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**Années de pèlerinage d'un Fragment Dantesque**

The long compositional journey of Franz Liszt's  
Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata

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“Si je me sens force et vie, je tenterai une composition symphonique d’après Dante, puis une autre d’après Faust – dans trois ans – d’ici là, je ferai trois esquisses : Le Triomphe de la mort (Orcagna) ; la Comédie de la mort (Holbein), et un fragment dantesque. Le Pensiero me séduit aussi.”

Franz Liszt

(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. The Pensiero also seduces me.)

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I thank my family for always supporting me in my studies and for encouraging me to face the disquietude that every new path in life presents us, because behind those difficulties there is always a much greater wonder.

## **Abstract**

This work is a reflection upon Franz Liszt's *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, the seventh and final piece in the second volume (*Deuxième Année: Italie*) of Liszt's collection *Années de pèlerinage*.

This Masterarbeit focuses on the inseparable link that Liszt had with literature and poetry and in particular with the works of Dante Alighieri and Victor Hugo. It also deals with the circumstances of the compositional inspiration of the piece, which have always been the subject of studies and controversies, underlining the importance of the composer's Italian stays, which were rich of artistic and cultural solicitations. Furthermore, this writing comprehends an analysis of the historical, artistic and biographical context as well as the study of principal manuscripts sources for the *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, which are now housed in the Goethe und Schiller Archive in Weimar. Also necessary was the analysis of the composition with its innovative form and bold language, through the examination of some peculiar musical components.

In the research and writing process, I used various sources: biographies, articles, books, scores, manuscripts and Liszt's correspondence.

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## I. Prolegomena

This work is a reflection upon Franz Liszt's *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, the seventh and final piece in the second volume (*Deuxième Année: Italie*) of the collection *Années de Pèlerinage*. This piece of innovative form and bold musical language had a long “pèlerinage” (pilgrimage), that lasted almost twenty years, characterized by numerous revisions, corrections and changes of title, before it reached the final version published in 1858<sup>1</sup>.

In this Masterarbeit I deal with the circumstances of the compositional inspiration of the piece, that starting from Lina Ramann's biography *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*<sup>2</sup>, authorized and commissioned by Liszt himself, had always been the subject of studies and controversies. For this reason I have considered the writings of several scholars, among which: Ben Arnold, Wolfgang Dömling, Nicolas Dufetel, Serge Gut, David Trippet, Sharon Winklhofer, Alan Walker et al.

In this writing, it is interesting to note the inseparable link that Liszt had with literature and poetry and, in particular, with the works of Dante Alighieri and Victor Hugo, attested by the numerous quotations present in his correspondence and by the compositions in his musical catalogue referred to those. I also aimed to underline the importance of the composer's Italian stays, which were rich of artistic and cultural solicitations. Very stimulating is also the comparison between the principal manuscripts sources for the *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, which are now housed in the Goethe und Schiller Archive in Weimar.

The following chapter, “Biography and main works”, refers to the life of the composer, with references to the particular events that characterized his career, to the moments that show his unique personality and to the interests and cultural stimuli that fascinated him.

Liszt's life was one of extraordinary variety, with his being a composer, author of

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<sup>1</sup> Winklhofer, Sharon. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the “Dante” Sonata. In: *19th-Century Music*, vol. 1, no.1, July 1977. Oakland, University of California Press, 1977, pp. 15-30, here p. 21. Retrieved May 17, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/746767>.

<sup>2</sup> Ramann, Lina. *Franz Liszt als Künstler Und Mensch*. Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1880, p. 462. Retrieved May 17, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/franzlisztalskns01rama>.

several books, essays and articles, a passionate traveler, a remarkable pedagogue, a conductor, a terrific pianist and also holder of minor orders in the Catholic Church: all this in one lifetime.

The biographical events are closely connected to Liszt's artistic and compositional path and, in particular, the *Dante Sonata* is intimately linked to his trip to Italy and his interest in Dante Alighieri and Victor Hugo.

"A world of poetry", the third chapter, is a description on the inseparable link that Liszt had with literature and poetry, which he would love for a lifetime and which would exert a decisive weight on the development of his musical production, increasing his search for new means of musical expression. Furthermore, this chapter also mentions the idea, supported by the composer, of a renewal of Music through a closer bond with Poetry<sup>3</sup>.

The fourth chapter, "Italie, Italie ! ... Ce pays privilégié", shows how important in Liszt's life were the encounters with the Italian musical world, which has always had great importance for him, with the composers who have profoundly marked his art, with the melodies and music of the operatic repertoire on which he composed reworking, improvisations and paraphrases that have given him a certain notoriety<sup>4</sup>. This chapter also underlines the importance of contact with the art and poetry of Italian artists, great source of inspiration for him, and also with the Catholic musical civilization that characterized his mature years, stimulated an inner journey and awakened the feeling of religiosity<sup>5</sup>.

The circumstances of the inspiration of the piece are addressed in the fifth chapter, "Franz Liszt, Dante Alighieri and Victor Hugo 'nel mezzo del cammin di' Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata". These too can be found both in the biographical events of the composer and in his correspondence, in addition

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<sup>3</sup> Liszt, Franz. Street-Klindworth, Agnes. Franz Liszt and Agnes Klindworth. A correspondence, 1854-1886. In: Pocknell, Pauline (Trans. and Ed.). *Franz Liszt Studies Series*, n. 8. Hillsdale, N.Y., Pendragon Press, 2000, p. 351-52. Retrieved May 17, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/franzlisztagness0000lisz>.

<sup>4</sup> Franceschi, Paolo. Liszt Italiano. Il viaggio in Italia di Ferenc Liszt, tra reminiscenze musicali, evocazioni letterarie, suggestioni paesaggistiche e ispirazioni religiose. In: *Rivista di Studi Ungheresi*, yearbook of the Interuniversity Center for Hungarian Studies in Italy, n. 13, 2014. Roma, Sapienza Università Editrice, 2014, pp. 133-147, here p. 134. Retrieved February 15, 2023 from <https://epa.oszk.hu/html/vgi/kardexlap.phtml?id=2025>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

to the circumstances concerning the first performances of the piece itself. Here it is also underlined the importance that the masterpieces of Dante Alighieri and Victor Hugo, probably in diverse ways and times, have had in the creative process of the piece.

“Année de pèlerinage d’un Fragment Dantesque”, the sixth chapter, retraces the long compositional “pilgrimage”, which lasted almost twenty years, of *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*. Starting from the first version composed in 1839 in San Rossore and called *Frammento Dantesco*<sup>6</sup>, the piece has undergone numerous revisions which, in addition to reconsidering its formal aspect, have changed its title several times. For these modifications, Liszt used each time properly literary terms or quotations from Dante and Hugo, confirming the explicitly literary reference and highlighting the changes in the very conception of the composition. With the subtitle *Fantasia quasi Sonata*, the musician then links the composition to the great past of the history of music, while detaching it from the classical concept of Sonata form<sup>7</sup>.

In the seventh chapter, “Selective Analysis”, some particular aspects concerning the thematic references and the formal analysis of the *Dante Sonata* are addressed; also in this case, its innovative form and bold language has created controversies among scholars. Some important musical components, used by Liszt to create suggestive impressions and atmospheres, are then analysed, such as the tritone interval, the interesting rhythmic peculiarities, the thematic transformation of the melodic lines and themes. In this chapter the particular harmonic aspects of the composition are also underlined, such as for example the use of chromatic melodic lines and whole-tone harmonizations which deny the sense of modal stability or make the tonal sense ambiguous; the harmonic path of the piece which follows a sort of circular path for whole tones; the use of the third degree (mediant) as the key for the second theme and the choice to avoid the tonic-dominant progression. All these peculiarities make the musical inventions contained in *Après une Lecture du*

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<sup>6</sup> Trippet, David. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata*. In: *19th Century Music*, vol. 32, n. 1, July 2008. Okland, University of California Press, 2008, pp. 52-93, here p. 55. Retrieved May 17, 2023 from <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2008.32.1.052>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 75.



*Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* original and effective.

The eighth and final chapter, “Conclusion”, as well as retracing and synthesizing the material present in this Masterarbeit, places the *Dante Sonata* not only as an emblematic example of Liszt’s creative spirit and of his continuous and tireless innovative research, but also as an evolutionary path of his musical maturity. Furthermore, I express my opinion according to which the piece represents Liszt’s personal conception of hell and heaven rather than faithfully reproducing Dante’s poem or Hugo’s verses. It is also stated that despite the references or quotations, present in the title, concerning Dante or Hugo and the link created with the past of the history of music through the subtitle *Fantasia quasi Sonata*, the greatest peculiarity of *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* lies precisely in not being easily definable.

## II. Biography and main works

Franz Liszt was born on October 22, 1811 in Raiding, Hungary. By the time he was five years old, he was already attracted to the piano and soon received lessons by his father Adam, an official in the service of Prince Nicholas Eszterházy, talented amateur musician who played the cello in the court concerts<sup>8</sup>.

When only nine, Liszt made his first public appearance as a concert pianist in Sopron and Pozsony (now Bratislava, Slovakia). His playing impressed the local Hungarian magnates to such an extent that they paid for his musical education for the next six years<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, in 1820, the Liszt family moved to Vienna where Franz had piano lessons with the composer, pianist and former Beethoven’s pupil, Carl Czerny, he studied composition with Antonio Salieri and he gave several concerts, with great success<sup>10</sup>. A *Variation sur une valse de Diabelli* (1823) was his first published work (1824)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Searle, Humphrey. Franz Liszt. In: *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Fact-checked by the Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, December 22, 2022. Retrieved January 10, 2023 from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Franz-Liszt>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Deutsche Grammophon. Franz Liszt. Berlin, Deutsche Grammophon. Retrieved January 10, 2023 from <https://www.deutschegrammophon.com/en/composers/franz-liszt/biography>.

<sup>11</sup> Basso, Alberto (Ed.). Franz Liszt. In: *Dizionario enciclopedico universale della musica e dei musicisti*. Torino, UTET, 1989, vol. IV, p. 424.

When the composer was twelve (1823), his father decided to take him to Paris, taking great financial risks to ensure his son's further education<sup>12</sup>. In Paris, he was refused admission to the Conservatoire; instead, he began studying theory with Antonín Reicha and composition with Ferdinando Paër<sup>13</sup>. During the period in Paris, his first opera *Don Sanche* was performed at the Opéra on October 17, 1825<sup>14</sup> and he continued to give concerts, touring in France, England and Switzerland. In 1826, the year he first visited England, he published a number of early piano works, principally planning a big collection of Etudes, the *Études pour le Piano-Forte en quarante-huit exercices dans tous les Tons Majeurs et Mineurs*, of which he actually published only twelve and which would become the thematic source for the later *Études d'exécution transcendante*<sup>15</sup>.

The sudden death of his father in 1827, affected Liszt deeply and thoughts of death brought religious life ideas into focus<sup>16</sup>. Nevertheless, he needed to give piano lessons to survive; one of his pupils was Caroline de Saint-Cricq, the first of many women with whom he fell in love<sup>17</sup>.

During this period, Liszt became extremely ill and underwent a long period of depression and doubt about his career which led him to a phase of intense mysticism and of religious meditation. In 1829, he expressed a desire to take vows and was dissuaded from joining the priesthood only through the efforts of his mother<sup>18</sup>. This phase of aversion to the career of virtuoso was compensated by reading and meeting the leading artists of the time<sup>19</sup>. He met and befriended almost every person of artistic significance in early 1830s Paris, for example Victor Hugo, Heinrich Heine, Honoré de Balzac, Eugène Delacroix, Alphonse de Lamartine and the musicians Hector Berlioz, Frédéric Chopin and Nicolò Paganini, who awakened in him the interest in virtuosity and inspired him to push piano technique through previously

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<sup>12</sup> Liszt Museum. About Franz Liszt. Budapest, Liszt Museum. Retrieved January 10, 2023 from <https://lisztmuseum.hu/research/about-franz-liszt-119943>.

<sup>13</sup> Searle, H. Franz Liszt. (2022).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Howard, Leslie. Franz Liszt. United Kingdom, The Liszt Society, 2007. Retrieved January 12, 2023 from <http://www.liszt.org.uk/franz-liszt>.

<sup>16</sup> Deutsche Grammophon. Franz Liszt.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Basso, A. Franz Liszt. (1989), p. 425.

<sup>19</sup> Searle, H. Franz Liszt. (2022).

unimagined difficulties and intricacies to achieve new brilliance and sonorities<sup>20</sup>.

In 1833, Liszt met Countess Marie d'Agoult (1805-1876), née Flavigny, who became his great love and the mother of his three children. Between 1835 and 1839, the couple lived mostly in Switzerland and Italy, which led to a further expansion of Liszt's cultural and artistic horizons<sup>21</sup>. Their children, Blandine (1835-1862), Cosima (1837-1930) and Daniel (1839-1859), were born during these years of wandering in Geneva, Como and Rome, respectively. Liszt's "travel reports" *Lettres d'un bachelier ès-musique*, of great literary merit and published in the Paris press, belong to this period<sup>22</sup>. The piano collections *Album d'un voyageur* (1835-36) and *Années de pèlerinage* (1836-39) also date back to this period, where Liszt translated his impressions of his Italian and Swiss stay<sup>23</sup> and where he combined poetic images and sound, tending to correspondence between the arts, an idea of primary importance for the Romantic Movement<sup>24</sup>.

When he received the news of the great flood in Pest, in 1838, Liszt gave a highly successful concert series in Vienna to benefit the flood victims<sup>25</sup>. This event, coupled with his ability to combine an extraordinary technique with a unique and fascinating personality, started what the composer himself called "Glanz-Periode"<sup>26</sup> (Splendor period), almost a decade of concert tours, during which he conquered the crowds of almost all the countries of Europe. In 1839, he became the first to give a full solo concert, as opposed to the mixed programmes that used to be the norm<sup>27</sup>.

"Figurez-vous que [...] ne pouvant parvenir à composer un programme qui eût le sens commun, j'ai osé donner une série de concerts à moi tout seul [...] et disant cavalièrement au public : 'Le concert, c'est moi.'"<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Deutsche Grammophon. Franz Liszt.

<sup>21</sup> Liszt Museum. About Franz Liszt.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Basso, A. Franz Liszt. (1989), p. 425.

<sup>24</sup> Gamrat, Małgorzata. Liszt's experiments with literature. In: Maciak, Natalia (Trans.). *Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology*, year 2014, issue n. 13. Poznań (Poland), Adam Mickiewicz University, published online 2018, pp. 107-125, here p. 120. Retrieved January 12, 2023 from <https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/ism/article/view/15168/14926>.

<sup>25</sup> Liszt Museum. About Franz Liszt.

<sup>26</sup> Liszt, Franz. Briefe. In: La Mara [= Ida Marie Lipsius] (Ed.). *Franz Liszt Briefe. Von Paris bis Rom*. Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1893, vol. 1, p. 257. Retrieved January 12, 2023 from [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_fvIPAAAAYAAJ/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_fvIPAAAAYAAJ/mode/2up).

