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(RECOMMENDED CITATION)

# IN THE SHADOW OF MANFRED: BYRON, SCHUMANN AND TCHAIKOVSKY

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***Motto:***
*"C'est un grand et beau problème à résoudre, de déterminer jusqu'à quel point on peut faire chanter la langue et parler la musique".*[2]
**J.- J. Rousseau**

**SUMMARY.** The romantic hero is born from reality. Whether his name is Manfred, Werther, Clavigo, Onegin or Byron, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, he will always bear the seal of the society he comes from. Noble and cultivated, he enjoys his privileged life to the fullest, but at some point this no longer satisfies him. An outlaw, a "wasted" and incomprehensible genius, this "enfant terrible" suffering from the incurable "mal de siècle" escapes, disillusioned, from his commonplace existence and embarks on a quest for the unknown, living in that Eminescian "poignant charm". He faces fate with dignity, without repent, paying for his audacity with his life. George Gordon Byron, Shakespeare's illustrious descendant, fascinated the whole European cultural space: he created the prototype of the Romantic hero not only through his poems, but also through his own adventurous life. *Manfred* (1816-1817) is a dramatic poem sprinkled with supernatural elements, haunted by ghosts, written in the tone of the black novel and of the mysterious romantic drama. The poet took the name of his character from Manfred, King of Sicily in the 13th century, invoked in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Nietzsche was so impressed with the image of the Byronic superhero that he wrote a musical composition on the same theme. Schumann's version *(Ouverture zu Manfred* op.115), composed in 1849 and having an autobiographical resonance, is considered among the composer's most touching pages. Tchaikovsky, engrossed in the drama of the theme, treated it in his own personal way, creating a monumental synthesis between the symphonic style and his unerring sense of the stage.

**Keywords:** Byron, Manfred, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, programmatism, overture-symphony, programmatic symphony.

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[2] Ilie Balea, *Dialogul artelor*, Editura pentru Literatură, Bucharest, 1969, p. 10.

This paper was conceived in 2010 and its theme connects the protagonist heroes in a succession of anniversaries: 200 years from the birth of Robert Schumann (1810), 170 years from the birth of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840), 170 from the death of painter Caspar David Friedrich (1840) and 125 years from Tchaikovsky's composition of the Manfred Symphony (1885).

The paper has not been kept in the drawer, but was presented in the same year at a musicological symposium, while a concentrated version of it is presented to each generation of students of the Cluj-Napoca Academy, during the courses on Romanticism. In 2011, it was also appreciated by the French students from the Dijon Conservatory. The decision to publish it is linked to another anniversary: 2014 marks 190 years since the death of George Gordon Byron (1824).

## Historical/literary context

The German and Anglo-Saxon literary Romanticism shifted from the ethos of antiquity and of the Enlightenment to embrace the *Sturm und Drang*[3] ideal: a strong sense of nature, the primacy of the individual and the natural goodness expressed by J.J. Rousseau, the exaltation of human feelings and of historical patriotism, as a reaction against the atrocities of the turbulent years of the Napoleonic revolution and campaign. At Herder's initiative, *Sturm und Drang* gathered around it a pleiad of writers such as Schiller, Goethe and Heine, and since 1800 onwards, Novalis invested it with a romantic, mystical exaltation. The Romantic theatre was tributary to Shakespeare's genius, which had been glorified by Lessing already in the previous century. In England, the literary Romanticism evolved perhaps the most freely, without manifestos (France) or schools (Germany), with a longevity of a century and a half, from the pre-Romantic Thomson (whose *Seasons* create a connection between nature and the simple, ordinary man) and the neo-Romantic Swinburne[4].

According to Goethe, "Romanticism is a morbid genre, except for Manzoni's Romanticism". Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) promoted a literary style of classical inspiration, less exalted, in a neat form, having "the useful as a purpose, truth as an object and the interesting as the means."[5]

"Romanticism is found precisely neither in the choice of subjects nor in exact truth, but in a way of feeling... For me, Romanticism is the most recent and the most current expression of beauty. The one who says Romanticism, says modern art – which is to say intimacy, spirituality, color, aspiration towards the infinite – expressed by all the resources of art", said Baudelaire in 1846.

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[3] A theatrical play by Klinger, in a melodramatic, pre-Romantic style (1776).

[4] Romanticism is known by different names: The *Romantic Movement* in France, *Die Romantische Schule* in Germany and *the Romantic Revival* in England. Cf. Ovidiu Drimba, *Istoria Literaturii universale*, vol. II, Editura SAECULUM I.O. and Editura Vestala, Bucharest, 1998, p. 135.

[5] Ovidiu Drimba, *Op. cit*, p. 201.

Victor Hugo (1802-1885), the author of the famous and extensive preface to *Cromwell*, which soon became the first manifesto of the French Romantic movement, is famous for several titles that have become masterpieces of the lyrical genre: *Hernani* (Verdi), *Le Roi s'amuse*[6]/*Rigoletto* (Verdi), *Lucrezia Borgia* (Donizetti). The characteristic features of his style include a complicated plot sprinkled with adventures and surprises, the importance given to "fatality", characters raised to the status of symbols in a picturesque setting, contrasts amplified into antitheses, exaltation of strong passions but also an overwhelming lyricism[7].

Animated by the nostalgia for the medieval times, Chateaubriand revives the legendary figure of Roland and travels back, with the *Genius of Christianity*, to the times of the Gaels, Druids and ancient Celts. He adds an element of morbidity to the Romantic Movement, just as Lamartine imbues it with melancholy, Vigny with solemnity and Musset with irony, imaginative style and conversational force.

Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)[8], a true poet of nature in his *Travel Pictures* (1824-1830), cultivates another distinctive feature of Romanticism, by exploring the exotic and distant lands, reflecting their unfamiliar, strange aspects. Liszt will follow suit in his *Années de pélerinage* (1831-1883).

The German drama (Kleist, Büchner, Grillparzer) stirs up devastating passions, presents death as the ultimate solution to life, the unshakable devotion of the beloved woman, all in a medieval setting, with knights and action sprinkled with fantastic elements; hypnosis, somnambulism (Bellini, *La sonnambula),* magic (Verdi, *A Masked Ball, The Force of Destiny),* dream symbolism, the Christian miracle (Wagner, *Tannhäuser).*

Byron, through his exaltation of the "self", is invoked much later by Pushkin *(Eugene Onegin,* 1823-1830), who, by contrast, urges a return to nature:

**Pushkin: *Eugene Onegin***

"I was born for peaceful roaming,
For country calm and lack of strife;
My lyre sings! And in the gloaming,
My fertile fancies spring to life...
I give myself to harmless pleasures
And *far niente* rules my leisures:
Each morning early I'm awake
To wander by the lonely lake,
Or seek some other sweet
employment:
I read a little, often sleep,
For fleeting fame I do not weep.
And was it not in past enjoyment
Of shaded, idle times like this,
I spent my days of deepest bliss?
The country, love, green fields and flowers,
Sweet idleness! You have my heart.
With what delight I praise those hours
That set Eugene and me apart.
For otherwise some mocking reader,
Or, God forbid, some wretched breeder
Of twisted slanders might combine
My hero's features here with mine,
And then maintain the shameless fiction
That, **like proud Byron**, I have penned,
A mere self-portrait in the end;
As if today, through some restriction,
We're now no longer fit to write
On any theme but our own plight!..."

