10 Liszt's symphonic poems and symphonies

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When I look back upon your activity in these last years, you appear superhuman to me; there is something very strange about this. However, it is very natural that creating is our only joy, and alone makes life bearable to us. We are what we are only while we create; all the other functions of life have no meaning for us, and are at the bottom concessions to the vulgarity of ordinary human existence, which can give us no satisfaction. (RICHARD WAGNER TO LISZT, 7 JUNE 1855)[1]

During his tenure at the court of Weimar, Franz Liszt focused much of his creative energy towards composing orchestral music, primarily his symphonic poems and symphonies. Liszt received the title of Court Kapellmeister Extraordinary on 2 November 1842[2] and eventually moved to Weimar in 1848 with Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. As Detlef Altenburg outlines in his article 'Franz Liszt and the Legacy of the Classical Era', Liszt and Grand Duke Carl Alexander viewed Liszt's appointment as in artistic succession to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1775–1832) rather than the previous most celebrated Kapellmeister, Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1819–37).[3] In this spirit, Liszt organised several festivals celebrating German artists in Weimar, beginning with the Goethe Festival in August 1849. Many of Liszt's symphonic poems, symphonies and other orchestral works are products of his aim to revive the 'Weimar spirit'. Even the works that are not directly connected to a Weimar figure are still part of his desire to reignite the creativity associated with the *Goethezeit*. In addition, Liszt considered his orchestral compositions to be a continuation of Beethoven's achievement. According to a view strongly held by Liszt and Wagner, the symphony – with the exception of Berlioz – had become stagnant after Beethoven. Liszt saw it as his mission to take orchestral composition further along the path initiated by the great symphonist.

Symphonic poems

The twelve symphonic poems composed during Liszt's Weimar years were published between 1856 and 1861 and all are dedicated to Liszt's partner, Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. Like its predecessor the concert overture, each symphonic poem is a one-movement piece with a programmatic title and most have a preface.[4] In fact, there was originally no difference at all between the concert overture and what came to be referred to as the

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Example 10.1 *Tasso*, bars 1–7

'symphonic poem', and several of the earlier pieces were titled 'overture' on their first performance. The literary, philosophical, and historical background of each work's topic character or subject provides a lens through which to interpret each work; some connections, however, are more tenuous than others.

Four of the symphonic poems, *Tasso*, *Orpheus*, *Prometheus*, and *Mazeppa*, sketch characters of creative genius, heroism and/or legend. In his preface to his symphonic poem *Tasso*, completed in 1854, Liszt stated that the first version of this piece had served as an overture for Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*, which was performed during the Weimar Goethe Centenary Festival.[5] In revising the piece into the 'revolutionary' genre of the symphonic poem, however, Liszt found Byron's poem *The Lament of Tasso* (1817) to be much more directly inspiring than Goethe, because of the empathy Byron evoked for the 'unfortunate poet'.[6] In an analogy to the poem's depiction of Tasso's oscillation between extreme mental states, the two opening motives of the symphonic poem are presented in strikingly different settings in the first sixty-one bars of the piece. See Example 10.1. After the hesitant and ambiguous beginning, the two motives become strikingly terse and furious in the *Allegro strepitoso* section (bars 27–53), but soon motive 1 decelerates back to the halting character of the *Lento* section (bars 54–61).

With the *Adagio mesto* section (bar 62), C minor is firmly established, beginning an exposition in sonata form.[7] Liszt claims to have heard gondoliers in Venice singing the stark principal theme to the first lines of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*: 'Canto l'armi pietose e'l Capitano/Che'l gran Sepolcro liberò di Cristo!' (I sing of the reverent armies and the captain who

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liberated Christ's great sepulchre).[8] Liszt had used this melody for the first time in the 1840 version of his piano piece *Venezia e Napoli*, marking the theme 'Chant du Gondolier'.

The Romantics regarded alienation as a prominent characteristic of the artistic genius, and self- and social alienation are certainly present in Byron's Tasso. Perhaps a hint of this is also present in the formal and tonal plan of Liszt's symphonic poem? The secondary theme of this piece is in the distant key of E major. The move to the major key of the raised third in a minor-key piece had strongly evoked a sense of distance and alienation in Schubert's Heine Lieder of the *Schwanengesang*, a work Liszt may have had in the back of his mind. In 'Der Atlas' and 'Der Doppelgänger', for example, texts dealing with self-alienation are presented in the key of the raised third.[9] Liszt transcribed most of *Schwanengesang* in 1838–9, altering the sequence of the songs but of course maintaining the original key relationships within the songs. He used this same raised-third relationship, probably with a similar affective intention, in *Prometheus* and the first movement of the *Faust* Symphony.

