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## *Liszt's experiments with literature*

**ABSTRACT:** Liszt's aspiration to create his own musical language and to find new tools of musical expression was unusually strong almost from the very beginning of his artistic career. Not only did the artist gladly spend his time among writers and read numerous texts, but he also turned to the technical and expressive means originating in literature. Among the most important attempts to work out new musical means on the basis of literary devices we may list: a strong emphasis on the sound factor, formal freedom and mixing of genres, composing a musical cycle on the basis of a poetic one (a narrative whole, leitmotifs), appealing to emotions by means of the appropriate selection of an oeuvre's parameters, in particular articulation and dynamics, poetic quotations preceding the score, transposition of literary genres into the field of music, or synthesis of poetry and music in songs, symphony choruses, and piano transcriptions of songs.

*Album d'un voyageur* is an excellent example of Liszt's borrowings from literature and a very individual cycle with literary value. It is a story of a voyage across a small part of Europe in search of self-understanding; it is also a history of rebellion and the doubts which come as its consequence, as well as finding peace through contact with nature and through searching for God. Liszt created here an unusual oeuvre that combines poetic images and sounds.

In 1884 Liszt declared that the most perfect form of synthesis of poetry and music is transcription of songs. It is here that music interprets poetry with its own means, which are often invented for the purposes of this synthesis. On the basis of the transcription of the song *Ich liebe dich* from 1860 we may observe how music becomes a language capable of imitating the intonation of the human voice, expressing emotions and, symbolically, relying on a programme, also expressing ideas.

**KEYWORDS:** Franz Liszt, *Album d'un voyageur*, *Ich liebe dich*, Friedrich Rückert, poetic music, musical epic, piano transcription, romantic song

## Introduction

Liszt's aspiration to create his own musical language and to find new tools of musical expression was unusually strong almost from the very beginning of his artistic career. It became even stronger in the mid-1830s when the composer was associated with the milieu of Paris writers with Victor Hugo as its central figure.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> More on Liszt's relations with the French literary romanticism is to be found in my article "Liszt and the French Literary Avant-garde" in this volume.

ture. The most important attempts to work out new musical means on the basis of literary devices include a strong emphasis on the sound factor (see Lamartine and his *Poetic and Religious Harmonies*), formal freedom and mixing of genres (see Hugo and his foreword to *Cromwell*), composing a musical cycle on the pattern of a poetical one (narrative entirety, leitmotifs), appealing to emotions by means of an appropriate choice of the oeuvre's parameters, in particular articulation and dynamics (which are of utmost importance when it comes to reading poetry aloud), poetic quotations preceding the score (a kind of foreword explaining the oeuvre, a game played with the reader and among romantic artists), transposition of literary genres into the field of music (e.g. ballad, epic poem), or synthesis of poetry and music in songs, symphony choruses, and piano transcriptions of songs. In these latter forms literature changes its status: a text transferred into a musical piece becomes its integral part and acquires a new context. Similarly the music gains additional meanings, almost another dimension.

Imitating poets or dramatic (oratorical) intonation was recommended by the two most important of Liszt's teachers – Antoine Reicha and Carl Czerny. Reicha in his well-known composition textbook suggested: 'Les Musiciens doivent imiter les grands poètes, dont les vers sont toujours purs et intelligibles quelque soit l'image qu'ils veulent rendre [...] Sophocle, Euripide, Virgile, le Tasse, Racine, Molière.'<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Czerny claimed that a musician, just like an orator, should win the audience over, especially by selecting devices appropriate to the situation and imitating the intonation of the human voice.<sup>3</sup> It seems that Liszt benefited fully from these teachings and conscientiously observed the recommendations while following his own, extremely individual, artistic path. Imitating poets was one of the most important elements of Liszt's skill as a composer, though he did not limit himself to mere imitation described by Reicha, or to oratory persuasion recommended by Czerny. The search for inspiration in literature led Liszt to completely unexpected solutions, which will be discussed below.

## 1. *My mission shall be to place poetry in music*

Musical research was accompanied by theoretical reflection, which is to be found in Liszt's writings, his letters, as well as in the notes of his family and friends. In those dissertations of an aesthetic nature one may point to several core

<sup>2</sup> Antoine Reicha, *Traité de haute composition musicale* [*Treatise on Advanced Musical Composition*] (Paris: Zetter, 1826), 165: "musicians should imitate great poets, whose verses are clear and comprehensible regardless of the image presented. [...] Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Tasso, Racine, Molière."

<sup>3</sup> See Carl Czerny, *A Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte*, transl. Alice L. Mitchell (New York-London: Longman, 1983).

aspects, which are of the utmost importance for understanding Liszt's concept of music and his music itself.

The first important text by Liszt is entitled *Compositions pour piano de M. Robert Schumann* [*Piano Compositions of Mr Robert Schumann*] and dates from November 1837. The composer wrote there about different types of instrumental music referring to an extra-musical sphere – 'la musique poétique et pittoresque, avec ou sans programme.'<sup>4</sup> Picturesque music was supposed to be a kind of musical ekphrasis, transposing objective images into subjective feelings or dreams, as for example fragments of *Pastoral Symphony* by Beethoven, in which the singing of birds is linked with positive emotions.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, according to Liszt, poetical music is an art that is able to express human passions and emotions, love, despair, or anger as it constitutes 'l'organe de cette partie de l'âme qui [...] reste inaccessible à l'analyse et se refuse à l'expression arrêtée et définie des langues humaines'.<sup>6</sup> Its development is possible thanks to 'l'extension et la diversité dans la forme'.<sup>7</sup>

