

LISZT - PORTRAIT OF A MUSICIAN. DANTE SYMPHONY

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“O light and glory of the other poets,
let the long study, and the ardent love
which made me con thy book, avail me now.”²

Dante Alighieri – *The Divine Comedy, Inferno* - Canto I: 82-84

SUMMARY. It is well known the fact that Liszt’s programmatic music does not describe something concrete but rather suggests the feelings triggered by a certain action, theme, landscape or artwork. One of the first statements about Liszt’s intention of writing the *Dante Symphony* exists in a letter addressed to Richard Wagner, in which the composer confessed: “Like Virgil led Dante, you showed me the way trough the mysterious regions of a lively world of sounds. I say to you wholeheartedly: *Tu sei lo mio maestro, e il mio autore* – and I dedicate this work to you with all my everlasting love, Weimar – *Ostern* – 1850. Yours, F. Liszt”³ In the same letter the author adds, “and if you do not disapprove, I will encrypt your name”⁴. This study aims to reflect the way in which the composer identifies himself with the main character of the Symphony, transcending this journey of creation further than reflected in his other works, in this way transforming the whole opera into an allegoric self portrait. The Symphony presents the protagonist Liszt-Dante starting a fascinating and at the same time terrifying journey through *Inferno-Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, reflecting, probably more than in any other work of his that every note is like a confession of his own personal religious beliefs.

Keywords: Dante Symphony, programmatic music, Franz Liszt, Gregorian chant

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² Alighieri, Dante, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri. The Italian Text with a Translation in English Blank Verse and a Commentary by Courtney Langdon*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918.

³ Correspondence between Wagner, Liszt, II, 7,1, cf. Raabe, Peter – *Vorwort Dante-Symphonie*, Verlag von Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, Berlin, Brüssel, 1921, p. 3

⁴ *Ibid.*

1. Genesis of the Dante Symphony

The Dante Symphony was completed 1855-1856, the first edition of the score being published in 1859. Subsequently, Liszt performed a transcription of the work for two pianos.

The years of dwelling in Weimar were a time of professional growth under the guidance of great masters, such as composer August Conradi and Joachim Raff.⁵

In an attempt to achieve a synthesis creation, Liszt wanted that the first performance be associated with illustrations on Dante, by Romantic the painter Giovanni Buonaventura Genelli,⁶ in the diorama technique.⁷

At the first performance, the work was rejected by the audience, a failure explained by Liszt due to the interpretation of the orchestra, which was not provided with sufficient rehearsals. The performance of this work in Prague, a year later, proved to be a real success.⁸

In the case of the *Dante Symphony*, as in the case of the *Faust Symphony*, from the manuscripts were preserved only the early and the final stages. There is also missing the first non-instrumentalized transcription.⁹ The first score (which was owned by Arthur Nikisch in Leipzig) is marked 15 April IND. At the end of every sentence is written *BBBBBB*.¹⁰

The note *IN D [In Nomine Domini]* is found very often and from the early stages of creation in the manuscripts of Liszt; also, from the time of the friendship with Princess Wittgenstein the final *BBBBB*. In his manuscripts are found up to seven Bs. Sometimes there appears the form *BBBB d B*. This was in reference, as Princess von Hohenlohe, daughter of Princess Wittgenstein, reported, to an understanding between Liszt and her mother. Often, Liszt said jokingly about himself and the princess that they are “twins, soulmates, *les bons bessons*.” *Besson* is a popular phrase for *jumeau*. The meaning of the note is: “*Que bon Dieu benisse les bons bessons*.” Another time, he ended his letter with the words “*Bon Dieu benisse bons bessons*.”

⁵ Balla Kemenes, Csilla, *Retorica muzicală a discursului pianistic din epoca Romantismului, (The rhetoric of piano music discourse in the Romantic era)*, Doctoral disertation, Academia de Muzică „Gh. Dima”, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p.250.

⁶ German painter of Italian origin, Gemelli (1798-1868) illustrated the Divine Comedy published in 1841 in Düsseldorf; v. [http://dfg-viewer.de/v2/?set\[mets\]=http%3A//digital.ub.uni-duesseldorf.de%2Ffoai%2F%3Fverb%3DGetRecord%26metadataPrefix%3Dmets%26identifier%3D1105779](http://dfg-viewer.de/v2/?set[mets]=http%3A//digital.ub.uni-duesseldorf.de%2Ffoai%2F%3Fverb%3DGetRecord%26metadataPrefix%3Dmets%26identifier%3D1105779)

⁷ Hamburger, p. 90. Diorama is a technique of static spatial representation, with figures in relief and light effects; from Gr. *διόρω*, to see through something.

⁸ Idem, p.91

⁹ Raabe, op.cit, p.3.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

Often he just signed with *Besson* or *B.B.* According to the understanding mentioned, the word *Dieu* was replaced by the Polish word for God - *Boze* - so that the new text was: *Bon Boze Benisse Bons Bessons*. The lower case *d* appearing frequently between the Bs must be understood as *deux*. The number of *B* letters, as we already mentioned, is different - but simply due to negligence.