[6] The King Has Fun.
[7] *Ibidem*, p. 198.
[8] He was born in the same year as Schubert and died in the same year as Schumann.

### George Gordon Byron (1788-1824)

The spirit of Byronism swept all over Europe. The father of the movement, George Gordon Byron, one of Shakespeare's illustrious followers, created the prototype of the Romantic hero, who was reflected both in his poems, and in his non-conformist, revolutionary and rebellious spirit. As a member of the House of Lords he took a firm stand against the persecutions in Ireland and the massacre of workers in Manchester who were demanding the right to vote, and spoke out against the law demanding capital punishment for the destruction of machinery, considered the main cause of unemployment and poverty.

Deeply disappointed, Byron identified himself with his hero Childe Harold *(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 1812-1818), a character who also inspired Berlioz to write his programmatic symphony *Harold in Italy* (1834, with viola concertante, dedicated to Paganini), and left his homeland for good. He then set out on a long journey to Spain, the Middle East *(The Giaour, The Corsair)* and Switzerland (the poem *Prisoner of Chillon*, 1816, dedicated to freedom). In Italy, he was initiated into the secret society of the Carbonari and its revolutionary aims to free Italy from Austrian rule. He died at Missolonghi in Greece, at age 36, while helping the Greeks in their struggle for independence from the Turkish occupation. His heroes are just like him: outlaws, misunderstood, suffering from that incurable "mal du siècle". In the poem *"On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year",* written in the last year of his life, Byron seems to sense the imminence of his death.

### Byron: *On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year*

'T is time this heart should be unmoved,
Since others it hath ceased to move:
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love!
My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of Love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!
The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze--
A funeral pile!
The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love, I cannot share,
But wear the chain.
But 'tis not *thus*--and 'tis not *here*--
Such thoughts should shake my soul, nor *now*
Where Glory decks the hero's bier,
Or binds his brow.
The sword, the banner, and the field,
Glory and Greece, around me see!
The Spartan, borne upon his shield,
Was not more free.
Awake! (not Greece--she *is* awake!)
Awake, my spirit! Think through *whom*
Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake,
And then strike home!
Tread those reviving passions down,
Unworthy manhood!--unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown
Of beauty be.
If thou regret'st thy youth, *why live*?
The land of honourable death
Is here:--up to the Field, and give
Away thy breath!
Seek out--less often sought than found--
A soldier's grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy Rest.

Romantic composers turned mainly to literature for inspiration, as did Schumann for example, especially as early in his career he had toyed with the idea of becoming a writer. *Manfred*, Byron's autobiographical dramatic poem, had a great influence on Schumann (then 38, i.e. almost the same age as the poet when he died), but also on Liszt, who also intended to illustrate this theme musically[9], while Tchaikovsky expanded the subject into a four-movement symphony.

*Manfred* is a dramatic poem written by Byron between 1816 and 1817. It contains supernatural elements in the tone of a black novel haunted by ghosts, a popular genre in England after the rediscovery of Shakespeare. It is a typical example of a Romantic mystery-drama. Friedrich Nietzsche was in turn impressed by the image of the superhero and wrote a musical composition for him.

The poet took the name of his character from Manfred (1232, Venosa – February 26, 1266), King of Sicily between 1258 and 1266. He was the natural son of Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen and had conflicts with the Papacy, being excommunicated several times. In *The Divine Comedy,* Dante meets Manfred outside the gates of Purgatory, where although he repented of his sins in *articulo mortis*, he must wait 30 years for each year he lived as an excommunicate, before being admitted to Purgatory proper.

### The Byronic hero in painting

Caspar David Friedrich (1774, Greifswald – 1840, Dresden) was known as a singular, solitary and melancholy painter who lived in an empty studio, which stirred his imagination with symbols and visual metaphors. His austere landscapes with high mountains and large expanses of water or ice, shrouded in a surreal, at times frosty and often morbid atmosphere, express an intense spirituality[10]. His enigmatically entitled painting *Wanderer above a Sea of Fog,* painted in 1818, could illustrate the meditative figure of Manfred, the Byronic hero.

### Schumann: *Ouverture zu Manfred* (1848-49)

Schumann's overture is considered among the composer's most passionate pages and reflects the inner conflict of the main character. The Symphonies Nos. 1, 4 and 2 had already been composed, and *Renana* followed one year after *Manfred*. In the following year (1849) he composed the motet *Verzweifle nicht im Schmerzenstal* for double chorus, organ and orchestra (ad libitum) and *Requiem für Mignon* for solo voices, chorus and orchestra.

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[9] Liszt had said: “I passionately admired Manfred and valued him much more than Faust, who, between you and me, seemed to me a decidedly bourgeois character... Faust's personality scatters and dissipates itself; he takes no action, lets himself be driven, hesitates, experiments, loses his way, considers, bargains, and is interested in his own little happiness. III, Librairie Armand Colin, Paris, 1955, p. 300.

[10] He was marked by the tragedies of his childhood: in 1781 he lost his mother, two sisters and a brother.

By July 29[11] Schumann had read Byron's *Manfred* in the translation of K.A. Suckow. A week later and soon after he finished his opera *Genoveva,* he began preparing Byron's text for his next dramatic work, consisting of spoken dialogues with vocal soloists and instrumental interludes, choruses and melodramas. The four-hand piano arrangement of his *Second Symphony,* composed at the urging of his wife, Clara, the album of songs written as a birthday present for his eldest daughter Marie, along with numerous other projects delayed the completion of the score until November 23. The première was held in Leipzig in March 1852, under the composer's baton, and was followed by a second performance in Weimar, in June, conducted by Liszt.

Schumann recognized himself in the Byronic hero and involuntarily identified himself with him[12]. "Never have I devoted myself to a composition with such love and energy"[13]. "My whole life, he wrote in a letter to his mother, has been a struggle between Poetry and Prose". (Letter of July 30, 1830). In its 15 separate numbers, this musical poem exquisitely illustrates several episodes of the action: in No. 2 (when the spirit appears in the shape of a beautiful woman) we recognize the author of the *Scenes for Children,* and in No. 6, the apparition of the Fairy of the Alps, the diaphanous sounds and the airy texture are reminiscent of Mendelssohn (the Elves)[14]. The most beautiful pages are dedicated to the evocation of Astarte. The words "I have called on thee in the still night" are accompanied by a simple melody, whose figurative motif returns many times, even at the end.

Schumann's *Ouverture zu Manfred* op. 115 begins at a fast pace (Rasch., quarter note = 152), like a signal in syncopated counterpoint, paving the way for a *tragic motif* in **E flat minor** (possibly *Schumann's symbol-signature* in *Carnaval:* E-flat – A – C-flat – B-flat), although the key signature heralds an E flat, followed four bars later by the *Manfred motif* (E-flat – B-flat – G-flat – F – A-flat – D – F – E-flat, containing the encrypted name of the hero and initials of the poet), which in conjunction with the Schumann motif outlines the theme of the work, which evolves into an implacable ascending *passus duriusculus*. Surprisingly, in bar 12 the *M motif* is transposed to major (E – B – G-sharp) and modulates to **F-sharp minor.** Equally abruptly, 7 bars later **the initial E-flat minor** returns**,**

[11] A fatidic date: July 29, 1956, the date of Schumann's death.