Both types of music were constantly present in Liszt's field of interests. Gradually, the possibility of connecting music with poetry, and the mutual explanation of these arts, gained a greater significance. In June 1839 Liszt confessed to Marie d'Agoult that he wanted to become the first composer to integrate poetry and music,<sup>8</sup> and in October 1839 he wrote to Hector Berlioz that one art allows for a better understanding of another, for example: 'Raphaël et Michel-Ange me faisaient mieux comprendre Mozart et Beethoven; Jean de Pise, Fra Beato, Francia m'expliquaient Allegri, Marcelle, Palestrina'.<sup>9</sup>

This mutual explanation or illumination of arts is not very far from the explication of major assumptions of programme music by Liszt. In 1853 in his article *Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie* Liszt wrote: 'Das Programm vermag der Instrumentalmusik Charaktere zu verleihen, welche den verschiedenen poetischen Formen fast identisch entsprechen; es kann ihr die Haltung der Ode, der Dithyrambe, der

<sup>4</sup> Franz Liszt, "Compositions pour piano de M. Robert Schumann" [*Piano Composition of Mr. Robert Schumann*], in: idem, *Sämtliche Schriften* [Collected Works], vol. 1, ed. Detlef Altenburg, commentaries Serge Gut, (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf&Härtel, 2000), 378: "poetic and picturesque music, with or without a programme."

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 380: "an organ of this part of soul [...] that remains elusive for analysis and rejects established and defined expression of human languages."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: "extension and variety of forms."

<sup>8</sup> See Marie d'Agoult, "Journal", in: *Mémoires, souvenirs et journaux*, ed. Charles F. Dupêchez (Paris: Mercure de France, 2007), 590, literally: "Ma mission à moi sera d'avoir le premier mis [...] la poésie dans la musique." Notes from 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> June 1839.

<sup>9</sup> Franz Liszt, "À M. Hector Berlioz", in: idem, *Sämtliche Schriften*., 306: "Raffaello and Michelangelo allowed me to better understand Mozart and Beethoven. John of Pisa, Fra Beato, Francia explained to me Allegri, Marcelle, Palestrina."

Elegie, mit einem Wort, aller lyrischen Poesie geben.<sup>10</sup> It may also take the form of an epic poem, which he mentioned in his letter to Marie d'Agoult in 1846, in which he wrote that his *Hungarian Rhapsodies* are a fantastic epopee because they convey the feelings of a lost heroic race, and constitute a certain *quasi*-narrative whole.<sup>11</sup> In the above-quoted text the composer clearly expressed his idea of a poetic form in instrumental music, that is a structure transformed under the influence of poetry. As he wrote: 'In der Programm-Musik ist Wiederkehr, Wechsel, Veränderung und Modulation der Motive durch ihre Beziehung zu einem poetischen Gedanken bedingt.'<sup>12</sup> This poetic idea determining all the parameters of a musical oeuvre seems to be another embodiment of poetic music described by the composer in 1837, and one of the most important of Liszt's achievements in the field of instrumental music, with the adjective 'poetic' having quite a broad meaning here.

## 2. *Album d'un voyageur*: a musico-poetic cycle

A perfect example of a music cycle written on the pattern of a poetic one is the seven-part piano collection *Album d'un voyageur*: *Lyon, Le lac de Walenstadt, Au bord d'une source, Les cloches de G\*\*\*\*\*, Vallée d'Obermann, La chapelle de Guillaume Tell, Psaume*.<sup>13</sup>

As befits a romantic cycle, this collection was preceded by a foreword (*Avant-propos*), in which the composer explains his sources of inspiration (countries he had visited, their history, poetry, and nature) and the basic structural assumptions of his music (the necessity to search for new solutions). He also raises the question of a potential addressee (the elite capable of understanding the new music that conveys ideas) and talks about music becoming one day 'un langage poétique plus

<sup>10</sup> Idem, *Berlioz et sa Symphonie / Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie*, quote after: Detlef Altenburg, *Franz Liszt and the Legacy of the Classical Era, 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 17 (1994/1), 56: "a programme allows for giving instrumental music characteristic features that almost precisely correspond with different poetic forms. It may have the form of an ode, dithyramb, elegy, to put it simply, music may take the form of any type of lyrical poetry." This article was completed in 1853 and sent to *Revue contemporaine*, which refused its publication. It was published two years later in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* translated into German by Richard Pohl. See Serge Gut, in: *Correspondance. Marie d'Agoult-Franz Liszt*, 1223. This text has not yet been published in a critical edition of Liszt's writings, hence my reference to the article by Detlef Altenburg, who is the chief editor of the critical edition of Liszt's writings.

<sup>11</sup> See *Correspondance. Marie d'Agoult-Franz Liszt*, 1149. Letter from 18<sup>th</sup> October 1846.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted after: Altenburg, *Franz Liszt*, 58: "in programme music recurrence of motifs, alterations, changes, and modulations are determined by their relation with the poetic thought."

<sup>13</sup> More on this cycle is to be found in: Małgorzata Gamrat, *Piano Music by Franz Liszt in the Context of the Idea of "Correspondance des Arts"* (*Muzyka fortepianowa Franza Liszta w kontekście idei correspondance des arts*), (PhD diss., Jagiellonian University/Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 2012), 135-145 and 171-187.

apte peut-être que la poésie elle-même à exprimer tout ce qui en nous franchit les horizons accoutumés; tout ce qui échappe à l'analyse; tout ce qui s'agit à des profondeurs inaccessibles de désirs impérissables, de pressentiments infinis.<sup>14</sup> After these statements, the musical journey begins, constituting what might be described as a narrative taking place on three planes.