<sup>27</sup> Liszt Museum. About Franz Liszt.

<sup>28</sup> Ollivier, Daniel. Franz Liszt et la princesse de Belgiojoso: lettres. In: *Revue Des Deux Mondes (1829-1971)*, vol. 56, no. 3. Paris, Revue des Deux Mondes, 1940, p. 467. Retrieved January 14, 2023

The very word “recital” was coined in connection with his appearances in London in 1840<sup>29</sup> and it is since then that the concept of a musical “recital” has begun to be used to describe any solo concert<sup>30</sup>. Even the term “Lisztomania” was coined by the writer Heinrich Heine in 1844 in his report on the hysteria surrounding Liszt in concert<sup>31</sup>:

“[...] so erklärte ich mir die Lisztomanie, [...] im italienischen Opernhaus, wo Liszt sein erstes Konzert gab [...] wie gewaltig, wie erschütternd wirkte schon seine bloße Erscheinung! Wie ungestüm war der Beifall, der ihm entgegenklatschte! Auch Buketts wurden ihm zu Füßen geworfen! [...] Und welcher Jubel! Eine wahre Verrücktheit, wie sie unerhört in den Annalen der Furore! [...] niemand auf dieser Welt seine Sukzesse oder vielmehr die mise en scène derselben so gut zu organisieren weiß wie unser Franz Liszt.”<sup>32</sup>.

The years 1839-1844 were those of Liszt’s consecration as a virtuoso of the piano<sup>33</sup>: he was the only virtuoso in history to travel so far away, to give such a number of concerts in so short a period and to enjoy such fame with the audience and public in general<sup>34</sup>. Saint-Saëns said that Liszt as an artist and as a man seemed

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from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44850557>. This passage is already mentioned in: Walker, Alan. *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847*. New York, Knopf, 1983, p. 275. Retrieved January 14, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/franzliszt0001walk>. “Can you imagine that [...] unable to compose a programme that would have made any kind of sense, I dared to give a series of concerts all by myself [...] and saying offhandedly to the public: ‘The concert, it is myself’”. (My English Translation)

<sup>29</sup> Gibbs, Christopher. Gooley, Dana. The worlds of Franz Liszt. In: *Liszt and His World*. Bard Music Festival Program, August 2006. Hudson Valley, N.Y., Fisher Center at Bard, 2006, pp. 2-6, here p. 4. Retrieved January 14, 2023 from <https://issuu.com/fishercenter/docs/2006bmf>.

<sup>30</sup> Classical Music. Who invented the piano recital?. Bristol, BBC Music Magazine, published online September 23, 2020. Retrieved January 14, 2023 from <https://www.classical-music.com/composers/who-invented-the-piano-recital/>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Heine, Heinrich. *Lutetia. Berichte über Politik, Kunst und Volksleben*. In: Walzel, O. F. Lietzmann, A. (Eds.). *Heinrich Heines Samtliche Werke in zehn Bänden – Neunter Band*. Leipzig, Insel Verlag, 1910, p. 404-406. This passage is already mentioned without precise reference in: Gibbs, C. Gooley, D. The worlds of Franz Liszt. (2006), p. 443. “[...] thus I explained this Lisztomania, [...] at the Italian Opera House, where Liszt gave his first concert, [...] how powerful, how shocking his mere appearance was! How impetuous was the applause to meet him! Bouquets were also flung at his feet. [...] And what jubilation! A veritable insanity, unheard of in the annals of furore! [...] no one in this world knows how to organize his successes, or rather their *mise en scène*, as well as our Franz Liszt”. (My English Translation)

<sup>33</sup> Warszawski, Jean-Marc. Franz Liszt. In: *Dictionnaire des Musiciens*, October 24, 2005. Montreuil, Musicologie.org, revised page September 15, 2016. Retrieved January 14, 2023 from <https://www.musicologie.org/>.

<sup>34</sup> Walker, Alan. *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*. New York, Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 3.

to be part of the world of legend<sup>35</sup> and that him being the incarnation of modern piano was not disputable<sup>36</sup>.

As regards his sentimental life, 1844 is the year of his definitively break with Marie d'Agoult<sup>37</sup>.

In 1846 the musician began his last tour in Hungary, Russia and Ukraine<sup>38</sup>, ending in September 1847 with his last public recital in the city of Elisabethgrad<sup>39</sup> (today: Kropyvnytskyj, the capital of Kirovohrad Oblast, Ukraine) and with the decision to forever give up his life as a concert performer.

“Ce point d’Elisabethgrad marque aussi pour moi la dernière étape de la vie de concerts telle que je l’ai pratiquée durant tout le cours de cette année. Désormais je compte être à même d’employer mieux mon temps et en attendant je me tiens en repos pour avancer plus rapidement.”<sup>40</sup>

As early as 1846, Liszt had already expressed his intentions in a letter to Charles Alexandre, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach: “Le moment vient pour moi (Nel mezzo del camin [sic] di nostra vita – 35 ans !) de briser ma chrysalide de virtuosité et de laisser plein vol à ma pensée”<sup>41</sup>.

While in Kiev, in February 1847, the composer met Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein (1819-1887)<sup>42</sup>, née Iwanowska, who would remain with him until his death and who would fight persistently for many years, unsuccessfully, to get her

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<sup>35</sup> Saint-Saëns, Camille. *Portraits et souvenirs*. Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1900, p. 19. Retrieved January 18, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/portraitsetsouve00sain>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Liszt Museum. About Franz Liszt.

<sup>38</sup> Warszawski, J.M. *Franz Liszt*. (2005).

<sup>39</sup> Walker, A. *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*. (1987), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Liszt, Franz. Sachsen, Carl Alexander von. *Briefwechsel Zwischen Franz Liszt Und Carl Alexander: Grossherzog Von Sachsen. La Mara [= Ida Marie Lipsius]* (Ed.). Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1909, p. 21. Retrieved January 18, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/briefwechselz wis00lisz>. This passage is already mentioned without precise reference in: Walker, A. *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*. (1987), p. 3. “This point of Elisabethgrad also marks for me the last stage of the life of concerts as I practiced it during the whole course of this year. From now on I expect to be able to make better use of my time and in the meantime I am resting to move forward more quickly”. (My English Translation)

<sup>41</sup> Liszt incorrectly writes the word “camin”. The correct word found in the text of Dante’s *Commedia* is “cammin”. *Ibid.*, p. 8. Quotation from Alighieri, Dante. *Commedia*. Chiavacci Leonardi, Anna Maria (Ed.). Bologna, Zanichelli, 2000, vol. 1, p. 4. This passage is already mentioned in: Walker, A. *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*. (1987), p. 3. “The time has come for me (Midway through the path of our life – 35 years old!) to break my chrysalis of virtuosity and let my thoughts take full flight”. (My English Translation)

<sup>42</sup> Liszt Museum. About Franz Liszt.

marriage annulled so that she could marry Liszt. Their relationship was never accepted and officially recognized, especially since they were both already wedded and were Catholics. Indeed Princess Carolyne's husband Prince Nikolaus zu Sayn-Wittgenstein-Berleburg-Ludwigsburg, a Russian service officer and great friend of the tsar Nicholas I, lodged a protest with the Russian Orthodox Church and the cancellation was withdrawn<sup>43</sup>.

Meanwhile, Liszt had been asked to consider becoming Kapellmeister in Weimar, a position he eventually took up in 1848<sup>44</sup>. In this period, he devoted himself entirely to his official function as Kapellmeister and to his profound vocation as a composer. He became mentor and supporter of many musicians, such as, among others, Karl Tausig (1841-1871) and Hans von Bülow (1830-1894), first husband of his daughter Cosima (1837-1930), giving his generous help in launching their careers<sup>45</sup>. He strove to transform the town of Goethe (1749-1832) and Schiller (1759-1805) into a centre of high art once again, after decades of decline, and above all into a music centre<sup>46</sup>. As music director of the court orchestra, he conducted the classical repertoire, in particular Beethoven's (1770-1827) music but also turned his attention to contemporary symphonic and operatic works, for example performing compositions by Schumann (1810-1856), Berlioz (1803-1869), Meyerbeer (1791-1864), Verdi (1813-1901) and Anton Rubinstein (1819-1894)<sup>47</sup>. Of special importance was his moral and financial support of Richard Wagner, who had been exiled from Germany because of his revolutionary activities in 1848<sup>48</sup> and who would officially become his son-in-law in 1870<sup>49</sup> by marrying Cosima in second marriage.

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<sup>43</sup> Predota, Georg. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Franz! Liszt and Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein. Published online, November 14, 2012. Retrieved January 20, 2023 from <https://interlude.hk/in-the-name-of-the-father-son-and-holy-franzliszt-and-carolyne-von-sayn-wittgenstein/>.

<sup>44</sup> Howard, L. Franz Liszt. (2007).

<sup>45</sup> Liszt Museum. About Franz Liszt.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Cosima Wagner. Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica (Eds.). March 28, 2022. Retrieved January 20, 2023 from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cosima-Wagner>.

The Weimar years (1848-61)<sup>50</sup> were also those of his great symphonic production with the first *12 symphonic poems*, the *Faust Symphony* (1854; rev. 1857-61) and *Symphony to Dante's Divina Commedia* (1855-56)<sup>51</sup>. During this period, Liszt managed to complete and publish, in their definitive version, several piano cycles, on which he had been working on for a long time, such as *Études d'exécution transcendante* (1837; rev. 1851), the *Grandes Études de Paganini* (1838; rev. 1851), fifteen of the *Hungarian Rhapsodies* (1846-53), the *Consolations* (1849-50), the first two volumes of *Années de pèlerinage: Première année, Suisse* (1848-53) and *Deuxième année, Italie* (1846-49) with the great *Dante Sonata*, and the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* (1847; rev. 1853) with the seventh piece *Funérailles* (1849) dedicated to the fallen of Hungary's brutally repressed revolt to gain independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1848)<sup>52</sup>. In these years of astonishing productivity, also others of his piano masterpieces were born, such as the *Totentanz* (1847-53; rev. 1859) for piano and orchestra, the *Piano Sonata in B Minor* (1852-53), the *Piano Concerto No. 1 in E♭ Major* (1849; rev. 1853 and 1856), and the *Piano Concerto No. 2 in A Major* (1839; rev. 1849-61)<sup>53</sup>. In the field of sacred music he created, in 1855, an outstanding masterpiece with the *Missa solemnis* („Gran” Mass), written for the consecration of the basilica in Gran (today Esztergom, city in northern Hungary) in 1856<sup>54</sup>.

The Weimar years came to an end when some members of the Weimar court objected strongly to the fact that Princess Caroline, who had moved in with Liszt, openly lived with the composer. In addition, Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, sister of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia and a great friend of the Grand Duke of Weimar (Liszt's employer), came under heavy pressure from her brother to ban Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein from all court functions<sup>55</sup>.

Therefore, in May 1860, the princess left Weimar for Rome in hopes of obtaining a divorce through the Pope's intercession. Liszt followed her the year after, with

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<sup>50</sup> Gibbs, C. Gooley, D. The worlds of Franz Liszt. (2006), p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Searle, H. Franz Liszt. (2022).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Liszt Museum. About Franz Liszt.

<sup>55</sup> Searle, H. Franz Liszt. (2022).

the same wish that was never granted; both remained in Rome but they gave up the idea of marriage and they lived in separate residences<sup>56</sup>.

During the year after leaving Weimar, Liszt became an established conductor, he had since long left the activity of virtuoso, being a composer of piano and orchestral works of extraordinary genius, and had established himself as a music critic (to remember the series of essays on works from Gluck to Wagner and the Frédéric Chopin's biography). In 1865, he faced an important turning point in his life: after requesting admission to the tertiary order of the Franciscans of Pest, he received the minor orders, becoming Abbé Liszt and moving to the Vatican<sup>57</sup>.

At the end of the Weimar period and for the next eight years (1861-69), Liszt lived mainly in Rome and occupied himself more and more with religious music<sup>58</sup>. He completed the oratorios *Die Legende von der heiligen Elisabeth* (1857-62) and *Christus* (1855-66); in 1862, after the death of his daughter Blandine at 26, he wrote the *Weinen, Klagen Variationen* (on a theme from the J. S. Bach's cantata)<sup>59</sup>. His son Daniel had also died in 1859 at 20, therefore Liszt composed the *Les Morts* (1860) in his memory, which he later included in the set of the three orchestral pieces *Trois Odes funèbres* (1866)<sup>60</sup>. The *Missa Choralis* (1865) and the *Ungarische Krönungsmesse* (1867), for the coronation of the emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria as king of Hungary, date also from this period<sup>61</sup>.

By this time, Liszt had suffered several family tragedies: in addition to the death of his two children, Daniel and Blandine, and the failure to marry Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, in 1866 he also lost his mother and in 1868 his daughter Cosima left Bülow for Wagner. As a result Liszt, who disapproved this relationship, broke personal ties with the couple for nearly ten years<sup>62</sup>. Furthermore, in Rome he failed to have the ecclesiastical position he hoped for, so in 1869 he accepted the invitation of the Grand Duke Carl Alexander to return in Weimar to teach piano master

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Basso, A. Franz Liszt. (1989), p. 426.

<sup>58</sup> Searle, H. Franz Liszt. (2022).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Howard, L. Franz Liszt. (2007).

<sup>61</sup> Searle, H. Franz Liszt. (2022).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



classes<sup>63</sup>. Two years later, the Hungarian government appointed him “Königlicher Rat” (Crown Councillor), with an annual salary of 4000 forints, and also director of the new Royal Academy. From then until the end of his life, Liszt divided his time into what has been called “vie trifurquée” (threefold life or three-pronged life), between Rome (composing), Weimar (teaching) and Budapest (supporting the Royal Academy)<sup>64</sup>.

Without stop in his continuous wandering, “Zu einer Hälfte Zigeuner, zur andern Franziskaner!”<sup>65</sup>, as he defined himself, in the last period of his life Liszt abandoned the creation of great compositions, apart the last symphonic poem *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe* (1881-82). He wrote mainly piano pieces and numerous choral compositions of a religious nature, sometimes even liturgical, which present a simple writing, at times almost unadorned and bare, that contrasts with the theatricality of the first sacred works<sup>66</sup>.

In 1872, after almost ten years, Liszt went to Bayreuth and reconciled with his daughter and with Wagner, thanks to a very moving letter from the latter<sup>67</sup>.

„Du kamst in mein Leben als der größte Mensch, an den ich je die vertraute Freundesrede richten durfte; [...]. Du warst der erste, der durch seine Liebe mich adelte [...]. Sage ich Dir nun: Komm! so sage ich Dir damit: komm zu Dir! Denn hier findest Du Dich. – Sei gesegnet und geliebt, wie Du Dich auch entscheidest! Dein alter Freund Richard.”<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Basso, A. Franz Liszt. (1989), p. 426.