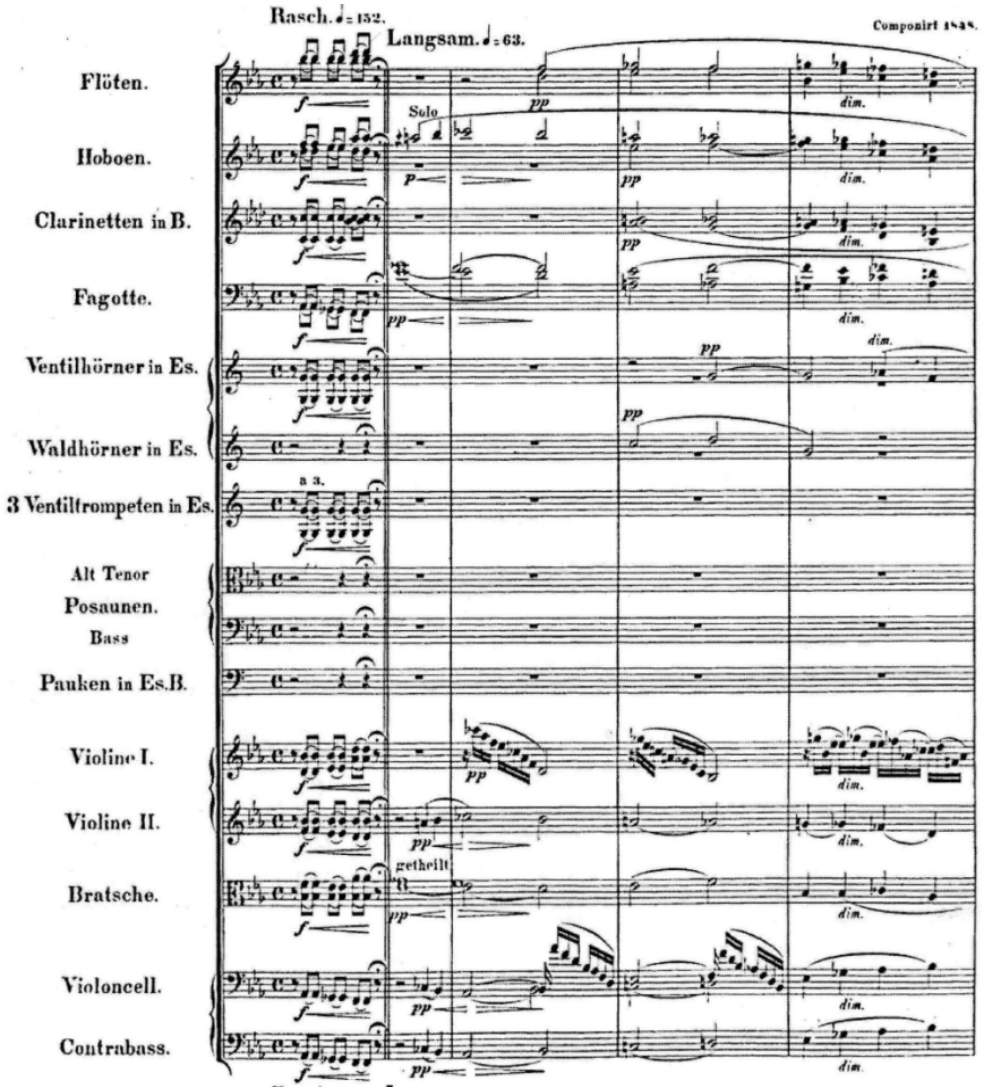
[12] In 1826, at the age of 16, Schumann suffered two losses: the death of his father (in August) and that of his sister. It seems that these memories drew him closer to the dramatic poem *Manfred.*

[13] Ioana Ştefănescu, *O Istorie a Muzicii Universale*, vol. III, Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, Bucharest 1998, p. 191.

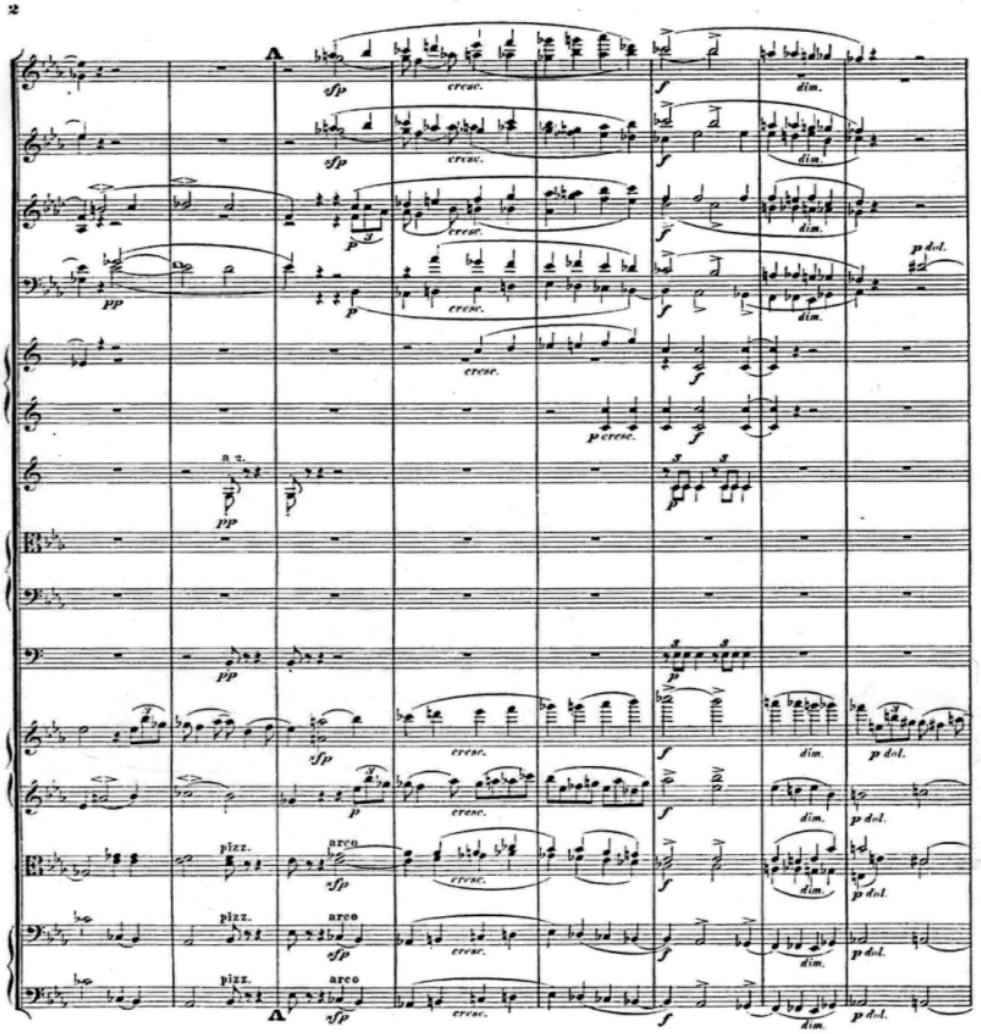
[14] J. Combarieu et R. Dumesnil, *Histoire de la Musique*, vol. III, Librairie Armand Colin, Paris, 1955, p. 300.

while the tempo accelerates gradually along with an increase in dynamics until a *ff* is reached. The brass instruments play a harmonic role and occur sporadically at first, but sometimes insinuate themselves with Beethoven's fate rhythm motif.