The first narrative plane consists of the titles of the individual pieces, which are like a list of visited places and create the external story. The next plane comprises quotations and mottoes placed above the scores of the individual parts, which in turn arrange themselves into a story of the inner experiences of the lyrical subject. The third layer is the music, in which elements of the external world are linked with the internal world, thus creating unusually complex forms of expression. Let us have a look at individual links in this musical story.

**Lyon** – the title of this composition refers to a particular place – the city where Liszt gave concerts with Adolphe Nourrit in 1837. However, the motto preceding the score is quite unambiguous in its meaning: 'vivre en travaillant ou mourir en combattant'<sup>15</sup> – this was the battle cry of Lyon workers, whose revolts in 1831 and 1834 and subsequent court trials deeply moved public opinion in France.<sup>16</sup> The socio-political programme element of Liszt's composition is confirmed by his *Lettre d'un voyageur. À M. Adolphe Pictet*, in which the composer wrote that he was deeply moved by the poverty and social injustice he witnessed in Lyon: 'Quelle torture, mon ami, que celle d'assister, les bras croisés sur la poitrine, au spectacle d'une population entière luttant en vain contre une misère qui ronge les âmes avec les corps! De voir la vieillesse sans repos, la jeunesse sans espoir et l'enfance sans joie!'<sup>17</sup>

As for the musical layer, *Lyon* is a composition of a quasi-military character, based on the principles of the sonata form. What dominates there is the dotted rhythm, while the melody of the first theme (T<sub>1</sub>) imitates military fanfares. It consists of two basic motifs: M<sub>1</sub> – monodic, played once with the right hand, then with the left one in the lower register of the instrument (a kind of topophonic texture<sup>18</sup>); M<sub>2</sub> coincides with the characteristic element originating from the accompaniment

<sup>14</sup> Franz Liszt, *Avant-propos*, in: *Album d'un voyageur I, III, Clochette et Carnaval de Venise*, eds. Adrienne Kaczmarczyk, Imre Mezö, (Budapest: EMB, 2007), 2: "a poetic language, maybe more capable than poetry to express everything that exceeds normal horizons, escapes analysis and tackles the inaccessible depths of immortal desires, infinite feelings."

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: "live working or die fighting."

<sup>16</sup> See Alexander Main, 'Liszt's *Lyon*. Music and the Social Conscience', *19th-Century Music* 4 (1981/3), 233.

<sup>17</sup> See Franz Liszt, "À un poète voyageur. À M. Adolphe Pictet", in: *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 1, 124: "what torture, my friend, it is to idly watch a play, i.e. the struggle of people fighting against poverty that divides the soul from the body! To see old age without rest, youth without hope, childhood without joy!"

<sup>18</sup> See Józef M. Chomiński, Krystyna Wilkowska-Chomińska, *Formy muzyczne. Małe formy instrumentalne* [Musical Forms. Short Instrumental Forms], (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1983), 173.

to Schubert's song *Erlkönig* (in the transcription by Liszt) (Ex. 1). This musical *quasi*-quotation is an extremely personal reminiscence of an oeuvre played by Liszt and Nourrit during their stay in Lyon. The second theme ( $T_2$ ) with its march character, dynamics (*ff*), and tonality coincides with  $T_1$ ; what changes there is the texture – monody is replaced by a doubled octave melody accompanied by chords (Ex. 2), which leads directly to the cadence closing this part with the E major chord and a pause with a fermata.



Example 1. *Lyon*, b. 1-5



Example 2. *Lyon*, b. 34-36

The development (bars 46-117) opens the third theme ( $T_3$ ), which constitutes a *quasi*-quotation of the first phase of *La Marseillaise*; this specifies the extra-musical meaning of the piece. The marching character remains the same as in the two previous themes, the texture is once again changed – diverse articulation of the individual elements creates two sound planes (Ex. 3). What happens here is also the change of key (C major into A major) and dynamics from *ff* into *mp*. This part is divided into six phases, which are defined mainly by changes in the texture, emphasized by differences in dynamics and musical notation pointing to the character of each segment. The two  $T_1$  motifs are the main object of the processing, while tension stems from their diverse juxtaposition. In this part there are

numerous modulations, strong chromatization, changes in the tempo and register of the instrument, and irregular rhythmic groups with unevenly placed accents. Reprise (bars 117-151) begins with  $T_2$ , and the themes undergo further processes of transformation. The first theme is presented in two variants: one more complex in terms of texture and the other reduced, in piano dynamics, *sotto voce*. The coda (bars 151-187) sums up the piece, in which the elements of the two main themes recur, overlapping each other.



Example 3. *Lyon*, b. 46-49

The uniqueness of this quite distinct sonata form lies in the fact that all three themes are equally expressive; it could thus be described as a monocharacteristic sonata. We may also note here the dynamic and tonal unity and the similarity of material between  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ , whereas thematic opposition stems mainly from the changes in texture (monody – homophony, declamation – melodiousness). It is difficult not to note the influence of the programme on the expressive quality of the oeuvre. Liszt combined here his personal experiences with historical events.

