expression found in *Années* establish Liszt as one of the most important Romantic composers.

[69]Walker, *The Man and his Music*, 154.

CHAPTER TWO

The Origin of the *Dante* Sonata

In many ways, the *Dante* Sonata is one of the most controversial pieces of *Années de Pèlerinage.* Liszt began to sketch it in 1839, along with the Petrarch Sonnets, later adding a few revisions. Each revision carries a different title and each revision suggests an explicit literary conception. The first version of the piece named *Fragment nach Dante* or *Fragment dantesque* implies "an unfinished form that, for Romantic poetry in particular pointed to the infinite by its very incompleteness."[70]

A subsequent version from 1849 bears the title *Paralipomènes à la Divina Commedia: Fantasie Symphonique pour Piano*. The title refers to material omitted from the body of the text stated as a supplement. After the completion, in a later revision in 1852, Liszt changes the title to *Fantasia quasi Sonata Prolegomènes zu Dantes Göttlicher Comödie,* indicating that Liszt changed his mind and preferred "not to append but to preface his music to a reading of the text."[71]

The final version, entitled *Aprés une Lecture du Dante (Fantasie quasi Sonata),* was incorporated as the seventh piece into the "Second Year" of *Années de Pèlerinage*. This final version was completed between 1853 and 1856 and published in the Schott edition of 1858. This version of the piece is inspired by Victor Hugo's poem *Aprés une Lecture de Dante* from the volume of poetry *Les Voix intérieur* (Inner Voices.) Although the piece maintains the same title

[70]David Trippett, "*Après une Lecture de Liszt:* Virtuosity and *Werktreue* in the *'Dante'* Sonata,"*19tt Century Music* 32 (2008), 56.
[71]Trippett, "*Après une Lecture de Liszt,* 56.

as Hugo's poem, Liszt replaces the preposition *de* with *du* rather on purpose "drawing on the German practice of using the definite article to refer to a famous person ... and attempting to translate this into French."[72] The retention of the title *Fantasie quasi Sonata* is alluding to Beethoven's *Sonata quasi una fantasia.*

The *Fragment dantesque* Manuscripts

The two existing fragments of what would become the *Dante* Sonata can be dated around the same time of Liszt's performances of the *Fragment dantesque***.** Liszt performed this version in a private performance given at *Hôtel de l' Europe* in Paris on the 25th of October in 1839 whereas the first public performance of the piece took place in Vienna on the 5th of December.[73] The two surviving fragments of the *Dante* Sonata capture two characteristic musical elements that Liszt would keep as "bookends in the final published sonata. The blank staves and paper types indicate that sketches were not surviving shards from a full manuscript...they were never intended to be 'complete' for the purposes of his performances in 1839-1840."[74] Instead, these sketches may have functioned as a guide in his "planned improvisation."[75]

The similarities between the *Dante* Sonata and the first manuscript on pg.31 are easily to be noticed. For example the tonality and the time signature are preserved, the notes are the same; the only visible discrepancies are the octaves and harmonic chords in the left hand that are doubled by the right hand. The doubling of chords and melody along with the monotonous rhythm indicates the fact that this first version was an incomplete sketch, which would later

[72]Trippett, "*Après une Lecture de Liszt*, 56.
[73]See preface from the album *Années de Pèlerinage,* edited by Imre Sulyok, Imre Mezö.
[74]Ibid.
[75]Trippett, *Après une Lecture de Liszt*, 56.

allow Liszt's imagination take over. From the following copy we may ascertain that the use of tritones in the opening of the piece, along with the title itself, suggest Liszt's attempt to establish a thematic program, in particular to Dante's *Inferno*.

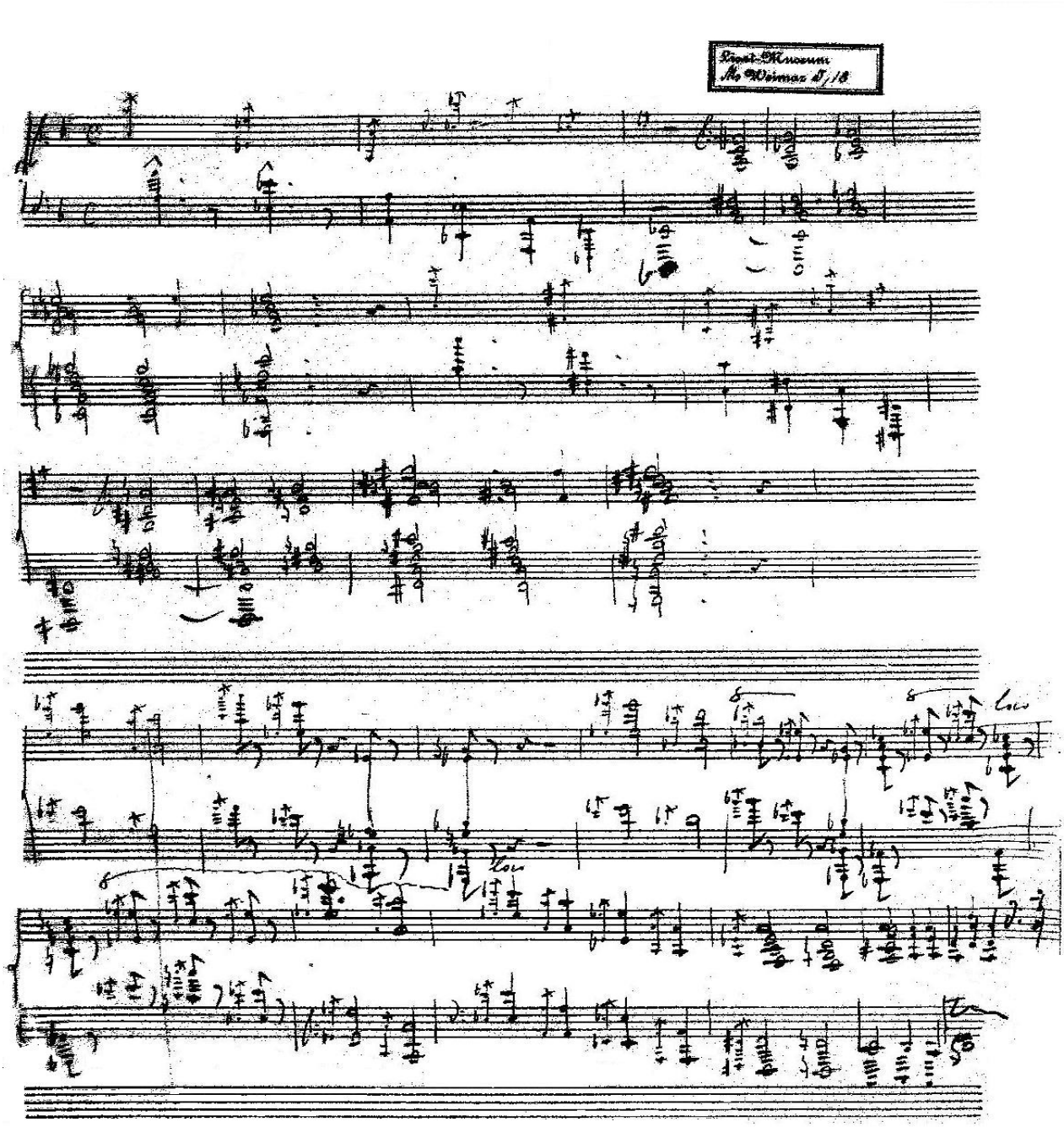


Figure 11. Liszt's first sketch for the opening of the *Dante* Sonata, ca.1839; MS I 18, no.1.[76]

[76]Trippett, *Après une Lecture de Liszt*, 57.

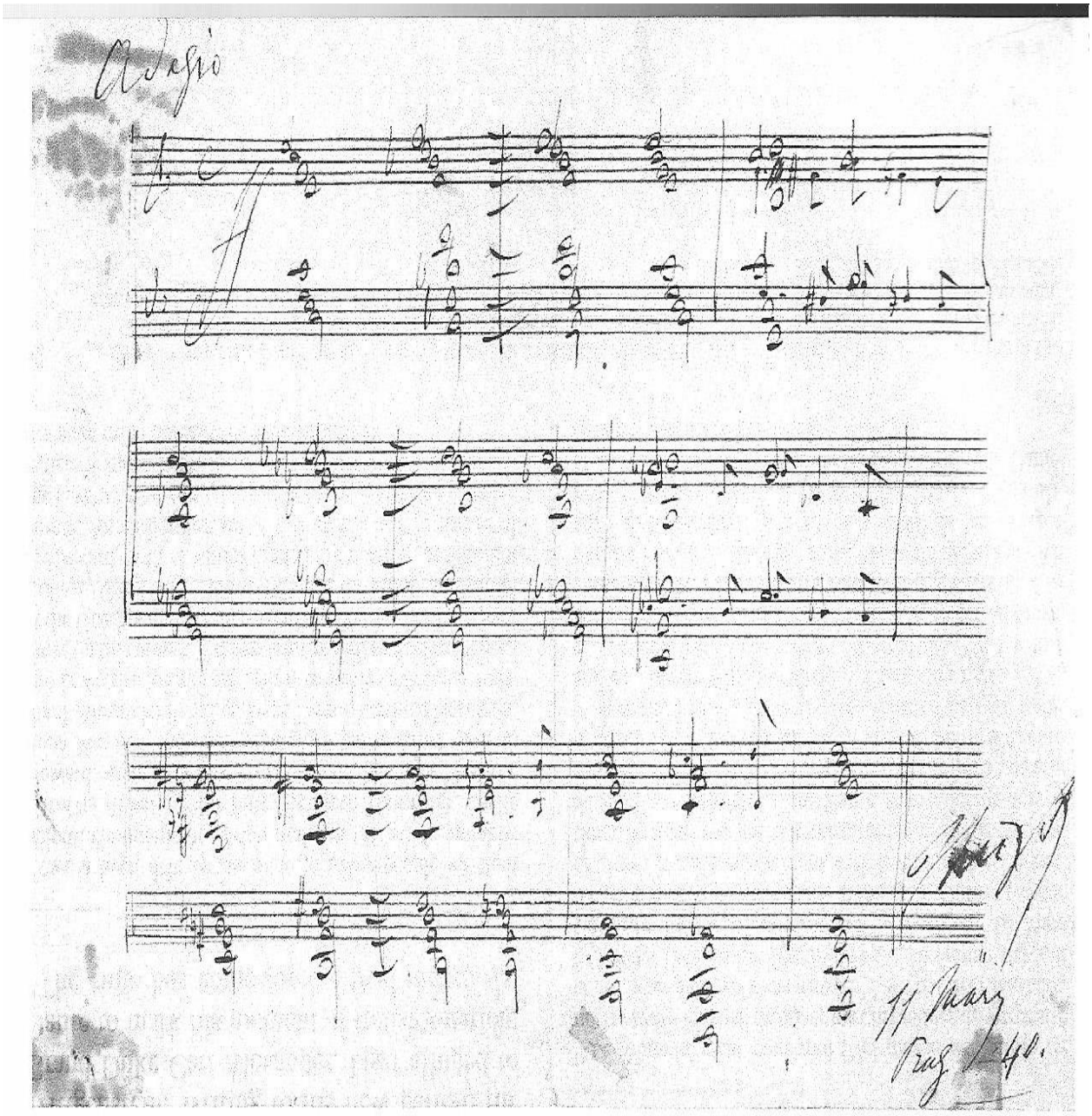


Figure 12. A sketch of the *Dante* Sonata's diatonic theme, dated 11 March1840.MS 1C.51.[77]

The second photocopy exhibits a manuscript apparently unrelated to the piece; it exposes a major chord progression written and found in the personal art-poetry album of a female

[77]Trippett, *Après une Lecture de Liszt*, 58.

admirer in Prague, "implying that Liszt performed there and copied the music."[78] The fact that the chord progression is written in C while the traditional version of the progression occurs in the keys of F♯ and D may suggest that Liszt was either attempting to simplify the composition for his admirer or aiming to create a characteristically improvisatory performance.[79] This manuscript resides in Prague State Conservatory while all other sources from the *Dante* Sonata may be found in *Goethe und Schiller- Archiv* in Weimar.

Ramann versus Winklhofer

The circumstances of writing the *Dante* Sonata are a matter of contention. Lina Ramann was Liszt's first biographer. At the composer's request she published *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch (*Franz Liszt as Man and Artist, written in Leipzig between 1880-1894).[80] Ramann's biography, written in three volumes, remains an authoritative source for many of Liszt's biographers, especially with regards to the period of Liszt's pilgrimage to Switzerland and Italy.

However, David Trippett and Sharon Winklhofer, among other musicologists, believe that Ramann's biography presents inaccurate evidence about Liszt's life and work. The most misleading affirmations are in the first volume regarding the 1830s. "Ramann's '*Liszt'* presented a falsely benign portrait of the composer in the 1830s, that essential information on his activities and interior life was lacking, and that individual pieces as well as entire collections were incorrectly dated."[81]

In the biography Ramann states that Liszt left Milan in the summer of 1837 to work on

[78]Trippett, *Après une Lecture de Liszt,* 58.
[79]Ibid., 56.
[80]Sharon Winklhofer, "Marie d'Agoult, and the 'Dante' Sonata," *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (July 1977), 15.
[81]Ibid.

his masterpiece, the Dante Sonata, at Lake Como during a vacation that he spent with his beloved:

> The great heat did not keep Liszt in Milan for long, impelling him toward Lake Como, nearby, where, with the Countess d' Agoult, he rented a villa in Bellagio. Here he lived until February 1838...the residence in Bellagio was for him a period of inward bliss, one of those few in his liaison over which a cloudless sky prevailed. No swarm of Muse-seeking artists crowded around them here; there was peace in both hearts. The Countess found herself in one of those moments when the voice of nature forces all worldly interests to silence, even in the vainest woman.

The author continues describing the circumstances:

> The two travelers spent most of their days on the lake, whose picturesque, rocky shoreline enticed them with ever-new excursions. During the fiercest heat of the day, they fled to the shade of the tropical trees at the Villa Melzi, and read the Italian's poet *Divine Comedy* at the foot of Comolli' s statue, '*Beatrice leading Dante*'... Liszt was often seen alone, absorbed in contemplating the nocturnal heavens...But these days of dreaming were not entirely given over to poetic moods...Some of his most precious (musical) flowers, filled with character and poetry rather than lyricism, originated here. Not only the surrounding charms of nature, but also his reading contributed to these pieces. It was here that the beginning of his Italian Album was conceived...first work he composed belonged to his sojourn in Bellagio. It was an echo of his reading in Dante, entitled: *Fantaisie quasi Sonata aprés une lecture de Dante*.