The second part of the original score has a cover bearing the title:
Eine Symphonie zu Dantes Divina Commedia

The initial score is much different in details from the final structure; in it, many items are simpler. For example, there lacks the fugue, or the *Lamentoso* moment of the *Purgatory*, respectively. Instead, there is a much more superficial execution. The *Andante Amoroso* passage of the *Inferno* was originally written fully in a 4/4 beat pattern, thus:¹¹

E. g. 1



The entire fragment differs consistently from the latter version, the unusual metric framing of 7/4 and full of momentum. The idea that in the end is heard again the muted horn on the “*Lasciate*” chords did not appear in the first score.¹²

About the *crescendo* from the end of the first part, Liszt wrote: “At presentations in theatres is added effect of the wind machine.”¹³ He later renounced it, but anyway, in 1856, he intended to use an effect, that Richard Strauss in 1897 used in *Don Quixote* and then in *An Alpine Symphony*.¹⁴

At the mention of the date in the original score the year is not specified. As we mentioned, the year was 1856. On May 16 of that year, Wagner, who was in London, wrote to Liszt that he read Dante for the first time: “I went through his *Inferno* and now I am at the gates of *Purgatory*.”¹⁵ On June 2, Liszt and replied:¹⁶ “So, you are reading Dante. It is a good company for you. In my way, I want to provide you with comments on this reading. I bear already for a long time in mind a Dante Symphony. Later

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Raabe – op.cit, p. 4.

¹⁵ Letter Wagner – Liszt (*Volks Ausgabe*), II, 68, cf. Raabe.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

this year I will finish it.” In the same letter, he mentioned at the end: “When I finish *Prometheus’s Choir*,¹⁷ I will pass to *Dante Symphony*, which is already partially outlined.”¹⁸

However, at the beginning, the work did not progress. On July 5, 1855, Liszt and wrote to Mrs. Agnes Street-Klindworth: “*Vers la mi* (illegible text) *je tacherai de commencer le Dante*.”¹⁹ But the year ended and the next began without Liszt to think seriously to put his plan into action. Ever since March 11, 1856, he wrote to his same friend:²⁰ “*Helas, il se passera bien encore 6 semaines avant que je ne puisse m’y mettre tout de bon*.” Immediately after this period, Liszt apparently found inspiration for this work and worked diligently, for on April 23, 1856 he wrote:²¹ “*Ces jours derniers j’ai beaucoup travaillé et suis tout pres de terminer mon Enfer*”; on May 24 he announced Christian Lobe²² that the *Dante Symphony* could be “half transcribed”²³ and on July 9, to Louis Köhler, that “yesterday I wrote the last rhythms of the score.”²⁴

Initially, the work was planned as a symphony in three parts. On June 3, 1855, Liszt wrote the composer Anton Rubinstein and related him about his plan on *Dante Symphony*, stating that the first two parts, *L’Enfer* and *Le Purgatoire* will be exclusively instrumental, and the third part, *Le Paradis*, will employ choir singing as well.²⁵ The same he communicated to Wagner.²⁶ He replied though three days later, in detail, that he had no doubt on the success of the creation by Liszt of the “Inferno” and “Purgatory,” but that he was reticent regarding a part dedicated to the “Paradise.” In a very detailed and well documented letter²⁷ (one of the most beautiful in all his correspondence), Wagner explained his doubts and had success, because Liszt renounced the presentation of Paradise in his work.

¹⁷ Which Liszt changed considerably in that period - cf. Raabe.

¹⁸ To the same end, on June 1, 1855, Liszt wrote to Agnes Klindworth (letter III, 23), whom he gave an edition of Dante (letter III, 37, 39). He listened with delight the opinions of this friend on literature (letter III, 45, 46). Also to Rubinstein, Liszt wrote even since the June 8, 1856, that he had already outlined the plan (Letter I, 201) Cf. P. R.

¹⁹ Letter III, 30 cf. Raabe.

²⁰ Letter III, 66 cf. Raabe.

²¹ Letter III, 69, cf. Raabe.

²² Letter III, 128, cf. Raabe.

²³ “Transcribed” means in Liszt’s German “written” and does not indicate, according to the meaning nowadays, that the voicing of the orchestra would have been achieved. In a letter sent the same day to L. Kohler, Liszt even says that the *Dante Symphony* that is transcribed over fifty percent. (Letter 1, 223), cf. Raabe.

²⁴ Letter 1, 224, cf. Raabe.

²⁵ Letter 1, 201, cf. Raabe.

²⁶ Letter Wagner – Liszt II, 71 (2 June 1855). The triptych structure of the symphony is also confirmed by the letters between Liszt and Bülow 138. cf. Raabe.

²⁷ Letter Wagner – Liszt II, 73 ff (7 June 1855) - cf. Raabe.