In *Tasso*, tonal expectations continue to be subverted as a *Recitativo, espressivo assai* (bars 145–64) leads into a Minuet section in F major. The Minuet was not added until Liszt's final 1856 version of this piece and brings with it the connotation of courtly culture. The entire section is constructed as a set of variations on the minuet theme (a transformation of the principal melody of the piece) and is tonally extremely distant from the work's tonic, thus increasing the sense of dissociation. The *strepitoso* section returns in bars 348–75 and serves as a bridge to a triumphal C major recapitulation.

Orpheus, composed in 1853–4, was first performed in Weimar on 16 February 1854 as a prelude to Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. The performance helped celebrate the birthday of Weimar's Grand Duchess Maria Pawlowna, who was an amateur musician and a staunch supporter of Liszt at Weimar. In his preface Liszt describes an Etruscan vase depicting Orpheus, and extols music's civilising effect on humanity. This reference to the ennobling effect of Orpheus and his art seems to be derived from the Orpheus portrayed in *Orphée* (1829) by the Lyon philosopher Pierre-Simon Ballanche (1776–1847). The Orpheus of this nine-volume odyssey, the only completed part of Ballanche's larger *Palingénésie Sociale*, leads humanity into the modern age by introducing civilised laws; it was intended to provide a new philosophy for all of Europe.[10] Liszt was an acquaintance and avid supporter of Ballanché, and his enthusiasm was shared by members of the French salons during the 1830s, especially by George Sand.[11]

The first element of Liszt's *Orpheus* to consider is instrumentation, predominantly featuring Orpheus's lyre. The scoring includes two harps, and the representation of the lyre by the harp's arpeggios in the Introduction

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(bars 1–14) immediately focuses the listener's attention on this instrument, metonymic with Orpheus's power. The harpist Jeanne Pohl, one of the new virtuoso performers brought in by Liszt to bolster the Weimar orchestra, inspired these harp effects.[12] Formally, *Orpheus* is a modified sonata form with a secondary key area containing two themes. The second theme, a static motive hovering over oscillating major and minor harmonies (bars 85–96), lacks the energy of the first, but has an especially poignant quality, wistfully presented by various solo instruments to a primarily harp accompaniment. The orchestration, together with the style, prompts an interpretation of this theme as Orpheus's voice.

The ethereal, chromatic ascent in the final bars of this piece attenuates any decisive closure that might be expected from a more conventional harmonic resolution. This, in combination with a last transformation of the closing theme of the second group, ends the work as a cryptic vision. This musical moment recalls the final moments of Ballanche's story, where the narrator, Thamyris, witnesses Orpheus disappearing into the clouds, leaving mankind with the task of developing his teachings of civilisation. Unlike many of Liszt's other symphonic poems, *Orpheus* is largely contemplative, and avoids the usual jubilantly assertive peroration. It was a favourite of Wagner's for that very reason.

Prometheus is a product of several revisions of an overture to Liszt's choral setting of Herder's *Der entfesselte Prometheus* (1802), which was first performed on 24 August 1850 for the Herder Festival in Weimar.[13] Herder's dramatic scenes are a Romantic sequel to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*.[14] In 1855 Liszt turned the overture into a symphonic poem and the choruses into a concert stage work. For the performance of the revised choruses, Richard Pohl, a noted critic and supporter of the New German School who was in Weimar from 1854 to 1864, condensed Herder's work into prologues to be read before each chorus. Unlike Herder's allegorical text, Pohl's prologues develop Prometheus' character, and emphasise Prometheus' sufferings and turbulent relationship with Zeus:

> He [Prometheus] stole and gave to mankind a godlike ornament, the creative fire. – Relentlessly for such guilt he received the gods' hate and punishment: so that he would learn to give honour to Zeus's sovereign power, and end his love for mankind . . . The lively hound, Zeus's blood-thirsty eagle, an uninvited visitor came every day sent down from him, harrowingly tearing apart his flesh with claws, satisfying himself by bloody robbery of his liver. Prometheus does not bend. His hatred for the gods remains.[15]

Pohl's description of Prometheus' treatment in the first Prologue creates an intensity that is not present in Herder's drama, and that intensity is

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carried over into the symphonic poem. A furious version of Prometheus is clearly represented in the radical opening of the work (bars 1–26), marked *Allegro energico ed agitato assai*, and in the principal material (bars 48–61) marked *Allegro molto appassionato* (see Table 10.1). The opening material consists of an agitated gesture over a tremolo (bars 1–6) which leads into a *Maestoso* section (bars 13–26).[16] At the end of the *Maestoso* (bars 22–6), a hint of the principal material is foreshadowed. Largely based on chords of the diminished seventh, this agitated music evidently represents Prometheus' physical and spiritual 'souffrance'.