Contrary to Ramann's account, it was not the “great heat” that drove the couple from Milan to Bellagio. The Countess was visibly pregnant and giving birth to an illegitimate infant in a place such as Milan, “a provincial town” where Liszt was acclaimed as the “Paganini of the piano,” would have possibly exposed the Countess to a great degree of defamation. Ramann's affirmation that Liszt and Marie spent several months in Bellagio until February 1838, during

which time supposedly the Sonata was written, is inaccurate too. Actually, the couple relocated several times. "Their visit to Bellagio took up only two months of the period from August to February. They never rented the Villa Melzi, as Ramann claimed, nor was their daughter born there on December 24."[82] Ramann implies that the lovers' time spent reading and resting at the foot of Giovanni Battista Comolli's statue *Beatrice leading Dante* and that this might be the closest inspirational source for Liszt's Sonata and also that the iconic Dante and Beatrice embody the ideal love for Liszt and the Countess.

Winklhofer challenges both of Ramann's statements. Ramann affirms that Liszt and Marie visited just one day the Villa Melzi Park where the statuary group was located. However, Winklhofer argues that this period was too short for it to have had such an impact either upon their relationship or as a source for the conception of the *Dante* Sonata.

There are at least two documented statements made by the composer and his muse which seem to support Winklhofer's claim. On the day of their visit to Villa Melzi, Marie confessed in her diary, "The Villa Melzi has a lovely garden. Valéry wrongly praises the group of *Beatrice leading Dante*. The Dante in particular is a common and deplorably vulgar piece."[83] Also Liszt's confession about Comolli's statue is not one of admiration. "'*Beatrice leading Dante*.' What a subject! And what a shame that the sculptor has so poorly understood it! That he carved for Beatrice a plump, maternal woman; for Dante, something shabby, stunted, like a poor beggar rather than as the *Signor del' altissimo canto,* the very words he himself applied to Homer. But to comprehend Dante requires a Michelangelo!"[84]

Ramann errs in asserting that the pair studied Dante's *Divine Comedy* during their stay at

[82]Winklhofer, "Marie d'Agoult, and the 'Dante' Sonata," 17.
[83]D' Agoult, *Mémoires*, 109.
[84]Franz Liszt, *Pages romantiques*, ed. Jean Chantavoine (Paris: 1912), 167.

Lake Como, although "they might have done so during an earlier stage of their relationship."[85] In all the letters and diaries of both Liszt and Marie there is no evidence that they read or even glanced at Dante's *Divine Comedy* during the period that Ramann suggests. "Liszt usually spent his afternoons composing at the piano; by the end of December he had completed his *Grandes Études* and the *Album d'un voyageur: Impressions et poésis.*"[86] Meanwhile, the Countess is preoccupied with writing letters or confessing in her diary. Her favorite books, among others, are Goethe's *Lettres sur l'Italie*, Vasari's *Lives,* and *The History of the Italian Republics in the Middle Ages*, by Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi, tomes that Franz finds "heavy, boring and unbearable."[87]

The real circumstances of drafting the Dante Sonata are documented by the Countess's letter. According to her statement, the couple moved in the beginning of 1839 from Rome to San Rossore where Liszt started to work on the first version of the piece. Liszt's first documented mention of the prospective work, referred to as *Eine Symphonie zu Dantes Divina Commedia,* appears in February 1839 in his diary *Journal des Zÿi*:

> If I feel within me the strength and life, I will attempt a symphonic composition based on Dante, then another on Faust- within three years- meanwhile I will make three sketches: *The Triumph of Death* (Orcagna), *the Comedy of Death* (Holbein) *and a Fragment dantesque.*

In a letter to Henri Lehmann that same year (1839), Marie d' Agoult affirms that the work on *Fragment dantesque* for keyboard had begun on the 26th September 1839[88]:

[85]Humphrey Searle, *The Music of Liszt* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), 32.
[86]D' Agoult, *Mémoires*, 129.
[87]Ibid., 114.
[88]Ibid., 160.

> *Le*[sic] *bravo suonatore* began this morning a *Fragment dantesque* which is sending him to the very Devil. He is so consumed by it that he won't go to Naples in order to be able to complete this work destined to remain in his sketched portfolio.

Nine months later, Liszt considered publishing the piece. On the 22nd of September 1840, he tells Marie that he had been revising some parts of the *Fragment dantesque* along with another piece entitled "*Tarantelles*".[89] Later, Liszt decided to put *Fragment dantesque* away until 1849.

By the time he decided to revisit his dream of writing a "*dantesque*" masterpiece, things had changed drastically in Liszt's life. He was born anew and started a new life. He had already left Italy and moved to Weimar, Germany. Here he devoted a significant part of his time worshiping God and was drawn closer to philosophy and religion more than ever. Secondly, he had brought to an end his passionate relationship with Marie and had found a new muse to inspire him, the Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. Regarding his musicianship, Liszt made a drastic change. He retired from the concert stage, stopped playing as a virtuoso pianist, and in spite of his tremendous success and disappointed admirers, became the *Kapelmeister* for his new patron, the Grand Duke Carl Alexander. In a letter addressed to the Duke, Liszt draws parallels between Dante and himself to mark his moment of transformation: "The time has come for me [he was thirty-five years old] to break out of my virtuoso's chrysalis and allow my thought unfettered flight."[90] What Liszt tries to imply with this affirmation is that he ultimately "metamorphosed from virtuoso-as-caterpillar...that his emphasis moved from virtuosity toward interpretation."[91] Liszt continues, now quoting Dante, "Midway in the journey of our life/ I found myself within a dark forest, /for the straight way was lost" (*nel mezzo del cammin di*

[89]Winklhofer, "Marie d'Agoult, and the 'Dante' Sonata," 30.
[90]Trippett, *Après une Lecture de Liszt*, 53.
[91]Ibid.

nostra vita/ mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,/ che la diritta via era smarrita). By quoting the *Divine Comedy,* Liszt compares himself to Dante whose thirty-fifth year in 1300, the "midpoint" in life's biblically allotted span, marked the beginning of a divine awakening.[92] Similar to Dante, Liszt was experiencing a period of transformation at this pivotal age. At thirty-five Liszt gave his final performance at Elisavetgrad, abandoning the stage to focus on composing what would become part of the musical canon.

Why Dante?

Among the elite of nineteenth-century France, Dante was hailed as one of the most important, legendary figures. He was known as the prophetic reformer of Christian theology and a hero searching for the universal Truth, characteristics which suited the preoccupation of the elite in the Romantic period. The most influential figures of the French Romantic period including Chateaubriand, Mme de Staël, Gautier, Delacroix, and Stendhal all found Dante very relevant. Dante serves as a character model in their works. Stendhal described Dante as "the romantic poet *par excellence.*"

Personalities of the Renaissance were rather *en vogue* during Liszt's first arrival in Paris. "Every artist's atelier contained volumes of Dante as well as Shakespeare, Goethe, Byron and Scott, and ladies of fashion wrapped themselves in turbans and veils to recreate *le moyen-âge*." [93] Liszt was an intellectual passionate about literature and a great admirer of the Renaissance poets. Therefore, much like the journeying characters of Sénancour and Byron, Liszt identifies with Dante. For example he sees in himself, as well as Dante, a pilgrim embarking on a spiritual

[92]Trippett, *Après une Lecture de Liszt,* 53.
[93]Winklhofer, "Marie d'Agoult, and the 'Dante' Sonata," 21.

voyage in search of Truth. "The Hell thus reified by Dante... as a series of spiritual states through which Everyman must pass in the journey through life."[94] His admiration for Dante led him to compose a symphony of the same program depicting Dante's voyage through Hell and Purgatory in its two movements, in addition to the Dante Sonata. Liszt found another striking similarity—Dante, too, was being led by a muse.

Liszt became sensitive to the "Dante-Beatrice ideal" when celebrity writers like Mme de Staël, N. Lenau, and V. Hugo perceived them as the Romantic idyllic love relationship. In the *Divine Comedy*, Beatrice is an important, symbolic figure. Also, she serves as the allegorical image of Dante's soul in *La Vita Nuova*. She represents for Dante "the ultimate source of comfort for earthly pains, and the Blessed One whose perfection allowed her to look upon the face of the Lord."[95]

The Controversy Surrounding Hugo's Poem

Après une lecture de Dante	**After Reading Dante**
Quand le poète peint l'enfer, il peint sa vie:	The poet, when he painted hell, was painting
Sa vie, ombre qui fuit de spectres poursuivie;	His life: a fleeing shade, ghosts at his back;
Forêt mystérieuse où ses pas effrayés	An unknown forest where his timid footsteps
S'égarent à tâtons hors des chemins frayés;	Had lost their way, strayed from the beaten track;
Noir voyage obstrué de rencontres difformes;	A somber journey clogged with strange encounters,
Spirale aux bords douteux, aux profondeurs énormes,	A spiral--its depth vast, its boundaries blurred-
Dont les cercles hideux vont toujours plus avant	Whose hideous circles went forever onward
Dans une ombre où se meut l'enfer vague et vivant!	Through the dark where hell's creatures dimly stirred.
Cette rampe se perd dans la brume indécise;	There were complaints perched upon every parapet:
Au bas de chaque marche une plainte est assise,	The steps vanished in vague obscurity,
Et l'on y voit passer avec un faible bruit	Within those dismal regions of grim darkness
Des grincements de dents blancs dans la sombre nuit.	White teeth seemed to be gnashing plaintively
Là sont les visions, les rêves, les chimères;	Visions were there, reveries, and chimeras,
Les yeux que la douleur change en sources amères,	Eyes turned by sorrow into bitter springs,
L'amour, couple enlacé, triste, et toujours brûlant,	Love, a yoked couple, ever burning, wounded,

[94]Milton Klonsky, *Blake's Dante: The Complete Illustrations to the Divine Comedy* (New York: Harmony Books, 1980), 10.

[95]Winklhofer, "Marie d'Agoult, and the 'Dante' Sonata," 22.

Qui dans un tourbillon passe une plaie au flanc;	Whirling along in wretched spiralings;
Dans un coin la vengeance et la faim, sœurs impies,	Revenge and famine, those rash sisters, squatting
Sur un crâne rongé côte à côte accroupies;	Together by a well-gnawed human head
Puis la pâle misère, au sourire appauvri;	In one dark corner, next to them, ambition
L'ambition, l'orgueil, de soi-même nourri,	Pale smiling misery; pride, ever fed
Et la luxure immonde, et l'avarice infâme,	On its own flesh, vile lechery; foul avarice -
Tous les manteaux de plomb dont peut se charger l'âme!	All of the leaden cloaks that burden souls!
Plus loin, la lâcheté, la peur, la trahison	Further along, fear, cowardice, and treachery,
Offrant des clefs à vendre et goûtant du poison;	With keys for sale, and drink in poisoned bowls;
Et puis, plus bas encore, et tout au fond du gouffre,	Deeper still, at the bottom of the chasm,
Le masque grimaçant de la Haine qui souffre!	Was the tormented mask of suffering hate.
Oui, c'est bien là la vie, ô poète inspiré,	Yes, poet, that is life indeed -- we plod through
Et son chemin brumeux d'obstacles encombré	Just such a foggy obstacle-clogged state!
Mais, pour que rien n'y manque, en cette route étroite	But to complete the scene, on this cramped way was
Vous nous montrez toujours debout à votre droiteVirgil;	Virgil; his brow was calm, and his eyes shone,
Le génie au front calme, aux yeux pleins de rayons,	He stood at your right hand, constantly visible,
Le Virgile serein qui dit: Continuons!	Serenely telling you: "Keep going on!"[96]

Liszt was familiar with Hugo's lyric poetry through the Countess's admiration for his lyrics. He dedicated to Marie a set of songs based on selected poems from Hugo's works *Chants du Crépuscule*, *Les Voix intérieures*, and *Rayons et ombres*. Possibly between 1842 and 1844, Liszt became familiar with V. Hugo's cycle *Les Voix intérieures* (1837), "for in that time he had employed the text of the thirty-first poem in the same set for his song '*La Tombe et la rose*'."[97] Once he was settled in Weimar, Liszt reviewed the poem *"Après une lecture de Dante"* from the cycle *Les Voix intérieures* and used the title as the final source for his Fantasie/Sonata. Although serving as the title of Liszt's composition, Hugo's poem may not have contributed to the birth of the Sonata *per se*. The titles *Fragment dantesque* and *Paralipomènes à la Divina Commedia* both reveal that the central idea of the piece was Dante and, specifically, his *Divine Comedy*, rather than Hugo's poem. This speculation is confirmed by a brief examination of the poem which refers exclusively to a picture of Dante's Inferno, excluding themes such as Purgatory, Paradise,

[96]A.M. and E.H. Blackmore, trans., *Selected Poems of Victor Hugo: A Bilingual Edition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 82-85.

[97]Winklhofer, "Marie d'Agoult, and the 'Dante' Sonata," 30.

and Beatrice contained in the Divine Comedy. Hugo's poem alludes to some of the leading characters in the Comedy, to Virgil and to Francesca da Rimini. On the contrary the episode about Francesca da Rimini figures largely in the Dante Symphony while "no flight of the imagination is capable of detecting any hint of the role of Virgil in Liszt's music."[98]

Another aspect that may dispel any theories that Liszt's work was inspired by Hugo's poem is that the poem itself is not printed in the score. In the case of the "*Canzonetta*," Liszt wrote the verses above the staves. Neither does the poem precede the music, as is the case with the previous pieces devoted to the Petrarch Sonnets in *Années de Pèlerinage*. Also, unlike Hugo's poem, Liszt's Sonata does not refer exclusively to the Inferno; beautiful flowing melodic lines and consonant harmonies may suggest the state of extreme happiness that is Dante's Paradise:

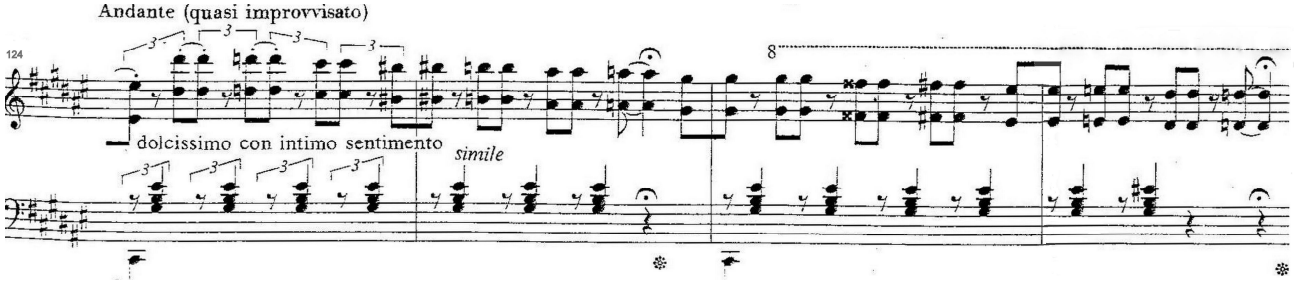


Figure 13. *Andante* (*quasi improvvisato*).