<sup>65</sup> Liszt, Franz. Franz Liszt's Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein. La Mara [= Ida Marie Lipsius] (Ed.). Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1899, vol. 4, p. 316. Retrieved January 20, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/franzlisztsbrief04liszt>. This passage is already mentioned in: Walker, A. Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847. (1983), p. 64. “Half Gypsy, half Franciscan!”. (My English Translation)

<sup>66</sup> Basso, A. Franz Liszt. (1989), p. 426.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Friedrich, Sven. Richard Wagner: Deutung und Wirkung. Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2004, p. 109. Retrieved January 26, 2023 from <https://books.google.it/books?id=IJv5AYgIUx0C&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>. “You entered my life as the greatest man whom I have ever been permitted to call my intimate friend; [...]. You were the first person whose love ennobled me [...]. If I now say to you: Come! I am saying: Come to yourself! For you will find yourself here. - May you be blessed and beloved, however you decide! Your old friend, Richard”. (Translated into English by Mary Whittall. In: Vesternhagen, Curt von. *Wagner: A Biography*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, vol. 2, p. 445. Retrieved January 26, 2023 from <https://books.google.it/books?id=QDQ7AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>).

Liszt was an early supporter of Wagner and, in the 1850s<sup>69</sup>, he led a “Wagnerian propaganda”<sup>70</sup>, as he himself called it, directing the works of the German composer, writing articles and essays to educate the public about Wagner’s music and composing paraphrases and transcripts on the latter’s works. After their reconciliation, the Hungarian composer expressed that admiration by regularly being at the Bayreuth festivals to attend Wagner’s works.

In 1877, Liszt completed the third book of *Années de pèlerinage*<sup>71</sup>. Unlike the first two books, *Suisse* and *Italie*, this *Troisième année* does not have a subtitle connecting it with a particular time and place, although many pieces have a real (*Aux cyprès de la Villa d’Este ‘thrénodie’ I and II*, and *Les jeux d’eau à la Villa d’Este*) or spiritual (*Sunt lacrymae rerum ‘en mode hongrois’*) setting<sup>72</sup>.

In the last period of his life, Liszt became more prone to bad falls, from which he never fully recovered. Increasingly afflicted with feelings of desolation and concern for death, he expressed these feelings that were also reflected in his compositions. “[...] devient excessive [...] ma fatigue de vivre! [...] je souffre souvent d’exister - la santé du corps me reste, celle de l’âme manque! Tristis est anima mea!”<sup>73</sup>, he wrote in a letter to Princess Carolyne in 1877. In the period of old age there are in fact pieces such as *Nuages gris* (1881), *Unstern! Sinistre, Disastro* (1881), *Abschied* (1885), *Mephisto Walzer* (1881 and 1885), *Csárdás*

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<sup>69</sup> Dufetel, Nicolas. Liszt and Wagner. Foreword. In: Hall-Swadley, Janita R. (Ed. and Trans.) *The Collected Writings of Franz Liszt. Dramaturgical Leaves: Richard Wagner*. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, vol. 3, part. 2, pp. XV-XLI, here p. XXXI. Retrieved January 26, 2023 from <https://books.google.it/books?id=GmF6DQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

<sup>70</sup> Trustees for Harvard University (Ed.). *The Letters of Franz Liszt to Olga von Meyendorff 1871-1886*. In the Mildred Bliss Collection at Dumbarton Oaks. Tyler, William Royall (Trans.). Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, distributed by Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 362. Retrieved January 29, 2023 from <https://books.google.it/books?id=JC1lew5qtccC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

<sup>71</sup> Hayes, Malcom. *Liszt: His Life and Music*. Naxos Educational cd booklet text. Hong Kong, Naxos Rights International Ltd, 2011, p. 162.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Liszt, Franz. *Franz Liszt’s Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*. La Mara [= Ida Marie Lipsius] (Ed.). Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1902, vol. 7, p. 193. Retrieved January 29, 2023 from [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_q\\_MHAQAAMAAJ/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_q_MHAQAAMAAJ/mode/2up). This passage is already mentioned in: Walker, Alan. *Franz Liszt: The Final Years, 1861-1886*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1983, p. 64. Retrieved January 29, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/franzlisztvol2we00alan>. “[...] becomes excessive [...] my fatigue of living! [...] I often suffer from existing - the health of the body remains with me, that of the soul is lacking! My soul is exceeding sorrowful!”. (My English Translation)

*macabre* (1882), *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe* (1881), and the pieces related to Wagner's illness and death: *Die Trauergondel* (1882), *R. W. - Venice* (1883) and *Am Grabe Richard Wagners* (1883), as well as elegies, memorials, funeral marches and lamentations<sup>74</sup>.

The last year of Liszt's life was characterized by a triumphal tour in England and France: in Paris the *Missa solennis* („Gran” Mass) was a huge success; at St. Jame's Hall in London *Die Legende der heiligen Elisabeth* was a triumph and the composer was received at Windsor by Queen Victoria.

Liszt performed for the last time in public in Luxembourg, in July 1886<sup>75</sup>. Returning to Bayreuth, seriously ill, he died on July 31 of complications from pneumonia<sup>76</sup>.

### **III. A world of poetry**

During his formative years, Liszt did not receive a regular literary education. This is understandable for a musical enfant prodige who, already at a tender age, roamed Europe from one aristocratic salon to another, showing his skills as a piano virtuoso<sup>77</sup>. Despite that, he found himself in the right place at the right time, having moved to Paris at the age of twelve. In fact, between the end of the 1820s and the beginning of the 1830s, Paris was the undisputed capital of the art world. Poets, Homère composers, painters, philosophers and writers, from all over Europe, congregated in heated cultural debates creating an effervescent intellectual scene<sup>78</sup>. Therefore, fascinated by this intellectual and cultural ferment, Liszt approached literature and poetry, which he would love for a lifetime. He read the great Greek and Latin authors and philosophers, Dante, Shakespeare and the classics of French literature such as Racine, Montaigne, Voltaire and Rousseau<sup>79</sup>. Soon, he personally got to know many members of the literary elite of his time as Lord Byron,

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<sup>74</sup> Basso, A. Franz Liszt. (1989), p. 426-28.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 426.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Scher, Steven Paul. Liszt and Literature (1991). In: Bernhart, Walter and Wolf, Werner (Eds.). *Essays on Literature and Music (1967-2004) by Steven Paul Scher*. New York, Editions Rodopi B.V., 2004, Word and Music Studies Series, vol. 5, p. 341. Retrieved January 29, 2023 from [https://books.google.it/books?id=Hr\\_FlhQ1b2gC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.it/books?id=Hr_FlhQ1b2gC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

Chateaubriand, de Senancour; he also became friend with some of the most prominent figures as Victor Hugo, Balzac, Alexandre Dumas père, Lamartine, Lamennais, as well as Heine and the polish poet Mickiewicz<sup>80</sup>.

“mon esprit et mes doigts travaillent comme deux damnes, = Homère, la Bible, Platon, Locke, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber sont tous à l’entour de moi. Je les étudie, les médite, les dévore avec fureur”<sup>81</sup>.

Liszt believed in a superiority of education of the poets, that together with talent and genius leads to the first of powers, the moral power<sup>82</sup>. He also recognized the communicative supremacy of poetry, which speaks everyone’s language<sup>83</sup> and that “immense et toute puissante par Victor Hugo, [...] soulève tous les problèmes, discute toutes les questions, remue toutes les passions, tous les intérêts, attaque et défend toutes les causes, et ainsi domine et régente les choses et les hommes, [...]”<sup>84</sup>.

In addition, the imitation of poets or the dramatic (oratorical) intonation was recommended by two of his most prominent masters<sup>85</sup>: Antonín Reicha (1770-

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Liszt, F. Briefe. Von Paris bis Rom. (1893), p. 7. Retrieved February 1, 2023 from [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_fvIPAAAAYAAJ](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_fvIPAAAAYAAJ). This passage is already mentioned in: Walker, A. Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847. (1983), p. 173. “my mind and fingers have been working like two lost spirits, = Homer, the Bible, Plato, Locke, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber, are all around me. I study them, meditate on them, devour them with fury”. (Translated into English by Constance Bache. In: Liszt, Franz. *Letters. From Paris to Rome. Years of travel as virtuoso*. La Mara [= Ida Marie Lipsius] (Ed). London, H. Grevel & Co., 1894, p. 8. Retrieved February 1, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/lettersoffranzli01lisz>.

<sup>82</sup> Liszt, Franz. De la situation des artistes, et de leur condition dans la société. Encore quelques mots sur la subalternité des musiciens. In: *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 2nd year, n. 46, November 15, 1835. Paris, Gazette Musicale de Paris, 1835, pp. 369-372, here p. 371. Retrieved February 01, 2023 from <https://archiveorg/details/revueetgazettemu4552pari/mode/1up>. This passage is already mentioned in: Zicari, Ida. *Après une lecture du Dante. Fantasia quasi Sonata di Franz Liszt. La poesia dei suoni*. Milano, Il Corriere Musicale, 2017, p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> Liszt, Franz. Lettre d’un bachelier ès-musique. In: *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 4th year, n. 29, July 16, 1837. Paris, Gazette Musicale de Paris, 1837, p. 341. Retrieved February 05, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/revueetgazettemu18374pari>. This passage is already mentioned in: Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> Liszt, F. De la situation des artistes, et de leur condition dans la société. (1835), p. 371. This passage is already mentioned in: Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 10. “Immense and omnipotent with Victor Hugo, [...] raises all problems, it discusses all issues, it arouses all passions, all interests, it attacks and defends all causes, and so it dominates and rules things and men”. (My English Translation)

<sup>85</sup> Gamrat, M. *Liszt’s experiments with literature*. (2014), p. 108.

1836) wrote that great poets always use pure and intelligible verse to to express whatever image and that musicians should imitate them<sup>86</sup>, and Carl Czerny (1791-1857) stated that just as the orator avoid being dry and boring through elegance, so also the performer must use beautiful and elegant phrases to achieve a special charm in their playing<sup>87</sup>.

In literature, poetry, philosophy and religion Liszt has always sought answers, ideas, great thoughts; he also said he couldn't live without Goethe and Dante masterworks. According to August Stradal "[...] sagte er, dass er Goethes Faust und die Divina Commedia stets auf Reisen mit sich führe und ohne diese Meisterwerke, die er immer wieder lese, nicht leben könne"<sup>88</sup>.

Liszt's interests in literature and poetry, which would exert a decisive weight on the development of his musical production, increased his search for new means of musical expression, also turning the technical and expressive ones originating in literature. In the search for these new musical means, he introduced for instance, the composition of musical cycles on the pattern of poetic collections (e.g. the cycle of ten piano pieces *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, inspired by the homonymous collection of poems by Alphonse de Lamartine); the composition of Symphonic poems which illustrate or evoke the content of a poem, novel, a literary work in verse (e.g. *Les Préludes*, inspired by a Lamartine's poem); the introduction of poetic quotations as a preface to a score or even of a poetic text placed above the stave; the composition of pieces on poetic texts (e.g. the *Sonetti del Petrarca*,

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<sup>86</sup> Reicha, Antoine. *Cours de composition musicale ou Traité complet et raisonné d'harmonie pratique*. Paris, Gambaro, 1819, p. 165. Retrieved February 5, 2023 from <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9628872j>. This passage is already mentioned in: Gamrat, M. *Liszt's experiments with literature*. (2014), p. 108.

<sup>87</sup> Czerny, Carl. *Systematische Anleitung zum Fantasieren auf dem Pianoforte: op. 200*. Vienna, Anton Diabelli & Co., 1829, p. 36. Retrieved February 10, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/CzernySystematischeAnleitungZumFantasierenOp.200>. This passage is already mentioned in: Gamrat, M. *Liszt's experiments with literature*. (2014), p. 108.

<sup>88</sup> Stradal, August. *Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt*. In: Arnold, Ben. *Liszt as reader, Intellectual, and musician*. In: Saffle, Michael (Ed.). *Liszt and His world. Proceedings of the International Liszt Conference held at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University 20–23 May 1993*. Analecta Lisztiana I. Franz Liszt Studies Series n. 5. Stuyvesant N.Y., Pendragon Press, 1998, pp. 37-60, here p. 47. Retrieved February 10, 2023 from <https://books.google.it/books?id=aMKCimNyF8EC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>. "He said that he always took Goethe's Faust and the Divina Commedia with him when travelling and that without these masterworks, which he read over and again, he could not live". (Translated into English by Ben Arnold. In: Ibid.)

transcribed later for piano solo, or his numerous Lieder on poems written in five different languages by Schiller, Tennyson, Musset, Teléky and others); the choice of parameters such as articulation and dynamics, which are fundamental for the recitation of poems; the transposition of literary genres such as the ballad or the epic poem into the musical field; the introduction of formal freedom and mixing of genres<sup>89</sup> as Victor Hugo wrote:

“Nous voici parvenus à la sommité poétique des temps modernes. [...] le Drame; et le drame, qui fond sous un même souffle le grotesque et le sublime, le terrible et le bouffon, la tragédie et la comédie”<sup>90</sup>.

Liszt inextricably linked his compositions to poetry: he set over one hundred poetic texts to music, he took inspiration from the titles of novels or poems for his compositions titles, such as for example the three books of the *Années de pèlerinage* whose title refer to Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister’s years of pilgrimage)<sup>91</sup> and he based a large part of his instrumental works on literature and philosophy. He argued that it is through the fusion of music with poetry that the highest peaks of art are reached<sup>92</sup>: indeed, he affirmed the idea of a renewal of Music through a closer bond with Poetry<sup>93</sup>.

Already in his essay on Berlioz’s *Harold Symphonie*, Liszt had expressed his thoughts on the link between music and poetry:

“La première [la musique] absorbe de plus en plus dans ses chefs d’œuvres, les chefs d’œuvres de l’autre [la littérature]. [...] Puis qu’elle [la musique] s’était associée à la tragédie de Sophocle et

<sup>89</sup> Gamrat, M. Liszt’s experiments with literature. (2014), p. 108.

<sup>90</sup> Hugo, Victor. Cromwell. In: Hugo, Victor. *Théâtre. Tome Premier*. Paris, Librairie Hachette et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1863, p. 26. Retrieved February 10, 2023 from [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_S-6InpuxBr0C](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_S-6InpuxBr0C). This passage is already mentioned without precise reference in: Gamrat, M. Liszt’s experiments with literature. (2014), p. 108. “We have now attained the culminating point of modern poetry. [...] the drama; and the drama, which combines in one breath the grotesque and the sublime, the terrible and the absurd, tragedy and comedy”. (Translated into English by I.G. Burnham. In: Hugo, Victor. *Oliver Cromwell*. Philadelphia, George Barrie & Son, 1896, p. 40-41. Retrieved February 10, 2023 from <https://books.google.it/books?id=HLMxAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

<sup>91</sup> Cresti, Renzo. Liszt musicista europeo. In: *Erba d’Arno*, three-monthly magazine, year 2011, issue n. 125. Fucecchio (Firenze), Edizioni dell’Erba, 2011, pp. 69-89, here p. 75.