**E.g. 1**

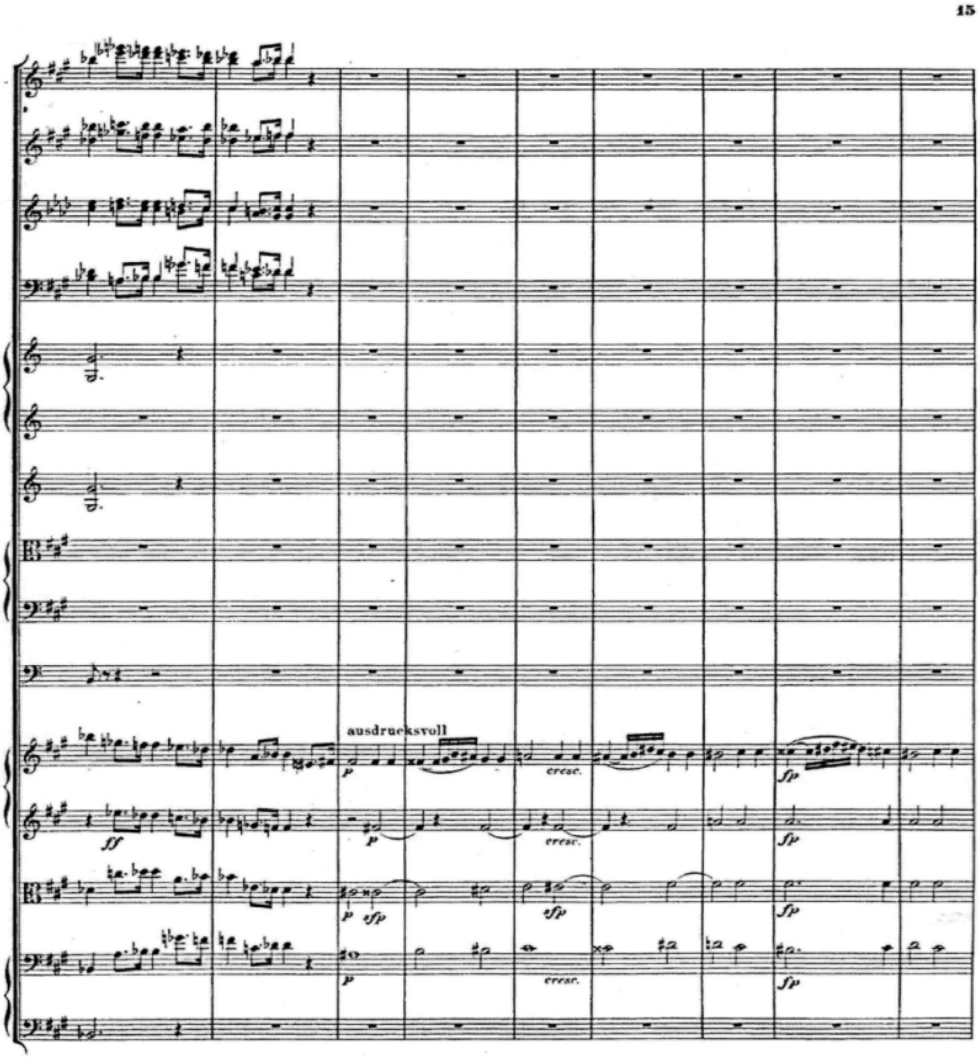


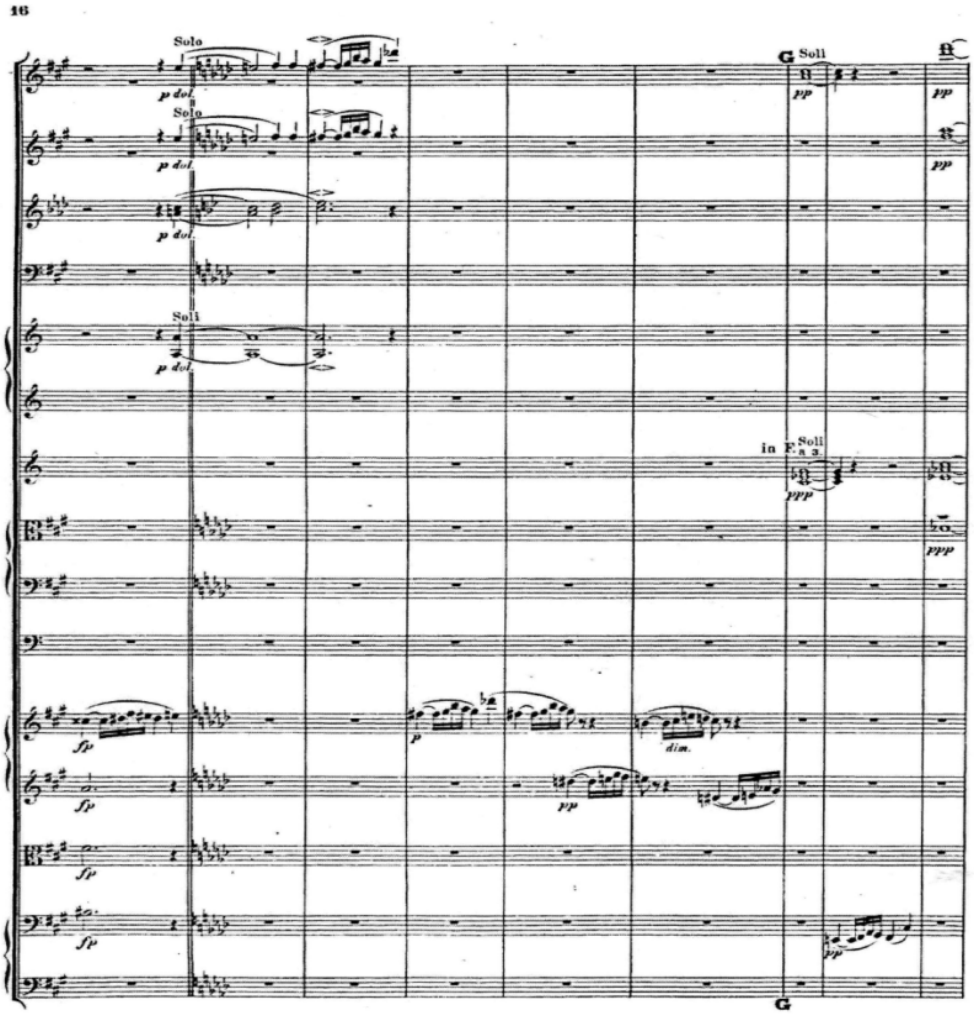
**E.g. 2**




Astarte's feminine theme occurs only briefly in the violins (mark D), in *piano,* only with chords accompaniment, without double basses, fading away on the sounds of the flute and oboe, with the new **F minor** tonality menacingly bringing in the **three trumpets**.