As shown in Table 10.1, from the choruses Liszt derived the passage marked *Recitativo* (bars 27–47), the secondary section, and the fugal third section. After the principal section (bars 48–115) and another appearance of the instrumental recitative, the secondary section begins in D♭ major. The thematic material comes from the 'Chor der Unsichtbaren', which was originally in E major. At this point in the drama Prometheus has been freed, an olive tree has sprouted from the rock where he was bound, and the chorus praises the wise Themis, the goddess of Justice. The presence of this thematic material at this moment in the symphonic poem probably does not, however, represent justice eventually served to Prometheus. The use of D♭ major, the raised third of A minor, rather than the dominant, E major, which convention might have led the listener to expect, is perhaps another reference to Romantic alienation.[17] The fact that while the thematic material appears in E major in the choruses Liszt chose not to use that key in the symphonic poem gives some support to this interpretation.

The fugato section (bars 161–84) continues in the second-group key, the first part of its subject originating from the 'Chor der Musen'. Preceding this chorus in the drama, Themis praised Prometheus for his greatest attribute: perseverance. That this fugue possibly represents not only this perseverance (in a similar fashion to the fugue in the Purgatorio movement of the *Dante* Symphony), but also Prometheus' creative genius, is supported by the fact that this material is taken from the 'Chor der Musen'.

Mazeppa, composed between 1851 and 1856, is prefaced by a poem by Victor Hugo, but Liszt also includes an incipit from Byron's poem of the same name. The first half of Hugo's *Mazeppa* describes the wild ride of the Ukrainian hetman (Polish/Cossack military leader) tied naked to a horse, while the triumphal second half relates Mazeppa's ride to the euphoria of art. The symphonic poem combines thematic material from the Transcendental Study 'Mazeppa' with the *Arbeiterchor* of 1848.[18] Following a 36-bar introduction of *agitato* triplets, the trombones present the main theme in D minor. After several variations of that theme, there is a sparsely orchestrated, recitative-like *Andante* section (bars 403–35). The work is concluded by an optimistic *Allegro marziale* with new thematic material.

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Table 10.1 Prometheus: *Musical analysis and relationships between the symphonic poem and the choruses*

Bar	Section/subsections	Theme/motive	Tonality	Dynamics/orchestration	Choral derivation
1–47	**INTRODUCTION**				
1–6	Allegro energico ed agitato assai	1 O	a	p/f	
6–12					
13–26	Maestoso, un poco ritenuto	2 O	/vii^{N}7/a	ff	
27–47	Andante (Recitativo)	Bridge	vii^{N}7/a	sparse	No. 3 Chor der Dryaden (bars 43–77) Alto Solo
48–115	**SECTION 1**				
48–61	Allegro molto appassionato; agitato assai	P(2 O)	a		
62–77		t			
78–83		1 O		Tr. and Tps.	
84–101		t			
102–15		P and Bridge			
116–28	Ritenuto, il tempo (quasi Recitativo)	Bridge			fragment of No. 3
129–60	**SECTION 2**				
	A tempo espressivo Dolce	S	D	p	No. 7 Chor der Unsichtbaren (25–51)
161–236	**SECTION 3**				
161–84	Allegro moderato	Fugato	D/	Marcato strings	No. 8 Chor der Musen

Continued

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Table 10.1 *(Cont.)*

Bar	Section/subsections	Theme/motive	Tonality	Dynamics/orchestration	Choral derivation
185–205		F		subject polychorally divided, eventually overlapping (b. 198)	
206–13		F	A	ff; divided (instrumentation reversed)	
213–36		F/P			
237–443	**SECTION 4**				
237–44	Allegro energico ed agitato assai	1 O			
245–9		P			
250–68	Andante (Recitativo)	Bridge			No. 3 Chor der Dryaden (bars 43–77) Alto Solo
*269–303	Allegro molto appassionato	P	a		
304–21	Stretto; Più animato	S	E		
322–51		F (frag.)			
352–63		F			
364–90		S	A		
391–443	Poco a poco sempre più stringendo sin al fine	F, 1 O	A		

Notes:
*Optional
Analytical symbols: the symbols for my musical analysis are based on those from Jan LaRue's *Guidelines for Style Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1970), 154–63. The letters indicate the following: O = introductory material; P = primary materials; t = transitional or other episodic, unstable functions; S = secondary materials; F = fugato; N = new material introduced after the conclusion of an exposition in sonata form. Parentheses indicate thematic derivatives. I have added other symbols where needed, which are explained in the text.