<sup>92</sup> Zicari, Ida. Après une lecture du Dante. Fantasia quasi Sonata di Franz Liszt. La poesia dei suoni. Milano, Il Corriere Musicale, 2017, p. 10.

<sup>93</sup> Liszt, F. Street-Klindworth, A. Franz Liszt and Agnes Klindworth. A correspondence, 1854-1886. (2000), p. 351-52.

à l’ode de Pindare par une union si absolue, quelle considération l’empêcherait de s’unir d’une façon, différente mais tonte aussi adéquate, à des œuvres dues aux inspirations inconnues de l’antiquité ? à des noms comme Dante ou Shakespeare ?”<sup>94</sup>.

Moreover, just around the time of the composition of *Fragment Dantesque* (1839)<sup>95</sup>, a piano piece that would become the masterpiece *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, merged into the second book of the *Années de pèlerinage* cycle, he had already written about the union of music and poetry: “la musique et la poésie devront-elles s’unir de plus en plus intimement, pour prendre possession l’une et l’autre du vaste héritage qui leur est providentiellement assigné [...]”<sup>96</sup>, thus finding himself facing one of the greatest aesthetic questions of the time, that is the combination of the arts<sup>97</sup>.

#### IV. Italie, Italie ! ... Ce pays privilégié<sup>98</sup>

The encounters with the Italian musical world have always had great importance in the life of Franz Liszt, starting with the one with Antonio Salieri in Vienna (1820)<sup>99</sup>. Furthermore, in the early 20s of the nineteenth century, the melodies and music of the Italian operatic repertoire, in particular by Spontini and Rossini, were very widespread in Viennese musical circles. Liszt began having a certain notoriety with

<sup>94</sup> Liszt, Franz. Sur Harold symphonie de Berlioz par F. Liszt. Sayn-Wittgenstein, Carolyne von (Copyist). Autograph manuscript (Fragment), 1855, signature MS-24359, view 47/115. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, published online June 20, 2021. Retrieved February 12, 2023 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10074675m?rk=21459;2>. This passage is already mentioned without precise reference in: Gamrat, M. Liszt’s experiments with literature. (2014), p. 108. “The first [music] absorbs more and more into its masterpieces the masterpieces of the other [literature]. [...] Since she [music] was associated with Sophocles’ tragedy and Pindar’s ode in an absolute union, what consideration would prevent her from joining herself in a way, different but always adequate, to the works due from the unknown inspirations of antiquity? To names like Dante or Shakespeare?”. (My English Translation)

<sup>95</sup> Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> Liszt, F. De la situation des artistes, et de leur condition dans la société. (1835), p. 371. Retrieved February 12, 2023. This passage is already mentioned in: Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 9. “[...] music and poetry will have to unite more and more intimately, to both take possession of the vast heritage which is providentially assigned to them”. (My English Translation)

<sup>97</sup> Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 9.

<sup>98</sup> Liszt, Franz. Lettre d’un bachelier ès-musique à M. Hector Berlioz. In: *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 6th year, n. 53, October 24, 1839. Paris, Gazette Musicale de Paris, 1839, p. 418. Retrieved February 15, 2023 from [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_4b5CAAAAcAAJ](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_4b5CAAAAcAAJ). “Italy, Italy! ... this privileged country”. (My English Translation)

<sup>99</sup> Searle, H. Franz Liszt. (2022).

a series of public performances under the banner of reworking and improvisation on the most famous opera themes of those composers<sup>100</sup>.

Later, when he arrived in Paris in the autumn of 1823, it was the Italian composer Ferdinando Paër who took care of his training and introduced him to the Parisian musical life that was frequented by many Italian musicians, among which the figure of Rossini was outstanding<sup>101</sup>.

Furthermore, in 1831 in Paris, he was able to listen to the Italian violin virtuoso Nicolò Paganini who profoundly marked his art by showing him a new vision of technique in terms of expression<sup>102</sup>.

Also the years spent in Italy with Marie d'Agoult (1837-1839) represented the contact with art and poetry<sup>103</sup> as well as a period of notable expansion of the corpus of his works: the list of compositions written in these almost three years counts even 110 opera numbers<sup>104</sup>. In 1839, Liszt himself wrote to Clara Wieck: "J'ai énormément travaillé en Italie. Sans exagération, je crois avoir écrit de 4 à 500 pages de Musique de Piano."<sup>105</sup>.

The first of about eighty Lieder written by Liszt is also in Italian: *Angiolin dal biondo crin* (The little angel with blond hair). This piece, dedicated to the four-year-old daughter Blandine, was written on a text by the Marquis Cesare Boccella (1810-1877), a friend of Liszt who had hosted him and Marie d'Agoult during their stay in Lucca, Tuscany<sup>106</sup>.

In the years of his maturity, with various stays in Rome, the composer rediscovered Italy no longer as the country of great professional successes or a romantic escape, but rather as the place of Catholic musical civilization. Also in the third book of the *Années de pèlerinage*, Liszt re-proposes Italy not as a place of

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<sup>100</sup> Franceschi, P. Liszt Italiano. Il viaggio in Italia di Ferenc Liszt. (2014), p. 134.

<sup>101</sup> Searle, H. Franz Liszt. (2022).

<sup>102</sup> Colombati, Claudia. D'Alessandro, Maurizio (Eds.). Nel cosmo di Franz Liszt. Roma, Aracne editrice, 2012, p. 35.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>104</sup> Cresti, R. Liszt musicista europeo. (2011), p. 77.

<sup>105</sup> Liszt, F. Franz Liszt Briefe. Von Paris bis Rom. (1893), p. 32. Retrieved February 15, 2023. This passage is already mentioned in: Cresti, R. Liszt musicista europeo. (2011), p. 77. "I worked enormously in Italy. Without exaggeration, I believe I have written from 4 to 500 pages of Piano Music". (My English Translation)

<sup>106</sup> Cresti, R. Liszt musicista europeo. (2011), p. 77.



inspiration and adventure anymore, but as a symbol of an inner journey, sometimes marked by a feeling of painful religiosity<sup>107</sup>.

It should be noted that the impressions on the musical situation in Italy, published by Liszt in the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, are not always entirely positive due to the almost exclusive preference of the Italian public for operatic music. In fact, in one of the *Lettres d'un bachelier ès-musique*, he wrote that in Italy the symphonic masterpieces of the great composers and, generally, instrumental music were completely neglected<sup>108</sup>.

Anyway, beyond the criticisms or polemics he expressed in the press, the years spent in Italy between 1837 and 1839 remain fundamental for him, full of solicitations, as a real cultural immersion<sup>109</sup>. He has been the composer who most valued the Italian literary and artistic heritage through his music.

This cultural solicitation is evidenced by the list of Liszt's compositions dating back to that period, although some have been revised several times and published in their final version several years later. In addition to the numerous *Réminiscences*, *Paraphrases* and *Fantaisie* on Italian operas motifs, there are for example: the first version of the six *Études d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini* (1838, in 1851 final revision and publication with the title *Grandes études de Paganini*)<sup>110</sup>; the first version of *Totentanz* - paraphrase on the Gregorian sequence of the *Dies Irae* - (1838, final revision in 1859)<sup>111</sup> inspired by the vision of the *Triumph of Death* in the Campo Santo of Pisa, a fresco attributed in Liszt's time to Andrea di Cione d'Arcangelo, known as l'Orcagna (nowadays it is believed that it belongs to Buonamico Buffalmacco); *Années de pèlerinage: Italie* (1837, final revision in 1856)<sup>112</sup>.

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<sup>107</sup> Franceschi, P. Liszt Italiano. Il viaggio in Italia di Ferenc Liszt. (2014), p. 144.

<sup>108</sup> Liszt, Franz. Lettre d'un bachelier ès-musique. In: *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 6th year, n. 13, March 28, 1839. Paris, Gazette Musicale de Paris, 1839, p. 101. Retrieved February 15, 2023 from <https://archive.org/stream/revueetgazetteмуl839pari#page/100/mode/2up>.

<sup>109</sup> Dufetel, Nicolas. Les séjours italiens de Liszt (1837-1839 et 1831-1886). In: *Études Germaniques*, four-monthly magazine, year 2008/3, issue n. 251. Paris, Éditions Klincksieck, 2008, pp. 449-471, here p. 452. Retrieved February 18, 2023 from <https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-germaniques-2008-3-page-449.htm>.

<sup>110</sup> Franceschi, P. Liszt Italiano. Il viaggio in Italia di Ferenc Liszt. (2014), p. 141.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

Meanwhile in the first collection of *Années de pèlerinage: Suisse*, the leitmotiv leading through the passages seems to be the impression aroused by nature and landscapes (in fact, there are titles such as *Au lac de Wallenstadt*, *Pastorale*, *Au bord d'une source*, *Orage*, *Les cloches de Genève*), in the second collection, *Italie*, the references are exclusively addressed to all artistic forms: painting, sculpture, music and literature<sup>113</sup>. Thus, we find the first piece entitled *Sposalizio*, in reference to the famous painting by Raphael about the wedding between the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph that Liszt saw at the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan. Then follows *Il Penseroso*, inspired by the statue sculpted by Michelangelo for the tomb of Lorenzo and Giuliano de Medici in Florence, in the church of San Lorenzo. The third piece is titled *Canzonetta del Salvator Rosa*, a piano transcription of a melody attributed to the Baroque painter Salvator Rosa, but probably by Giovanni Battista Bononcini (1670-1747). The collection continues with the *Trois sonnets de Pétrarque* (sonnet 45, sonnet 104 and sonnet 123) inspired by three lyrics of the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca. The last piece, with the title of a poem by the French writer Victor Hugo, is *Après une lecture du Dante: fantasia quasi Sonata*, which was inspired by Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy), a literary work much loved by Liszt.

Therefore, in Italy Liszt appears to be interested only into cultural stimuli; in one of his *Lettres d'un bachelier ès-musique* he wrote to Berlioz:

“Le beau, dans ce pays privilégié, m'apparaissait sous ses formes les plus pures et les plus sublimes. L'art se montrait à mes yeux dans toutes ses splendeurs ; il se révélait à moi dans son universalité et dans son unité. Le sentiment et la réflexion me pénétraient chaque jour davantage de la relation cachée qui unit les œuvres du génie. Raphaël et Michel-Ange me faisaient mieux comprendre Mozart et Beethoven ; Jean de Pise, Fra Beato, Francia, m'expliquaient Allegri, Marcello, Palestrina ; Titien et Rossini m'apparaissaient comme deux astres de rayons semblables.”<sup>114</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Liszt, F. Lettre d'un bachelier ès-musique. A M. Hector Berlioz. (1839). Retrieved February 18, 2023. This passage is already mentioned in: Dufetel, N. Les séjours italiens de Liszt. (2008), p. 453. “The beauty in this privileged country became evident to me in its purest and most sublime form. Art in all its splendor disclosed itself to my eyes. It revealed itself to me in its universality and unity. 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 made me understand Mozart and Beethoven better; Giovanni Pisano, Fra Beato, and Il Francia explained

The repeated Italian wanderings, that have brought Liszt to Milan, Como, Venice, Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Genoa, Bologna, Pisa, Florence, Rome and other cities, fit perfectly into the tradition of the Grand Tour so loved by romantic artists and witnessed by the various travel stories, of which the literary production of the nineteenth century is rich. Anyway, whatever were the reasons for Liszt's travels in Italy, the suggestion that the Italian cultural environment exerted on him is indisputable<sup>115</sup>.

“Italie ! Italie ! [...] tu fus et tu seras toujours l’élective patrie de ces hommes qui n’ont point de frères parmi les hommes, de ces enfants de Dieu, de ces exilés du ciel qui souffrent et qui chantent, et que le monde appelle poètes. Oui, toujours l’homme inspiré, philosophe, artiste ou poète, se sentira tourmenté d’un mal secret, d’une brûlante aspiration vers toi. Toujours le mal de l’Italie sera le mal des belles âmes”<sup>116</sup>.

#### **V. Franz Liszt, Dante Alighieri and Victor Hugo “nel mezzo del cammin di”<sup>117</sup> Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata**

The sources of inspiration for *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* have always been a great subject of study and controversy. Liszt presented it for publication as the final piece of *Deuxième Année de pèlerinage: Italie* (1858)<sup>118</sup>, with the title *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*. By doing this, the composer adds a further literary reference in addition to Dante's always

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Allegri, Marcello and Palestrina to me. Titian and Rossini appeared to me like twin stars shining with the same light”. (My English Translation)

<sup>115</sup> Dufetel, Nicolas. Liszt e Roma: bilancio e prospettive di ricerca. In: Engelhardt, Markus (Ed.). *Musikstadt Rom: Geschichte - Forschung – Perspektiven*. Analecta Musicologica, year 2011, issue 45. Roma, Department of Music History at the German Historical Institute in Rome, 2011, pp. 452-477, here p. 456. Retrieved February 18, 2023 [https://perspectivia.net/receive/pnet\\_mods\\_00003061](https://perspectivia.net/receive/pnet_mods_00003061).

<sup>116</sup> Liszt, F. Lettres d’un bachelier ès-musique. A un poète voyageur. In: *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 4th year, n. 7, February 12, 1837. Paris, Gazette Musicale de Paris, 1837, p. 54. Retrieved February 18, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/revueetgazettemul8374pari/page/54/mode/2up>. This passage is already mentioned without precise reference in: Colombati, C. D’Alessandro, M. (Eds.). *Nel cosmo di Franz Liszt*. (2012), p. 19. “Italy! Italy! [...] you were and will always be the elective fatherland of those men who have no brothers among men, of those children of God, of those exiled from heaven who suffer and who sing, and whom the world calls poets. Yes, always the inspired man, philosopher, artist or poet, will feel tormented by a secret evil, by a burning aspiration towards you. Always the nostalgia of Italy will be the nostalgia of beautiful souls”. (My English Translation)

<sup>117</sup> Alighieri, D. *Commedia*. (2000), vol. 1, p. 4.

<sup>118</sup> Winkhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D’Agoult, and the “Dante” Sonata. (1977), p. 16.

recognizable poem *Divina Commedia*: indeed, *Après une lecture de Dante* is the title of a poem by Victor Hugo from the collection *Les Voix intérieures* (1837)<sup>119</sup>. This created a heated debate among scholars on the relationship between his composition and Dante's poem, rather than Hugo's poetry.

As for Dante, Liszt has always had a particular bond with the Florentine poet and his works. Already in 1823, when the musician went to Paris, the supreme poet was identified as "the romantic poet par excellence"<sup>120</sup>, the publication of new editions of the *Commedia* had multiplied both in France and in Italy and the music referable to Dante's masterpiece had an exponential increase.

The French elite of the nineteenth century associated the path from hell to heaven of the *Divina Commedia* with the search for the ideal and acclaimed Dante as one of the most important and legendary figures. Artists perceived Dante and Beatrice as an example of idyllic relationship of romantic love par excellence.

In nineteenth century France, this admiration for Dante and his work was closely linked to the new romantic sensibility that re-evaluated the Middle Ages and the interest in foreign authors<sup>121</sup>.