The title of the following piece, *Le lac de Wallenstadt*, refers to a particular place in which the composer stayed in 1835 – to the town of Wallenstadt situated on Lake Walen. The poetic fragment preceding the score comes from the third song of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* by Lord Byron. This part was written in Switzerland on Lake Geneva and the action takes place mainly in that country. It is dominated by feelings of melancholy and sadness in the spirit of Senancour or Chateaubriand, and by reflection on one's own existence. As the poetic element of music, Liszt chose a short passage describing the beauty of Léman, which the poet addresses while speaking of its charm that stands in contradiction with the civilization in which he lives:

...thy contrasted lake  
With the wild world I dwelt in, is a thing  
Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake  
Earth's troubled waters for a purer spring.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, song III, passage 85, quoted after: Liszt, *Le lac de Wallenstadt*, in: *Album d'un voyageur*, 18.

Liszt's piece is short and characterised by an unusual melodiousness and tranquility, with imitation of water movement in the accompaniment, based on a fixed rhythmic scheme – a triolet and two semiquaver duolets. Its melodious theme (*andante placido*) is made up of the sounds of tonic and dominant, and the expression is clarified by the markings *dolce* and *cantabile*. The simple melody seems here to be a tranquil song, in which each poetic phrase has its equivalent in a musical phrase. This composition consists of three parts based on identical thematic material: AA<sub>1</sub>A<sub>2</sub>coda. This simple construction may also be put in another way: if we take tonal changes and intensity of modulation processes as the basis, we obtain a three-part construction **A** (A flat major) **B** (A major – C sharp minor – B major) **A<sub>1</sub>** (A flat major).

In her memoirs Marie d'Agoult wrote that Liszt composed for her 'une mélancolique harmonie, imitative du soupir des flots et de la cadence des avirons'<sup>20</sup> during their stay on Lake Walen. It is difficult not to agree with the countess that in this piece one may hear 'sighs of the waves' and feel the tranquility of the lake, described also by Byron. However, its ambivalent construction seems to symbolise the dissonance between the tranquility of the lake and the inner quandaries of the poet.

In *Au bord d'une source* the programme consists of the title and a poetic quotation. This quotation was taken from a poem by Friedrich Schiller, *Morgenfantasie. Der Flüchtling*, in which the poet contemplates 'die Spiele der jungen Natur'<sup>21</sup> – young nature playing with the reflections of light on the water's surface, the morning mist, golden sunrise, colours of flowers, and the morning zephyr.

This short and not unduly complex piece was filled with unusually vivid and rich sound, with which Liszt tried to render those joyful games of young nature. The basic theme of the piece is formed by two parallel melody lines composed of two-sound motifs: in the upper voice mainly of fourths and sixths consisting of a crotchet and a quaver, whereas in the lower voice – quavers and crotchets in a second movement (therefore, creating a uniform quaver pulse). On each first metre of a rhythmic grouping the two motifs appear together, and their second juxtaposition creates a specific, slightly dissonant tone, supported, just as in the precedent piece, by broken chords in the accompaniment, which translates into the feeling of undulation and fluidity. The superimposition of these three sound layers *Au bord d'une source* brings to mind a piece by the impressionists: slightly dissonant, shimmering with a harmonically uneven accompaniment, allowing one to become submerged by feeling, by poetic impression...

In this oeuvre, just as in his previous ones, Liszt frequently changes the texture and modulates it to quite remote keys (e.g. from A flat major into E major). The

<sup>20</sup> D'Agoult, *La passion*, in: *Mémoires, souvenirs et journaux*, 360: "a melancholic harmony imitating sighs of the waves and cadences of the paddles."

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Der Flüchtling*, in: Liszt, *Album d'un voyageur*, 22: "young nature playing."



accompaniment is at one time underneath, at another above the main melody line, to then suddenly surround it from both sides. Sometimes the piano imitates the orchestra and its tone possibilities as well as the ability to play several sound planes simultaneously. The piece finishes with a short, but very interesting cadence:  $^{\circ}S_{VI}-^{\circ}S_{II} \begin{smallmatrix} 7 \\ 5 \end{smallmatrix} \begin{smallmatrix} 3 \\ 5 \end{smallmatrix} -D^7-T$ , which 20 years later would open one of the most famous operas by Richard Wagner – *Tristan und Isolde*.

*Au bord d'une source* has several elements in common with the preceding work, such as: rhythmic unity of accompaniment, domination of the *piano* dynamics, A flat major key, a programme referring to the element of water and imitating its movement. Another similarity consists in the quotations preceding the two pieces, which describe the beauty of nature, though in different context and mood.

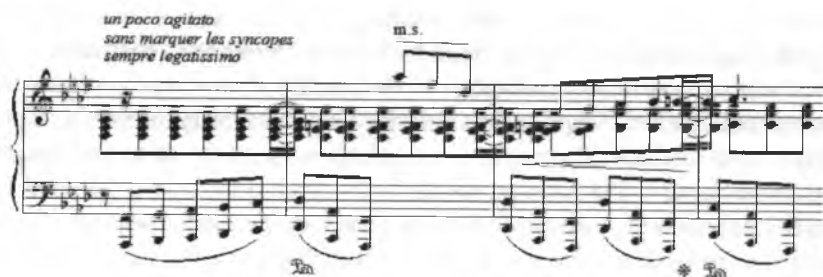
**Les cloches de G\*\*\*\*\*** – the mysterious title of the piece refers to the sound of bells in the city where Liszt spent two years after leaving Paris in 1835 (Geneva). The composer particularly enjoyed the sound of the bells, which was present for a long time in his memory. He even mentioned it in one of his letters to his daughter, asking her to check if after so many years those bells were not out of tune.<sup>22</sup> However, the main element of the programme of the piece consists of two short quotations. In the first one an unknown author speaks about the tranquility of the dormant lake lit by the stars as observed from the shore. In the second, Byron declares (*Childe Harold*) that he is becoming a part of the surrounding nature.