The following example (Figure 14) undoubtedly ranks among the beautiful passages in piano literature, and offers another view of ecstasy and sublime as depicted in Dante's Paradise.

[98]Walter Robert, "*Aprés une Lecture de Dante*, (*Fantasia quasi sonata*) of Liszt," *Piano Quarterly* 23/89 (Spring 1975), 26.

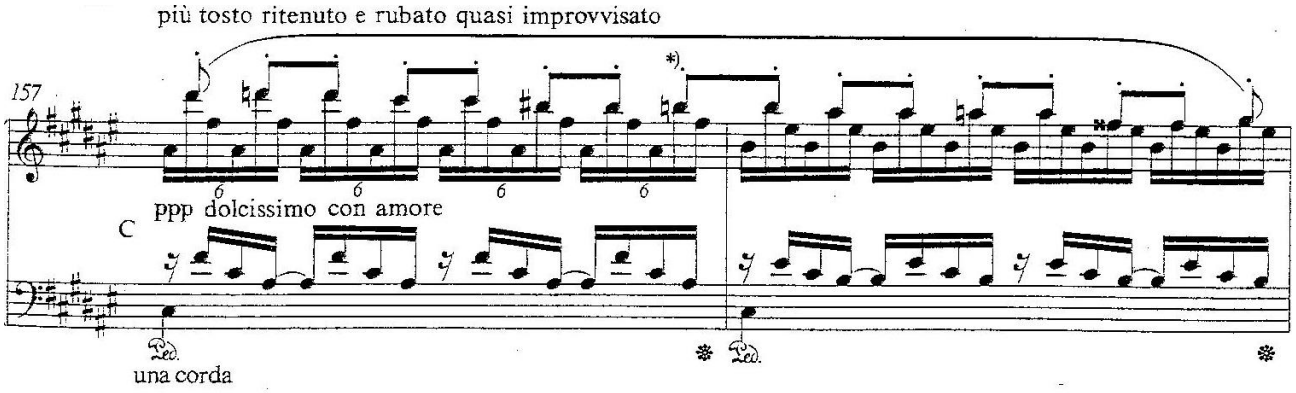


Figure 14. Mm. 157-158, marked *dolcissimo con amore*.

Although the subject of Liszt's aural representation here is uncertain, markings of *dolcissimo con intimo sentimento* or *dolcissimo con amore* certainly suggests that it is not a scene of the Inferno. Furthermore, Beatrice, who was not present in Hugo's poem, is represented in the Paradise episode of Liszt's sonata. Walter Roberts has coined the following passage of Beatrice's theme as "the basic motif in its neo-modal setting": [99]

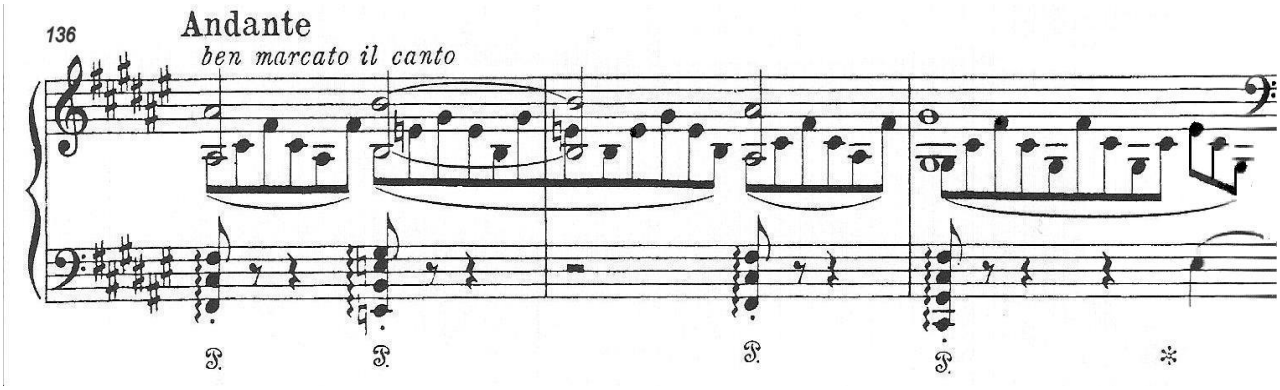


Figure 15. Beatrice's theme by Walter Roberts.

The question of symbolism in music is always treated as speculation and is very controversial due to subjectivity of human and oral perception. The descending tritones located in the initial measures prove to be quite controversial. For example, tritones have historically been labeled *diabolus in musica*, associated with the devil himself. However, the devil is barely

[99]Robert, "*Aprés une Lecture de Dante*, 26.

alluded to in Dante's poem and is less associated with evil, wrath, and malice conceptions than some have commonly held. "Dante speaks only of Lucifer as the fallen angel."[100] Although controversial, one may speculate that Liszt makes use of a series of tritones to characterize the following aspects of his hero's character: his fruitless search for Truth while being lost in confusion and doubt.[101] Nevertheless, the music doesn't follow Hugo's poem. However the Inferno and Paradise in Liszt's music are apparent.

Liszt brought his own interpretation to the story, and in addition he mastered through his unique improvisational style the major themes of the piece. Furthermore he exploited the maximum potential of the piano, challenged all pianists through difficult and virtuosic passages while creating a new stage in the evolution of the fantasia quasi sonata.

[100]Robert "Aprés une Lecture de Dante," 26.
[101]Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

The Form of the Sonata and its Significance

Liszt was a pioneering composer of great originality, and he proved to be rather innovative in the realm of musical form. At first glance, one may sense a lack of traditional formal structure in his other pieces from *Années de Pèlerinage*. They seem to be free of traditional binary, ternary, or sonata forms. Liszt, weary of conventional forms, begins an exodus from the canonical with his *Dante* Sonata.

In a letter to Louis Köhler written in 1856, Liszt confessed:

> [My works] are for me the necessary developments of my inner experiences, which have brought me to the conviction that *invention* and *feeling* are not so entirely *evil* in Art. Certainly you very rightly observe that the *forms* (which are too often changed by respectable people into *formulas*) 'First Subject, Middle Subject , After Subject, etc., many very much grow into a habit, because they must be so thoroughly natural, primitive, and very easily intelligible.' Without making the slightest objection to this opinion, I only beg for permission to be allowed to decide upon the forms by the contents, and even should this permission be withheld from me from the side of the most commendable criticism, I shall none the less go in my own modest way quite cheerfully.[102]

In his search Liszt found ways of expressing ideas by "the total integration of sonata elements into the fantasy structure in an original and inventive way."[103]

Tracing the sonata and fantasy principle to their origins will provide an increased

[102]Jackson Yi-Shun Leung, "A Selective Study of Sonata-Fantasies in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century" (D.M.A., diss., University of Cincinnati, 1990), 122.
[103]Ibid., 122.

understanding of Liszt's *Dante* Sonata. The term sonata originated in the sixteenth-century. The term *sonata* means "anything not sung but played."[104] Despite its early origins, the sonata's form did not become clearly defined until the Classical period. The Classical conception of the sonata describes it being "an instrumental piece [consisting] of two, three, or four successive movements of different character, which has one or more melody parts, with only one player to a part…. Depending on the number or *concertante*, melody parts that it has, a sonata is described as [being] *à solo*, *à due*, *à tré*, etc."[105] The sonata was one of the most important principles of musical form from the Classical period until the twentieth-century. A typical sonata first movement form comprises three main parts, integrated into a two-part tonal structure. The first part of the structure is called the 'exposition' and coincides with the first section. The second part of the structure comprises the remaining two sections, the 'development' and the 'recapitulation.' The exposition divides into a first theme in the tonic key while the second theme is in another key, usually the dominant. The movement concludes either with a cadence in the tonic mirroring the end of the exposition, or with a coda following the recapitulation

The term 'Fantasy' was adopted in the Renaissance for an instrumental composition. The fantasy originates from the Greek *phantasia*, which referred to the general senses of imagination, the product of the imagination, and caprice.[106] C.P.E. Bach defines a clear conception of the Fantasy: in his treatise "*Versuch über die Wahre Art das Klavier zu spielen"* (Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments):

> A Fantasia is said to be free when it is unmeasured and moves through more keys than is customary in other pieces, which are composed or improvised…A free fantasia consists of

[104]"Sonata," In *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev., edited by Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e9594> (accessed April 26, 2010).

[105]Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era*, 23

[106]Christopher D.S. Field, et al. "Fantasia." In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online* <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40048> (accessed April 26, 2010).

> varied harmonic progressions which can be exposed in all manner of figuration and motives. A key in which to begin and end must be established. Although no bar lines are employed, the ear demands a definite relationship in the succession and duration of the chords themselves…In a free fantasia modulation may be made to closely related, remote, and all other keys…[107]

Both the fantasy and sonata form had been independent principles until the very beginning of the nineteenth-century. Beethoven was the first to associate the two forms and to join them in his works, for example the Sonata op.27, no.1 and no.2, written in 1800-1801 for piano solo, carries the programmatic title "Sonata quasi una fantasia." Unlike his previous sonatas, Beethoven ventures away from formal traditions. In the "Sonata quasi una fantasia" Beethoven does not follow the traditional fast-slow-fast pattern, typical of sonatas. Instead, the first movement of Sonata op.27, no.1, starts with a slow *Andante* and, the first movement of Sonata op.27, no.2, starts with an *Adagio sostenuto*. It is particularly notable that in both sonatas Beethoven exploited the inherent strength and interest of sonata *Allegro* form by reserving the procedure in its special effect for the last movement rather than the first. This practice moderates the effect of mood and character changes between movements of a traditional sonata and leads toward the improvisatory nature and the sectional juxtapositions of a single movement fantasy. Although without the same denomination, the third movements, "*Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un Eroe*" from the Sonata op.26 and the "Tempest" Sonata with its disparate phrase structures, "the open-ended ness of its themes, and the interpolated passages in recitative style, also exhibit an amalgamation of the two forms."[108]

Beethoven's idea of unifying the formal structure of the sonata with the fantasy and the blending of their main characteristics has had a significant influence upon other composers. For

[107]Leung, "A Selective Study of Sonata-Fantasies,"10.
[108]Leung, "A Selective Study of Sonata-Fantasies,"16.

instance, Beethoven's influence is apparent in Schubert's "Wanderer Fantasy" op.15 for piano solo and the Fantasy in F Minor, op.103 for four hands. Specifically, both pieces comprise four contrasting movements. Contrary to his sonatas, all movements are connected, creating a one continuous gesture. In the "Wanderer Fantasy" the entire piece is based on a single basic motif from which all themes are developed. This motif which appears in the second movement is a sequence of variations on a melody extracted from Schubert's song "Der Wanderer." This idea of cyclic structure was utilized later by Berlioz, Franck, and others.

One of the master composers under Schubert's influence in using this cyclic structure was Franz Liszt. The "Wanderer Fantasy" was one of Liszt's favorite concert pieces, which he transcribed for piano and orchestra in 1851.[109] Under Schubert's influence of "encapsulating elements of several movements in one," Liszt composed the Dante Sonata, the *Grosses Konzertsolo* for two pianos, and the famous B Minor Sonata.[110] These three masterpieces exemplify Liszt's contribution to the nineteenth-century piano sonata. The *Grosses Konzertsolo* and the B Minor Sonata were written around 1850, and the Dante Sonata that was sketched earlier was completed around at the same time. It was in these pieces when Liszt had "worked out his approach to sonata form in the symphonic poems, and they share stylistic features not only among themselves but also with the symphonic poems."[111] The major element that the three pieces share in their respective openings is the relatively unstable melodic material and the lack of a clear tonic. "Idea thus determines form, for in each case the lack of tonic focus at the outset affects the balance of the resulting form."[112] Furthermore, in all pieces the second section is more stable thematically. Thus, Liszt presents the second part as the climax in the recapitulation

[109]Kenneth Hamilton, *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt,* 77.
[110]Ibid.
[111]Todd, *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, 418.
[112]Ibid., 418- 19.

unlike "its traditional location at the end of the development or the onset of the recapitulation."[113] The insertion of a slow section near midpoints is another innovative element that contributes to the development of the nineteenth-century sonata. The introduction of the *Andante* section in all three works affects the overall tonal shapes. In the *Dante* Sonata the *Andante* delicately continues the tension created by the tonality of the secondary thematic area while creating a free, improvisatory interlude. In the *Grosses Konzertsolo* the Andante section "serves as a decisive point of interruption: its overt tonal and thematic contrasts vitiate any strong sense of continuity."[114] In the B Minor Sonata, the *Andante sostenuto* disrupts "an unstable development to provide a sense of tonal stasis."[115]

One of the most distinctive features that each of the three pieces possesses is the use of certain thematic materials as unifying elements in their organization. For example in the *Dante* Sonata the tritone motive appears at the beginning of each section, except in the recapitulation where the motive appears at the end of the piece. The B Minor Sonata as well as the *Grosses Konzertsolo* "also uses unstable opening motives, of which one, the celebrated descending scale…serves a structurally unifying role related to that of the tritone motive in the *Dante* Sonata." [116]

The *Dante* Sonata, as aforementioned, is novel in its total integration of sonata elements into a fantasy design. The sonata starts with a slow introduction marked *Andante maestoso* comprising three distinct motives recurrent throughout the piece. The opening introduces, in a declamatory style, the tritone motive (motive x) in parallel octaves, veiling the tonic key. The tritone motive reappears frequently in various tonal areas, elaborating the tonal structure and

[113]Ibid.
[114]Ibid., 422.
[115]Ibid.
[116]Todd, *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, 423.

delaying, defining cadence on the tonic. The second motive (motive y) is marked *pesante* and with its chromatically related diminished and minor triads continues the established ominous character. The third motive (motive z), chilling and suspenseful, displaced metrically with its augmented seconds and triton ending heightens once more the drama.