Every artist had to have Dante's work in his studio as well as those of Shakespeare, Goethe and Byron; Delacroix's *La Barque de Dante* had just been exhibited at the Louvre Museum for the Salon de Paris (1822)<sup>122</sup> and Liszt obviously knew the *Divina Commedia*<sup>123</sup>. Indeed, as early as 1832 we can already read one of the first references to Dante by Liszt in the diaries of the mother of one of his pupils in Paris; she wrote that, during a lesson, Liszt compared an octaves exercise by Kessler to Dante's *Inferno*<sup>124</sup>.

Also in Liszt's correspondence, references to Dante's *Commedia* are often

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Landon, Charles Paul. Salon de 1822. Recueil de morceaux choisis parmi les ouvrages de peinture et de sculpture exposés au Louvre le 24 Avril, 1822. Paris, Bureau des Annales du Musée, 1822, vol. 1, p. 87. Retrieved February 20, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/salonde1822recue01land>.

<sup>123</sup> Winklhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the 'Dante' Sonata. (1977), p. 21.

<sup>124</sup> Boissier, Caroline. Liszt pédagogue. Leçons de piano données par Liszt à Mlle Valérie Boissier, à Paris, en 1832. Paris, Honoré Champion, 1928, p. 53. Retrieved February 20, 2023 from <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k323210v>.

found. The first quotation written in his own hand dates back to 1837:

“Souvent, dans la plus forte chaleur du jour, nous allons nous reposer sous les platanes de la Villa Melzi, nous lisons la Divina Commedia assis au pied du marbre de Bomelli [sic] ; le Dante conduit par Béatrix. Quel sujet !”<sup>125</sup>.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1838, in the *Journal des Zŷi*, the musician wrote a quotation from the Dante’s first Canto of the *Inferno* (Canto I, 49-50): “Je suis comme la louve du Dante : ... Che di tutte le brame / Sembiava carica nella sua magrezza.”<sup>126</sup>. And then in December he quoted *Purgatorio* (Canto I, 9): “J’ai pensé, songé, rêvé, vous savez de quoi ! Ce vers: ‘O settentrionale [sic] vedovo sito !’ m’a fait pleurer.”<sup>127</sup>. This exact use of quotations, among the less known, is particularly significant because it is the earliest evidence of Liszt’s serious reading of the *Commedia*<sup>128</sup>.

Many scholars, based on the Lina Ramann’s biography *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*<sup>129</sup>, authorized and commissioned by Liszt himself, date back to 1837 the composition of *Après une lecture du Dante*, referring to the piece as the result of an idyllic stay spent in Bellagio, on the shores of Lake Como<sup>130</sup>. On the other hand, further studies place the work in a later period and precisely in 1839, which is between the “Glanzzeit” of the successful European tours and the time as

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<sup>125</sup> Liszt incorrectly calls the sculptor “Bomelli”. The marble group of Dante and Beatrice, present in the garden of Villa Melzi, was sculpted in 1810 by the neoclassical artist Giovanni Battista Comolli (1775-1830). Liszt, Franz. Lettre d’un bachelier ès-musique. In: *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 5th year, n. 29, July 22, 1838. Paris, Gazette Musicale de Paris, 1838, p. 295. Retrieved February 20, 2023 from [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_te0qAAAAYAAJ](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_te0qAAAAYAAJ). This passage is already mentioned without precise reference in: Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 11. “Often in the greatest heat of the day, we go to rest under the plane trees of the Villa Melzi; we read the Divina Commedia sitting at the foot of the marble by Bomelli [sic]; Dante led by Béatrix. What a subject!” (My English Translation)

<sup>126</sup> Stern, Daniel [= Marie d’Agoult]. *Mémoires, souvenirs et journaux de la comtesse d’Agoult*. Paris, Mercure de France, 1990, vol. II, p. 214-215. Retrieved February 20, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/memoiressouvenir0000ster>. This passage is already mentioned in: Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 12. Quotation from Alighieri, D. *Commedia*. (2000), vol. 1, p. 10. “I am like Dante’s she-wolf: ... That with all hungerings / Seemed to be laden in her meagreness.” (My English Translation)

<sup>127</sup> Liszt incorrectly writes the word “settentrionale”. The correct word found in the text of Dante’s *Commedia* is “setentrional”. Liszt, Franz. D’Agoult, Marie. *Correspondance de Liszt et de la comtesse d’Agoult. 1833-1840*. Ollivier, Daniel (Ed.). Paris, Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1933, p. 250. Quotation from Alighieri, D. *Commedia*. (2000), vol. 2, p. 9. This passage is already mentioned in: Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 11. “I thought, dreamed, fantasized, you know of what! This verse, ‘Oh septentrional widower site!’ it makes me weep.” (My English Translation)

<sup>128</sup> Winkhofer, S. *Liszt, Marie D’Agoult, and the ‘Dante’ Sonata*. (1977), p. 26.

<sup>129</sup> Ramann, L. *Franz Liszt als Künstler Und Mensch*. (1880), p. 462.

<sup>130</sup> Winkhofer, S. *Liszt, Marie D’Agoult, and the ‘Dante’ Sonata*. (1977), p. 16.

Kapellmeister in Weimar, spent mostly composing<sup>131</sup>. And it is precisely in February 1839 that it is possible to find the first mention on Liszt's hope of writing a fragment based on Dante, a solo piece certainly inspired by the *Divina Commedia*<sup>132</sup>:

“Si je me sens force et vie, je tenterai une composition symphonique d'après Dante, puis une autre d'après Faust – dans trois ans – d'ici là, je ferai trois esquisses : Le Triomphe de la mort (Orcagna) ; la Comédie de la mort (Holbein), et un fragment dantesque. Le Pensiero [sic] me séduit aussi.”<sup>133</sup>.

In addition, after the transfer from Rome to San Rossore, passing by Florence and Lucca<sup>134</sup>, Madame d'Agoult, in a letter dated 26<sup>th</sup> September 1839, refers to a feverish work on a fragment: “Le bravo suonatore [sic] commence ce matin un fragment dantesque qui le fait donner au Diable.”<sup>135</sup>. Liszt also refers to the *Fragment Dantesque*, composed precisely in San Rossore, in a letter addressed to his friend Henri Lehmann and dated 20<sup>th</sup> September 1840, even considering, prematurely, its publication: “Vous ai-je jamais joué mon Fragment Dantesque ? Je ne crois pas. Bon gré mal gré je le publierai à l'entrée de l'hiver avec la première de Mes années de pèlerinage”<sup>136</sup>.

<sup>131</sup> Trippet, D. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata*. (2008), p. 91.

<sup>132</sup> Winkhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the ‘Dante’ Sonata. (1977), p. 27.

<sup>133</sup> Liszt incorrectly calls the Michelangelo Buonarroti's marble statue “Pensiero”. The portrait of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici Duke of Urbino, part of his funeral monument kept in the Florence's Cappelle Medicee, is called the “Penseroso” or the “Pensoso”. Stern, D. [= Marie d'Agoult]. *Mémoires, souvenirs et journaux de la comtesse d'Agoult*. (1990), p. 219. This passage is already mentioned in: Winkhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the ‘Dante’ Sonata. (1977), p. 27. “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. The Pensiero [sic] also seduces me”. (My English Translation)

<sup>134</sup> Winkhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the ‘Dante’ Sonata. (1977), p. 29.

<sup>135</sup> Marie D'agoult incorrectly writes the word “suonatore”. In Italian, the correct word is “suonatore”. Liszt, Franz. D'Agoult, Marie. Lehmann, Henri. *Une correspondance romantique: Madame d'Agoult, Liszt, Henri Lehmann*. Joubert, Solange (Ed.). Paris, Flammarion, 1947, p. 35. Retrieved February 22, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/20220119-une-correspondance-romantique-madame-dagoult-liszt-par-henri-lehmann>. This passage is already mentioned in: Winkhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the ‘Dante’ Sonata. (1977), p. 29. “The good player began this morning a Fragment Dantesque which is sending him to the Devil.” (My English Translation)

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128. This passage is already mentioned without precise reference in: Winkhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the ‘Dante’ Sonata. (1977), p. 30 “Have I ever played you my Fragment Dantesque? I don't think I did. Willy-nilly I will publish it at the beginning of winter with the first of my years of pilgrimage.” (My English Translation)

The circumstances of *Fragment Dantesque* executions are also specifically recorded. The first performance took place in private form at the Hôtel de l'Europe on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1839, with Liszt boasting in a letter that the listener was extremely surprised and impressed by the experience<sup>137</sup>: “À midi chez Fana [sic] auquel je joue mes nouveaux morceaux. Il est surprise du Fragment dantesque.”<sup>138</sup>. The first public performance, on the other hand, took place in one of the six concerts that the musician gave in Vienna in November 1839; on that occasion a summary of Liszt's concert programs, written in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, quotes the piece with the title *Fragment nach Dante*<sup>139</sup>.

Regarding Victor Hugo, Liszt knew the French poet's works, had great admiration for his poetry and was strongly inspired by it<sup>140</sup>. Liszt's lieder in French, based on texts by Hugo, are considered among the musician's most significant works.

The first literary reference to Hugo's poem *Après une lecture de Dante*, the twenty-seventh of a collection of thirty-two poems called *Les Voix intérieures* (1837)<sup>141</sup>, is instead evidenced by a letter from Eduard Remenyi, for which Liszt played his composition, still unpublished, in 1853: “Cette égratignure se permet de s'adresser au grand homme – après avoir entendu [...] la Fantaisie d'après Dante, [...] –”<sup>142</sup>.

<sup>137</sup> Trippet, D. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata*. (2008), p. 66.

<sup>138</sup> Liszt incorrectly calls the Italian musician, his admirer, “Fana”. The correct name is Antonio “Fanna” (1792-1845). Liszt, F. D'Agoult, M. *Correspondance de Liszt et de la comtesse d'Agoult*. (1933), p. 268. This passage is already mentioned in: Trippet, D. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata*. (2008), p. 66. “At noon at Fana's where I play my new pieces. He is surprised by the Fragment dantesque.” (My English Translation)

<sup>139</sup> Fink, Gottfried W. (Ed.). *Wien Musikalische Chronik des vierten Vierteljahres 1839*. In: *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, vol. 42, n. 5, Januar 29, 1840. Leipzig Breitkopf & Hartel, 1840, p. 91-92. Retrieved February 25, 2023 from <https://books.google.it/books?id=hggVAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

<sup>140</sup> Winkelhofer, S. *Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the ‘Dante’ Sonata*. (1977), p. 30.

<sup>141</sup> Walker, Alan. *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847*. New York, Knopf, 1983, p. 275. Retrieved February 25, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/franzliszt0001walk>.

<sup>142</sup> Czerny, Carl et al. *Briefe hervorragender zeitgenossen an Franz Liszt. La Mara [= Ida Marie Lipsius]* (Ed.). Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1895, vol. 1, p. 283. Retrieved February 28, 2023 from [https://books.google.it/books?id=1PMHAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_atb&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.it/books?id=1PMHAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_atb&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false). This passage is already mentioned in: Winkelhofer, S. *Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the ‘Dante’ Sonata*. (1977), p. 30. “This scribbler allows himself to address a great man - after having heard the Fantaisie d'après Dante, [...] -” (Translated into English by A. Walker. In: *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847*. (1983), p. 275. Retrieved February 28, 2023).

Effectively, on one of the manuscripts (GSA 60/I 17)<sup>143</sup> housed in the Goethe und Schiller Archive in Weimar, Liszt had canceled everything previously written, noting his definitive decision as *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*<sup>144</sup>. The musician has re-proposed, as a real tracing, the original title of Victor Hugo's poetry modifying only the "de" in "du", probably following the German use of the definite article to refer to a famous person and making an attempt to translate this practice into French<sup>145</sup>.

However, Liszt's encounter with Hugo's collection *Les Voix intérieures* had already taken place between about 1842 and 1844, since he had used the text of the thirty-first poem for his voice and piano piece *La Tombe et la rose* (1844)<sup>146</sup>. Moreover, in the same period, he transposed into music five poems as a gift to Marie d'Agoult, drawing them from some volumes of Victor Hugo, such as *Les Chants du Crépuscule* (1835), *Les Voix intérieures* (1837) and *Les Rayons et les Ombres* (1840)<sup>147</sup>.

Probably, in diverse ways and times, and certainly with different roles, both Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Hugo's poetry played a fundamental part in the long journey that would lead to the final version of *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*.

The investigation into the motivations that led to the last title and the internal relationships with the musical text, have certainly created numerous controversies and debates among scholars, but if the definitive title is understood as an inseparable element from the work itself and indispensable for its understanding, as Liszt himself affirmed<sup>148</sup>, it is plausible that his compositional thinking related to Hugo's *Après une lecture de Dante* and Dante's *Divina Commedia*.

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<sup>143</sup> Liszt, Franz. *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*. Autograph manuscript, signature GSA 60/I 17. Weimar, Goethe and Schiller Archive, processing status June 15, 2017. Retrieved February 28, 2023 from [https://ores.klassikstiftung.de/ords/f?p=401:2:::P2\\_ID:192152](https://ores.klassikstiftung.de/ords/f?p=401:2:::P2_ID:192152).

<sup>144</sup> Winkhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the 'Dante' Sonata. (1977), p. 31.

<sup>145</sup> Trippet, D. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the "Dante" Sonata*. (2008), p. 56.

<sup>146</sup> Winkhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the 'Dante' Sonata. (1977), p. 30.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Liszt, Franz. Berlioz und seine «Harold Symphonie». In: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, vol. 43, n. 4, July 20, 1855, Leipzig, Steigräber Verlag, 1855, p. 40. Retrieved February 28, 2023 from [https://books.google.it/books?id=i8APAAAAYAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.it/books?id=i8APAAAAYAAJ&redir_esc=y).



## VI. Année de pèlerinage d'un Fragment Dantesque

After the first version composed in San Rossore in 1839<sup>149</sup>, the *Fragment Dantesque* underwent a long compositional “pèlerinage” (pilgrimage) that lasted almost twenty years. This pilgrimage was characterized by numerous revisions, corrections and second thoughts, before arriving at the definitive version published in 1858 by the Schott editions<sup>150</sup>, as the seventh and last piece of Liszt’s collection *Années de pèlerinage: Deuxième Année, Italie*.

*Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* was born as *Fragment Dantesque*. Even though the manuscript of this first version of the piece has been lost, this is how Marie d’Agoult and Liszt had named it in their cited letters of 1839<sup>151</sup> and 1840<sup>152</sup> to Henri Lehmann and in the composer’s letter to the Countess in 1839<sup>153</sup>.

In the absence of the primary source, it is not possible to know what Liszt had written at that phase; still, the title used suggests a reference to the literary form of the romantic fragment that, in particular for Romantic poetry, indicated the infinite precisely for its being incomplete<sup>154</sup>.