In *Les cloches de G\*\*\*\*\** Liszt once again fits in the context of 'water' pieces by means of the poetic quotation preceding the score and the application of barcaroles in the middle part. The piece opens with the motifs of bells, and only after this the proper melody line is to be heard; in the beginning the melody line resembles  $M_2$  from *Lyon* (fragment from Schubert's *Erkönig*; ex. 4). The element which binds the piece together is the motif of the Geneva bells, but what is even more important, frequently combined with  $M_2$  from *Lyon* (a symbolic union of the two cities?). It is not always easy to grasp while listening due to the changes of tempo and texture. Nevertheless, in the piece there are fragments where it is quite simple, as, for example, at the beginning of the part *un poco agitato* (bar 60 and the following; ex. 5): after  $M_2$  from *Lyon* the motif of bells appears, frequently repeated in different registers of the piano, which creates the effect of an echo (orchestra trope).



Example 4. *Les cloches de G\*\*\*\*\**, b. 1-10

<sup>22</sup> See *Correspondance de Liszt et de Madame Ollivier*, ed. Daniel Ollivier (Paris: Grasset, 1936), 251. Letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> September 1860.



Example 5. *Les cloches de G\*\*\*\**, b. 60-63

The calm tempo of the majority of the piece, the *piano* dynamics, performance markings such as: *dolcissimo*, *espressivo*, *amoroso*, the barcarole in the middle part, or the expressiveness which dominates in this piece, seem to correspond with the poetic verses quoted at its beginning where we find a description of a calm evening lake reflecting the stars, and of the sound of bells that Liszt literally and allegorically placed in his score.

The programme of *Vallée d'Obermann* consists of two quotations from an epistolary novel by Étienne Pivert de Senancour – *Obermann*; excerpts from *Letters* LXIII and IV. The first quotation begins with the questions 'Que veux-je? Que suis-je? Que demander à la nature?'<sup>23</sup> posed symbolically at midnight on the lake shore illuminated by the light of the Moon. The night is full of sounds that the author finds very romantic (the rustling of the trees, the trill of a nightingale) but also conducive to reflection. Against the background of this romantic night music the writer ponders the reasons for all things and the fact that there is nothing certain in the universe, while 'toute fin trompeuse; toute forme change'.<sup>24</sup> *Letter* IV, which comes as the second quotation, also deals with nocturnal nature, but describes as well man's contact with nature, his sensitivity to the world around him and his awareness of that world. In order to feel the splendour of nature one needs sensitivity, consciousness, passion, and knowledge. The writer comes to the conclusion that the closeness of nature, and being close to nature, may, alongside admiration, also lead to the feelings of solitude and alienation, yet allow one to know and understand oneself better.

The music layer of *Vallée d'Obermann* constitutes a whole just as in the case of *Lyon*, though its basis here is the mood of mourning, and not revolution. The direction of the melody line, the E minor key, and the marking *lugubre*, define the tone of the piece, full of reflection and sadness, from the very beginning. In the introduction there are two kinds of melody phrases: the monodic *quasi*-recitatives and the very melodious polyphonic segments preceded by pauses, which may

<sup>23</sup> Étienne Pivert de Senancour, *Obermann. Lettre LXIII*, in: Liszt, *Album d'un voyageur*, 42: "what do I want? who am I? what should I expect from nature?"

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: "all end is illusory, each form is changeable."

bring to mind opera motifs of sighs. However, the main theme is led on the notes of descending Gypsy scale in small octave of the left hand, while the right hand accompanies with higher chords, which naturally quite quickly undergoes various transformations. The sombre expression of this topic is additionally marked 'avec un profond sentiment de tristesse'.<sup>25</sup>

This piece consists of characteristic variations, whose scheme may be presented in the following manner: theme *sostenuto* (bars 23-42); variation I, *sempre un poco ritenuto ed indeciso il tempo* (bars 43-61); variation II, *con forza e passione* (bars 62-75); introduction developed with variations *lento, recitativo, sotto voce* (bars 76-88); variation III, *recitativo sempre a capriccio* (bars 89-97); variation IV (culmination *fff*; bars 97-107); virtuoso bridge *prestissimo* (bars 108-130); another version of the introduction (bars 131-141); theme *come prima, sostenuto* (bars 142-158); variation V, *un poco più lento, dolcissimo armonioso, dolce espressivo il canto* (bars 159-179); variation VI, *il più presto possibile, non troppo f* (bars 180-191); coda (bars 191-209). Undoubtedly they are variations, but the reappearance of the elements from the introduction allows us to discern here an idea of tripartition which organises the structure of these variations: part A consisting of an introduction, theme and its two variations (bars 1-75); part B another version of the introduction and two variations, the second of which is a culmination (bars 76-107), a bridge (bars 108-130); part A<sub>1</sub> the third version of the introduction, the basic theme and its other two variations (bars 131-191), a coda which is the culmination of the piece (bars 191-209). Generally speaking, this manner of organising variations is quite characteristic of this composer. Even more interesting are the reminiscences from the preceding pieces of the cycle: M<sub>2</sub> from *Lyon (Erlikönig)* as well as the motif of bells from *Les cloches de G\*\*\*\*\**, which frequently appear together. They initially appear in the first variation, they then play a significant role in the coda, being almost its main motifs, and they can be heard easily due to the texture and the tempo.