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Three of the symphonic poems, *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne*, *Les Préludes*, and *Die Ideale*, are directly or indirectly associated with poems that do not deal with a specific protagonist. *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* is prefaced by a poem by Victor Hugo from *Feuilles d'Automne* (1829). Four versions of the work appeared between the years 1847 and 1856. Harp arpeggios (bars 33–8) provide an introduction to the primary material (bars 38–43), an undulating and tonally unstable theme that returns frequently throughout this extensive piece. The *Maestoso* secondary theme beginning in bar 95 is first heard in F♯ major followed by trumpet calls in E♭ major (bars 155–66). Although not every part of the symphonic poem has a specific literary analogy, a chorale-style section (bars 477–518) marked *Andante religioso* certainly recalls the 'hymne heureux!' in Hugo's work.

As with *Prometheus*, *Les Préludes* was originally conceived as an introduction for a cantata, *Les Quatres Eléments* in 1844–5. It consisted of settings of four poems by Joseph Autran (1813–77): 'La Terre', 'Les Aquilons', 'Les Flots' and 'Les Astres' and was never published. Liszt later revised the overture to this work and renamed it *Les Préludes* in 1854.[19]

Although *Les Préludes* was thus obviously not originally inspired by Lamartine, poem and symphonic poem are a fairly appropriate, if hardly a particularly specific, match. The four general themes that are present in the poem – love, sorrow, aggression, and a Romantic pastoralism – are mirrored in the music. The secondary material, marked *Cantando* and *Espressivo ma tranquillo*, is of an evidently amorous nature, and the other three facets correspond to expressive markings in the score: *Allegro tempestoso*, *Allegretto pastorale*, and *Allegro marziale animato*. The last includes a trumpet fanfare recalling Lamartine's 'La trompette a jeté le signal des alarmes: aux armes!', which is quoted proudly in the symphonic poem preface, perhaps because it is the only passage in the whole musical work that might sound as if it is directly, rather than vaguely, derived from the poem.

Die Ideale, composed between 1856 and 1857, was from the start intended to be a musical counterpart to Schiller's eponymous poem, and was first performed on 3 September 1857 for the centenary of the birth of Carl August, Grand Duke of Weimar. This enormous work has passages from Friedrich Schiller's poem printed throughout the score. The passages are titled as follows: 'Ideals' (bars 1–25); 'Aspirations' (bars 26–453); 'Disillusion' (454–567); 'Employment' (568–679); and 'Apotheosis' (680 to the end). The 'Aspirations' section establishes the tonic of F major after the tonally ambiguous opening. The second section eventually settles into C minor and, after a passage of E major, the third section continues in this minor key. Perhaps not surprisingly the grandiose Apotheosis – Liszt's addition to Schiller's poetic scheme – ends the piece in the tonic major.[20]

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Originally Liszt conceived *Héroïde funèbre* as the first movement of *Symphonie révolutionnaire* (1830). There are two versions of the symphonic poem, one from 1850, and a revised version from 1854 to 1856 that is far more subtle and varied in orchestration, although the thematic and formal outlines remain much the same. The preface of this work focuses on the allegedly unique immobility of grief in human existence – everything else about humanity changes, yet grief is the one true constant. The 31-bar introduction begins with a slow dirge-like rhythm in the percussion followed by anguished chords in the woodwinds and brass. The main funeral march begins in bar 32 in F minor, with a subsequent trio section, marked *Più lento*, in D♭ major. Eventually both the March and the Trio return in F, producing a slow-movement sonata form of convincing structure and vivid emotional impact.

Three of the symphonic poems have no preface at all. Liszt began the composition of the first, *Festklänge*, in 1853, publishing it in 1856 but then adding four 'Variants' to the score in 1861. He composed this piece as 'wedding music' for his eventually thwarted marriage to the Princess zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. Her Polish heritage was represented by the polonaise rhythms in the work, which were made more pervasive in the 1861 revision. The biographical connection between Liszt himself and *Hungaria*, the second, is an obvious one. Celebrating native artists became a way of rallying Hungary's nationalistic spirit, and Liszt was embraced by the country as one of its most famous and respected representatives in Europe. Although he strongly supported Hungary's effort to exert its own distinctive national identity, he did not join more radical voices that advocated a complete severance from Austria.[21] Throughout his later years Liszt remained a true Hungarian patriot ('I remain, until death, Hungary's true and grateful son'[22]), and his feelings towards his homeland are given extensive expression in *Hungaria*. The first section of this piece (bars 1–132) contains the stylistic characteristics of the Hungarian *verbunkos* or recruiting dance music. The *verbunkos* grew in popularity in the late eighteenth century in Hungary and became more stylised in the nineteenth, when it acquired associations with Hungarian national pride.[23] Primary characteristics include alternating slow and fast sections (*lassu* and *friss*), sharply accentuated rhythms (frequently dotted and triplet) and profuse violinistic ornamentation.