The manuscripts of the *Dante Sonata*, housed in the Goethe und Schiller Archive in Weimar and in the Prague State Conservatoire, are all copyists’ versions except one (GSA 60/I 17)<sup>155</sup> and almost all contain corrections, modifications and revisions by Liszt<sup>156</sup>. However, in the years between the first version and the definitive publication, it was not only the piece’s formal aspect that was reviewed and reconsidered, but the title was also changed several times. These modifications have given rise to an intricate and interesting history about the work’s real title and, each time, have suggested an explicitly literary representation, highlighting the changes in the very conception of the composition.

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<sup>149</sup> Trippet, D. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata*. (2008), p. 55.

<sup>150</sup> Winklhofer, S. *Liszt, Marie D’Agoult, and the “Dante” Sonata*. (1977), p. 21.

<sup>151</sup> Liszt, F. D’Agoult, M. Lehmann, H. *Une correspondance romantique*. (1947), p. 35.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>153</sup> Liszt, F. D’Agoult, M. *Correspondance de Liszt et de la comtesse d’Agoult*. (1933), p. 268.

<sup>154</sup> Trippet, D. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata*. (2008), p. 54.

<sup>155</sup> Liszt, F. *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*. Signature GSA 60/I 17.

<sup>156</sup> Trippet, D. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata*. (2008), p. 56.

The earliest available manuscript sources consist of two copies without titles. One is composed of three sheets (GSA 60/I 18)<sup>157</sup> written by a copyist and dating back to ca. 1839<sup>158</sup>, in which there is the demonic topic of the descent into hell constituted of the initial tritons<sup>159</sup>; the other is a sketch, dated March 11, 1840<sup>160</sup>, housed in the Prague State Conservatoire and called “Prague fragment” (MS 1C 51)<sup>161</sup>. In the latter copy, found written in the guest book of a female admirer in Prague, it is possible to identify the characteristic progression of major chords present in the first measures of the Sonata, transcribed in C major<sup>162</sup>. This difference in key, compared to the first complete manuscript (GSA 60/I 76)<sup>163</sup>, where it occurs in F# major and D major, could represent a kind gift from Liszt who has simplified it for his amateur admirer<sup>164</sup>.

Whatever Liszt wrote working on the *Fragment*, up to that point, must have conducted to the now lost original manuscript, which would then lead to the oldest complete copy (GSA 60/I 76)<sup>165</sup>. This can be confirmed by a letter from 1840, where Liszt wrote Marie d’Agoult to have revised several parts of the *Fragment Dantesque*<sup>166</sup>.

This oldest complete copy, by two copyists, is undated and with numerous corrections by Liszt’s hand, representing the young stage of the piece<sup>167</sup>, and it also has the inscription *Paralipomènes à la “Divina Comedia” Fantaisie Symphonique*

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<sup>157</sup> Liszt, Franz. Skizzen zur Dante-Sonate. Manuscript, signature GSA 60/I 18, Gaetano Belloni (Hand copyist). Weimar, Goethe and Schiller Archive, processing status July 29, 2015. Retrieved February 28, 2023 from [https://ores.klassik-stiftung.de/ords/f?p=401:2:::P2\\_ID:192153](https://ores.klassik-stiftung.de/ords/f?p=401:2:::P2_ID:192153).

<sup>158</sup> Trippet, D. Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata. (2008), p. 56.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>163</sup> Liszt, Franz. Paralipomènes à la ‘Divina Commedia’. Fantaisie Symphonique pour Piano (später “Après une lecture du Dante”, in “Années de Pèlerinage”, Deuxième Année: Italie, Nr. 7). Manuscript, signature GSA 60/I 76, Adolph Stahr, Gaetano Belloni (Hand copyists). Weimar, Goethe and Schiller Archive, processing status July 29, 2015. Retrieved March 07, 2023 from [https://ores.klassik-stiftung.de/ords/f?p=401:2:::P2\\_ID:192399](https://ores.klassik-stiftung.de/ords/f?p=401:2:::P2_ID:192399).

<sup>164</sup> Trippet, D. Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata. (2008), p. 56.

<sup>165</sup> Liszt, Franz. Paralipomènes à la ‘Divina Commedia’. Signature GSA 60/I 76.

<sup>166</sup> Liszt, Franz. D’Agoult, Marie. Correspondance de Liszt et de la comtesse d’Agoult. 1840-1864. Ollivier, Daniel (Ed.). Paris, Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1934, p. 21.

<sup>167</sup> Zicari, I. Après une lecture du Dante. (2017), p. 21.

*pour Piano par Liszt*. Therefore, in this compositional phase, the *Fragment* had become *Paralipomènes*, or music intended as an ideal completion to Dante's poem, given that the term "paralipomena (Greek Παραλειπόμενα) indicates things omitted in the body of a work, and appends as a supplement."<sup>168</sup>.

It is interesting to dwell on the indication *Fantaisie Symphonique pour Piano*, which refers to a writing aimed at expanding the timbre and virtuosic possibilities of the piano up to, perhaps, arriving at the orchestration. It should also be emphasized that on the second page of the same manuscript there are the words *Fantasia quasi Sonata* that, even if with clear erasure marks, lead to a probable Liszt's compositional idea of the piece attributable to the *Fantasia*, a musical form with characteristics of improvisation, formal freedom, motivic variety and free modulations.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1849, in a letter to Joachim Raff, Liszt communicated a further modification and referred to the piece by writing the title "*Fantasia quasi Sonate (Prologomènes [sic] zu Dantes Göttlicher Comödie)*"<sup>169</sup>. Indeed, on the title page of the first existing manuscript source by Liszt (GSA 60/I 17)<sup>170</sup>, there are erasure marks on the word *Paralipomènes* that is replaced with *Prolégomènes*. Therefore, at this date, the work had been rethought not as a supplement to Dante's *Divina Commedia* but as an introduction: indeed, the term "prolegomena (Greek προλεγόμενα) indicates a preliminary discourse, a learned preamble, something introductory."<sup>171</sup>.

The same manuscript (GSA 60/I 17)<sup>172</sup> also documents the next step: everything previously noted on the title page appears erased and, in the lower part of the same page, in graphite pencil, the writing *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi*

<sup>168</sup> Onion, Charles T. Little, William et al. (Eds.). *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. London, Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 1429. Retrieved March 10, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.83694>.

<sup>169</sup> Liszt incorrectly writes the word "Prologomènes". The correct word is "Prolégomènes". Raff-München, Helene. Franz Liszt und Joachim Raff im Spiegel ihrer Briefe. In: *Die Musik*, year I, fourth quarter. Berlin und Leipzig, Schuster & Loeffler, 1901, p. 287. Retrieved March 10, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/diemusik10gergoog>. This passage is already mentioned in: Winklhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the "Dante" Sonata. (1977), p. 30.

<sup>170</sup> Liszt, F. *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*. Signature GSA 60/I 17.

<sup>171</sup> Onion, C.T. Little, W. et al. (Eds.). *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. (1933), p. 1596.

<sup>172</sup> Liszt, F. *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*. Signature GSA 60/I 17.

*Sonata* is written for the first time. It was at that moment that the title remained unchanged by adding, for the first time, the literary reference to Hugo's poetry taken from the collection *Les Voix intérieures*<sup>173</sup>.

Two letters intervene to document the use of the definitive title, just as reported in Liszt's manuscript (GSA 60/I 17)<sup>174</sup>. In fact, in addition to the aforementioned letter from Eduard Reményi of 1853<sup>175</sup>, in the same year Liszt also wrote to the publisher Heinrich Schlesinger asking him to publish *Années de Pèlerinage, Suisse and Italie*, writing that the last piece was entitled *Fantasia quasi Sonata Après une lecture du Dante*.

“Je vous offrirai volontiers mes deux Années de Pèlerinage (Suisse et Italie) qui se composent d'une douzaine de morceaux de très moyenne dimension, et termine par ma Fantaisie quasi Sonate intitulée “Après une lecture du Dante” – [...]”<sup>176</sup>.

Another copy (GSA 60/I 13)<sup>177</sup>, written by a copyist and dating back to 1853-56, represents the final phase of the compositional “pèlerinage” of the *Fragment Dantesque* and largely reproduces the previous version<sup>178</sup>. Liszt's last corrections on this copy will form the Stichvorlage for the edition published by Schott in 1858<sup>179</sup>.

The use of properly literary terms in the title, such as *Fragment*, *Paralipomènes* and *Prolégomènes*, the citation of Dante's name and the use of the title of Hugo's poem confirm Liszt's explicitly literary conception.

The subtitle *Fantasia quasi Sonata* adds another peculiarity. Indeed, while in the

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<sup>173</sup> Winkhofer, S. Liszt, Marie D'Agoult, and the “Dante” Sonata. (1977), p. 30.

<sup>174</sup> Liszt, F. *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*. Signature GSA 60/I 17.

<sup>175</sup> Czerny, C. et al. *Briefe hervorragender zeitgenossen an Franz Liszt*. (1895).

<sup>176</sup> Liszt, Franz. Heinrich, Schlesinger. Autograph letter from Franz Liszt, Weimar, to Heinrich Schlesinger. Autograph manuscript, June 27, 1853, signature ML95.L68 n. 108. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Music Division. Retrieved March 15, 2023 from <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018563244>. This passage is already mentioned in: Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p.7. “I will gladly offer to you my two *Années de Pèlerinage* (Switzerland and Italy) which comprehend a dozen pieces of modest dimensions and which conclude with my *Fantasia quasi Sonata* entitled ‘Après une lecture du Dante’”. (My English Translation)

<sup>177</sup> Liszt, Franz. *Années de Pèlerinage, Seconde Année, Italie*. Manuscript, signature GSA 60/I 13, Joachim Raff (Hand copyist). Weimar, Goethe and Schiller Archive, processing status June 29, 2015. Retrieved March 20, 2023 from [https://ores.klassik-stiftung.de/ords/f?p=401:2:::::P2\\_ID:192147](https://ores.klassik-stiftung.de/ords/f?p=401:2:::::P2_ID:192147).

<sup>178</sup> Trippet, D. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the “Dante” Sonata*. (2008), p. 93.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

eighteenth century Sonata e Fantasia were generally seen as two contrasting genres, with the Fantasia considered as a musical genre opposed to the fixed form ones, on the other hand, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the lines between the two musical forms began gradually to disappear; in the Fantasia elements similar to the Sonata started to be found and in the Sonate were often included passages of Fantasia but the two genres remained anyways well distinguished<sup>180</sup>. Only with Beethoven, the fusion between these two genres happened, which is also made explicit in the title of his compositions: for example, the two Sonatas op. 27 have the description *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*. In the romantic period, the three-parted scheme and the general structure remained in use but some variants were also developed, such as the cyclic Sonata, in which the same thematic material recurs in all its movements, the *Adagio* which is placed after the *Scherzo*, the movements that are linked between themselves, the tonal relationships between the two main themes which are free<sup>181</sup>.

Liszt in *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* makes a further elaboration of the cyclical structure, reuniting the various movements into one. Furthermore, it is by using the reversed terms of the title *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*, used by Beethoven for the Sonata op. 27 n. 1 and op. 27 n. 2, and transforming it into *Fantasia quasi Sonata* that Liszt declares his position compared to the past: he establishes a historical lineage for his music while detaching himself from the classical concept of Sonata form<sup>182</sup>.

## VII. Selective Analysis

### 1. Particular Musical Aspects

The controversies over the *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* do not concern only the circumstances relating to its writing and the relationship between Liszt's composition, Dante's poem and Hugo's poetry, but also, and above all, the thematic references and its formal analysis.

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<sup>180</sup> La Nuova Enciclopedia della Musica. Fantasia. Editors of La Nuova Enciclopedia della Musica (Eds.). Milano, Garzanti Editore, 1987, p. 264.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Trippet, D. *Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the "Dante" Sonata*. (2008), p. 75.

As regards the melodic references, some scholars affirm that Liszt, in his score, undoubtedly considers some particular moments of the *Divina Commedia*: hell, the anguished supplication of the damned, the figures of Paolo and Francesca or the love of Beatrice<sup>183</sup>.

Others, however, observe that the *Dante Sonata* is probably not a musical narration of some verses of the *Divina Commedia*, but a poetic reflexion on Dante's masterpiece<sup>184</sup> recalling some of its emotive images. Still others argue that some of these references are probably filtered from Hugo's poem, which however refers exclusively to Dante's *Inferno*, excluding themes such as *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso* and Beatrice, contained instead in the *Divina Commedia*<sup>185</sup>.

What is certain is that Liszt left no indication on the melodic references linked to the verses of the *Divina Commedia*, apart from the title *Après une lecture du Dante*, but this could have no meaning considering that every other composition of the *Années de pèlerinage: Deuxième Année, Italie* refers specifically to an Italian work of art.

The only possible clue could be constituted by the pencilled annotations present on the musician Walter Bache's personal copy of the *Dante Sonata*, which link some passages from the Dante's *Inferno* to some melodic themes<sup>186</sup>. Bache, as well as being an assiduous promoter of Liszt's music to the British public, was his pupil in Rome from 1862 to 1865 and regularly attended the Weimar master classes until the composer's death in 1886<sup>187</sup>. This exceptionally long relationship must surely have led to a particularly close bond between master and pupil, so it cannot be excluded that Bache could have received the information, reported on his score, directly from Liszt himself<sup>188</sup>.

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<sup>183</sup> Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 25.

<sup>184</sup> Dömling, Wolfgang. *Franz Liszt und seine Zeit*. Lilienthal, Laaber-Verlag, 1985, p. 129. Retrieved March 20, 2023 from [https://books.google.it/books/about/Franz\\_Liszt\\_und\\_seine\\_Zeit.html?id=OpWfAAAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.it/books/about/Franz_Liszt_und_seine_Zeit.html?id=OpWfAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y).

<sup>185</sup> Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 25.

<sup>186</sup> Walker, A. *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847*. (1983), p. 278.

<sup>187</sup> Walker, Alan. *Reflections on Liszt*. Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 106. Retrieved March 27, 2023 from <https://books.google.it/books?id=4URhKNWu0XQC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

<sup>188</sup> Walker, A. *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847*. (1983), p. 278.

The English musician had notated verses 22-30 of Canto III of Dante's *Inferno* near the beginning of the theme at measure 35<sup>189</sup> (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto III, 22-30 and Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, m. 35.

“Quivi sospiri, pianti e alti guai  
risonavan per l’aere senza stelle,  
per ch’io al cominciar ne lagrimai.  
Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,  
parole di dolore, accenti d’ira,  
voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle  
facevano un tumulto, il qual s’aggira  
sempre in quell’aura senza tempo tinta,  
come la rena quando turbo spira.”



Furthermore, Walter Bache had written verses 1-7 and 16-18 of canto XXXIV of the *Inferno* near m. 103 and also at the beginning of the theme of m. 115<sup>190</sup> (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto XXXIV, 1-7, 16-18 and Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, m. 103 and m. 115.

“Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni  
verso di noi; però dinanzi mira’,  
disse ’l maestro mio, ‘se tu ’l discerni’,  
Come quando una grossa nebbia spira,  
o quando l’emisferio nostro annotta,  
par di lungi un molin che ’l vento gira,  
veder mi parve un tal dificio allotta;

[...]