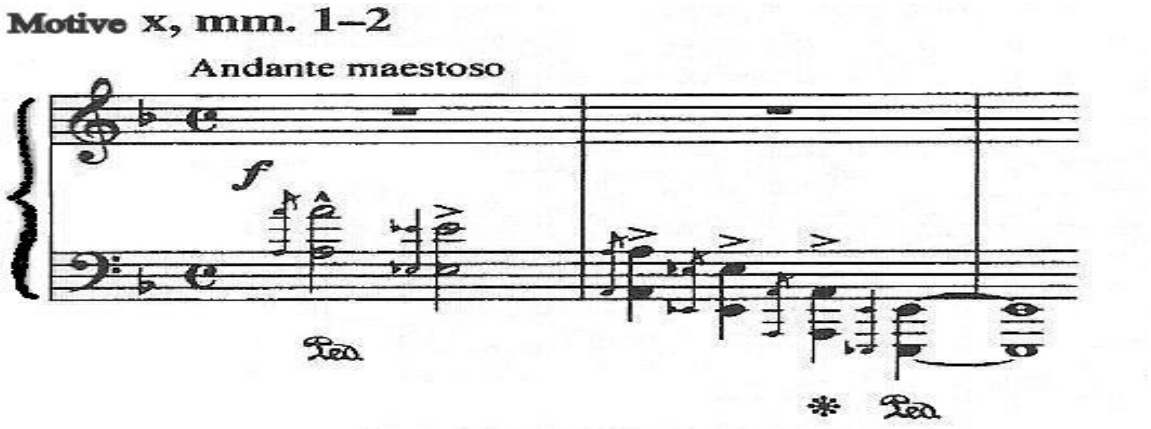


Figure 16. Motive x.

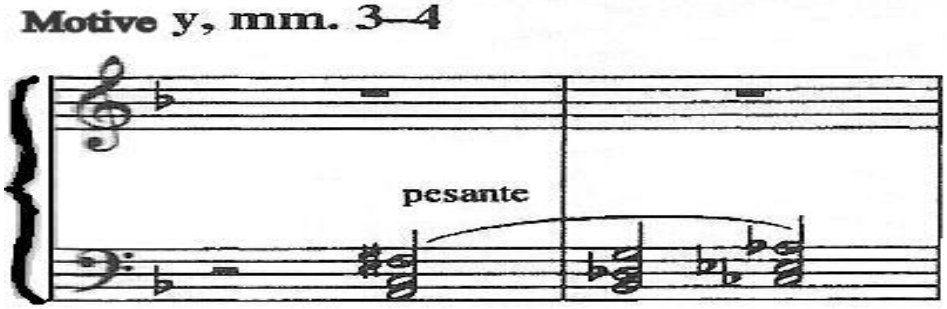


Figure 17. Motive y.

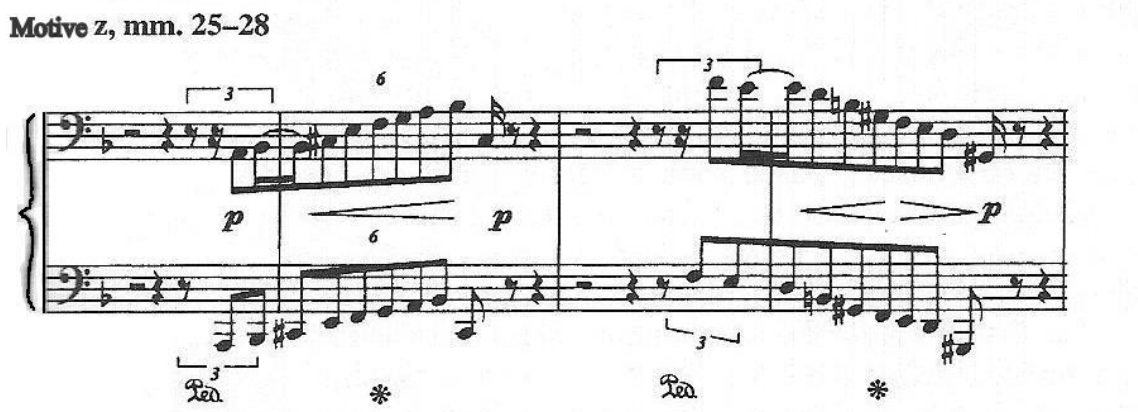


Figure 18. Motive z.

Those three motives x, y, z serve as introduction for the entrance of the first theme or as transitions to the second theme, as exemplified later in the chart on page 40. Finally with the entrance of the first theme in m. 30, the D Minor tonality is established.

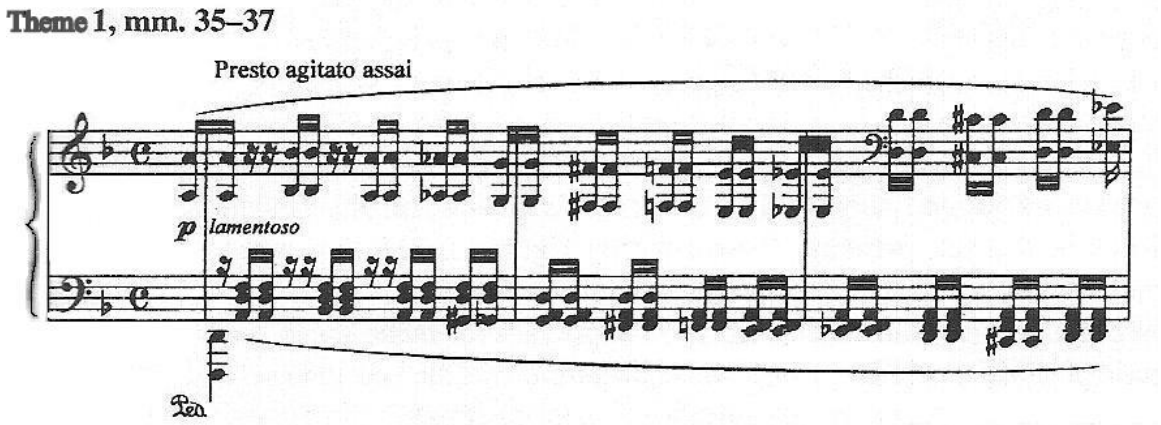


Figure 19. Theme 1.

The ‘tritone motive,’ motive “x,” is reinforced in the transition this time only in the left hand but has altered its interval to the interval of the perfect fifth. The motive leads into the second theme a choral-like theme in whole-note chords conflated with thunderous octaves.

Theme 2, mm. 103–107

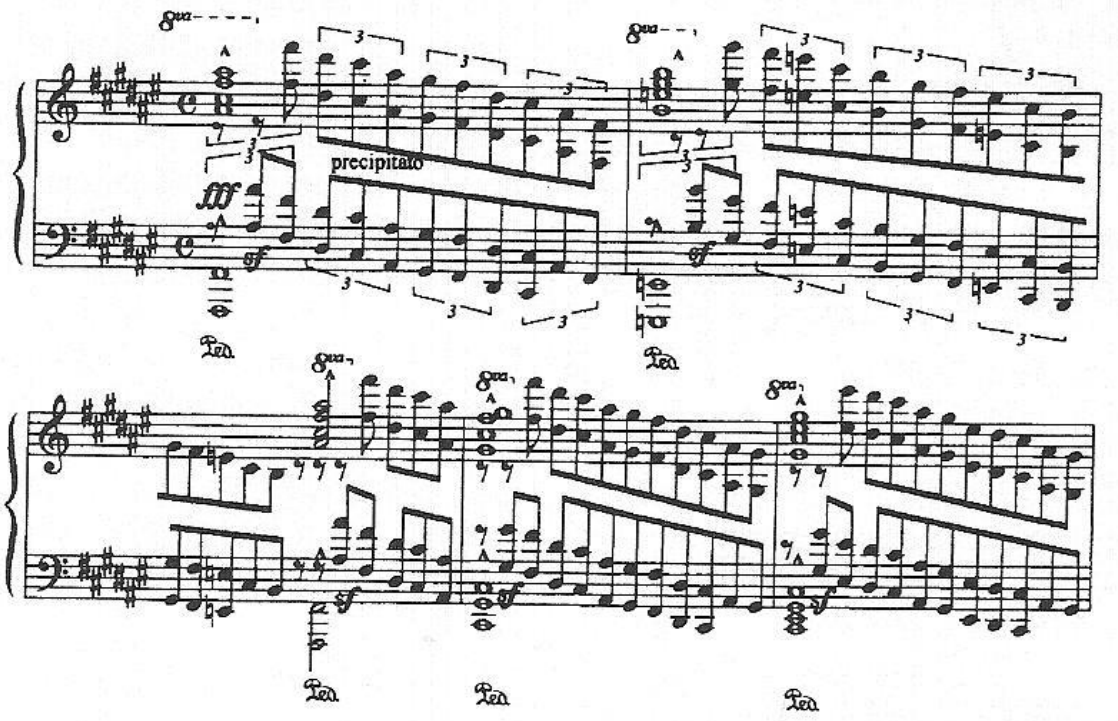


Figure 20. Theme 2.

The second theme establishes a new tonal area, the mediant of F♯ Major. The use of F♯ Major is "symbolic, for much of Liszt's 'beatific' music unfolds in this key, including the *Bénédiction de Dieu* dans la solitude and *Les jeux d'Eaux à la Villa d'Este."*[117] The choice of the raised mediant for the second theme is meaningful too; it was preceded by Beethoven's Piano sonatas op.31 no.1 and op.53 and the String Quartet op.127 where the composer omitted the traditional tonic- dominant pairing in favor for the major mediant "for their second subjects."[118]

The development section starts with the tritone motive (D-G#) and returns to the slow *Andante*. This slow tempo recalls the introduction with its *Andante maestoso* tempo marking and its arresting descending triton motive excepting the fact that there are displayed different

[117]Todd, *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, 125.
[118]Ibid.

intervals. The development section continues in the key of F♯ Major displaying three section structure and bringing the second theme in a new light. This time the theme presents the characteristics of a song which appears in the middle register of the piano with an accompanimental figure in the right hand and the bass-line presents harp-like rolled chords. The second theme is enclosed between two variations of the first theme. The second part of the development, *Allegro moderato*, m.181 exhibits the juxtaposition of two tritones G# - D in the left hand and B-F in the right hand in ostinato figures creating a haunting affect, "functioning as the epitome of the harmonic contradictions of the entire piece."[119] The rest of the development section continues to display all the previous thematic materials.

The recapitulation omits the first subject but the second theme reappears with tremolo accompaniment in the high register in the parallel D Major tonality. The coda in m.326 brings back the first theme and the transformed tritone motive, but omits the second theme. In the concluding Presto, Liszt brings out the first theme in a diatonic version. At the end of the piece Liszt intentionally "avoids the formulaic dominant-tonic progression by concluding this piece with a IV-ii-I."[120]

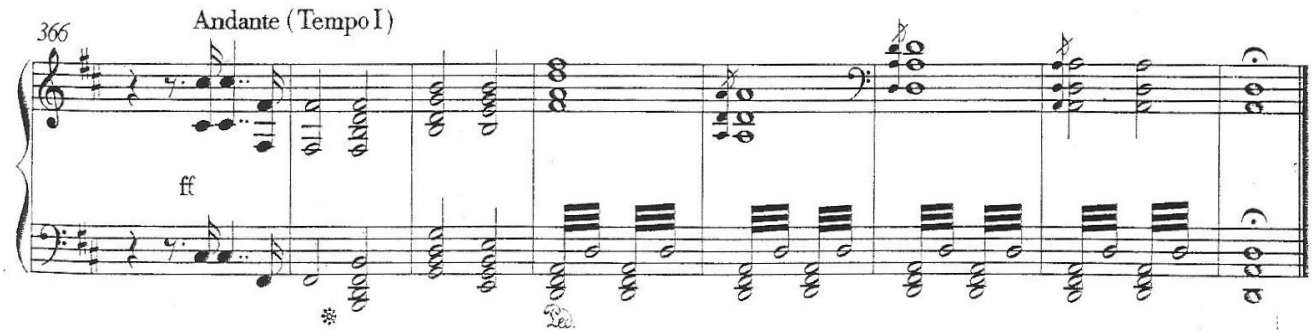


Figure 21. Mm. 366-373, cadenza.

Liszt will borrow this same cadential ending in later works like "The Fantasy and Fugue on the

[119]Todd, *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, 127.
[120]Ibid.

Theme B-A-C-H," "Variations on Bach's *Weinen , Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*," and the second Legend, "St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves." Ben Arnold has drawn the following chart for a detailed analysis:[121]

Liszt, *Dante* Sonata

Section	Measures	Key	Theme/Motive	Tempo
EXPOSITION 1–114				
Introduction	1		mot. x, y, z	*Andante maestoso*
1st Theme	35	D minor	th. 1	*Presto agitato assai*
Transition	73		mot. x, z	
2nd Theme	103	F♯	th. 2	
DEVELOPMENT 115–289				
	115		mot. x, y	*Tempo I (Andante)*
	124	V/F♯	th. 1	*Andante (quasi improvvisato)*
	136	F♯	th. 2	*Andante*
	157	F♯	th. 1	*più tosto ritenuto . . .*
	167	F♯	th. 1	
	181		mot. x, y	*Allegro moderato*
	199		th. 1, mot. z	
	211	A♭ (seq.)	mot. x'	*Più mosso*
	233		mot. x', z	
	250	B major	th. 2, mot. z	
Retransition	273	V/D minor	th. 1	*Tempo rubato...*
	283		mot. x'	
RECAPITULATION 290–373				
2nd Theme	290	D	th. 2	*Andante*
	306	D	th. 2	*Allegro*
	318		mot. x	
CODA 326–373				
	326	D	th. 1	*Allegro vivace*
	339	D	th. 1	*Presto*
	366	D	mot. x'	*Andante (Tempo I)*

Figure 22. Ben Arnold's chart for analyzing the *Dante* Sonata.