The quotation preceding the score begins with existential questions about the foundations of human existence and the meaning of nature for human life. Liszt seems not to ask questions but to answer them with sadness and instability, which fluctuates between *sotto voce* singing and enormous, almost orchestra-like culminations. On the other hand, broad melodic phrases, often combined with the marking *lugubre*, correspond with the feeling of sadness which dominates in *Obermann*.

The title of the next piece of the cycle – *La chapelle de Guillaume Tell* – on the one hand points to a place of religious worship, and on the other – to the Swiss popular hero. The motto written just below the title – 'Einer für alle, Alle für

<sup>25</sup> Liszt, *Vallée d'Obermann*, in: *Album d'un voyageur*, 44: "with a deep feeling of sadness". See the remark from the first version of *Poetic and Religious Harmonies* by Liszt – "with a profound feeling of boredom" ("Avec un profond sentiment d'ennui").

einen<sup>26</sup> (so much favoured by the romantics, for example *The Three Musketeers* by Dumas, *Wilhelm Tell* by Schiller) emphasises the importance of community and joint responsibility of free people. The dedication to Victor Schoelcher – a politician and writer fighting for human rights – complements the ideological aspect of the piece's programme.

In *La chapelle de Guillaume Tell* Liszt returns to the C major key and a quasi-military character (dotted rhythm, *marziale*). Just as in *Lyon*, the monodic theme ( $T_1$ ) is based on the tonic chord and was placed in different registers of the instrument. Its sound was specified by the composer as the sound of an alphorn. After  $T_1$  another theme ( $T_2$ ) is introduced, which coincides with the first one on the level of material and construction (tonic chord), but the *religioso* character and the *andante* tempo make the two distinct from one another; the expressive change complements this peculiar duality of the programme.  $T_2$  (bars 23–41) smoothly changes into the middle phase, which initially does not contain the theme material but just some virtuoso elements, serving to build up suspense by the increase of dynamics and tempo (up to *prestissimo*).  $T_2$  appears next, played *tutta forza*, filled with chords notated in dotted rhythm – here we are dealing with the overlapping of characteristic features of the two themes (bars 69–75). However, at the end of the piece  $T_2$  appears in the version similar to the original one, yet even in the next bar there are motifs from the epilogue to  $T_1$ ; it is a peculiar synthesis of the two topics. The piece is closed by a short coda *allegro risoluto*, which emphasises the quasi-military character of the composition.

This piano miniature is very interesting in terms of structure, as in its general three-part construction it contains some features of the sonata form: a presentation of two themes which are similar to one another in key and material, but opposed in terms of expression and agogic accent – their development – the synthesis of the main motifs and characters. The two themes seem to contain in their expression all that was considered most important in the programme: a battle and an almost religious approach to the ideals being fought for. Liszt makes references to musical codes such as the march, chorale texture, and plagal cadences. The contrast, created by the juxtaposition of two themes that are distant from one another in terms of expression and meaning, makes this part of the cycle extremely expressive.

The whole cycle closes with *Psaume (de l'église à Genève)*, whose programme is a fragment of a psalm expressing the need of 'Dieu fort et vivant',<sup>27</sup> to whom the exhausted man may address all his pleas. In this short, charming piece the composer conveys solemnity and religiousness by using chorale texture, slow tempo, markings such as *dolce*, *sotto voce*, and very simple harmonics (numerous plagal cadences, domination of the function of tonic, sub-dominant, and dominant). Moreover, the simple structure of the piece reinforces its origin and, to some extent,

<sup>26</sup> Liszt, *La chapelle de Guillaume Tell*, in: *Album d'un voyageur*, 63: "one for all, all for one."

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*, 70: "Strong and living God."

its ritual function. It should be emphasised that it is not Liszt's original piece, but merely a piano transcription of psalm 42 from a church in Geneva, set to music by Claude Goudimel.<sup>28</sup>

This already-mentioned parallelism of individual elements of the pieces in the cycle *Album d'un voyageur* may be described as follows: the first plane – the sphere of phenomena objective in relation to the author, which consists of: city 1 (*Lyon*) – water space (*Le lac de Wallenstadt, Au bord d'une source*) – city 2 (*Les Cloches de G\*\*\*\*\**) – valley (*Vallée d'Obermann*) – combat and religious element (*La chapelle de Guillaume Tell, Psaume*). The second plane is the ideological content of the oeuvre, which consists of the quoted passages from literature and mottoes, selected by Liszt according to his own conception, that is: a rebellious city; an apostrophe to the lake describing the contradiction between the human world and nature (*Childe Harold*, Byron); praise of young nature (*Der Flüchtling*, Schiller); beauty of the Swiss lake and the feeling of unity with the surrounding world (*Childe Harold*); doubts, the search for one's place in the world and an awareness of nature (*Obermann*, Senancour); need of contact with God (Psalm 42).

In the musical layer one may point to several elements that give unity to the cycle, such as the dominance of three-part constructions, juxtaposition of themes and motifs, variations on the themes, rhythmical, melodic, and expressive convergences, considerable role of the virtuoso element in shaping the expressiveness of the piece, orchestral texture and extremely important recurring motifs:  $M_2$  from *Lyon* and the motif of bells from *Les cloches de G\*\*\*\*\**. Close musical links between the pieces of the cycle, especially in their aural reception, are also established by the tonalities used by the composer: C major – A flat major – B major – E minor/E major – F major (T – °VI – (D) – III – T – S) and the agogic sequences: *Allegro eroico* – *Andante placido* – *Allegretto* – *Lento* – *Non troppo lento* – *Allegro moderato* – *Andante*.