Regarding the merging of Purgatory with the suggestion of a presentation of Paradise, composer and writer Richard Pohl, who subsequently made, at the request of the master, the preface to the score,²⁸ notes: "Both for reasons of musical and Catholic dogma, the composer is allowed to prefer to present the second and third parts as slightly separate outside as they are inside Art does not like to paint the sky, but only the earthly brightness of this sky in the centre of the soul returned into the light of divine mercy. And so, this glow remains for us just a covered glow, even if only with the purity of knowledge. The composer wanted to follow the soloist only to this point."

As in all his works, in this case too, after he finished it, Liszt noted a series of decisive changes. The two endings existed since the first transcription of the score. Initially, the second ended four measures earlier. Liszt added four measures and the entire pompous ending, with the mention in the *pp* measures that "probably here is the ending."

When in October 1856 he presented Wagner his *Dante Symphony*, in Zurich, he opted wholeheartedly for a peaceful ending. Liszt initially agreed with the preservation of this version.²⁹ Subsequently, both the end of the *Dante Symphony* and of the *Faust Symphony* were altered.

The first performance in Dresden³⁰ was held on November 7, and was preceded, according to tradition, by private performances in Weimar.³¹

The work was rejected by the audience and the press in Dresden. Unlike the private performances in Weimar, Liszt identified more clearly in the public performance the shortcomings that had to be corrected. In March

²⁸ On the various prefaces on the Dante Symphony and their story, see Müller - Reuter „Lexikon der deutschen Konzertliteratur“ 275, 276, cf. Peter Raabe.

²⁹ Wagner, Rich, "Mein Leben", My Life "Volksausgabe 1914 III, 120, cf. Peter Raabe.

³⁰ Letters II ², 330, Lina Ramann states that the first performance was held under the leadership of the choir master Fischer. This is false. Liszt conducted himself, which is proved by the the discussions on the concert in the newspapers published in December 1857, and in his letters to Brendel (Letter II, 24), in which Liszt accused himself of "negligent conducting" (see letter VII, 192: " elle avait une chute mortelle ...a Dresde, un peu por ma faute " and the letter to Gille, 23 "in Dresden, where the performance was very unsuccessful due to inadequate rehearsals. I recognize my fault, which I often supported as a conductor the shortening of my work with a sick tolerance"). In addition, in the same place, Lina Ramann states that the second performance in Prague on March 11, 1858 (erroneously, she mentions March 13), was conducted not by Liszt, but by Prof. Mildner. This too is false, see letter I, 298, Liszt's letter to Cornelius. cf. Peter Raabe

³¹ The existence of such rehearsals (on October 12, 1857) is confirmed by a letter of Bülow, then Heinr.Reimann presented a copy of it in his unfinished bibliography on Bülow (Berlin 1908). The letter is currently at the History of Music Museum of Fr.Nicolaes Manskopf in Frankfurt a.M. It's missing from the letters and texts by H.v.Bülow. Cf. Raaf.

1859 he himself wrote to Max Seifritz³² that “the performance in Dresden served only as evidence, and afterwards he made some changes in the score,” and in January 1858 he wrote to Draeseke:³³ “The performance in Dresden was necessary, so that in this way I would get to objectivity. As long as you are dealing only with dead paper, it is easy to make mistakes. Music needs sound and echo.” In the letters to Brendel,³⁴ he called the changes made subsequently as “improvements, simplifications and clarifications of the score, which were fixed in his head during the rehearsals and the performance and which were heard first by him, not to take into account the audience.”

When *Dante Symphony* took shape in Liszt’s mind, he decided to dedicate his work to Richard Wagner. These words were not intended for public opinion. In his sad and bitter letter to Bülow, on 7 October 1859, Wagner wrote:³⁵ “There are many things that we like to recognize among us, like for example that since I met the compositions of Liszt I have become a completely different man as harmonist than I was before ... Liszt may, for example, write about me in ink on the dedication page of “Dante” because he believes that he has to thank me for many things; I believe that it is rather an excess of friendship. No matter how silly it may seem, I insist that such a thing printed should have mentioned in the dedication everyone. In this way, I would have had the opportunity to publicly protest.” On the cover of the last version copied by hand, Liszt wrote:³⁶ “Dedicated to Richard Wagner, with immeasurable admiration and eternal friendship.”

But he removed this text as well eventually, and on the first page of the score remained only the words: “Dedicated to Richard Wagner.”

2. Dante Symphony – analysis

Taking inspiration from Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, the *Symphony* retains the ternary structure and the overall theme of the triptych. The first two parts bear the original names: *Inferno* and *Purgatory*. The third part, which is entitled *Paradise* in the *Divine Comedy*, becomes hymnal, through the biblical song *Magnificat* – with the role of epilogue.

Depicted as a perfect poetic expression, *Divina Commedia* benefitted the full support of the Catholic Church, which considered that the three

³² Seifritz (1827 -1885) as a kapelmeister in Loewenberg, presented the orchestral works of Liszt. His letter to him is found in Letters I, 317, cf. Raabe.

³³ Letters I, 204, cf. Raabe.

³⁴ Letters II, 24, cf. Raabe.

³⁵ Richard Wagner, Letters to Hans von Bülow, Jena, Eugen Diederich, 125 - cf. Raabe.