Quando noi fummo fatti tanto avante,  
ch’al maestro piacque di mostrarmi  
la creatura ch’ebbe il bel sembiante,”



<sup>189</sup> Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 27. Quotation from Alighieri, D. *Commedia*. (2000), vol. 1, 47-48. “Here sighs, with lamentations and loud moans,/resounded through the air pierced by no star,/that e’en I wept at entering./Strange tongues, horrible cries,/words of pain, tones of anger,/voices deep and hoarse, with hands together smote that swelled the sounds,/made up a tumult, that for ever whirls round/through that air with solid darkness stained,/like to the sand that the whirlwind flies.”. (Translated into English by A. Walker. In: *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847*. (1983), p. 278).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. Quotation from Alighieri, D. *Commedia*. (2000), vol. 1, 592-593. “The banners of Hell’s Monarch do come forth/towards us; therefore look’/so spoke my guide ‘if thou discern him’./As, when breathes a cloud Heavy and dense,/or when the shades of night fall on our hemisphere,/seems viewed from far a windmill, which the blast stirs briskly round,/such was the fabric then me thought I saw; [...] To the point we came,/where at my guide was pleased that I should see/the creature eminent in beauty once,”. (Translated into English by A. Walker. In: *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847*. (1983), p. 278-279).

Beyond the thematic references and particular indications, the titles *Fragment dantesque*, *Paralipomènes* and *Prolégomènes à la Divina Comedia*, leave no doubt that the central idea of the piece was Dante and, specifically, his *Divina Commedia*.

Regarding formal analysis, what is constant among scholars is the lack of a unitary line of thought, disagreement perhaps supported by the presence of the subtitle *Fantasia quasi Sonata*. The fragmentary nature of a free form such as the Fantasia can be considered as the founding value of the piece, interpreting it as a sequence of variations and transformations of a single theme characterized by tempo and keys changes, dynamic contrasts, mutations of colour, of mood and of harmonic relationships. On the other hand, in *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* the fundamental features of a Sonata form can be recognized, noting that, despite being a free one-movement piece, it repropose its characteristic principles: thematic multiplicity, contrast, development, tonal movement. In this regard, it is interesting to note how, even within the same opinion, there may be differences on the analysis of the thematic material and the formal organization (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Scheme with analysis examples of *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*.

Sections	Louis Kentner <sup>191</sup>	Serge Gut <sup>192</sup>	Ben Arnold <sup>193</sup>
Introduction	mm. 1-34	mm. 1-34	mm. 1-34
Exposition	mm. 35-180	mm. 35-123	mm. 35-114
- 1 <sup>st</sup> theme	m. 35	m. 35	m. 35
- Modulating Transition	/	m. 77	m. 73
- 2 <sup>nd</sup> theme	m. 103	m. 103	m. 103
2 <sup>nd</sup> Exposition	/	mm. 124-180	/
Development	mm. 181-272	mm. 181-272	mm. 115-289
- Retransition	/	/	mm. 273-289
Recapitulation	mm. 273-373	mm. 273-338	mm. 290-373
- Coda	/	mm. 339-373	mm. 327-373

<sup>191</sup> Kentner, Louis. Solo Piano Music (1827-1861). In: Walker, Alan (Ed.). *Franz Liszt. The Man & His Music*. New York, Taplinger Publishing Company, 1970. pp. 79-133, here pp. 92-104. Retrieved March 27, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/franzlisztman00walk>.

<sup>192</sup> Gut, Serge. Liszt. Editions de Fallois, Paris, 1989, p. 319. Retrieved March 27, 2023 from <https://archive.org/details/franzliszt0000guts>.

<sup>193</sup> Arnold, Ben. *The Liszt companion*. London, Greenwood Press, 2002, p. 86.



What certainly reconciles the academics thought and opinion are the originality and effectiveness of the musical inventions contained in *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*<sup>194</sup>.

These peculiarities are represented by some particular musical elements that Liszt uses to create suggestive impressions and atmospheres, such as for example the tritone interval, the interesting rhythmic peculiarities and the thematic transformation of the chromatic theme and chorale theme.

The tritone interval was defined by medieval treatise writers as “diabolus in musica”<sup>195</sup> due to the dissonant effect on listening and the intonation difficulties. The ecclesiastics of the Middle Ages classified it as an “Evil chord”, traditionally it was considered as the symbol of the devil and has always been used to express an evil feeling<sup>196</sup>. It seems that Guido d’Arezzo (a Christian monk and music theorist considered the creator of the modern musical notation) judged the tritone a heresy; he was also attributed the phrase “mi contra fa est diabolus in musica” (E with F is the Devil in Music) which gave rise to the numerous legends on the ability of this interval to evoke the devil<sup>197</sup>.

### **Excursus**

The interval between the two notes indicated by the Christian monk specifically referred to the distance of three tones present between two sounds belonging to two hexachords, namely to two sequences made up of six sounds with a specific semitone position<sup>198</sup>. On the hexachord he based his method of “solmisation”, which made it possible to always and indifferently name two sounds with the syllables Mi-Fa if separated by a semitone; practically, it was a symbolic representation of sounds made phonically through syllables and had the pedagogical and mnemonic function of teaching to distinguish quickly the interval of a tone from that of a semitone<sup>199</sup>.

The syllables used by Guido d’Arezzo to name the sounds of the hexachords were Ut - Re - Mi - Fa - Sol - La and they corresponded to the beginning of the first six hemistichs (first

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<sup>194</sup> Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 8.

<sup>195</sup> Basso, Alberto. (Ed.). Tritono. In: *Dizionario enciclopédico universale della musica e dei musicisti - Il lessico*. Torino, UTET, 1989, vol. IV, p. 593.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> La Nuova Enciclopedia della Musica. Tritono. (1987), p. 732.

<sup>199</sup> Basso, A. Solmisazione. (1989), p. 343.

or second part of a verse) of a Gregorian hymn sung in the vespers of the solemnity of the nativity of Saint John the Baptist (attributed to the Christian monk and scholar Paolo Diacono - around 770)<sup>200</sup>; each hemistich of the chant began on a contiguous note in ascending progression and were arranged as follows within the hymn itself: Ut queant laxis / Resonare fibris / Mira gestorum / Famuli tuorum / Solve polluti / Labii reatum / Sancte Johannes<sup>201</sup> (later the two initials of this last hemistich also gave rise to the note Si).

The model constituted by the hexachord was of fundamental importance during the Middle Ages, in which the musical models used consisted of the presence of three semitones within the octave, and corresponded to the current E - F, B - C, A - B $\flat$ <sup>202</sup>. Hence the use of three types of hexachords: the hexachord which began with Ut on the note C and contained the semitone between E and F, called the “naturale” hexachord; the hexachord where Ut corresponded to G, with the semitone between B and C, known as “durum”; the one with Ut on F and the semitone between A and B $\flat$ , called instead “molle”<sup>203</sup>. In case it was needed to learn melodies that went beyond six notes, it was necessary to move from one hexachord to another using a procedure called “mutation”, which involved replacing the syllables near the semitones, always modifying them with the words E and F<sup>204</sup>. For example, the passage from a hexachord “durum” to a hexachord “naturale” involved the following mutation: Ut (G) - Re (A) - Mi (B natural) - Fa (C) - Sol (D) - Mi (E) - Fa (F) - Sol (G) - La (A). This mutation clearly shows the presence of a tritone between the E of the hexachord “durum” and the F of the hexachord “naturale”, which gave rise to the aforementioned sentence “mi contra fa est diabolus in musica” and which made it necessary to introduce the B $\flat$  present in the hexachord “molle”<sup>205</sup>.

The tritone interval, with its restless and dissonant connotation and its harmonic instability, used as an allusion to the underworld, is a fairly relevant constant in Liszt’s production. For example, the composer uses it in symphonic pieces (*Dante-Symphonie*, *Faust-Symphonie*) in piano pieces (*Unstern! Sinistre*, *Disastro*, *Mephisto Waltz n. 2*, *Bagatelle ohne Tonart*) and in pages for piano and orchestra (*Totentanz*, *De profundis*).

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Benedectines of Solesmes (Ed.). Versus in laudem sancti Iohannis Baptistae. In: *The Liber Usualis*. Tournai (Belgium), Desclée & Co., 1961, p. 1504. Retrieved May 17, 2023 from [https://archive.ccwatershed.org/media/pdfs/13/08/14/14-59-32\\_0.pdf](https://archive.ccwatershed.org/media/pdfs/13/08/14/14-59-32_0.pdf).

<sup>202</sup> La Nuova Enciclopedia della Musica. Tritono. (1987), p. 678.

<sup>203</sup> Basso, A. Solmisazione. (1989), p. 343.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., Mutazione. (1989), vol. III, p. 306.

<sup>205</sup> La Nuova Enciclopedia della Musica. Mutazione. (1987), p. 494.

The tritone interval is also one of the most significant elements in *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*. The piece begins precisely with this notorious interval (A-Eb) and in the first two bars it immediately presents an initial motive made up of no less than five descending tritones (see figure 4). Furthermore, this incipit seems to be a symbolic reference to the inscription above the gate of hell in Dante's third Canto of the *Inferno* (Canto III, 9), "Lasciate ogne speranza, voich'intrate"<sup>206</sup>, or as a reference to the dramatic fall of souls into hell.

Figure 4. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 1-2.



In mm. 7-8 the same motive makes its second appearance, again with five descending tritones, but transposed a minor third higher (C-F#) (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 7-8.



The tritone interval is constantly present in the *Dante Sonata* also, for example, in the enharmonic transposition of its first appearance (see figure 6a) or in a juxtaposed version between two tritones in ostinato figures creating a haunting affect (see figure 6b).

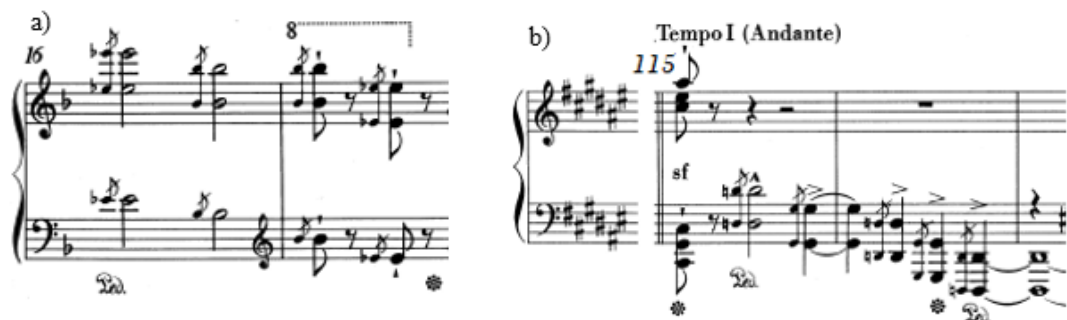
<sup>206</sup> Alighieri, D. *Commedia*. (2000), vol. 1, p. 46. "Abandon all hope you who enter." (My English Translation)

Figure 6. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 73-74 and mm. 181-185.



The initial tritone motive also reappears frequently in the piece: transposed into different tonal areas, modified in rhythm, presented in chords, changed in the motion between the hands, transformed in the intervals themselves or even in the tritones number that constitute it (see figure 7).

Figure 7. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 16-17 and mm. 115-116.



It is also interesting to verify Liszt's almost hidden use of the tritonal element. In the middle of what scholars recognize as the development section (see figure 3), an emphasis of the opening motive on  $A^b$  is present (see figure 8), thus establishing a tritone relationship between  $A^b$  major and the tonic key of D minor that further

reinforces the primary tonal tension of the tritone in the piece<sup>207</sup>.

Figure 8. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 211-212.



*Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* contains also interesting patterns and rhythmic peculiarities.

One of these fascinating rhythmic patterns is present right in the piece opening (see figure 4), it is made up of main notes preceded by grace notes (each of which is identical to its main one) and it is perceived as formed by dotted notes, when listening to it.

This dotted rhythm, which in the beginning is not explicitly written, will later be annotated exactly (see figure 9) or transformed into other rhythmic figurations that provide this specific auditory impression and recall its basic rhythmic pattern (see figure 10).

Figure 9. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 20-22.



<sup>207</sup> Todd, Larry R, (Ed.). Nineteenth century Piano Music. New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 422. Retrieved March 27, 2023 from [https://archive.org/details/nineteenthcentur0000unse\\_l2f9/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/nineteenthcentur0000unse_l2f9/mode/2up).

Throughout the entire piece, Liszt inserts a kind of rhythmic displacement of the melodic motives (see figure 9), sometimes determining an ambiguity of the metric pulsation that extends even for several measures. In the *Presto agitato assai*, for example, this sensation lasts from measure 35 to measure 51 (see figures 10).

Figure 10. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 35-51.



In *Dante Sonata* Liszt applies a revolutionary conception for his time: he dissociates the parameters of a given motive as if they had an autonomous existence<sup>208</sup>. This is how the rhythms of any theme can be transferred to the melody of another theme, thus obtaining extremely different and sometimes opposite sensations<sup>209</sup>. This occurs, for example, between the initial motive, image of Lucifer and the infernal powers, and the melody recognized as a symbol of heavenly victory (see figure 11).

Figure 11. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 1-3 and mm. 95-97.



<sup>208</sup> Gut, S. Liszt. (1989), p. 348.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

Another significant aspect in the *Dante Sonata* is the thematic transformation of the chromatic line of the melody of what is identified as the first theme (see figure 10). In line with Walter Bache's annotations on his personal copy of the piece (see figure 1), this theme appears to evoke the anguished lament of the damned and suggests the dramatic fall of souls into hell.

This dramatic theme is composed primarily of descending and ascending chromatic scales in alternating sixteenth notes, with the inner voices harmonizing the chromatic line and characterizing its tonal indefinability and with the bass holding the key firmly anchored in D minor. Here Liszt writes *lamentoso* while, further on, when the theme shows up an octave higher with a dynamic change and with support by chords in both hands (see figure 12), the indication is *disperato*. Not by chance in both appearances the tonality is D minor, "a key that has often symbolized the underworld in music"<sup>210</sup> (such as: the aria *A cenar teco* from Atto II of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*; the Queen of the Night's aria, *Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen*, from the same composer's *Zauberflöte*; Schubert's *Der Tod und das Mädchen* Quartet, Liszt's own *Totentanz* and *Dante Symphony*).

Figure 12. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 54-55.



The chromatic descending line is presented again in m. 124 (see figure 13) but here Liszt's indication *dolcissimo con intimo sentimento*, the rhythmic figuration, that morphed into continuous triplets seems to have a calming effect, and the tonality of F# major transform it into a suave melody associated with heaven. In Liszt's production a lot of his "divine" or "blessed" music develops in F# major (*Bénédiction de Dieu*, *St. Francois d'Assise: La prédication aux oiseaux*, *Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* with a quotation from the Gospel according to John).