All of the aforementioned characteristics are present in the first 132 bars of *Hungaria*. *Largo con duolo* sections alternate with an *Andante marziale* in a contrast of *lassu* and *friss*, and the thematic material beginning in bar 18 has the rhythmic style associated with the *verbunkos*. This material is very similar to the third movement of the 'First Hungarian Society Dance' (1842) by Márk Rózsavölgyi, a well-known violin virtuoso who primarily helped to establish the late *verbunkos* style with his 'society dances' and chamber

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music.[24] The violin solo beginning in bar 132 of *Hungaria*, and most notably the cadenza *ad lib.* passage in bar 141, can be associated with the *verbunkos* style and also with Hungarian/gypsy music in general. Liszt had already used the thematic material from the *Andante marziale* section in the 1840 *Heroic March in Hungarian Style* for piano. The secondary material begins in bar 242 in B major, and from bar 425 it is juxtaposed with the primary material in a funeral-march section. Here the music presents the results of extreme nationalistic fervour: the deaths of many Hungarians during the 1848 revolution. Faith in the future of the Hungarian nation, however, is eventually affirmed as the *Allegro eroica* secondary material, which Liszt also used in the *Heroic March in Hungarian style*, triumphantly returns in the tonic major.

Although *Hamlet*, the third symphonic poem, does not have a preface, it was intended to depict specific scenes from Shakespeare's play.[25] Liszt composed this work in 1858 after a private performance of the drama on 25 June of that same year. The opening motive, marked *Molto lento e lugubre*, was intended as a setting of Hamlet's soliloquy from Act III. The rest of the opening section, bars 9–73, is melancholic and agitated. After a quicker *Allegro appassionato ed agitato assai* in B minor, the horns and trumpets leap out with an exclamatory fanfare. The centrepiece of this symphonic poem is the episode between Hamlet and Ophelia.[26] Ophelia first appears in bar 160, as we know through Liszt's footnote reference to her in the score. Her recitative-like passage is interrupted by an *Allegro* section in which the strings and bassoons are marked *Ironico* in a depiction of Hamlet's 'get thee to a nunnery'. The work ends in despondency and despair with a funeral march for Hamlet's death.

Hunnenschlacht was composed in 1857. Liszt's preface reveals that he was inspired by Wilhelm von Kaulbach's (1805–74) imposing painting, *The Battle of the Huns*: 'It seemed to me that [Kaulbach's] idea might suitably be transferred to music and that this art was capable of reproducing the impression of the two supernatural and contrasting lights, by means of two motives.' The two themes presented in this work are the *Crux fidelis* chant and a 'Schlachtruf' (Battle Cry). After a tempestuous opening, the chant is heard in C minor and the Battle Cry a tritone distant in F♯ minor. The chant returns in E♭ major and then finally in a triumphal C major. The addition of the organ to the orchestration from bar 271 to the end of the piece results in a swelling of tone volume, and its church associations emphasise the victory of Christianity.

After the completion of this work, Liszt did not return to the genre of the symphonic poem until 1883, when he dedicated *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe* to Count Mihály Zichy, an Hungarian artist who had made two drawings with this same title. The symphonic poem is divided into three

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parts: 'Die Wiege', 'Der Kampf um's Dasein' and 'Zum Grabe, die Wiege des Zukünftigen Lebens';[27] it bears all the characteristics of Liszt's spare and concentrated late style. As in the *Faust* Symphony, the final part ('To the grave') is a radically varied transformation of the first ('The cradle') – appropriately enough for a depiction of the 'cradle of the life to come'.

Symphonies: *Faust* and *Dante*

Hector Berlioz, the eventual dedicatee of Liszt's *Faust* Symphony, introduced Liszt to Goethe's *Faust* in the 1830s.[28] Even though Liszt sketched parts of the *Faust* Symphony during the 1840s, the main composition of the work took place within the span of two months, August through October 1854.[29] During this time, George Henry Lewes and George Eliot were visiting Liszt and Carolyne. Lewes was working on his *Life and Works of Goethe*, and the two couples engaged in frequent discussions of Goethe's life and works. Once again the celebration of Weimar's classic past inspired Liszt's music.