³⁶ In the Liszt Museum, Ms A 13, cf. Raabe.

realms - *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* - present the universality of the laws and the order proper to those times.³⁷ Dante, as a literary hero, does not represent an abstract allegorical figure, but a living man by whose personality the souls return to the human condition and achieve their quest for happiness and salvation.

Purification is not only cathartic, but anagogic:³⁸ for *homo religiosus* only the mystic level can bring spiritual ascension. Dante as the protagonist of his own creation presents a wide range of human values - ethical, aesthetic, religious, social, philosophical, historical - and become for his successors, an idealized standard. Liszt reaches Dante, similar to how Dante identified himself with Virgil's destiny in his preparations for the *Commedia*. He appears programmatically in the piece for piano *Fragment après Dante* (first performance 1839), in *Fantasia quasi sonata Après une lecture de Dante* (published in the volume for piano "Years of Pilgrimage" in 1858) and in the *Dante Symphony*. The programme of the *Symphony* summarises the initiatic journey through a relatively small number of verses drawn from the literary work.

The orchestration is based on five compartments of strings, uses the harp with suggestive colour effects, has the percussion compartment relatively rich for the historical period in question (4 timpani, tam-tam, bass drum, cymbals), abundant brass (common since Berlioz: four horns, two trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba) and the woodwinds (especially the English horn and bass clarinet) are emphasized as soloists.

Inferno

The first part of the *Dante Symphony* is looming as a complex sonata structure and, potentially, interacting with an arched macroform. To be noted the perfect combination of the two principles of form. Although Romanticism was in the era in which composers have exceeded the limitations of the rules of composition, this extension does not prevent Liszt from merging the two principles on an extremely clear and well organized frame both in terms of melody and harmony.

The motto "Leave all hope, ye who enter" has a strong expressive force, generating multiple states in the Dante character at the beginning of his journey through the circles of hell.

In this first part, the evil is musically illustrated in an ironic way - as will be entitled the mephistophelic part of the *Faust Symphony*. The gradation of tempo from *Lento* to *Allegro frenetico* is intense.

³⁷ Balla Kemenes, Csilla, op.cit, p.249.

³⁸ Idem.

Although the key signature does not indicate any alteration sign, the initial tonality is D minor. The sound material brings, at a closer look, a scale in which alternate minor and major seconds - called by analysts “the Dante scale.”³⁹

E. g. 2

Per me si va tra la per-du.ta gen-te

marcatissimo

marcatissimo

Liszt insists in exposing the triad on G#, with suggestions to *diabolus in musica*, and also to the modal folk traditions.

Inferno starts with a thematic succession⁴⁰ - exposed by trombones, tuba and low strings – in which *anabasis* cells on a range of a diminished fourth and *catabasis* on a diminished third frame the leap of minor sixth, a grieving *exclamatio* rhetorically effective. The selected text (keywords: *per me, dolente*) coincides prosodically with the melody:

E. g. 3

Per me si va nella cit.tà do.len-te:

A brief transition developed over three measures connects this first moment with Dante’s motto *Lasciate ogni Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate* (Canto 3):

³⁹ Hamburger, op.cit., p.92. The scale coincides with Messiaen’s mode 2 with limited transposition.

⁴⁰ The theme had been previously used by Liszt in the lied *Le vieux vagabond*, on the text of the poet Pierre-Jean de Béranger.

E. g. 4



The repetition in the interval of a unison of long notes is an intervallic-semantic characteristic of the fragment which proposes, from a symbolic point of view, the idea of a spiritual ascent of the man gazing toward heaven.⁴¹

The recitative of the *Dante Symphony* exposed in the opening of the *Inferno* is a typical Romantic construction that captures the complexity of the mental and spiritual states of the character. Liszt employs a broad sonority, processing the sigh metaphor of the soul into a *ff* nuance. The recitative has the melodic-harmonic support the whole compartment of the strings which through *tremolo* increase the feeling of anguish. Liszt illustrates the suffering in the underworld through fast sounds, repeated in an ascending chromatic progression.

The introduction ends with a bridge leading to the onset of the exposition proper. The ascending chromatic movement in binary values overlapping ternary ones in the low pitched strings creates the feeling of pain and anguish. The moment develops under the agogic indication *poco a poco accelerando*:

E. g. 5



⁴¹ Balla-Kemenes, Csilla, op.cit., p.129.

Theme A is initially exposed in the strings compartment:

E. g. 6

and is followed by a conclusive segment, then by the bridge introducing the second thematic group.

The entire construction of the theme is based on a *passus duriusculus* expanded over the range of a diminished twelfth.

We notice that the manner of realisation of the bridge is similar with the previous one. A distinctive feature of the second theme is the permutation of elements between groups of instruments; we can thus see that when the theme is exposed in the brass section, the overlapping between binary and ternary values is performed in the strings, or in the woodwind instruments.

The descending theme - a chromatic line having atonal nature – proposes through its sonority a tense moment. The theme appears twice before being employed by the orchestra, suggesting Dante's downfall in the depths of the inferno.