In conclusion, the *Dante* Sonata, written as a large scale work in one movement, has contrasting short episodes (motives) but mainly consists of variations of the first and second theme. Presented in a context of thematic and tonal juxtapositions so radical in their departure from established norms, that Humphrey Searle has been prompted to say: "It is a strange,

[121]Arnold, *The Liszt Companion*, 88.

confused, and passionate piece, perhaps incoherent and inchoate, but conjuring up a powerful and unmistakable atmosphere."[122]

[122]Searle, *The Music of Liszt*, 32.

CHAPTER FOUR

Selective Musical Analysis

The present chapter will analyze the four major musical elements comprising the *Dante* Sonata: the tritone motive, thematic transformation of the main themes, harmonic structure and rhythmic elements. The tritone motive, one of the most important elements of the piece, reappears throughout as a unifying element. As may be observed in the previous chapter in Ben Arnold's chart on pg. 52, the piece begins and ends with the tritone motive.

The Tritone Motive

Throughout the piece, the tritone motive functions as a link toward the major themes. The piece starts with the tritone interval (A-E♭).

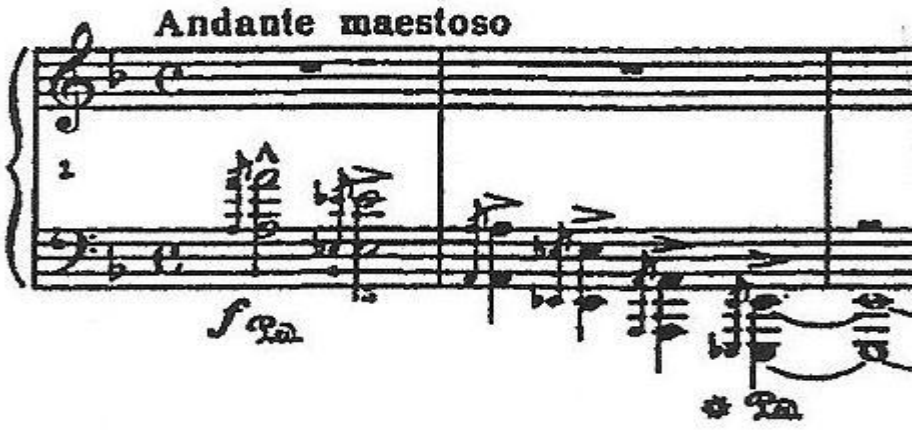


Figure 23. First appearance of the tritone motive.

Within the first two measures the tritone interval appears five times. In mm. 7-8 the tritone interval appears again five times, but this time it is transposed a minor third higher (C-F♯).

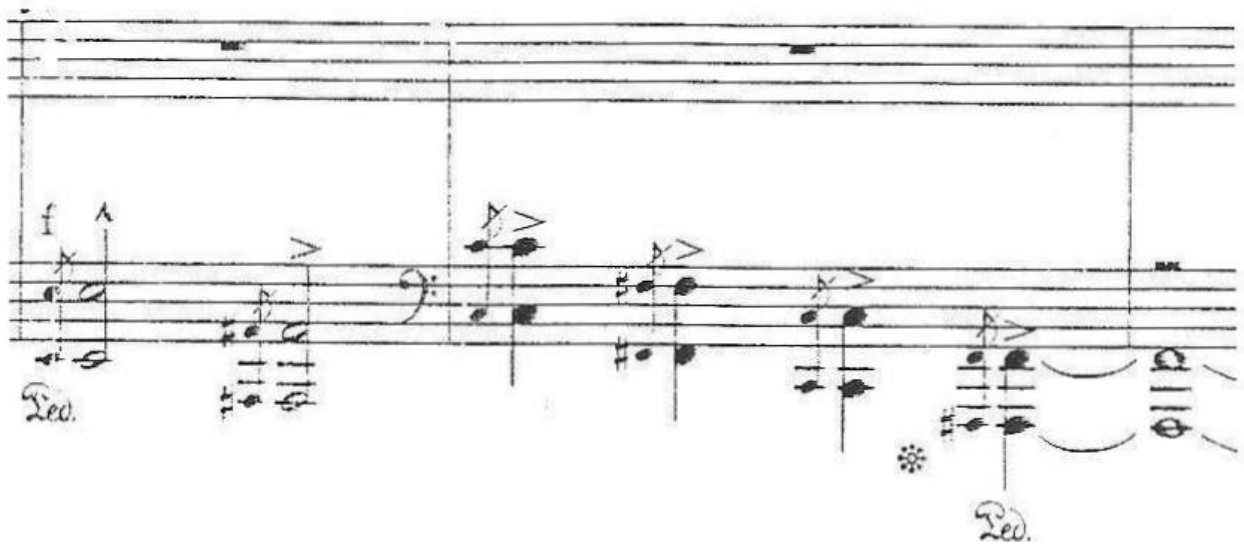


Figure 24. Second appearance of tritone motive.

For the first time in the piece, the motive is altered to a descending perfect fourth followed by a descending perfect fifth in mm. 16-17. The interval is modified once again in the next two measures, presenting the motive changed to a descending major sixth (C- E♭) but this time the motive is modified rhythmically and is not displaced on the downbeat as before. In fact, the motive appears on the second and third beat. A succession of tritones follows simultaneously in both hands, although at the beginning of the sequence the left hand ascends while the right hand sequence descends.

After the appearance of the first theme, the principal motive recurs presenting the descending motive in alternate octaves with rhythmical diminution of sixteenth notes and with the tritone presented enharmonically (a-d♯)in mm.73-74. The tritone occurs for the last time in the exposition in mm. 95-102 only in the left hand, at the incipit in one line, then doubled by

octaves with the interval again altered to a perfect fifth (d-g), (b♭-e♭). Following the final occurrence of the d♭-a♭ motive, the second theme emerges.

In the development section, Tempo I (*Andante*), m.115 the tritone motive returns. Within the first two measures in this section, mm. 115-116, there are a total of four descending tritones instead of five (d-g#) as presented in the exposition. However, the next two measures include the full five descending tritones (b-e#). In comparison to the exposition where the tritone motive appeared consecutively in almost each measure within the span of twenty-two measures, in the development section, it is omitted until mm. 181-183 where it reappears as the simultaneous intervals b-f and f-b. In m. 185 the descending interval alters to a perfect fourth (f-c), maintaining the same rhythmical pattern. Sporadically, the motive reoccurs in mm. 194, 196, and 198 only in the left hand.

Starting at the *Più mosso* in mm. 211-223 the tritone motive appears emphatically in the same rhythmical shape, moving through various tonal areas from A♭ Major, to B Major, and finally to D Major. In m. 234 the motive recurs triumphantly in unison chords and continues only in the left hand. In mm.236, 238, and 241, the dotted rhythm transforms into a triplet. In the faint reminiscent gesture in mm. 285 and 286, a descending perfect fifth and fourth occur. Before the last recurrence in mm. 318-323, the motive reverts to the initial rhythm and presents three groups of descending tritones, the first two containing four of the tritones and the third containing five successions of the tritones. In the final measures 366-373 the tritone motive present in a declamatory style is altered to the descending interval of a perfect fifth.

The Thematic Transformation of the Main Themes

The next elements to be traced are the two main themes of the piece. The first theme appears in the exposition in mm. 35-37 in the *Presto agitato assai* section.

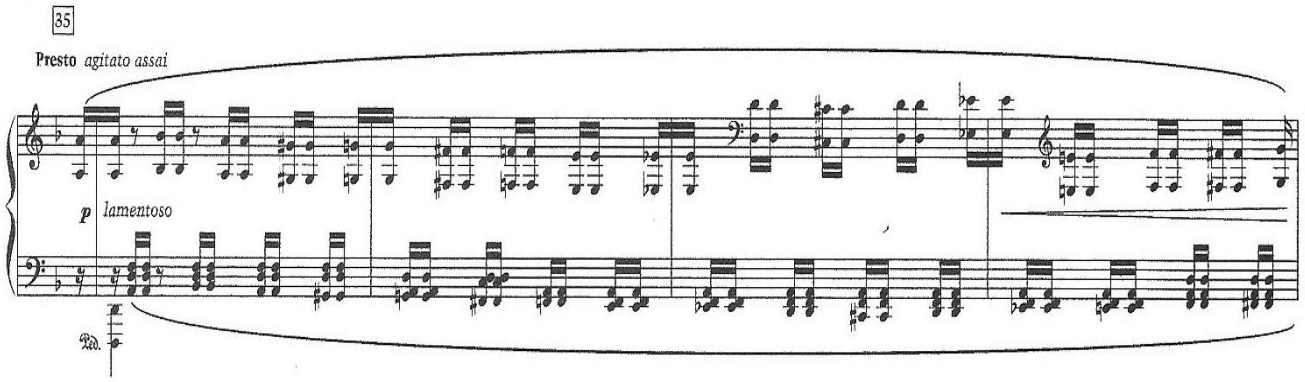


Figure 25. Mm. 35-37, *Presto agitato assai*.

The occurrence of the first theme starts in a descending chromatic line in alternating sixteenth notes. The first theme is composed primarily of descending and ascending chromatic scales which start on the dominant note descend to the tonic in m.37 and returns to the dominant in m. 39. Inner voices harmonize this chromatic line, but do not compromise the fact that this motion prolongs a d minor triad, unfolding over a D pedal. Although chromatic scales inherently sound dissonant the theme exudes dramatic, melodic qualities. The chromatic theme continues for over ten measures with ascending and descending lines continuing the thematic line. The root position dominant harmony in mm. 52 and 53 prepares a return of the principal thematic material in m.54, one octave higher. The appearance of the theme, although only in the right hand, exudes a more dramatic character through the dynamic change and marking of *disperato* and support by chords in both hands.

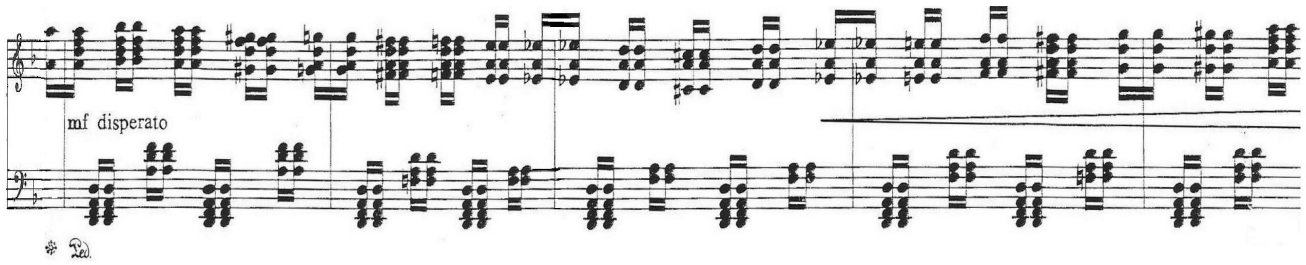


Figure 26. Mm.54-58. *Disperato*.

In the development section the chromatic descending line is presented again in m. 124; this time it appears in C♯ Major (the dominant of F♯ Major) and completely alters the temperament. In this new guise as it appears as a serene melody while exhibiting an improvisatorial character. Whereas the first two appearances of the theme have a virtuosic character, the theme now appears as a suave, transcendental melody.

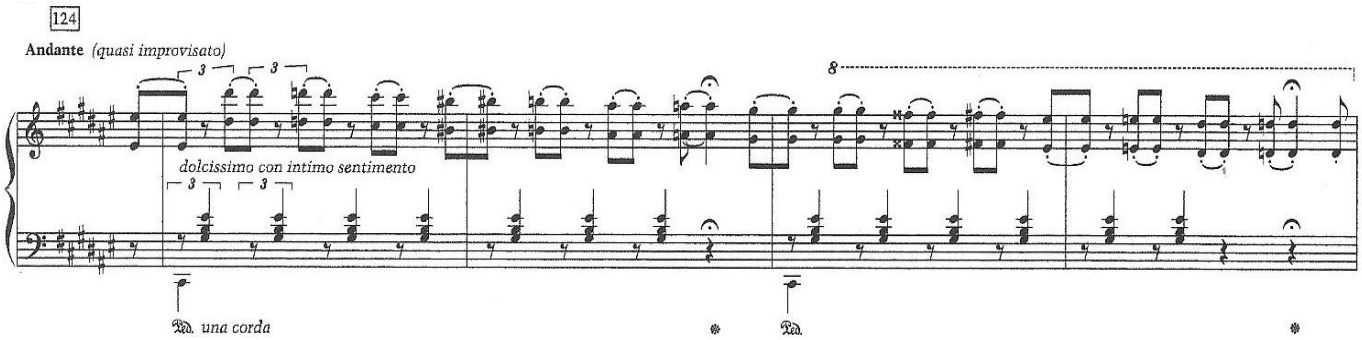


Figure 27. Mm. 124-128.

The rhythm morphs into a continuous triplet with soothing effect. After the exhibition of the theme in C♯ Major in mm.124-128, Liszt further improvises utilizing the same melody, and transposing it to E Major. This transposition from C♯ to E Major presents another chromatic mediant relation in m.128. Mm.147-149 and 152-153 present brief reminiscences of the first theme, where it is represented in a single line in the left hand with syncopated rhythm that coincides perfectly with the marking of *lagrimoso* in the score.

In m.157 the theme is transformed into a very long lyrical statement that starts on the

second inversion of the F♯ Major triad and incorporates an intricate six against four rhythms. This is the most difficult rhythmic passage to perform in the piece.