Liszt referred to the *Faust* Symphony as consisting of three character sketches, Faust, Gretchen and Mephistopheles. The first movement of the Symphony, 'Faust', bears striking resemblances to aspects of *Tasso* and *Prometheus*, particularly in terms of mood and key relationships, although 'Faust' is undoubtedly more complex and ambitious. The movement is a sonata form in C minor, which key is established by the *agitato* principal material beginning in bar 71.[30] The tonal centre of the secondary material (see bars 179–201), marked *Affettuoso poco Andante*, is E major. This section is also marked by a striking orchestral change and predominantly features the clarinets, bassoons, and horns. After a 22-bar interruption by the principal *agitato* theme (marked *Allegro con fuoco* in bar 202), a brassy, grandioso closing theme is firmly grounded in E major. The distant relationship between a minor tonic and its raised major third has already been mentioned as typical for Liszt.

The opening motives of the introduction of *Faust*, like those in *Tasso*, are differentiated by range and instrumentation and are used as the basis for thematic material throughout not only the first movement but the entire symphony. Devoid of a tonal centre, the radical first motive in the strings arpeggiates descending augmented triads and uses all twelve pitches of the chromatic scale. A solo oboe responds to the wandering arpeggios with a *dolente* sigh motive ending in another tonally ambiguous augmented triad (see Example 10.2). The first motive is immediately reinterpreted in the *Allegro impetuoso* section, surrounded by string tremolos and high-pitched, sustained woodwinds and horns. This section ends abruptly and is followed

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by a long pause. The second motive then reappears in a recitative-like passage on the bassoon marked *Lento assai*. Much has been written about these opening motives of the *Faust* Symphony.[31] Whether Motive 2 is described as illustrating Faust's emotionalism or his contemplativeness is perhaps inconsequential. What is more relevant for this discussion is that the binary opposition between the motives was obviously intended by Liszt to parallel two characteristic traits of Goethe's *Faust*. The appearance of thematic material from the first movement in the second and third movements reveals those elements of Faust's character that are associated with his relations with Gretchen and Mephistopheles. The first seventy bars of the first movement can therefore serve as an introduction not only to this movement but to the symphony as a whole.

The secondary theme of the *Allegro* section of *Faust*, which is an expansion of Motive 2, makes an appearance in bars 44 through 51 of the 'Gretchen' movement. Eventually this is supplanted by another 'Faust' theme, marked *patetico* (bars 111–87). In 'Liszt, Goethe, and the Discourse of Gender' in *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900*, Lawrence Kramer interprets Gretchen's music as attracting Faust's music, but later he acknowledges: 'What we have been calling Gretchen's music is really Faust's.'[32] We might, in this vein, regard the entire second movement as representing Gretchen from the perspective of Faust, and consequently the listener really learns more about Faust than about the complex, individual woman presented in Goethe's drama. The Gretchen of Liszt's symphony – the innocent, one-dimensional woman – exists only in Faust's imagination. The listener becomes aware of the masquerade when the 'Gretchen' mask Faust is wearing slips with the appearance of the Faustian themes in bars 44 through to 51 and bar 111 to the end of the piece.

Mephistopheles can also be interpreted as an abstraction, a projection of the destructive components of Faust's character. In the symphony, Faust mocks his own humanity by taking on the identity of Mephistopheles, and in consequence little of the thematic material is new in the 'Mephistopheles' movement but is mostly derived from the first two movements. As in Goethe's drama, Mephistopheles is the spirit of negation, constantly belittling and provoking Faust,[33] so within this movement previous thematic material is caricatured. The Gretchen theme that reappears in this movement is, however, immune to distortion.

There are two versions of the *Faust* Symphony that merit rather different interpretations. Liszt's original version of 1854 ended with a last fleeting reference to Gretchen and an optimistic orchestral peroration in C major, based on the most majestic of the themes from the first movement. One might say that this conclusion remains within the persona of Faust and his imagination. In rethinking the piece, Liszt added a choral finale in 1857, a

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Example 10.2 *Faust*, Movement 1, bars 1–5

Ob.
Cl. in C
Bssn
Vn I
Vn II
Vla
Vc.
dolente
dolente
p
ff

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setting of the last eight lines of Goethe's *Faust*, Part 2, the 'Chorus Mysticus'. Ending the symphony with a chorus intoning Goethe's closing verse makes the symphony a closer dramatic parallel to the play. The 'Chorus Mysticus' signifies the end of Faust's earthly striving, so masterfully portrayed in the first movement, and appropriately enough it is to a solo tenor and a male chorus that Liszt gives the last eight lines of the drama:

> All that is transient
> Is but an image;
> The unattainable
> Here becomes actual,
> The indescribable
> Here is accomplished.
> Woman Eternal
> Leads us onward.[34]

The text 'Das Ewig-Weibliche', scored for solo tenor, is set to a fragment of Gretchen's theme. The Faust thematic material has mostly disappeared. With the addition of the 'Chorus Mysticus' text, the Gretchen theme has been transformed, and she no longer appears as a masked Faust. With the direct association to the last scene of the drama we have escaped Faust's imaginings and are hearing another voice commenting on his striving and redemption.

Although the completion of the *Dante* Symphony took place after that of *Faust*, Liszt had long nurtured ideas of setting Dante's *Divine Comedy* to music, and had initially intended starting with the latter symphony. In an entry in his 'Journal des Zÿi' dated February 1839, Liszt wrote: 'If I feel within me the strength and life, I will attempt a symphonic composition based on [Dante's *Divine Comedy*], 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*.'[35] Later that year, in a letter to Berlioz from San Rossore in October 1839, Liszt commented on this same topic:

> Dante has found his pictorial expression in Orcagna and Michelangelo, and someday perhaps he will find his musical expression in the Beethoven of the future.[36]

The *Fragment dantesque* eventually became the piano piece *Après une lecture de Dante, fantasia quasi sonata*, the seventh piece of *Années de pèlerinage, deuxième année: Italie* (1839–49), and *Eine Symphonie zu Dantes Divina Commedia* was finished in 1856. In the light of Liszt's remarks to Berlioz, it is probable that Liszt believed that the 'Beethoven of the future' might be none other than himself.

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Although Liszt played fragments of the *Dante* Symphony for Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein during his visit to Woronince in 1847, he did not finish it until 1856.[37] Liszt had previously written to Wagner, to whom the work is dedicated, explaining his intentions concerning the project:

> Then you are reading Dante? He is excellent company for you. I, on my part, shall furnish a kind of commentary to his work. For a long time I had in my head a Dante symphony, and in the course of this year it is to be finished. There are to be three movements, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, the first purely instrumental, the last with chorus. When I visit you in autumn, I shall probably be able to bring it with me; and if you do not dislike it, you must allow me to inscribe it with your name.[38]

Wagner's reply on 7 June 1855 was broadly encouraging, but expressed doubts as to whether anyone could ever adequately depict paradise in music. Liszt took this comment to heart, for the idea of a 'Paradiso' movement was abandoned, and, as eventually published, the symphony consisted of two movements, 'Inferno' and 'Purgatorio', with a choral setting of the Magnificat added to the end of the latter (bars 314–431). Like *Hamlet*, this symphony depicts specific scenes from a literary work. The first movement, 'Inferno', is the larger by far (646 bars). Its vivid illustration of the torments of hell and the equally direct portrayal of the contrasting 'Francesca da Rimini' episode (a love element particularly attractive to nineteenth-century sensibility) reveal Liszt's affiliation with the Romantic conception of Dante. The beginning of the movement represents the passing of Dante and Virgil through the gate into hell. Similar to the poetry inserts in *Die Ideale*, a modified version of Dante's four-line inscription on the gate into hell appears in the score in the introduction (bars 1–17). The first three text lines are written over a very chromatic, rhythmically varied unison melody played by the low brass and strings. The last line of the inscription, 'Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate!' (Abandon all hope, those who enter here!), is printed over a recitation tone in the horns and trumpets, as if it could be sung. The dramatic meaning of these motives is directly connected to the text throughout the movement. The 'Lasciate' motive in particular returns several times, serving as bridge material between the main sections, and as the final exclamation of the coda.

The next part of the movement (bars 18–63) is not attached to any poetic text but nevertheless involves three highly descriptive motivic ideas. The chromatically rising triplet figure beginning in bar 18, marked *tempestoso*, evokes the storm Dante and Virgil encounter in Canto 5.[39] The descending chromatic line beginning in bar 22 is a rather obvious allusion to Dante and Virgil's descent through the circles of hell. This descent motive is followed by an agitated figure, marked *Violente*, which rises in pitch to the opposite end

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of the orchestra and closes with frantic repetitions (bars 28–9). The principal material in D minor (bars 64–102), marked *Allegro frenetico*, is an expanded version of the *Violente* motive and maintains the frenzied character of its progenitor. Another similarly whirlwind-like passage is presented at the *Presto molto* (103–30), but after a variation of the principal theme, striking new material is introduced (bars 163–209). This opens with a leap of a fifth and is presented in the unrelated keys of B major and then C major before the 'Lasciate' motive is repeated over a dirge-like pattern in the timpani (bars 260–79).