This occurs during the first part, sometimes repeated in varied form, sometimes identical; it aims to spur action and to push it toward a climax, which from a literary point of view is represented by stepping on the frozen floors of the inferno.

The sigh motif is prefigured in the winds. It is not a simple, but a contorted form, which turns into an *anabasis* based on the sound material of the Dante scale:

E. g. 7

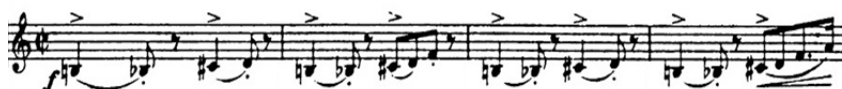
Before the advent of second thematic succession, Liszt brings an element of surprise: the interval of augmented fourth (*diabolus in musica*); placed in the discourse of the double bass, it appears in inversion, in ascending movement, three times.

The second thematic succession begins with a new personality, but not completely different from the previous material, which was foreshadowed by the mentioned sigh motif; the agogic indication is *Allegro frenetico. Quasi doppio movimento*.

The section consists of three themes, of which the final B serves a conclusive role, while the second thematic group is presented as follows:

B1:

E. g. 8



B2:

E. g. 9



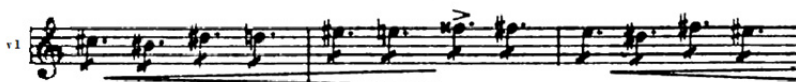
This B2 is based on the scale with augmented second called by Liszt "the Gypsy scale," which he exposed in his Romantic essays and letters.

The reappearance of the B2 theme in a triple ternary succession (3 x 3) may be an allusion to the *Kyrie* invocation in the mass (totaling nine invocations), its expressive meaning being that of a desperate supplication.

The answer to this prayer comes contrasting, organized in repetitive binary groups, the sonorous material used being a metric distortion of the theme A and suggests demonic laughter.

The initial motif of the secondary thematic group is transformed, becoming the interval profile B-A-C-H (transposed), obsessively multiplied, then dispersed.

E. g. 10



From measure 64, the quote “fatherland full of torment” is played by three musical materials: the first is descending chromatically in the bass, in *staccati (catabasis)*, the second material is based on *suspiratio* and the third, with the function of secondary theme, is isorhythmic, accompanied by descending *staccati* chords (m. 163).

The middle section – representing the episode of guilty love between Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini – is a development of the sonata form, beginning with a harmonization of the motto *Lasciate ...* of the introduction:

E. g. 11

Liszt uses herein the entire emotional power of the flute and harp; in auditory terms, the symbolism of the chosen instruments implies the need for a purification that will allow the subsequent ascent to Paradise. The contrast between the first two sections is very clearly outlined by the opposition between the groups of winds. It is known that Liszt’s dramaturgy does not follow point by point the source of literary inspiration, choosing to describe the love between Paolo and Francesca and the turmoil of the tormented souls, but not Dante’s journey in the Circles of Hell.

The exact literary source of this moment is Canto V. The two characters appear portrayed in warm lighting, in the moment *Quasi Andante ma sempre un poco mosso*, being portrayed in the timbre expression of the strings, harp, clarinet and English horn.⁴² The next tempo indication, *Andante amoroso* comes as if to capture the presence of these two characters overwhelmed by tragic love.

Liszt uses in the descriptive musical discourse of love feelings a unique way of employing rhythmic and metric means of expression, through the 7/4 time. The expressive effects of this unusual compositional solution

⁴² Balla-Kemenes, Csilla, op.cit., p.252.

include hints of *rubato*, afterwards converts to quasi-*giusto*, including suggestions of hesitant dance. The atmosphere is suddenly interrupted, the occurrence of the motif “*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate!*” restoring the sound plane into the symbolic perimeter of suffering.

The second phase of the development proposes a contrast both in terms of the *Quasi andante ma sempre un poco mosso* tempo, and in the score writing. Liszt does not use the whole orchestra sonority here. Noteworthy is the diversity of the means that the author employs in processing the motifs. Thus, in this section we find:

- lyrical-descriptive passages:

E. g. 12

The image shows a page of a musical score for Liszt's 'Portrait of a Musician' from the Dante Symphony. The title is 'Quasi Andante, ma sempre un poco mosso'. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Horn (Hr.), Harp (Harfe), Piano (Pianoforte), and Cymbals (Cymb.). Performance instructions include 'pp mit Dämpfer (con cord.)', 'pizz.', 'glissando', 'due Pedali', 'con sordino', 'molto legato', 'strem.', 'pizz.', and 'p senza agitazione'. There are also notes in French and Italian: '(Pianoforte in the absence of Harp.)', '(Cymbale à défaut de Harpe.)', '(Empire A&H 4/12)', and 'Pianoforte in the absence of Harp.'.

- a moment of recitative placed in the bass clarinet:

E. g. 13

The image shows a snippet of a musical score for a recitative passage. The tempo is 'Recit.' and the dynamics are 'mf espressivo dolente'. The passage includes a 'ritenuto' section and ends with 'amors.' and 'pp'.

