

THESES OF DLA DISSERTATION

Tamás Zétényi

Franz Liszt's chamber music featuring the violoncello
Structure and narrativity in the late works of Franz Liszt

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I. Background

The studies discussing the late works of Liszt would fill a library. As András Wilhelm put it in his 1986 article entitled *Liszt és a huszadik század* [Liszt and the 20th century], studying the late works of Liszt is a special issue of musicology; hence „whenever a new theoretical school, or just a new analytical method (...) emerges, it practically cannot avoid the investigation of these compositions”.

Nevertheless, although Liszt's works with chamber music versions all belong to his late period of composition, no study has been written about them. The comprehensive studies of this period that mention them do not devote to them more than an occasional page or an occasional paragraph.

The viewpoint of my analysis – as opposed to that of previous studies – is not determined by a theoretical school or a technique (e.g., Hungarian influence, Schenkerian analysis, or pitch class set theory). I am looking for similarities and differences in Liszt's five compositions arranged for violoncello and piano.

The framework that I have adopted in capturing the the narrative tendencies emerging from their structural and thematic relations is that employed by Márta Grabócz in her volume entitled *Zene és narrativitás. Írások a 18-19. századi és kortárs zeneművekről* [Music and narrativity. Studies on 18th-19th century and present-day musical compositions] (Pécs: Jelenkor Kiadó, 2004).

2014.12.18. 19.00

Old Academy of Music, Chamber Hall

The late Liszt - Tamás Zétényi's lecture and a concert by the students of the Doctoral School

Liszt: Angélus! Prière aux anges gardiens (string quartet)

Liszt: Romance oubliée (cello, piano)

Liszt: Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth (Elegie) (cello, piano)

Liszt: Élégie (cello, piano, harp, harmonium)

Liszt: Zweite Elegie (cello, piano)

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Liszt: Nuages gris (Trübe Wolken) (piano)

Liszt: Schlaflos, Frage und Antwort (piano)

Liszt: Unstern: sinistre, disastro (piano)

Liszt: La lugubre gondola I (piano)

Liszt: La lugubre gondola II (cello, piano)

Liszt: R. W. – Venezia (string quartet, piano)

Liszt: Am Grabe Richard Wagners (string quartet, harp)

Featuring doctoral students of the Franz Liszt Academy of Music: Zétényi Tamás (cello); Fejérvári Zoltán (piano); Razvaljajeva Anasztázia (harp); Pétery Dóra (harmonium); Sándor László, Baksai Réka (violin); Tornyai Péter (viola).

III. Method

In the first phase of my study, I subjected the five pieces to thorough thematic, structural and tonal analyses. I arranged the results in a table, which made the structural similarities of the pieces apparent.

Then I also inserted the phases of mourning in the same table, as a result of which the parallelisms became manifest (see the table in chapter *Konklúzió* and *kitekintés* [Conclusion and further prospects] of the dissertation).

Thereafter I obtained as much information about the biographical background of the pieces as possible in order to have a better perspective of the circumstances of their composition, and the motivation and background of their rearrangements.

Eventually I looked for correlations in the data I collected – on the model of the narratives identified in convincingly analyzed Liszt compositions.

At various points in the course of my research, I encountered pieces which were stylistically or chronologically related to the five Liszt compositions for violoncello and piano that form the centerpiece of my dissertation. As a last step, I analyzed these pieces in the manner mentioned above, thereby confirming my interpretations of the violoncello-piano pieces in question.

IV. Results

The five pieces for violoncello and piano studied in my dissertation are similar not only in their atmosphere but also in their structure; they are built of similar units. The sequences of the formal elements suggests that their composition process was determined by content; it followed a program. My paper identified the principle underlying the structure of these Liszt compositions with the phases of mourning as described by modern psychology.

The assumption that this is a good direction for the analysis of these pieces is supported by the titles and the associations evoked by them, as well as by the genres defined by the titles: *Èlégie*, *Zweite Elegie*, *Romance oubliée*, *Lugubre gondola* [original title: *Troisième Èlégie*], *Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth* [subtitle: *Elegie*]. The origin of the pieces, and, more generally, the facts of Franz Liszt's biography point into the same direction, as in several cases there is a clear connection between the narrative content of the composition and the events of Liszt's life, often involving the mourning of the death of a person close to Liszt.

My study supports this novel interpretation, which has so far not emerged in the literature on Liszt, by the detailed analyses of Liszt's five compositions for violoncello and piano.

V. Documentation of the activity relating to the subject matter of the dissertation

Gray Clouds: Late Chamber Music of Franz Liszt

2011/10/29

Library of Congress
Washington D.C.

Cellist Tamás Zétényi presents a program developed in a year-long residency as visiting Hungarian fellow at Bard College, through research in the Library's Liszt collections. Harmonically visionary transcriptions and chamber works -- elegies, prayers and meditations -- that stretch the boundaries of tonality and foreshadow music written a century later.

With Sabrina Tabby, Scott Moore, violin / Dávid Tóth, viola / Anna Bikales, harp / Zsolt Balogh, piano.

LISZT: transcriptions of Angelus!, R.W. - Venezia for piano trio; and Am Grabe Richard Wagners for string quartet; and, for cello and piano, Unstern: sinister, disastro; Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth (Elegie); Nuages gris; Schaflos, Frage und Antwort; Wagner/Liszt, La lugubre gondola I and II; and O du, mein holder Abendstern.

II. Resources

The score that my research was based on is *Liszt Society Publications: FERENC LISZT, The Complete Music for Violoncello and Pianoforte (Urtext)*, Edited by Leslie Howard with Steven Isserlis, The Hardie Press, 1992. This is a collection of all the pieces whose violoncello–piano version was prepared by Liszt himself. It includes the following five compositions: Èlégie [Première Èlégie], Zweite Elegie, Romance oubliée, La lugubre gondola, Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth.

I also analyzed piano pieces: Aux cypres de la Villa d'Este. Threnodie (I); Nuages gris; Schlaflos! Frage und Antwort; Unstern! Sinistre, disastro; Romance; Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth [Elegie]; La Vallée d'Obermann; R. W. – Venezia; Am Grabe Richard Wagners; La lugubre gondola I, using in each case New Liszt Complete Critical Edition (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest).

In discussing Franz Liszt's life, the following two volumes of Alan Walker's monography were essential for me: *Liszt Ferenc II. A weimari évek 1848–1861*. [The Weimar years 1848–1861] (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1994), and *Liszt Ferenc III. Az utolsó évek 1881–1886*. [The last years 1881–1886] (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 2003).

I cited the description of the phases of mourning as approached by modern psychology from Alaine Polcz's book *Együtt az eltávozottakkal* [Together with the departed] (Pécs: Jelenkor Kiadó, 2005).