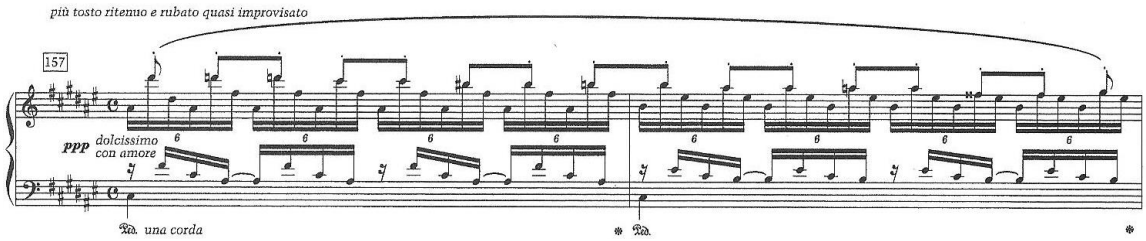
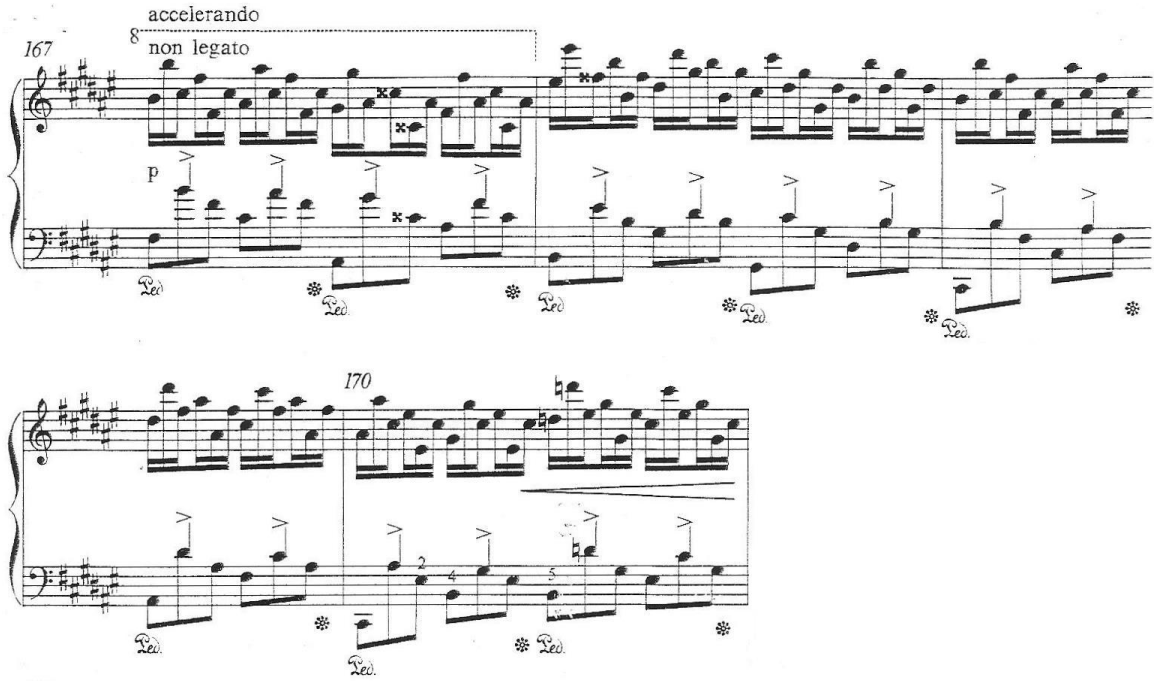


Figure 28. Mm. 157-158, six against four rhythms.

The theme perpetuates the same pattern for ten measures. For the first time in the piece, the chromatic line is altered to a "dechromaticized descending melody of the same extended character of that from which is derived" in m. 167.[123] The descending melody emerges in the left hand as the accented second element in a succession of triplets. The same thematic line is repeated three times with very little changes.



[123]David Anthony Yeagley, "Franz Liszt's 'Dante Sonata': The Origins, the Criticism, a Selective Musical Analysis, and Commentary," (D.M.A. diss., The University of Arizona, 1994), 36.

Figure 29. Mm. 167-170.

M. 199 recalls the first theme in three sequential statements, transposed by whole-tone steps. The first sequence starts in m.199 with a C Major dominant chord; the second sequence starts in m.199 with the D Major seventh chord. The third sequence in m.203 appears with an E Major seventh chord.

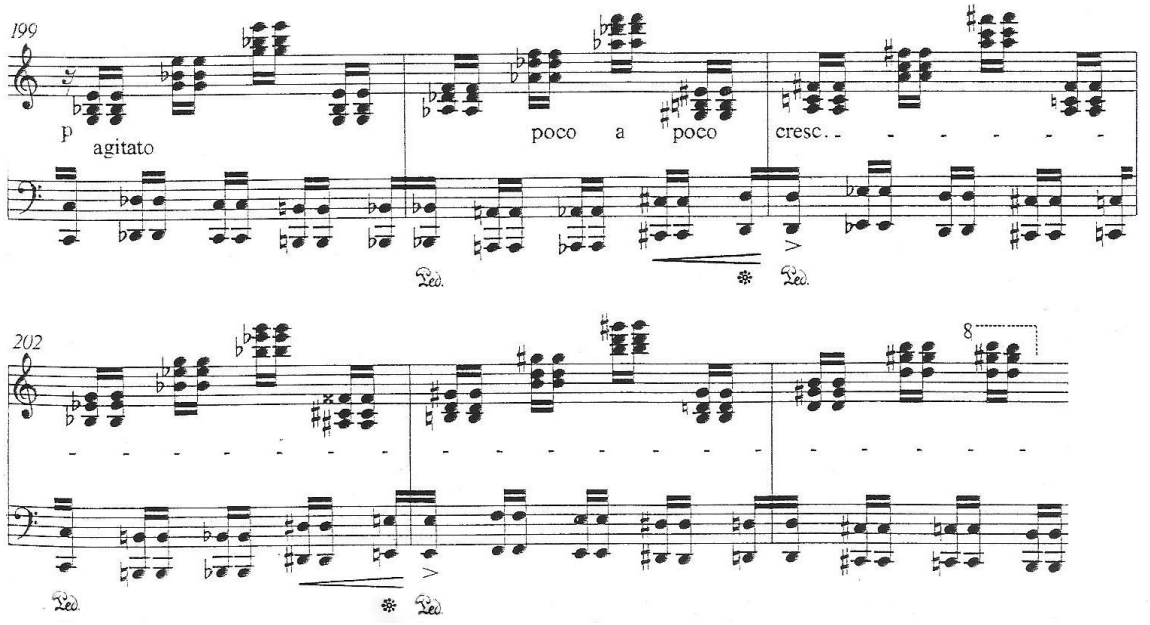


Figure 30. Mm. 199-204.

For the last time in the development section the first theme recurs in mm. 273-282. The original recurrence of the opening melodic, chromatic descent is presented during the aforementioned measures with a linking pedal tone of an A Major dominant chord. The rhythmic pattern is 'borrowed' from the improvisatorial section of m.124 of the beginning of the development section.

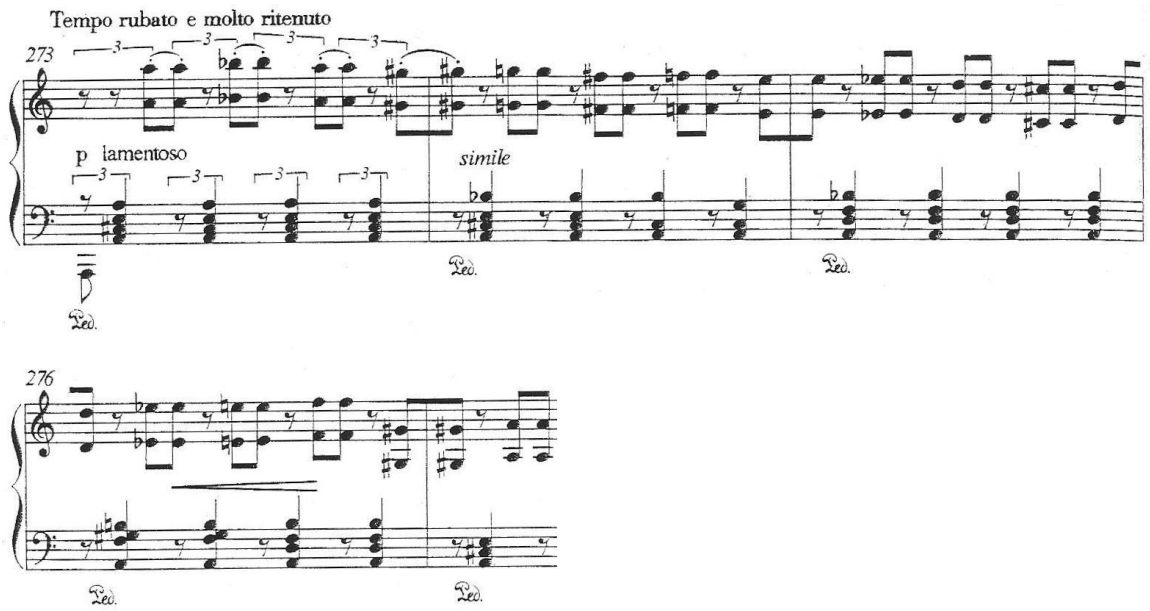


Figure 31. Final occurrence of the theme in the development section.

Mm. 327-337 of the coda "represent a rhapsodic version of the 'major-ized' version of the chromatic melodic descendant."[124] Mm. 339-350 continue the thematic transformation of the melody and rhythm. This rhythm resembles a version of both triplet themes from the beginning of the development, the slow sections m. 124, and the slow developmental sections of m. 273.

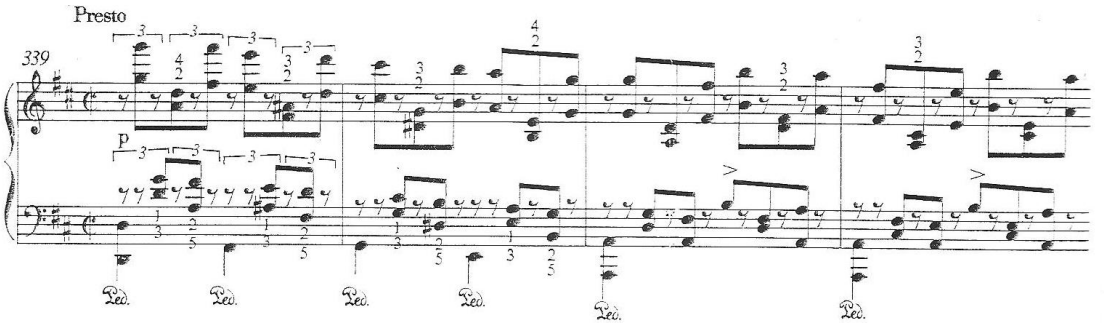


Figure 32. Mm. 339-342.

For the last time the theme appears towards the end of the coda in mm. 353-360 in the tonic key,

[124]Yeagley, "Franz Liszt's 'Dante Sonata,' 37.

resembling mm. 199-208.

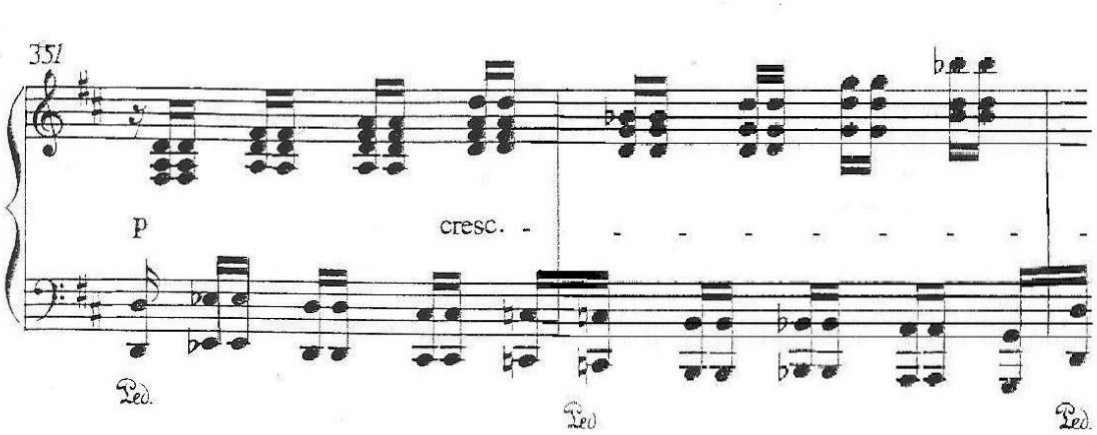


Figure 33. Mm. 351-352.

The second theme is placed at the end of the exposition. This theme is introduced in *precipitato* in mm. 103-107 and resembles a chorale. The theme itself "might be seen as a 'sanctified' or 'eternalized' version of the chromatic descendent melody, the first dechromaticization, although its elongation (augmentation) and particularly its underlying harmonization would seem to obfuscate this association."[125] The whole-tone succession of F♯ Major, to E Major, and back to F♯ Major "calls attention away from the melody itself, emphasizing the raw Mixolydian modal character."[126]

[125]Yeagley, "Franz Liszt's 'Dante Sonata,' 39.
[126]Ibid..