After superimposing the two non-musical layers on each other, we may observe the following schema of this poetic-musical epic: rebellion against social injustice in the city (*Lyon*) – calming down upon contact with nature and existential reflection (*Le lac de Wallenstadt, Au bord d'une source*) – admiration for nocturnal nature and sounds of a sleeping city (*Les Cloches de G\*\*\*\*\**) – existential reflections (*Vallée d'Obermann*) – ideals of equality and liberty (*La chapelle de Guillaume Tell*) – religious contemplation (*Psaume*). Yet grouping the pieces according to their dominant characteristics in relation to their formal structure, programme, and tonality, allows us to observe an interesting arrangement that resembles the structure of the sonata cycle: *Lyon* (sonata form) – *Le lac de Wallenstadt, Au bord d'une source, Les Cloches de G\*\*\** (scherzo) – *Vallée d'Obermann* (andante lugubre) – *La chapelle de Guillaume Tell* (finale) – *Psaume* (coda).

<sup>28</sup> See Kaczmarczyk, "Preface", in: Liszt, *Album d'un voyageur*, XXVIII.

Among the elements which link *Album d'un voyageur* by Franz Liszt with the devices used by the authors representing French romantic literature, one may enumerate: themes (real and imaginary voyage, search for the meaning of life, dangerous and generous nature, contact with nature, nocturnal reflection, flight from civilisation and the feeling of contradiction between civilisation and nature); juxtaposition of topics and motifs; cyclicity, apparent in the presence of the main theme followed by consecutive parts and, most importantly – the use of leitmotifs which function as the *signes mémoratifs* described by Senancour (after Rousseau). Moreover, Liszt uses quotations from romantic poetry and prose, explaining his oeuvre from the emotional, ideological, and sometimes psychological aspects, which is an obligatory attribute of the French romantics, as well as opening his cycle with a foreword.

Apart from the borrowings from romantic literature, we also encounter here an independent musical quest. While integrating classical discipline and romantic imagination, Liszt tried to create an instrumental music that could equal poetry, giving it a completely new form and expression. *Album d'un voyageur* is a typically romantic journey in the space and in the world of one's own mind and heart. Liszt created an extremely original oeuvre that combines poetic images and sound, a cycle which aims to achieve correspondence of the arts, an idea of such importance for the romantic movement.

### 3. The most perfect form of synthesis

In 1884, while giving his famous piano lessons, Liszt told one of his pupils that in his opinion the most perfect form of synthesis of poetry and music is the transcription of songs.<sup>29</sup> In this kind of music, poetry and music function in a symbiosis; music interprets poetry with its characteristic means, which are often invented for the purposes of this synthesis. However, as August Stradal observed, before a pupil could play any transcription in the presence of his master, he needed to know the original song and understand well the poetry that initiated the creation of the song, as that was the prerequisite to obtaining a truly deep interpretation.<sup>30</sup>

During his long career as a composer, Liszt wrote several dozen transcriptions of songs. While creating piano versions of, for example, Schubert's masterpieces, he was perfecting his craft as composer, whereas by writing transcriptions of his own songs he sought the ideal union of music and poetry, another incarnation

<sup>29</sup> See August Göllerich, *The Piano Master Classes of Franz Liszt: 1884-1886. Diary Notes of August Göllerich*, ed. Wilhelm Jerger, trans. Richard L. Zimdars (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 33.

<sup>30</sup> See August Stradal, *Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt* [Memoirs of Franz Liszt] (Bern: Haupt, 1929), 163.

of poetic music. I present here the last of the 21 piano transcriptions of his own songs,<sup>31</sup> which Liszt wrote in 1860 – *Ich liebe dich*.

The text by Friedrich Rückert is one of his well-known *Liebesgedichte* (from *Liebesfrühling*, 1823), which ideally fits the romantic topos of love; what we have here is a confession similar to the one from the famous poem and the even more famous *Lied* by Robert Schumann – *Widmung*. The lyrical subject expresses his feelings and at the same time tries to justify and explain them. The poet applies various kinds of comparisons and explanations, seeking an unearthly origin of the feelings (the will of heaven, magic); he also sees in them a force that makes it possible to live. This kind of confession was very popular in romantic poetry.

The anaphoras that open each verse (inverted in the second part), decasyllables, strong rhythm and alternating rhymes increase the expression of this confession. The poem is built of two stanzas; each of them can be divided into two smaller parts, dependent on the poetic content: in the first stanza, the first two verses tell us: 'I love you because' this is my internal imperative; in the following two verses of this stanza the lyrical subject explains that this feeling has its source in the will of the heavens and in magic. In the second stanza, in the first two verses after the words 'love you' the poet compares, in a manner characteristic of Goethe, the strength of his feelings to the dependencies that take place in nature (so much admired by the poets of the epoch) and the strong links between its elements – a rose with a bush and the sun with its own light (rose being a romantic symbol of love), and in the last two lines of the poem he confesses that love is a vital force and the meaning of life, constituting the essence of his being:

Ich liebe dich, weil ich dich lieben muß;  
 Ich liebe dich, weil ich nicht anders kann;  
 Ich liebe dich nach einem Himmelsschluß;  
 Ich liebe dich durch einen Zauberbann.