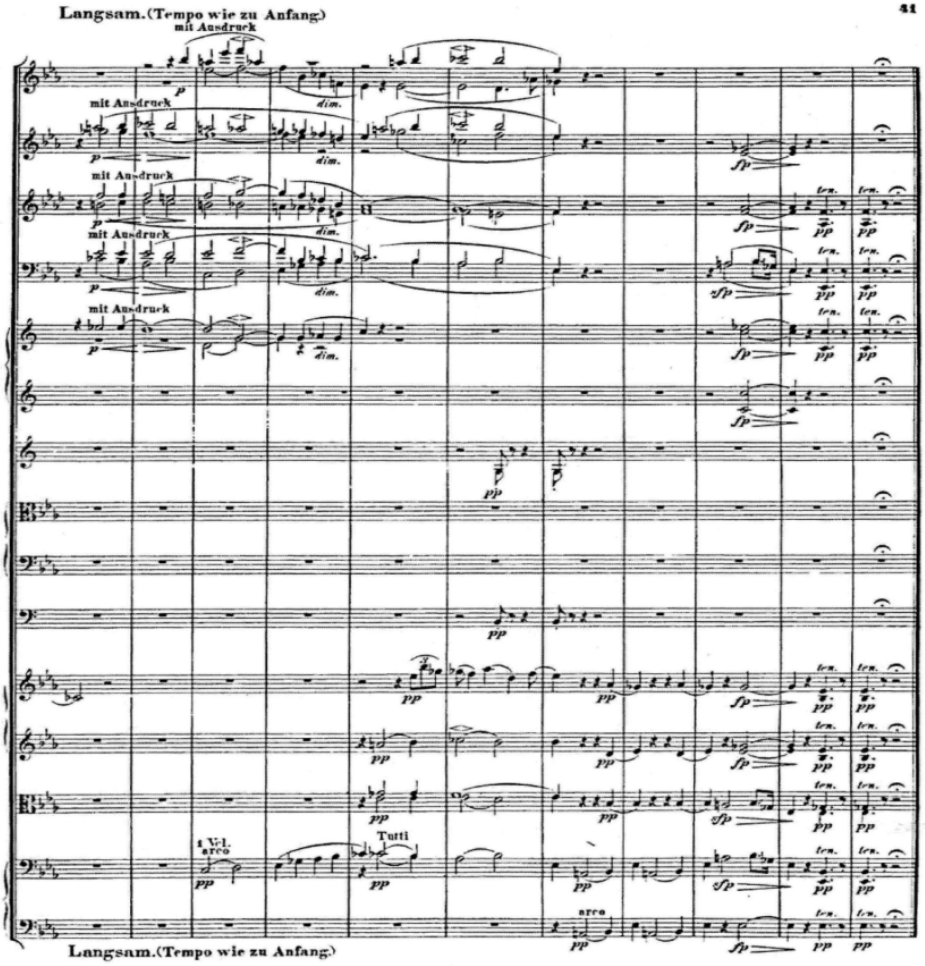
**E.g. 3**






After an extensive thematic development in the composer's internalized dramatic style, the conclusion comes as reconciliation with destiny, through the solemn sounds of a *Requiem* coming from a nearby monastery.

**E.g. 4**




Chronologically, between the two symphonic illustrations a lyrical version is also reported to exist in the form of the opera *König Manfred,* Op. 93 (F. Röber, July 26, 1867 or 1870) by Carl Reinecke[15] (1824-1910), a composer who has remained in the memory of posterity more for his chamber works and for the pleiad of composers that he nurtured, including Edvard Grieg, Leoš Janáček, Isaac Albéniz, Max Bruch.[16]

[15] Carl Heinrich Carsten Reinecke (June 23, 1824 – March 10, 1910), German composer, conductor and pianist

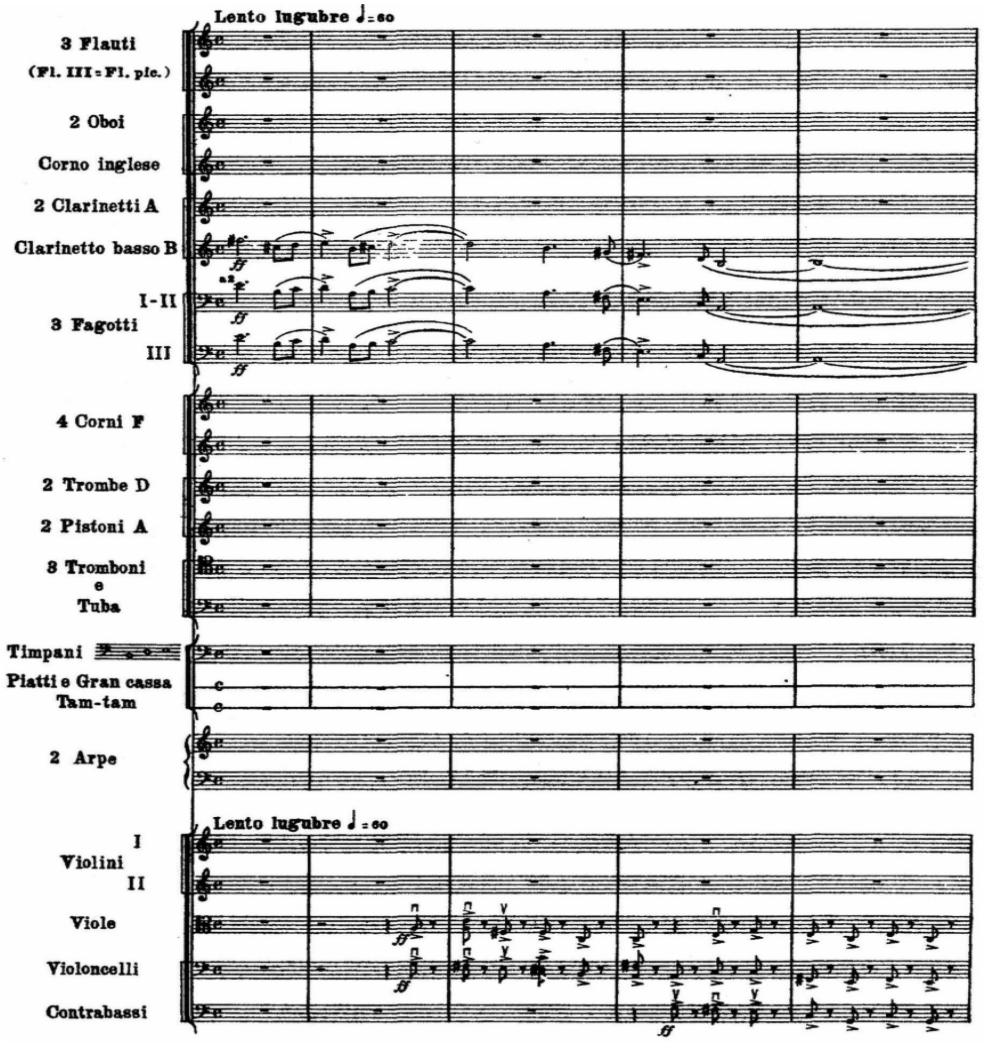
[16] Edvard Grieg, Basil Harwood, Christian Sinding, Leoš Janáček, Isaac Albéniz, August Max Fiedler, Johan Svendsen, Richard Franck, Felix Weingartner, Max Bruch.

## Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* (1885)

In 1885 (at the age of 45), Tchaikovsky transposed the Byronic demonic subject into a programmatic symphony, at the suggestion of Liszt and Balakirev. In 1879, Tchaikovsky composed *Eugene Onegin*, and one year before he had written *Mazeppa*. The première took place in Moscow one year later and was a tremendous success. The structure of the symphony follows the classical pattern, with each movement illustrating a tableau from Byron's poem. The *Manfred Symphony* op. 58 (I. Lento lugubre; II. Vivace con spirito; III. Pastorale. Andante con moto; IV. Allegro con fuoco) comes between Tchaikovsky's Fourth and Fifth Symphonies. Although Balakirev, with his authoritarian nature, had prescribed the subject, the generating motif, the main themes, the modulations and even the formal outline of the work, Tchaikovsky, engrossed in the drama of the theme, treated it in his own personal way, creating a monumental synthesis between the symphonic style and his unerring sense of the stage. The orchestral apparatus in the *Manfred Symphony* exceeds the timbral range of all the other symphonies of the composer. Tchaikovsky constantly uses three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, a tuba, and even a bass tuba in his Fourth Symphony. In Manfred he also uses the English horn, the bass clarinet, a third bassoon, two cornets a piston besides the usual two trumpets, a large number of percussion instruments besides the three timpani (cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, triangle, tambourine), two harps, and, at the end, bells and organ, with an illustrative role.

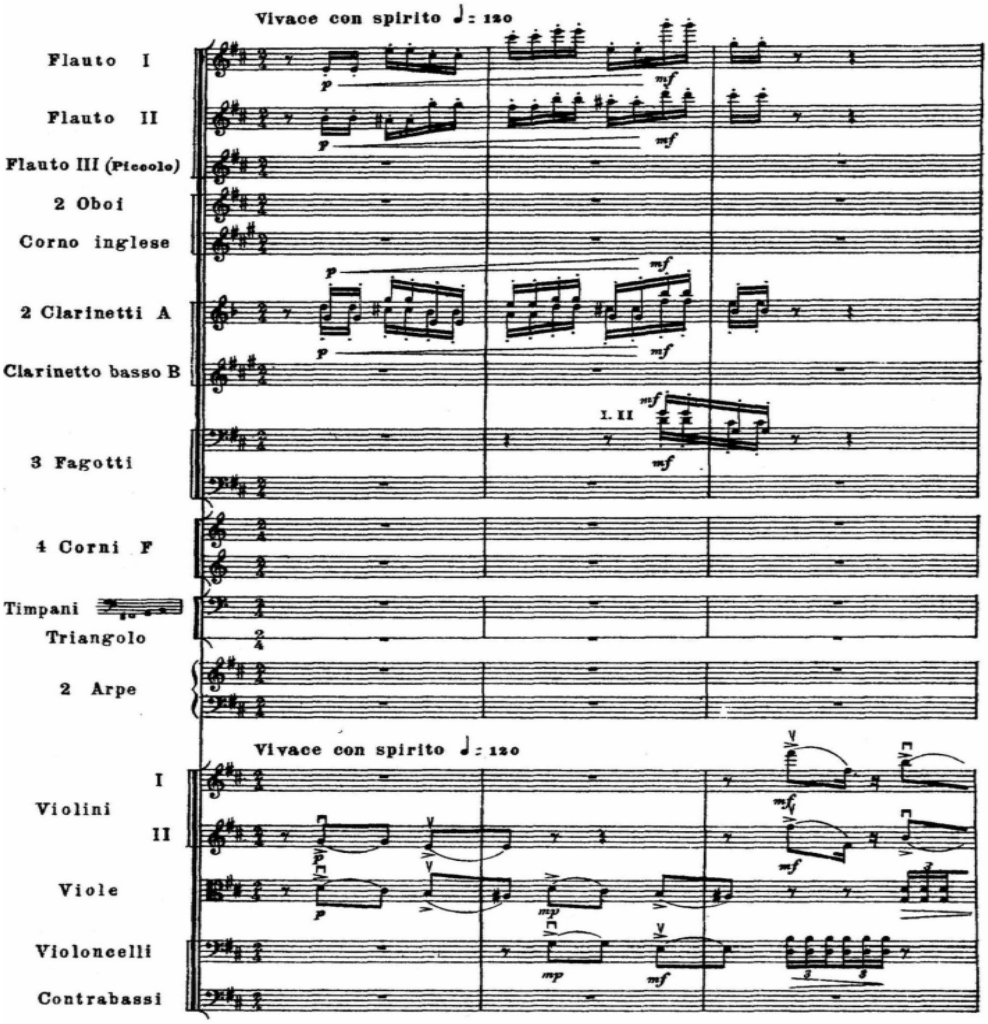
The first movement (I. Lento lugubre) presents Manfred, the main hero, trying to find relief for his sufferings. A slow, middle part evokes the image of his beloved Astarte. The first movement concludes with a dramatic *fff,* illustrating the hero's despair, tormented by remorse.