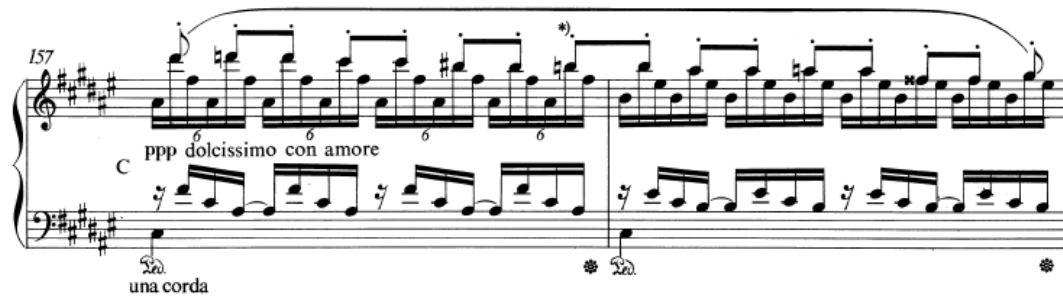
<sup>210</sup> Walker, A. Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847. (1983), p. 276.

Figure 13. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 124-125.



The chromatic melodic line therefore recurs on several occasions: transformed in the key, in the rhythmic figuration, in the dynamic and above all in the character (see figure 14).

Figure 14. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 157-158.



At measure 136, for example, Liszt begins with a melody (see figure 15a) derived from the second theme (see figure 18), which in turn can be considered a derivation of the initial chromatic motive, but with a decidedly opposite character, thus obtaining a powerful thematic contrast (see figures 10 and 15b). This new melody, also in the key of F# major, symbolic of Liszt's "beatific"<sup>211</sup> music, is often associated with the figure of Beatrice or Francesca da Rimini<sup>212</sup> and it is enclosed between two variations of the chromatic motive, indicated with *dolcissimo con intimo sentimento* (see figure 13) and *dolcissimo con amore* (see figure 14), which suggest the extreme joy of Dante's *Paradiso*.

<sup>211</sup> Walker, A. Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847. (1983), p. 276.

<sup>212</sup> Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p. 28.



Figure 15. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 136-141 and comparison between the two opposing subjects<sup>213</sup>

a)

b)

Particular metamorphoses of this theme are given by its diatonic transformation (see figure 16) and by its transposition in steps of whole tones. For example, starting from m. 199, the first theme is recalled in a sequence of three appearances transposed in whole-tone steps: it starts with a C Major seventh chord; then it rises a tone and starts the sequence with the D Major seventh chord; finally, in the third transposition, it appears starting from the E Major seventh chord (see figure 17).

Figure 16. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 167-170.

<sup>213</sup> Walker, A. Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847. (1983), p. 277.

Figure 17. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 199-204.



The choral second theme is introduced at measure 103 (see figure 18) after a modulating episode that gravitates around the dominant harmony of the new key of F# major. The entire modulating section, which begins at measure 77, gives a strong sense of transition towards the new tonality. All possible means are used to amplify the excitement: change of key signature; writing in full, broken and alternating octaves, scales, great leaps, repercussion of detached chords that advance by intervals of a minor third in an ascent that seems to find no end; agogic and dynamic indications that increase the restlessness.

Figure 18. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 103-106.



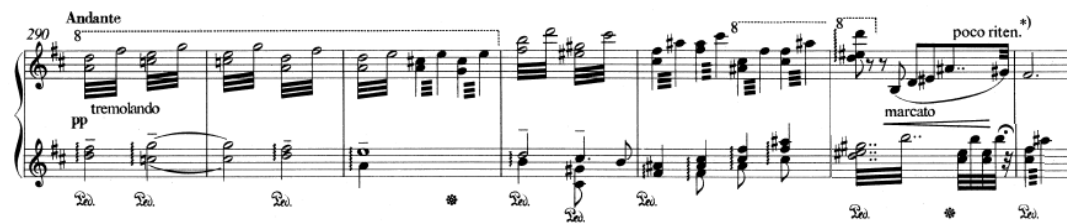
Finally, the second theme arrives in a different tonality from the dominant (renouncing the classical consuetude of combining tonic-dominant and choosing the mediant major for the second subject), which however does not alter its function of opposition to the first theme, with a sonority in *fff*, with a sound extension that expands from the low F# with four additional ledger lines to the penultimate acute one at the top of the keyboard and with a heroic gait.

Also for this second theme, Liszt's expressive intention is debated among scholars. The aforementioned "beatific" key of F# major can suggest the battle of good versus

evil, the heroic versus the macabre, the sacred versus the infernal. Recalling Walter Bache's annotations (see figure 2), its violently and *precipitato* expression, as indicated in the score, can also re-propose the other face of the "regis inferni", "la creatura ch'ebbe il bel sembiante" as described by Dante in Canto XXXIV of the *Inferno*<sup>214</sup>.

In addition to the reappearance in m. 136 (see figure 15a), which transformed it into an angelic song, this second theme also recurs on several occasions: assigned to different registers of the keyboard, modified in key, presented integrally or in contracted form and reinterpreted in its dramatic function. For example, when it reappears at m. 290 (see figure 19), with the key of D, in major in the medium-high register, with the resonances of the tremolo in *pp* on the high register and with *Andante* in the agogic indication, it creates the effect of astonishment of a music of paradise<sup>215</sup>.

Figure 19. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 290-297.



## 2. Particular Harmonic Aspects

The peculiarities, that make the musical inventions contained in *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* original and effective, also concern some of the harmonic aspects of the piece.

For example, the extensive use of the tritone with its sense of mystery and of the descending chromatic profile with expression of lament and pain, firstly negates the sense of modal or tonal stability, providing a feeling of restlessness and ambiguity.

Another harmonic peculiarity is given by the harmonization in whole tones. The first example, found at the beginning of the second theme (see figure 18) where the

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 278. Quotation from Alighieri, D. *Commedia*. (2000), vol. 1, p. 592-593. "Hell's Monarch", "the creature eminent in beauty once". (Translated into English by A. Walker. In: *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847*. (1983), p. 278-279).

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

bass line moves from F# major to E major and then back to F# major, then recurs in every representation of the choral theme (see figures 15a, 19 and 20).

Figure 20. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 306-308.



The clearest and most extended whole-tone harmonization example is present starting from measure 225 where the chords, entrusted to the right hand, constitute a passage which descends step by step up to Ab major, starting from D major (see figure 21).

Figure 21. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 225-232.



These harmonic aspects, that make the tonal sense ambiguous, are opposed to Liszt's choices regarding tonalities linked to an expressive purpose; anyway these choices are certainly not the result of a random selection. Thus, also in *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, the key of D minor represents hell and evil (as for example in *Totentanz* and in the second movement "Purgatorio" of *Dante Symphony*), Ab major is associated with love (as for example in two of the *Liebesträume* nn. 1 e 3, in lieder *In Liebeslust* and in the second movement "Gretchen" of the *Faust Symphony*) and F# major symbolizes the divine and heaven (*Bénédiction de Dieu*, *St. Francois d'Assise: La prédication aux oiseaux*, *Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* and "Magnificat" of the *Dante Symphony*).

In the *Dante Sonata*, Liszt also introduces another particular harmonic aspect: a

sort of circular harmonic trajectory in which a section begins in a certain key, then proceeds sequentially through a series of keys to finally reach the original key that introduces the section itself. However, this cyclical displacement does not occur in the order of the circle of fifths but, again, it moves in whole tones steps. An interesting and very complex example can be found in the section of the *dolcissimo con amore* (see figure 22), which starts in the key of F# major (m. 157), passing through A $\flat$  major (m. 161), B $\flat$  major (m. 162), C major (m. 163) and finally returning to the initial F# major (m. 167).

Figure 22. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 157, 161, 162, 163, 167.

più tosto ritenuto e rubato quasi improvvisato

157 ppp dolcissimo con amore

161 affrettando

162 affrettando

163 più crescendo ed appass

167 accelerando non legato

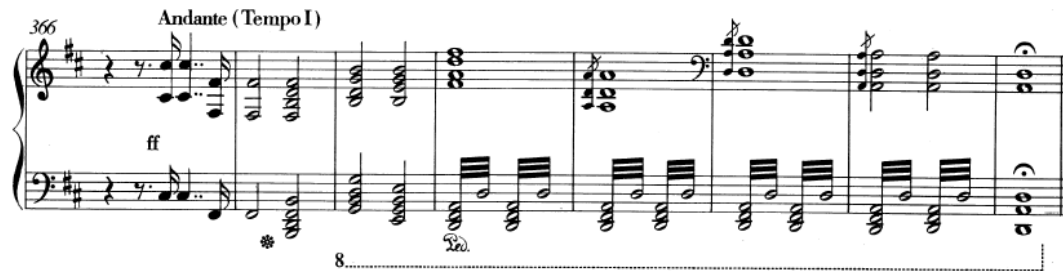
una corda 8

P

Another particular harmonic choice is given by the use of the third degree (mediant) as key for the second theme. Before Liszt, an authoritative example of this decision comes from Beethoven who, in his Piano Sonata op. 31 n. 1 and Piano Sonata op. 53 and in the String Quartet op. 127, omits the traditional tonic-dominant combination by precisely choosing the mediant major for the second subject<sup>216</sup>. This decision to avoid the tonic-dominant progression is also present in the finale of *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, which concludes in the luminous key of D major, with a harmonic succession of chords on VI (B major), IV (G major), minor II (E minor) and I (D major) (see figure 23).

<sup>216</sup> Todd, L. (Ed.). *Nineteenth century Piano Music*. (2004), p. 404.

Figure 23. Franz Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, mm. 366-373.



## VIII. Conclusion

With his creativity that embodies Hungarian flair, French emotion and Latin culture, Liszt is one of the emblems of the nineteenth century cosmopolitan musician. Trained in Vienna and Paris, he travelled through Europe, Russia and Ukraine, eventually settling in Weimar, Budapest and Rome<sup>217</sup>.

Musician and performer, with a complex personality and open to the most disparate cultural stimuli, capable of catalyzing the attention of entire European audiences, thanks to his talent, his intelligence and his genius, he later gave up his concert life to devote himself to his deep vocation as a composer. His extensive catalogue includes works of sacred and secular choral music, orchestral works, piano pieces, pieces for piano and orchestra, chamber music, songs and vocal works, Recitations, compositions for other instruments and an Opera.

In Liszt's musical production, literature and poetry have exercised a decisive weight and have increased his search for new means of musical expression.

Indeed, the young musician, who during his formative years had not received a regular literary education, was fascinated by the intellectual and cultural ferment present in Paris between the end of the 1820s and the beginning of the 1830s. In this city, the undisputed capital of the art world, poets, composers, painters, philosophers and writers from all over Europe congregated in heated cultural debates, creating an effervescent intellectual scene<sup>218</sup>.

Therefore, the composer approached literature and poetry, which he would love for a lifetime. He read the great Greek and Latin authors such Homer and Plato, became

<sup>217</sup> Gibbs, C. Gooley, D. The worlds of Franz Liszt. (2006), p. 4.

<sup>218</sup> Scher, S. P. Liszt and Literature. (1991), p. 341.

interested in philosophy and meditated the Bible. He loved Dante, Shakespeare and the classics of French literature such as Racine, Montagne, Voltaire and Rousseau<sup>219</sup>, while also studying the masterpieces of great composers such as Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart and Weber<sup>220</sup>.

Liszt was captivated by the ability of poetry to arouse all passions and speak everyone's language<sup>221</sup> and personally got to know many members of the literary elite of his time as Lord Byron, Chateaubriand, de Senancour. He also became friend with some of the most prominent figures as Victor Hugo, Balzac, Lamartine and Heine<sup>222</sup>.

An example of this inextricably link between Liszt's compositions and poetry can be found looking at his cycles based on pattern of poetry collections and Symphonic Poems that illustrate or evoke the content of a work in verse. He introduced poetic quotations as a preface to a score or even within the piece above the stave and composed pieces on poetic texts; he also transposed typical forms of the literary genres into the musical field and introduced formal freedom and mixing of genres. Another example is documented by the choice of naming his compositions with titles of novels or poems, such as for example the three books of the *Années de pèlerinage* which title refers to Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's years of pilgrimage)<sup>223</sup>.

The seventh and last piece of the second volume (*Deuxième Année: Italie*) of Liszt's collection *Années de pèlerinage* is *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* which, in addition to being another clear example of the inseparable relationship with poetry, also highlights the importance of the musician's Italian stays, rich in artistic and cultural solicitations.

The creative process of this piece and his long compositional "pèlerinage" (pilgrimage), characterized by numerous revisions, corrections and second thoughts, lasted almost twenty years and is closely linked to Liszt's trip to Italy and his interest in Dante Alighieri and Victor Hugo. The musician stayed in places

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>220</sup> Liszt, F. Briefe. Von Paris bis Rom. (1893), p. 7.

<sup>221</sup> Liszt, F. Lettre d'un bachelier ès-musique. (1837), p. 341.

<sup>222</sup> Scher, S. P. Liszt and Literature. (1991), p. 343.

<sup>223</sup> Cresti, R. Liszt musicista europeo. (2011), p. 75.

linked to the great Italian poet and visited for example the pine forest of San Rossore, also mentioned in the *Purgatorio* (Canto XXVIII, 1-21) to describe the enchanting forest of the earthly paradise; furthermore, his correspondence is full of quotations and references to *Divina Commedia*, the “poème immense”<sup>224</sup> (immense poem) as he himself called it.

The works of Victor Hugo were also of great inspiration to him and references to the French literate’s poems can be found in the catalog of his compositions.

In *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* the innovative form and bold musical language are evident. The piece displays recognizable elements of the Sonata form and the characteristics of a free form such as the Fantasia, while the linguistic audacity is expressed through the extensive use of the tritone interval, the chromatic scale and the whole-tone scales, that make the tonal sense ambiguous. The *Dante Sonata* is therefore an emblematic example of Liszt’s creative spirit and of his continuous and tireless innovative research.

Furthermore, through the constant revisions of the *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, Liszt conceptually moved away from the explicit description of a literary work: in fact, in the succession of musical episodes of this composition it is not possible to identify any narrative path. He presumably represented his personal conception of hell and paradise rather than faithfully reproducing Dante’s poem or Hugo’s verses, even if they both most likely played a fundamental part in the long journey that would lead to the final version of the piece born as *Fragment Dantesque*. Even the subtitle *Fantasia quasi Sonata*, however indicative it may be, should not necessarily be considered a clue for research regarding the piece’s structure.

Despite the citation of Dante’s name and the use of the title of Hugo’s poem, which confirm Liszt’s explicitly literary conception, and the use of the terms Sonata and Fantasia, which establish a historical lineage for his music, perhaps the greatest peculiarity of *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* lies precisely in not being easily definable.

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<sup>224</sup> Liszt, F. Lettre d’un bachelier ès-musique. (1838), p. 295. This passage is already mentioned in: Zicari, I. *Après une lecture du Dante*. (2017), p.11.



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## Musical Score

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