- a choral supported by clarinet and bassoon:

E. g. 14

The third phase of the development represents a moment of *lamento*: “*nessun maggior dolore che ricordarse del tempo felice nella miseria.*” This time, the English horn has soloist role, being accompanied by the arpeggiated chords of the harp. Gradually, the writing progresses, reaching the maximum extension of this phase, respectively of 6 wind instruments accompanied by harp.

The fourth phase of development brings the sigh motif overlapped on the material which processes the theme itself:

E. g. 15

A specific melodic-rhythmic aspect of the unison repeated in equal values is configured in the final section, with allusions to Beethoven’s rhythmic motif of destiny:

E. g. 16

The last phase of development is also the most extensive, both in terms of scope, and especially of content, which aims to synthesize and conclude what was previously exposed. The conclusive nature of the moment is also rendered by the appearance towards the end of the motto “*Lasciate*”

The recapitulation brings the exposition of the second thematic group, in reverse order, namely B3, B2, B1; therefore it delineates a more dynamic reprise, ending with processing theme A.

The part ends with a coda, presenting remnants of the thematic group A. The resemblance with the second theme is very clear from the beginning,

E. g. 17



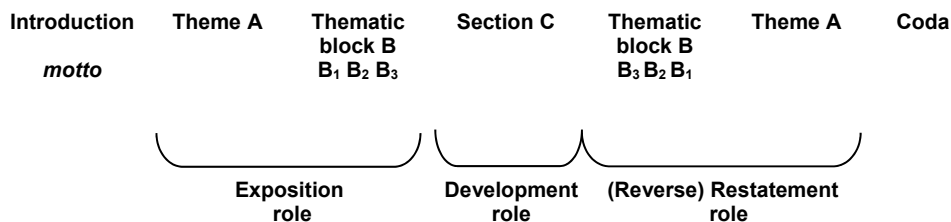
becoming increasingly difficult to detect, almost like an echo:

E. g. 18



In light of those presented above, the structure of this part can be rendered in the following scheme:

E. g. 19



The complexity of the themes is one of the main reasons we advocate that this part has a sonata structure. Another important factor is the tonal plane. Debuting in the area of D minor, Part I relies mainly on modulations to tonalities fulfilling the role of dominant, relative or parallel.

We can also see how the emergence of the themes is achieved in thematic successions, a process characteristic of the sonata form. They are treated in the middle section, which entitles us to assert with certainty that it fulfills the role of development. The themes are resumed with variations in the final section, which is therefore a dynamized recapitulation.

Although all the features mentioned above are typical of the sonata form, this part does not have for certain the simplicity of a classical structure. On macrostructural level, we notice the interference that occurs between these characteristics and those of the arched shape. If we consider the middle segment as the axis of symmetry, we find that its external parts are reflected.

The Inferno achieves in structural terms a synthesis of the sonata with the arched form, due to the expansion and of the multitude of defining elements for both patterns.

Purgatory

The second movement, *Purgatory*, is more quiet and reflective, rendering the contrast between the suffering Dante experiences in the underworld and the hope that shimmers in *Purgatory*. Liszt uses a fugue based highly on the descending melodic motif used in the first movement. The *Lamentoso* indication is atypical for a piece of this kind.

Part two also brings together several principles of form. From the point of view of the macrostructure, it is a ternary articulation presented as follows:

E. g. 20



The first section begins with an introduction. The orchestral writing gradually increases until the eighth measure, where the theme is introduced:

E. g. 21



We note again how Liszt uses the overlapping between the ternary with the binary rhythm in the strings and harp, respectively. This process was employed also in the first part of the *Symphony*:

E. g. 22

1. Harfe.

sempre p e legato

sempre p e legato

sempre p e legato

sempre p e legato

The *Purgatory* presents the first thematic succession in the sphere of D major. From the symbolic point of view, that can be treated as an improvement of the tense infernal condition.

Important to note is that this first moment of introduction and theme A are resumed identically in terms of intervals and rhythm, to an ascending minor second.

We encounter in this segment a new overlay of planes, which this time joins two types of inner experiences: the discourse of the harp in arpeggios continues the spiritual turmoil exposed by the strings compartment in eighths, adopting much faster values,

E. g. 23

while the chord successions exposed in the brass seem to invoke a fleeting moment of peace:

E. g. 24

A musical score for E. g. 24, featuring five staves. The top two staves are for violins, the middle two for violas and cellos, and the bottom staff for the double bass. The music is in a minor key and includes various dynamics such as *p* and *pp*. A 'muta in D' is indicated at the end of the passage.

The tempo indicated by the composer, *Andante con moto quasi Allegretto. Tranquilo assai*, is also significant, representing an element of contrast with Part I, *Inferno*.