**E.g. 5**



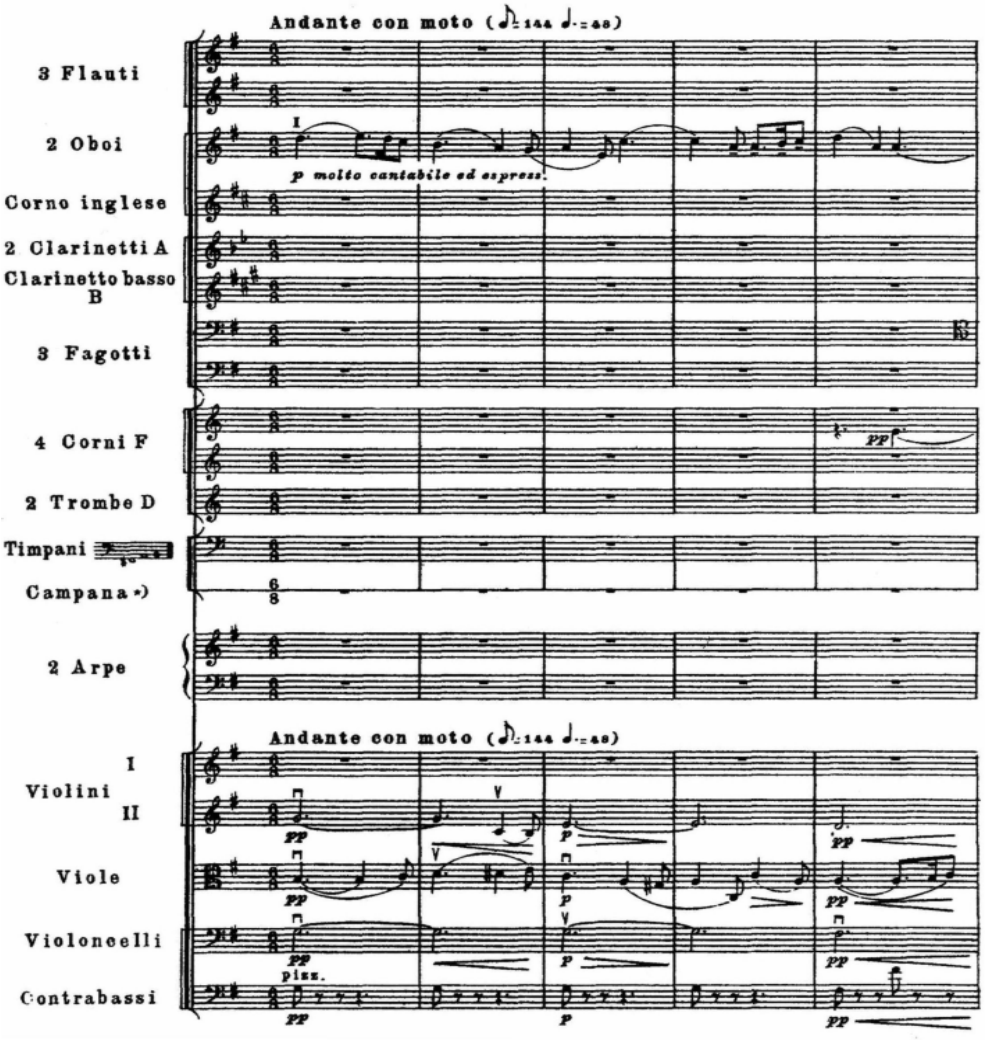

The second movement (II. Vivace con spirito) is a pictorial tableau: the poem of a waterfall in the Alps. The suave and alluring alpine fairy appears to Manfred beneath the rainbow of the waterfall spray.

**E.g. 6**



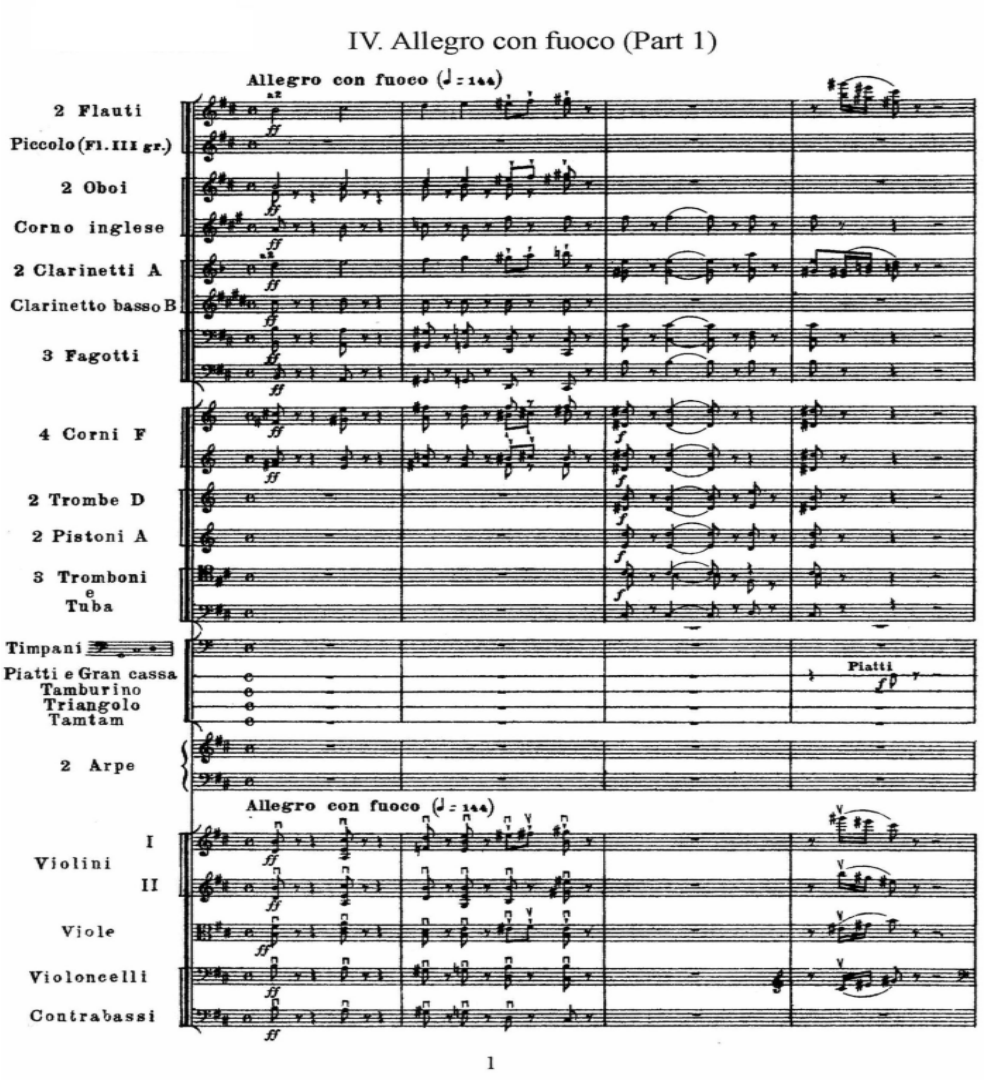

The third movement (III. Pastorale. Andante con moto) is a pastoral portraying of the simple life of the Alpine people. The sad Manfred theme returns in contrast with the merriment of the revelers. The pastoral sounds reveal a conceptual analogy with the corresponding (third) movement of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony or of Berlioz's *Fantastic Symphony.* The movement ends in a morendo *pppp.*

**E.g. 7**




The final movement (IV. Allegro con fuoco), begins with an expansive theme in **B minor** that leads to the palace of Arimanes, the ruler of the underworld. The movement portrays the appearance of Manfred in the middle of a wild bacchanal and the evocation of Astarte. She predicts an end to his sufferings.