Liszt now suddenly transfigures the mood of the music. Transformed 'storm' material from the *Presto molto* now reappears yearningly in bars 280–5 (*Quasi andante*) in the strings and flutes. With the slower tempo and a harp accompaniment, this motive now alludes to the dissipation of the storm in the contrasting tonal area of F♯ major. In Dante's poem, the hurricane in the second circle subsides so that Francesca may tell her story, which in Liszt's orchestral version begins with a recitativo melody played by a solo bass clarinet (b. 286, *Espressivo dolente*). Following a repetition of bars 260–94, the recitativo theme reappears, this time inscribed in the score with Francesca's words 'Nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria' (There is no greater sorrow than to recall, in wretchedness, happy times) over harp arpeggios.

The main melody of the next section, *Andante amoroso* (bars 354–87), begins as an abbreviated version of the *Recitativo* passage and develops into a pleading, romantic cantilena, eventually cut off by the threatening motive of hopelessness (bars 388–92). After an extensive harp cadenza, a rhythmically augmented version of the principal material returns. The first two bars of the primary theme, however, are distorted here. A note in the score instructs that 'this entire passage is intended to be blasphemous mocking laughter, very sharply accentuated in the two clarinets and the violas'.[40] The closest correlation to this passage in the poem would be Dante and Virgil's encounter with the devils in Malebolge, the fifth valley of the eighth circle (Cantos 21–2). The circle contains ten different types of deceit, the fifth valley housing barratry, the (now admittedly rather dated) buying or selling of ecclesiastical or civil advancement. Black devils hurl the over-ambitious sinners into a pool of black pitch and make blasphemous jokes.

This developmental section leads to the recapitulation of the *Più mosso* passage first heard in bars 87–162 (bars 465–540). At bar 541 the new material of bars 163 through 209 that appeared in B major is expected, but is instead replaced by a reiteration of the descent motive. It is not until bar 571 that the strident new theme is recapitulated in the tonic key, D minor, and even then it is only heard once. The descent motive takes over again, leading to one more thrust of the new material into G minor, followed by the

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implacable reiteration of 'Lasciate ogni speranza' to bring the movement to a merciless end.

The second half of the symphony, 'Purgatorio', which has as its conclusion a choral setting of the Magnificat, primarily manifests the liturgical atmosphere of Dante's *Purgatorio*. Unlike the first movement, which contains numerous descriptive passages, only the opening *Andante* section, also marked *Tranquillo* (bars 1–27), functions as descriptive music. This D major passage is of a particularly limpid beauty, with horn calls floating over an undulating figure in the strings. It would seem to reflect the hope that is present throughout this book, which abounds in idyllic pastoral settings, such as the Meadow of Princes, which Dante encounters in Ante-purgatory, and the garden of Earthly Paradise, where he arrives before meeting Beatrice. From bar 61 onwards the movement takes on a more liturgical aspect, as a recitative passage played by a solo violin is followed by an extended chorale.

A fugue in B minor interrupts these responsorial sections (bars 129–231). Marked *Lamentoso*, it is a symbol of endurance similar to the fugue in *Prometheus*. In this case, one must endure the trials of purgatory to gain the humility needed to ascend to Paradise, which is glimpsed from afar as a choir of boys' voices sing the Magnificat (bar 314 ff.). The words of the Magnificat, a canticle sung at vespers, were supposedly originally spoken by Mary the mother of Christ, who in the *Divine Comedy* is humanity's advocate in heaven and the facilitator of Dante's journey to Beatrice (see *Inferno*, Canto 2: 94–6). The main tonal area of the Magnificat, B major, can be connected to the B-major material in the first movement as well as the F♯ major tonal area of the Francesca episode. It is significant that the Magnificat does not in any way describe God or paradise. Following Wagner's advice, Liszt chose to end the symphony in a mood of pensive anticipation and avoided portraying the bliss of heaven itself. He did, however, provide two alternative endings, one quietly rapt (and admired by Wagner) and the other loudly grandiose (favoured by the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein but deplored by Wagner). The former is surely the more successful, and shares the mystical atmosphere of the conclusion of *Orpheus*, the most delicately shaded of all the symphonic poems. Despite Liszt's fondness for stirringly clangorous orchestral apotheoses, he was often at his best when aiming for a subtle restraint.

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