The bridge moment which will introduce the second theme is marked by the indication *Più lento*. It ends with a descending chromatic movement in the first violins, *passus duriusculus*:

E. g. 25

A musical score for E. g. 25, showing a single staff with a descending chromatic movement. The dynamics are *pp* and *perdendo*.

which will be used again in the theme and exposed by the bassoon:

E. g. 26

A musical score for E. g. 26, showing a single staff with a descending chromatic movement. The dynamic is *dim.*

In this section, we may speak about an additive development of the theme, which consists of two submotifs:

E. g. 27

A musical score for E. g. 27, showing a single staff with an additive development of the theme. The instrument is labeled 'Klar.' and the dynamics are *dim.* and *smorz.*

It reaches a climax, and then returns to the original structure.

The middle section C starts with a fugue exposition in four voices - some entries being doubled by an instrument with similar ambitus but belonging to another group, for example the bassoon and double bass. The exposition proper of the themes ends with a codetta. We can see that in many instances, the thematic formulation is elliptical.

Lamento is designed at first rigorously in a fugue form, but the development uses as material only the head theme, reaching culmination in measures 63-68 of the *Lamento*.

A contrasting element is represented by the tonal relation between the initial section and the middle one. If section A was exposed in D major, section B is in the parallel minor key.

A moment of chorale meets the dynamised reprise, which uses mainly the sound material of theme A.

Magnificat

The *Magnificat* brings, as some previous sections, the overlapping of two planes of binary and ternary values, this time distributed in the woodwind instruments, and in the brass respectively. To this structure is added the plan of the chord succession placed in the high register and supported by the strings.

Oddly, but justified, this section includes a women or children choir. The vocal writing is extremely simple in terms of intonation and rhythm. The long values create a sense of reverberation echo of the choir of angels.

The tonality chosen by Liszt for the presentation of this moment is B major, this time with the notation of the key signature.

The text used is not exclusively taken from the original *Magnificat*, the hymn ending with *Hosanna* followed by *Alleluia*, an obvious suggestion of the heavenly ascent.

Liszt reproduced in the *Magnificat* only the first text stanza of the biblical song:

Magnificat: anima mea Dominum.

*Et exultavit spiritus meus: in Deo salutari meo*⁴³

The theme

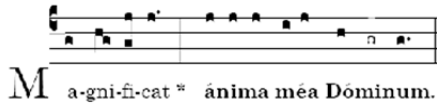
E. g. 28



is free paraphrase, transposed, of the original Gregorian in mode 8:

⁴³ My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

E. g. 29



The *Hosana Alleluia* epilogue sums up the two exclamations of glorification specific of the mass, through a dramatic process at his own initiative. The fragment extends over measures 391-420.

This is built on the scale of tones, the first ending of the work being highly original and also unexpected, bringing from a harmonic point of view a B major chord suspended in six-four position, shimmering in *piano pianissimo*:

E. g. 30

The second ending proposed is in *ff* with a strengthened brass ensemble, supporting the fundamental note. Usually this is not performed, being considered unfit.

Conclusions

Liszt's *Symphony*, seen in relation with the literary masterpiece, proposes a compelling and original musical approach, which allows the realization of a very clear image, obtained by means not at all simplistic, which are able to address primarily the human spirit, beside reason. This is a basic characteristic of the Romantic period, where free creative fantasy is raised to the rank of rule.

Liszt's programmatic music does not display a naturalist character, music being far from representing external aspects, as the composer himself confesses: "There is no doubt that the works that belong only objectively to exterior knowledge can not have external touch points with

music. The weakest student in the art of landscape painting renders more exactly a view than a musician with the help of the most skillful orchestra. The same things, as soon as they reach the spiritual world and - so to speak – they subjectivize to dreams, to elevate feelings, acquire a singular relationship with music.”⁴⁴

Part I of the *Symphony* begins with a slow introduction suggesting the words encribed in the score: “*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate!*” Theme I is played in the low strings and the group of brass instruments; this orchestral distribution is designed to anticipate the motto presented above and to symbolize the path of no return. Theme II retains the programmatic suggestion of the former, this time through the intervention of brass instruments placed amid a *tremolo* in the percussion. Another extremely important element in achieving this moment is represented by the precipitated agogic plan, reaching an *Allegro frenetico*. This brings along a hyperbolization of the torments experienced by the hopeless souls of the inferno. The agglomeration in the orchestral writing by the multitude of descending chromatic arpeggios, corresponding to the Baroque rhetorical *passus duriusculus*, suggests feelings of hatred, anger or pain - dynamised in *Presto*.

Part I presents the characters of Francesca and Paolo, the lovers living the drama of impossible love. Making an analogy with the destiny of Liszt and Maria d'Agoult, we see that both figures exceed their condition of character, gaining the extent of an emblem of endless suffering caused by unfulfilled love. Liszt outlined in this part the drama of the human soul subjected to such torture, through certain characters, but not limited to the status of storyteller. The deep emotional involvement he has in this theme entails the achievement of lyrical-descriptive passages of maximum intensity, contrasting with the drama of the whole.

The first part describes the ideatic path of the character of Dante and his foray into the depths of his soul. The composer identifies himself with the hero, the *Inferno* being the trial that his soul must pass in the attempt to reach *Paradise*.