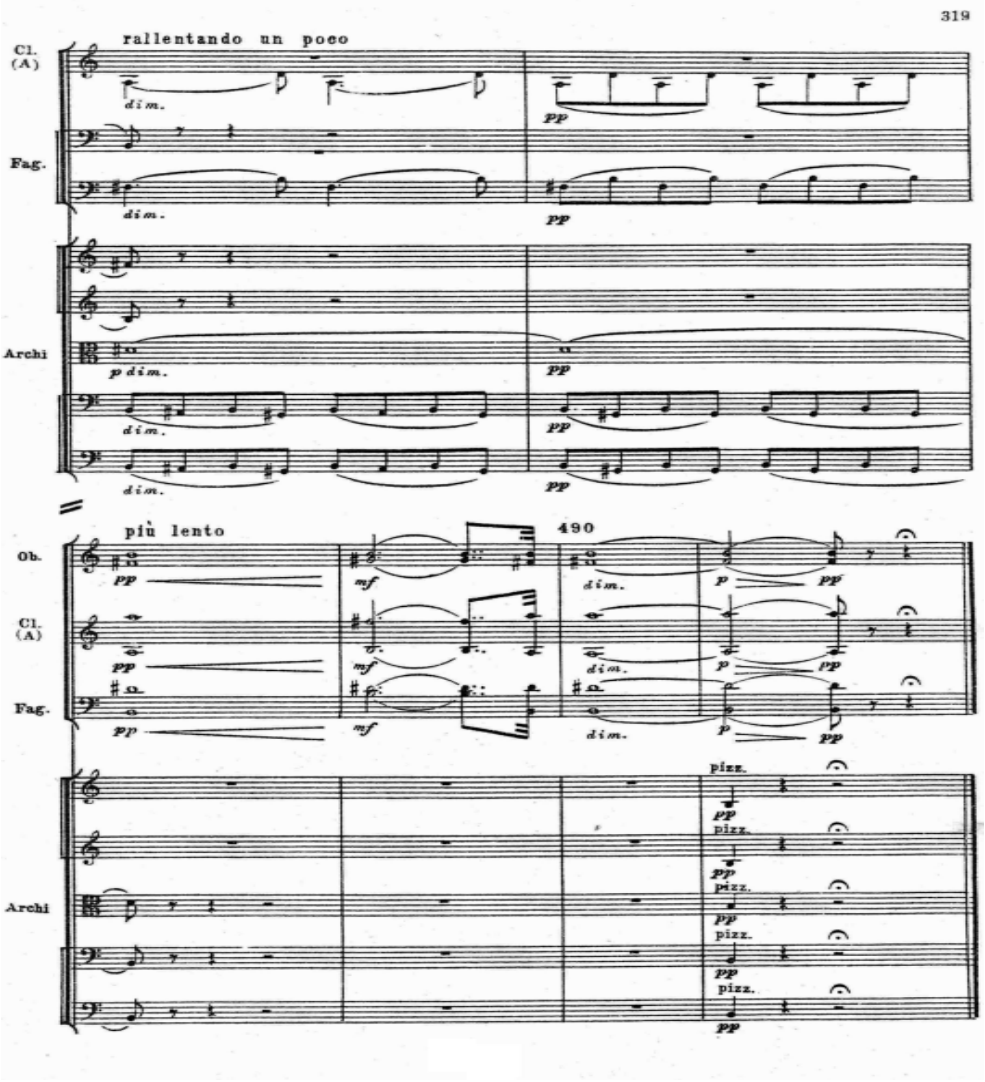
**E.g. 8**




A long fugato suggests the confrontation between Arimanes and Manfred, in which the hero dies.

The funeral theme of the first movement returns: the symphony ends in a calm mood, illustrating Manfred's ultimate liberation in death.

**E.g. 9**




## Conclusions

Both of the works inspired by Byron's text are symphonic works of maturity: Schumann composed his version as a dramatic work, consisting of spoken dialogues with vocal soloists and instrumental interludes, choruses and melodramas. The score was completed on November 23, 1851. Schumann

conducted the Leipzig première on March 14, 1852, while Liszt conducted the Weimar performance on June 13. Although unanimously praised for its aesthetic value, today it is only the overture that is still performed regularly.

We notice the *tragic motif* in **E flat minor** (*Schumann's symbol-signature* in *Carnaval:* E-flat – A – C-flat – B-flat), along with the *Manfred motif* (E-flat – B-flat – G-flat – F – A-flat – D – F – E-flat, with the encrypted name of the hero and initials of the poet), which in conjunction with the Schumann motif outlines the theme of the work. The contrast of the opposing themes, i.e. the tragic Manfred/Schumann theme and Astarte's lyrical one, the surprising modulations **(E-flat minor – F-sharp minor – E-flat minor),** the acceleration of tempo and the increase in dynamics up to *ff,* lead to the tragic denouement, marked by the brass instruments with Beethoven's fate motif.

In 1885 (at the age of 45), Tchaikovsky transposed the Byronic theme into a programmatic symphony, at the suggestion of Liszt and Balakirev. The theme had also been proposed to Berlioz, but he chose another hero, Harold. Preceded by the opera *Eugene Onegin,* the symphony follows the classical pattern, with each movement illustrating a tableau from Byron's poem. Its 1886 première in Moscow was a tremendous success. At first reluctant to the theme, Tchaikovsky changed his mind and decided to create a monumental version with a unique orchestration **(English horn, bass clarinet, a third bassoon, two cornets a piston** besides the two trumpets, a large number of **percussion instruments** besides the three timpani (cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, triangle, tambourine), **two harps** and **bell and organ** at the end), which he had never used it his previous symphonies and would not use in the last one, the *Pathétique* Symphony, either. Written between his famous Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, the Manfred symphony is rarely performed nowadays.

The Romantic hero is born from reality. Whether his name is Manfred, Werther, Clavigo, Onegin, or Byron, Pushkin, he will always bear the seal of the society he comes from. Noble and cultivated, he enjoys his privileged life to the fullest, but at some point this no longer satisfies him. In total disillusionment, he escapes from his commonplace existence and embarks on a quest for the unknown, living in that Eminescian “poignant charm”. He faces fate with dignity, without repent, paying for his audacity with his life.

"Fare thee well! I ne'er shall see thee more! As my first glance of love and wonder was for thee, then take my latest look: thou wilt not beam on one to whom the gifts of life and warmth have been of a more fatal nature! The mind which is immortal makes itself requital for its good or evil thoughts -- Is its own origin of ill and end --!”

Below we reproduce the final part of Byron's poem.

SPIRIT. But thy many crimes
Have made thee —

MANFRED. What are they to such as thee?
Must crimes be punish'd but by other crimes,
And greater criminals?-- Back to thy hell!
Thou hast no power upon me, that I feel;
Thou never shalt possess me, that I know:
What I have done is done; I bear within
A torture which could nothing gain from thine.
The mind which is immortal makes itself
Requital for its good or evil thoughts,
Is its own origin of ill and end,
And its own place and time; its innate sense,
When stripp'd of this mortality, derives
No colour from the fleeting things without,
But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,
Born from the knowledge of its own desert.
Thou didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me;
I have not been thy dupe nor am thy prey,
But was my own destroyer, and will be
My own hereafter.-- Back, ye baffled fiends!
The hand of death is on me-- but not yours!
[The Demons disappear].

ABBOT. Alas! how pale thou art-- thy lips are white--
And thy breast heaves-- and in thy gasping throat
The accents rattle. Give thy prayers to Heaven--
Pray-- albeit but in thought,-- but die not thus.

MANFRED. 'T is over-- my dull eyes can fix thee not;
But all things swim around me, and the earth
Heaves as it were beneath me. Fare thee well--
Give me thy hand.

ABBOT. Cold-- cold-- even to the heart--
But yet one prayer-- Alas! how fares it with thee?

MANFRED. Old man! 't is not so difficult to die. [MANFRED expires].

ABBOT. He's gone, his soul hath ta'en its earthless flight;
Whither? I dread to think; but he is gone.

Translated by Marcella Magda

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