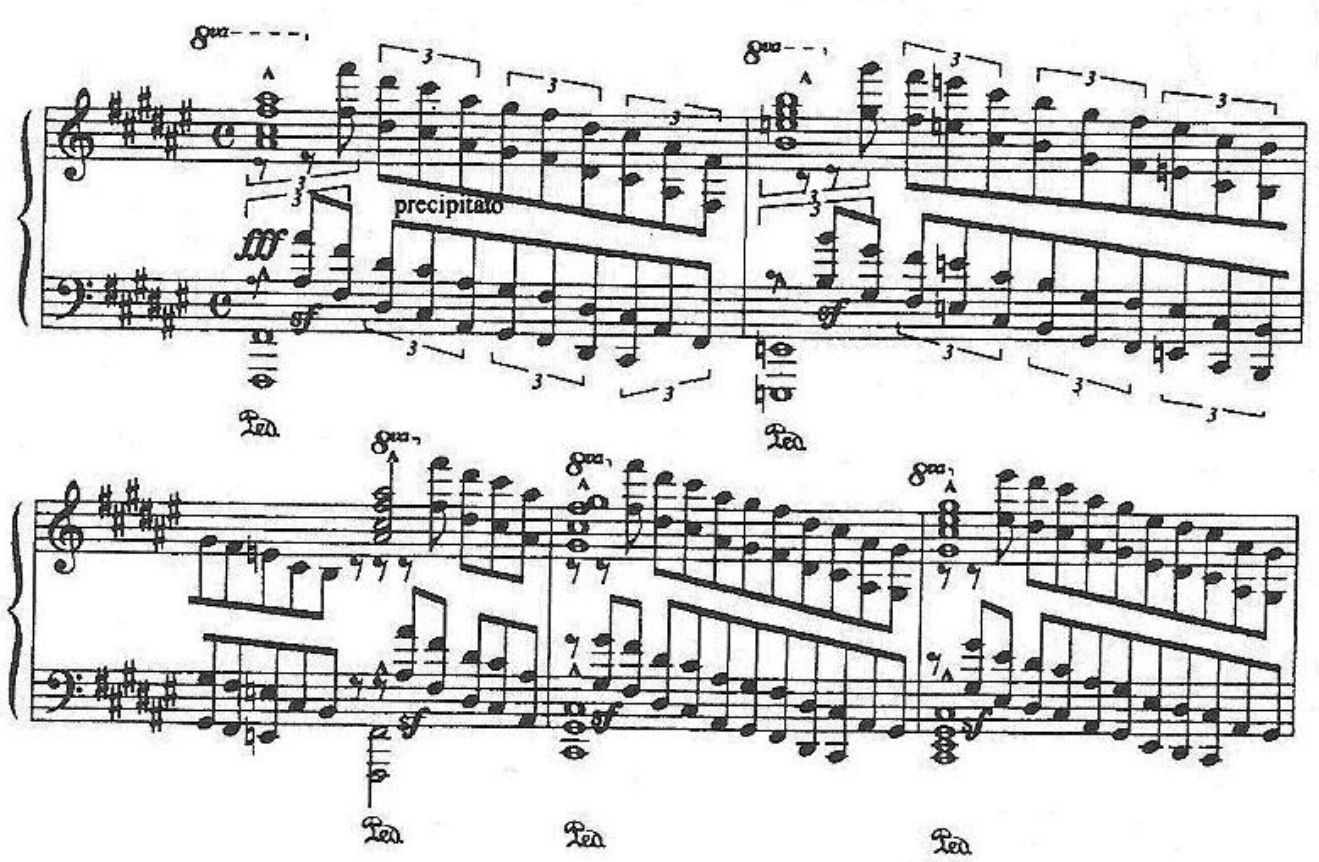


Figure 34. Mm. 103-107.

The development section reaffirms the theme in the same tonality of F♯ Major in m. 136 with a total change of character. For example, instead of a very demonic, virtuosic passage, the melody exhibits an ‘angelic’ song--*ben marcato il canto*--with a harp-like accompaniment.

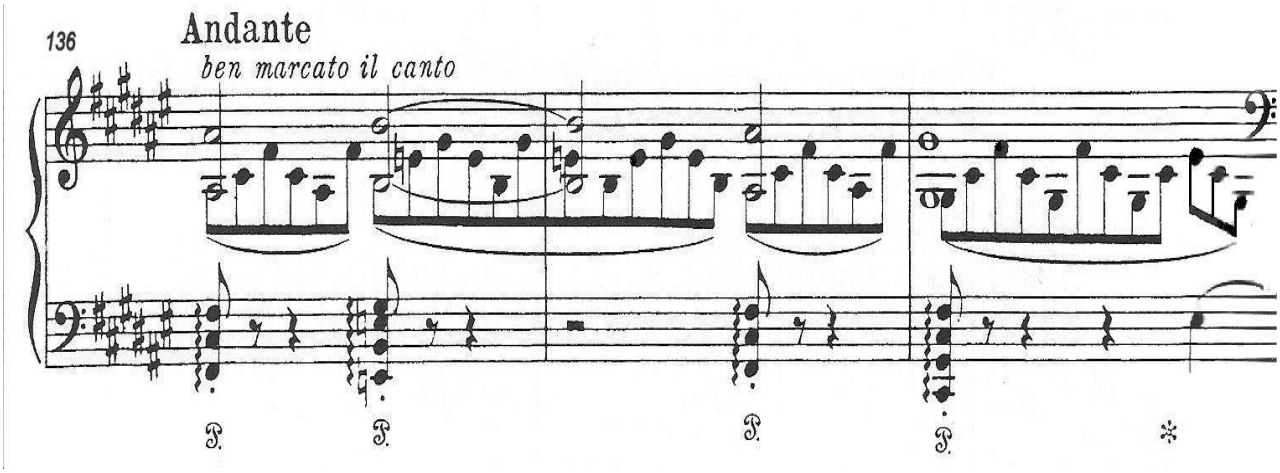


Figure 35. Mm. 136-138.

Toward the end of the development section the chorale theme reappears in m. 250 in the central register. Nevertheless, it is played with the left hand while the right hand plays the accompaniment.

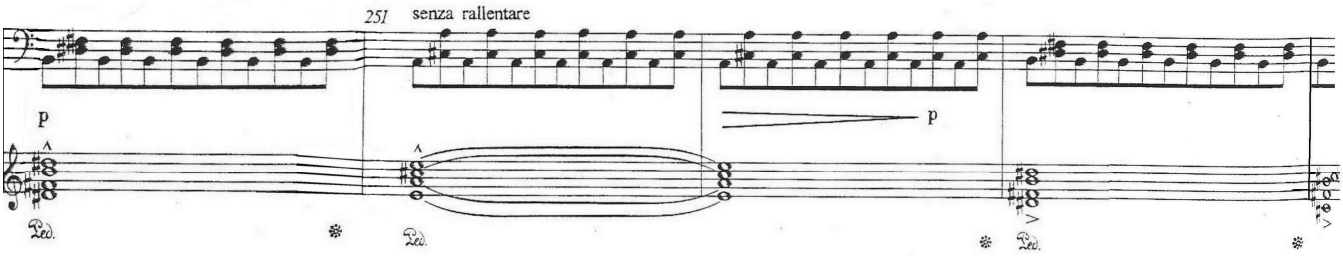


Figure 36. Mm. 250-253.

In m. 250 the theme starts in B Major while in m. 259 the theme reoccurs in the tonality of G Major. The theme is repeated sequentially after two measures in the tonality of E♭ Major, in C Major after another two measures, and finally establishes the tonality of B♭ Major in m.266. The

sequences are four chorale theme appearances juxtaposed in a chromatic mediant relationship (B-G and E♭-C). The first two appearances of the theme are presented in full while the last two are contractions of the main theme.

In the coda, m. 290 marked *Andante*, there is a reminiscence of the *Andante* song-like in character, from its first appearance in the developmental section of the theme. This time the melody is placed in the upper register in D Major in pianissimo, in the left hand.

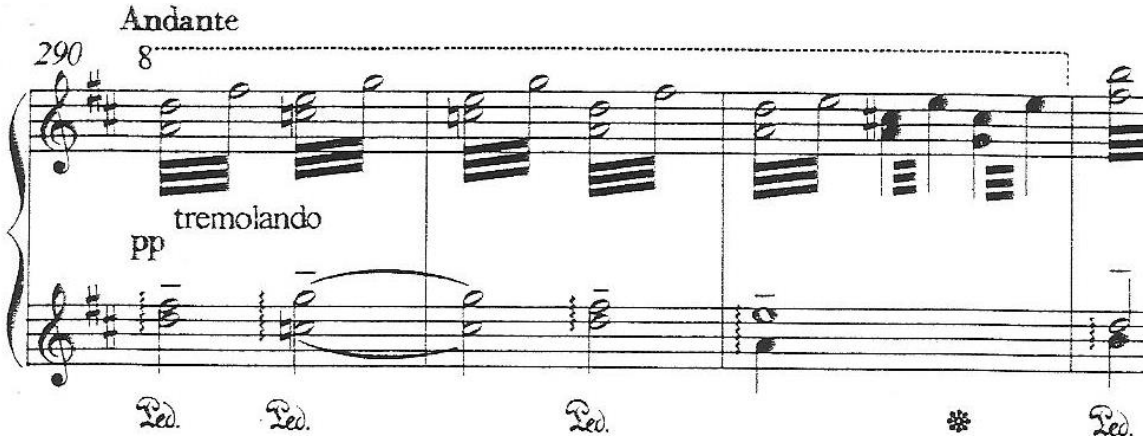


Figure 37. Mm. 290-293, *Andante*.

The last recurrence of the theme appears in m. 306 of the *Allegro* section. The theme is presented in a declamatory style in the original tonic key, also reverting to the whole note rhythm in the extremities while the middle part displays virtuosic chord leaps.

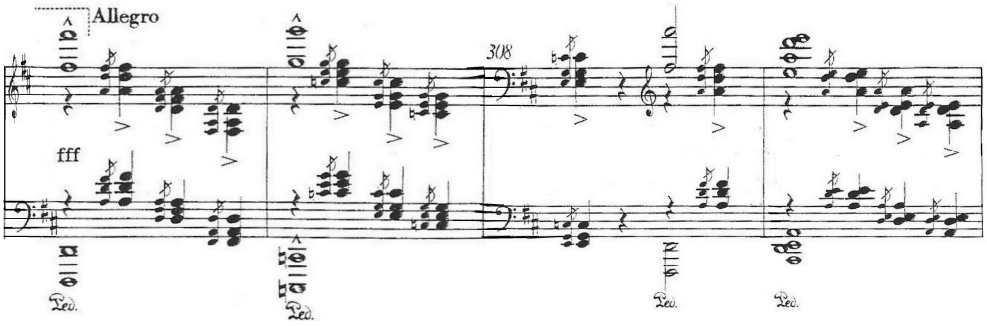


Figure 38. Mm. 306-309, *Allegro.*

Selective Harmonic Analysis

From the very beginning extensive use of chromatic element elaborates the basic tonal structure to such an extent that it is frequently obscured at the surface. This shrouding effect, especially the extent to which it is created by a saturation of triton motives, creates a sense of mystery, consistent with the programmatic agenda of this work.

Though this radical juxtaposition of motivic elements and successive disjunctive harmonic events resists conventional analytic constructs much of the time, at a closer investigation they can be understood as elaboration of the basic tonal structure in D minor. For example all elements of motive x, except the B natural in mm.1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 18, and 19 can be derived from the diminished seventh chord: F♯, A, C, E♭ which emerge in m.20 as vii7/iv in D minor. Resolution of this harmony although indirect is affected unequivocally by the appearance of G minor in m.24 (IV^6 in D minor.) The succeeding dominant seventh chord in m.25 and 26 and even the secondary diminished seventh harmony (g♯, b, d, f) in mm.27 and 28 all serve to continue this cadential motion and the first theme in m.35.

The strong parallelism between mm.1-6 and mm.7-12 and their successive cadences on A♭ Major and B Major respectively are not obviously integral to a standard succession in D minor, though their link is clearer when we observe the enharmonic relationship between passages such as in m.9 where B♯, D♯, F♯, A, can be understood as respellings of the basic diminished seventh chord of m.3 F♯, A, C and E♭. Of course this reinterpretation makes possible the new direction to a cadence on B Major. Even so we are left with reconciling the relationship of A♭ Major in m.6 and B Major in m.12 to a succession of element leading to the first theme in

D minor in m.35. Observing these cadences as part of a longer linear succession leading to f♯ and the diminished seventh chord in m.20 helps to understand their place in the overall structure: A♭ (G♯) in m.6., B in m.12, C♭-B♭ in m.17; B♭, A in mm.17, 18; and G, f♯ in mm.19, 20.

Perhaps we can understand the deepest structural significance of A♭ and B♮ and the dramatic cadential emphasis they receive in mm.6 and 12 by noting that each in turn is a triton from the tonic and mediant notes, respectively (D and f), of the D minor triad. E♭ from the very opening is a tritone away from A♮, the dominant of D. These vary triton relationships emerge at the surface with dramatic effect in m.181 where B-f♮ and G♯-D sound simultaneously over the pedal, C♯.

Harmonic mediant relationships may be observed throughout the entire piece.[127] An example of harmonic chromatic mediant is displayed in mm. 90-91. On the third beat of m. 90 an A♭ minor chord appears, followed on the downbeat of m. 91 by a B minor chord.

M. 103 establish the tonality of F♯ Major, followed by a passing E Major chord, and returning to F♯ Major in m. 105. M. 107 displays a C♯ Major chord in root position that passes into a B♭ Major in m. 109. The tonality of F♯ Major returns, actually functioning as a IV chord in C♯ Major. M. 113 continues into the next measure with a C♯ Major chord in second inversion and cadences on the tonic of C♯ Major, juxtaposing the ending of the exposition with the beginning of the development section.

The tonality of G minor is established in mm. 146-156 followed by a "chromatic modal relation."[128] The triad of G minor becomes F♯ Major through enharmonic notes. The B♭ remains

[127]Yeagley, "Franz Liszt's 'Dante Sonata,' 37.
[128]Ibid., 38.

the same while G and D are flat; thus it is actually a G♭ Major triad. Mm. 268-269 display a hint of possible polytonality where the bass line exhibits an obvious G minor chord while the upper line shows the clear arpeggiation of a B♭ Major chord.

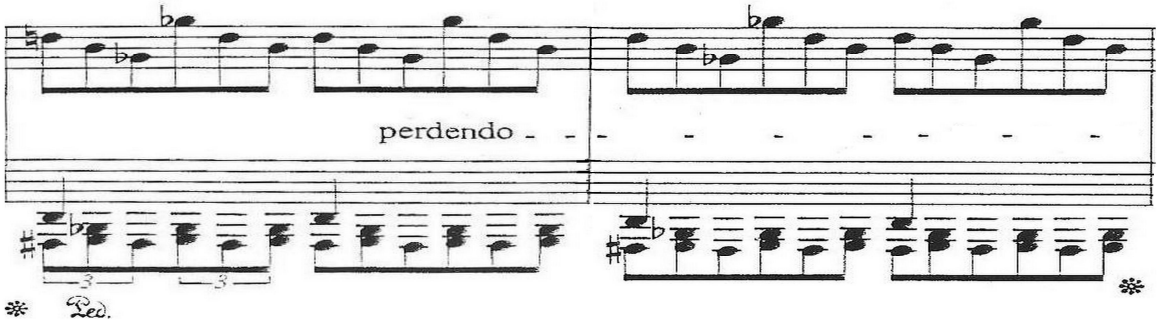


Figure 39. Hint of polytonality.