Part II, *Purgatory*, starts with an indication of *Andante con moto quasi allegretto*, this moment corresponding in programmatic terms with the opening of the gates of Purgatory. Liszt achieved here a symbol- metaphor, suggesting the profound need for purification of the souls by their uplifting.

The fugue in the *Lamentoso* section of the second part begins with a theme whose emotional load reaches heartbreaking proportions; it is outlined with diminished arpeggios and leaps of diminished seventh, making use of Baroque rhetoric elements such as *passus* and *saltus duriusculus*.

⁴⁴ Apud Balla-Kemenes, Csilla, op.cit. p.253.

The fugue, also of Baroque origin, becomes in Liszt's construction the most complex musical way able to surprise the introspection of the human spirit - both in the model of Dante and Faust.

The world of the *Purgatory* is completely different from that of the *Inferno* - reminding the Christian idea rendered in literature by Dante, of cleansing the human spirit to become worthy of living in heaven.

The *Magnificat* or epilogue section of the work is a foreshadowing of the paradise. This part places Liszt in a different position from the poet Dante, because of the vision of paradise, which contrasts with the medieval one - abstract and speculative. The devout attitude is expressed by paraphrasing the archaic choral melodics entrusted to the vocal ensemble composed exclusively of female or children voices, accompanied by the orchestra, with Romantic harmonic relations.

Dante Symphony appears to be a metaphorical transcendence of the literary masterpiece. Liszt often uses the thematic transformation process, as variation technique, in pursuit of extensive structures. The composer used a variety of rhetorical devices. For the topic discussed it is necessary to mention in particular the use of the medieval epithet *diabolus in musica*, processed in an archetypal form in both *Dante Sonata* and in the *Symphony* bearing the same name. The tonal pattern is structured on the augmented fourth, which divides the octave in an equidistant manner.

The Dante scale, a modal scale constructed on the interchange between semitone and tone, is used from the first measures of the *Symphony*. At the end of the work occurs also the scale of whole tones (chord progression on augmented seconds, a scale that was not used previously), of which Liszt stated in a letter to his student, Ingeborg Stark (summer of 1860) that is a "frightening" scale; in another letter dated August 20, 1859, to conductor Julius Schaeffer, he writes about the whole tone scale (G#-F#-E-D-C-Bflat-Aflat-F#) and the successions of chords he structures based on it.⁴⁵

Magnificat is remarked by the contrast of the sound sphere, being intensified by the exclamations *Hosana* and *Alleluia*; it is, aesthetically speaking, a gradation of beauty into the sublime.

In terms of compositional techniques, Liszt was a synthesis musician, which is very well highlighted in this *Symphony*. Modal sonorities of the Gregorian tradition blend with modern harmonies and even new elements, ranking him nowadays among visionaries.

Liszt also foreshadowed certain structures, which will be used by Debussy, and afterwards, a century later, by Messiaen, namely "the modes

⁴⁵ Hamburger, op.cit., p.92.

of limited transposition.” The modes employed by Liszt will be, with Messiaen, mode 1 or whole-tone scale and mode 2 (with the semitone structure 1-2-1-2-1-2-1-2). Mode 1 (whole tone scale) is proper to Debussy as well. Mode 2 with limited transposition is the one we encounter in the *Symphony* as the “Dante scale.”

The proportions of the golden section outline certain ideatic contents. Research of this issue is considered essential for an objective status of masterpiece of a work. The examination we carried out following a performance of the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Leonard Bernstein, applying the mathematical relations $0.382 / 1$ and $0.618 / 1$ on timed articulations, each part of the symphony being considered as a whole. We identified in the score the coinciding moments with the ratio found in the time development. The conclusions resulted are significant. In Part I, the proportionate divisions are placed in the first recitative of the bass clarinet, which will convert into choral by adding the brass compartment, or at the start of the hesitant dance in 7/4 meter, respectively, framing thus the Francesca-Paolo episode.⁴⁶ The second part is sectioned negatively at the occurrence of the *suspiratio* motifs, subsequent to the fugue exposition, and correspondingly in the quasi-recitative of the violin,⁴⁷ (the second time, this type of instrumental discourse, with possible reference to Beethoven, is placed in a key moment of the musical construction), a declamation that can be considered as a prayer without words. The proportions of Part III are homogenous.

A curious biographical coincidence: Liszt's 75 years of life (1811-1886) have the positive golden section (45) in 1856, the year he completed the *Dante Symphony* ...

Liszt the man, always permeated by a deep spirituality, manifest or not the various circumstances of his life, always sought an answer to the existential questions of life. The real spiritual tumult is seen only in his creations, which, under the huge dome of musical programmatism, hide valuable clues about his feelings, joys, disappointments or failures. We may assert that the *Dante Symphony* is a visionary self-portrait – both on the biographical and technical-compositional plan and regarding metaphysical aspirations.

Translated by Dora Felicia Barta

⁴⁶ Pages 37 and 47 of the score, ed.cit.

⁴⁷ Pages 100 and 109 of the score, ed.cit.

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