Another harmonic mediant relation, located in the recapitulation in m. 290, starts in D Major. This is followed by an F♯ Major mediant in m. 294, and cadences with an A Major chord at the *Più Mosso* section in m. 300. The last time the chromatic mediant relations make their appearances is in the final passages of the *Dante* Sonata in mm. 367-368 with a B minor chord followed by a G Major and E minor, all in root position. Finally, the piece ends at the tonic of D Major.

In the *Dante* Sonata, Liszt creates a "harmonic 'revolving door' effect, in which he starts a section in one tonality, progresses through a cycle of series of tonalities in a sequential manner," and then returns to the original tonality.[129] This displacement is cyclical but does not occur in a specific order like the circle of fifths. A few examples of this cyclic harmonic progression can be found in the development section of the piece and in the coda. The first major occurrence of the progression can be found in mm.157-167 where the fragment starts in the tonality of F♯ Major, passing through A♭ Major, B♭ Major, C Major, and finally returning to

[129]Yeagley, "Franz Liszt's 'Dante Sonata,' 43.

the initial F♯ Major.

Another harmonic progression occurs at the *Più Mosso* section between mm.211-233. This progression starts with the tonic of A♭ Major, passes through several tonalities, returns for a moment to A♭ Major in m. 227, and descends by whole-tone steps from G♭ Major (enharmonic F♯) back to A♭ Major. In m. 361 of the coda section, (*Presto),* there is another line descending by whole-tone steps from D Major to F♯ Major, returning to the final D Major through two chromatic mediants and a whole-tone step.

The Rhythmic Patterns

The *Dante* Sonata contains a few interesting rhythmic patterns that are repeated throughout the piece. From the opening of the piece, Liszt utilizes the dotted rhythmic pattern.

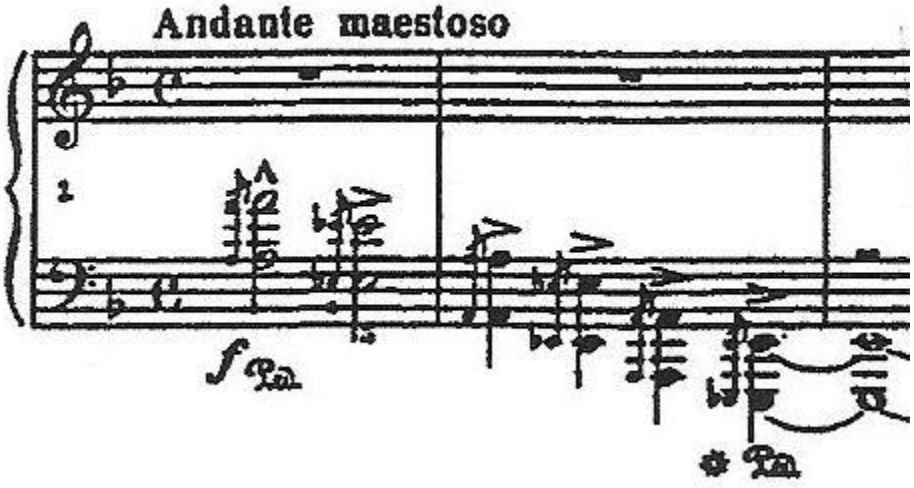


Figure 40. Rhythmic pattern.

Although perhaps misleading, as the opening gesture starts with two half notes preceded by grace notes followed in the next measure by four quarter notes preceded by grace notes, the aural perception is illustrated by the following rhythm:[130]

Figure 41. Aural perception as illustrated by Yeagley. [131]

Apparently, Liszt chooses the grace note notation "for the intensified drama afforded by the 'interpretable' grace note. The pianistic execution of the grace note notation allows for a broadening, an *allargando*, as the descent into the lower registers of the keyboard demands, to insure the clarity of gesture."[132]

The aural impression of the dotted rhythm is even more emphasized in mm. 29-32, especially in the bass line with its descending chromatic melody. The illusion of dotted rhythm is confirmed through the continual use of the same rhythmical pattern, only the descending chromatic line along with the rhythmical pattern switches to the right hand from mm. 35-51.

Figure 42. Illusion of dotted rhythm.

A variation of the dotted rhythm can be observed at the beginning of development section in mm.

[130]Yeagley, "Franz Liszt's 'Dante Sonata,' 43.
[131]Ibid, 29.
[132]Ibid.

124-132. Here, the rhythm changes to triplets and the melody in the right hand is perceived as the following:

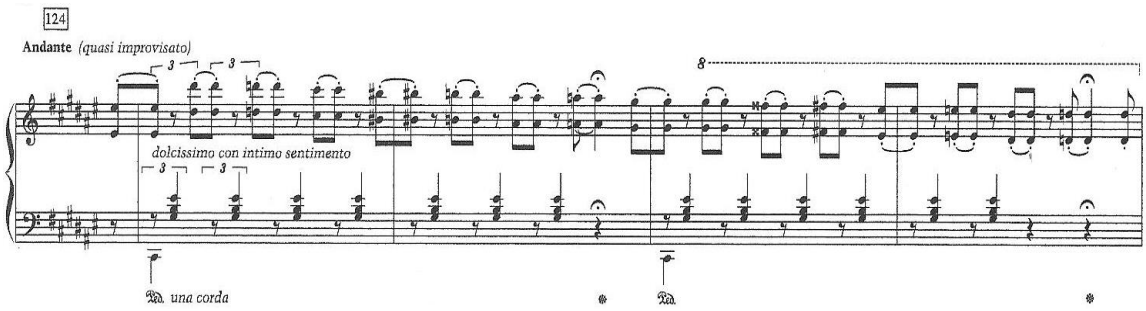


Figure 43. Mm. 124-128.

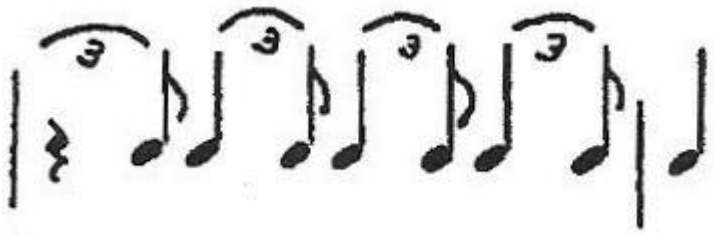


Figure 44. Yeagley's illustration of the perceived rhythm of mm. 124-132.[133]

The identical pattern occurs in mm. 273-282. The coda of m. 339 presents one of the most deceptive fragments to perceive the hidden dotted rhythm allusion.[134]

During the entire piece, Liszt displays his evolving tendencies toward great experimentation with "rhythmic displacement of ideas."[135] He starts experimenting with overlapped rhythm in m. 20, but the greatest rhythmic innovation starts with the *Presto agitato assai* of mm. 35-50. The main reason for having such a long rhythmical displacement must have been to keep consistency along with the melody because this was the main theme and the longest

[133]Yeagley, "Franz Liszt's 'Dante Sonata,' 31.
[134]Ibid., 32.
[135]Ibid., 43-4.

musical idea in the piece.

The next stage in the rhythmic innovation process is the "mensural displacement, when a gesture's length is incongruous with a measure, but the gesture is repeated until it finally coincides with a *krouein* [the downbeat], usually after three or four measures."[136] The first example occurs in mm. 25-29 when the metrical pulse gives the illusion of changing to the 3/4 meter. Another example can be found in m. 84 where the meter is even more ambiguous, creating the impression of a change to 6/4 meter. The piece has plenty of these patterns. These were just a few examples of rhythmic innovation found in the *Dante* Sonata.

[136]Yeagley, "Franz Liszt's 'Dante Sonata,' 44.

AFTERWORD

There is no doubt that the *Dante* Sonata is the apotheosis of all pieces of *Années de Pèlerinage*. It represents the climax of the entire *Années* volume through its originality and innovative style. Although it is a character piece, it does not belong to the miniature pieces category like all other pieces from the *Années.* Most likely, Liszt decided to attach it to the Italian volume because it was conceived during the years of his Italian pilgrimage and during the period when he was fascinated and inspired in his composition by Italian medieval figures. Liszt might have started to compose the piece with a program in mind but the last revision illustrates that he abandoned this idea.

Although it may seem a "strange, confused" piece as Searle describes, it still captivates the attention of performers and listeners alike. Through my research I found that there are many speculations that some passages of the sonata depict certain events from the *Divine Comedy,* but my belief is that the sonata rather depicts Liszt's own conception of Inferno and Paradise rather than being a loyal depiction of Dante's poem. The only exceptions perhaps would be the beginning of the piece and, more precisely, the appearance of the tritone motive. As it may be observed in the first manuscript of "*Fragment dantesque,*" the beginning of the piece starts with the dotted rhythm and descending tritone motive. This motive is a powerful dramatic statement that depicts a strong exclamatory avowal. Most likely, the tritone motive may be among the only connection to Dante's Inferno through its declamatory opening that suggests the "precipitous fall

into Hell."[137] It is also likely that the tritone motive may depict Liszt's destiny and journey through life as this motive reappears obsessively throughout the entire piece with very little transformation. The ending of the piece again utilizes the descending tritone motive; however, it is converted to the interval of a fifth which suggests the acceptation of fate. Through its declamatory style it resembles Beethoven's "destiny's" motive from his 5th Symphony; similar thematic material can be found in the introduction of both Liszt's *Grosses Konzertsolo* and the B Minor Sonata.

Further evidence that the *Dante* Sonata has no programmatic character is found in the transformation of the themes. The general consent is that the first theme (Theme one) appears only in the *Presto agitato assai* section but there is actually a hint that part of the theme appears earlier in m. 30 and clearly evolves from the tritone motive. Although chromatic, the quasi-theme starts with A and descends until E♭.

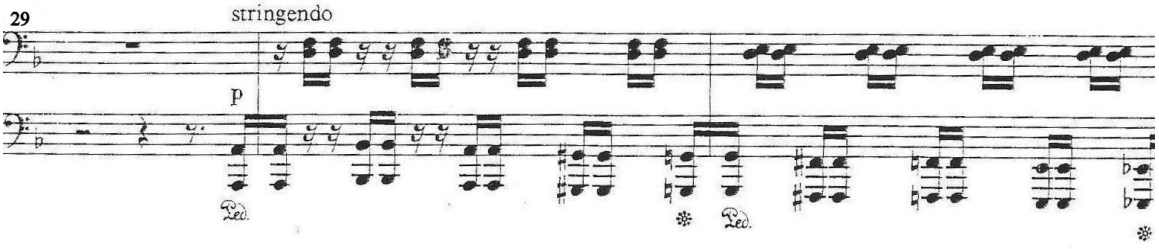


Figure 45. Mm. 29-31.

This rather demonstrates the innovative compositional style of thematic transformation than any association with Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Also, the main themes sometimes appear very agitated, dramatic, but in a new section they completely change character and appear as *dolce*, *dolcissimo possible.* Another piece of evidence is located in the so-called "Beatrice's" theme in m. 136. In

[137]Yeagley, "Franz Liszt's 'Dante' Sonata," 50.

the *Divine Comedy*, Beatrice appears as the leader of the earthly Paradise. However, Beatrice's theme appears previously in the 'Inferno' section in m. 103 as a climax of the 'Inferno' or dramatic section, marked *precipitato,* when actually Beatrice appears only in the Paradise in Dante's poem. This provides another confirmation of the thematic transformation in Liszt's compositional technique.

As aforementioned, the sonata is in a rather innovative compositional style, not just through the mastery of thematic transformation but through its musical form. Liszt perhaps found the sonata form to be too conventional and restrictive a form for what he sought to express here, thus he incorporated elements of a fantasy into his hybrid sonata form. He mastered this new form in the B Minor Sonata, and the *Grossess Konzertsolo*. Although those pieces are similar in form, thematic transformation, and lack the idea of program, the *Dante* Sonata has more lyrical passages. However, the Sonata, as do the other pieces, requires amazing virtuosic skills but demands a lot of emotion to play the beautiful, affectional passages comprised in the middle section. Common to the three sonatas, the most virtuosic element occurs at the midpoint of the piece, just as in the A Major Piano Concerto.

Similar to the *Grossess Konzertsolo,* the second theme in the *Dante* Sonata appears in whole notes using even the same intervals which again possesses similar compositional elements and excludes the idea of program. All three sonatas share an abundance of dotted rhythms on the main theme. What makes the *Dante* Sonata exceptional is the lack of *cadenza di bravura* that can be found in any of his virtuosic pieces.

There is no doubt that Liszt was the predecessor of the impressionistic current. The fact that Ravel's **"***Jeux d'eau*" was inspired by Liszt's "*Jeux d'eaux a la Villa d'Este*" is suggested by the title itself. Ravel's masterpiece "*Ondine*" contains a recitative-like passage before the

culminating point that must have been influenced by the development section of the *Dante* Sonata, marked *recitativo*. Also, there is a single melodic line played by the right hand in the two pieces. Both recitatives are slow and although the tonality and the melodic material differ, a deep, melancholic lamenting character depicts both passages. Ravel recognizes Liszt as predecessor through the following statement"

> Are the failings in all Liszt's works really so important to us? Are there not sufficient strong points in the tumultuous, seething, vast, and glorious chaos of musical material on which several generations of famous composers have drawn? Let us be honest: it is very much to these shortcomings that Wagner owes much of his declamatory vehemence, that Strauss owes his over enthusiasm, Franck his prolix sublimity, the Russian School its occasional harsh and pittoresque style, and the French School the uncommon coquettishness of its harmonic charm. For all their dissimilarity, do not these writers owe the best of their qualities to the overflowing musical generosity of their great predecessor?[138]

Also Liszt's genius is recognized by his compatriot Béla Bartók:

> If we compare Liszt as a composer with his predecessors and contemporaries, we find features in his works which we search for in vain elsewhere. We discover that among all the greater composer of his own day and of the previous age there was not a single one on whom so many disparate influences were at work […]. Liszt never set out from a single point, nor did he combine several interrelated things in his works; he abandoned himself to the most varied, contradictory, one might almost say most irreconcilable elements […]. We must seek the essence of his works in those new ideas to which Liszt was the first to give expression, and in his brave and pioneering penetration of the future.[139]

[138]Maurice Ravel, concert review, 1912. Quoted in: Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronical of his Life in Pictures andDocuments*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Oxford and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 332.

[139]Béla Bartók, from his public lecture, *Problems of Liszt*, 1934. Quoted in: Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronical of his Life in Pictures and Documents*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Oxford and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 332.

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