Dich lieb ich, wie die Rose ihren Strauch;  
 Dich lieb ich, wie die Sonne ihren Schein;  
 Dich lieb ich, weil du bist mein Lebenshauch;  
 Dich lieb ich, weil dich lieben ist mein Sein.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Liszt wrote a total of 21 transcriptions of his own songs. *Tre Sonetti di Petrarca* 1843-46 ("Benedetto sia'l giorno", "Pace non trovo", "I' vidi in terra"), *Buch der Lieder* I 1843 ("Die Loreley", "Im Rhein, im schönen Strome", "Mignons Lied", "Es war ein König in Thule", "Der du von dem Himmel bist", "Angiolin dal biondo"), *Buch der Lieder* II 1847 ("Oh, quand je dors", "Comment, disaient-ils", "Enfant, si j'étais roi", "S'il est un charmant gazon", "La tombe et la rose", "Gastibelza"), 3 Nottornos *Liebesträume* 1850 ("Hohe Liebe", "Gestorben war ich", "O lieb so lang du lieben kannst"), *Il m'aimait tant* (1843), *Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth* (1843), and *Ich liebe dich* (1860).

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Rückert, *Werke* [Works], B. 1, ed. Conrad Beyer (Leipzig: Verlag Max Hesse, 1900), 380.

In his song (in A flat major), written in 1857, Liszt makes an attempt to render musically this confession in a manner atypical for his technique, that is, close to the early romantic composing principles of the German *Lied* (for example: one syllable of text – one note, the structure of the song corresponding to the structure of the text). Some of the elements characteristic of Liszt's composing technique are missing, such as the orchestral texture in the accompaniment (almost an identifying mark of Liszt's vocal music) nor the virtuosity of the two media. However, we do find here a calm, intimate utterance with a dynamic culmination towards the end of each stanza, two parts whose structure corresponds to the poem's structure, a chordal, quite ascetic texture, numerous changes in modulation, enharmonic changes, progression by a third and a major second and extremely careful following of the poetical text. Due to the slow tempo – *lento appassionato* – this short piece seems to be very stretched in time, as if suspended in space, just as the feeling which Rückert's text describes as immortal and independent of the passing time.

In the first stanza of this *Ich-Lied*<sup>33</sup> the anaphora 'I love you' is characterised by a distinct rhythmical and melodic outline – a half note, a quaver and a leap of the perfect fifth down, which emphasises 'love,' the key word of the poem, while the explication which follows this confession is a gently undulating melody written in crotchets; the second line is written a major third lower and it finishes in F minor (break of periodicity). The third line introduces a new melody on the words of the anaphora 'I love you' that opens the verse – the rhythm preserves its structure, but the falling fifth is replaced with a second, which gives the composer new harmonic possibilities. The melody develops rising higher and higher until the word 'sky' (*Himmel*), on which the first dynamic culmination (*ff*) in the oeuvre takes place. Liszt closes this passage of the text with the chord C flat major to begin the last line of the first stanza with the enharmonically identical B major. We find there calmness (*mezza voce*, *ppp*) and a slowing down of the tempo (*ritenuto*). Liszt finishes this stanza with arpeggio chords in the high register of the piano, and the whole dissolves in the barely audible A flat major chord, where the poet writes about love's magic.<sup>34</sup>

The same dynamic and textural scheme is used in the second stanza, in which the anaphora opening each line is the inversion of the one from the first stanza – 'love you.' The composer uses here a kind of game – he still rhythmically emphasises the most important word ('love'), but the fifth is replaced with the fourth (inversion of the fifth), which allows for new harmonic solutions and opens a space for new musical material in the following part of the line – now, instead of a gentle melody in seconds we have a leap by a major sixth upwards, which allows for emphasising the important elements of the comparisons of the strength of feeling (a rose

<sup>33</sup> Classification based on the works by Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Od wyznania do wołania. Studia nad pieśnią romantyczną*, [From Confession to Call. Studies in the Song of the Romantic Era] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Akademii Muzycznej, 1997), 39–43.

<sup>34</sup> More on Liszt's musical language and the devices he used depending on the topic in: Gamrat, *Piano Music by Franz Liszt*, 252–259.



and the sun). The second line is the progression of the first one by a minor second upwards. The third line, in turn, brings a new solution: 'Dich lieb ich' is based on two leaps – the augmented third upwards and the major third downwards, which introduces harmonic uncertainty and quite an 'intriguing' sound, while the next part of the line – the explanation of what love is for the lyrical subject; it is a melody consisting of various intervals with the widest ambitus so far (e<sup>1</sup>-des<sup>2</sup>). The first part of the last line constitutes the climax of the piece, not only in terms of dynamics, but also in terms of expression, largely due to the interval of the sixth used at the beginning (which also emphasizes the intensity of feeling and the word 'love'); while the second part of this line (the confession that love towards the addressee is the meaning of the lyrical subject's existence), has been musicalised in a very interesting manner, by treating it as an intimate confession. The composer applied here *pp* and *ppp* dynamics, slowed down the tempo, and returned to a chordal, almost chorale, texture, allowing the confession to resound in silence, since neither words nor notes can say any more.

Liszt seems to change the rhythm of the poem by introducing pauses to the anaphora just before the object of the verb and between lines, thus prolonging the sounding of individual syllables. What is also of interest is the issue of interpreting the poetic text and its repeated fragments: Liszt changes the harmonics, sometimes also melody and texture, saying the same thing but each time in a different manner, changing the intonation like an actor or skilled reciter. Drama skills, and particularly his extremely persuasive declamations of poetry, were known and valued in the Paris of the 1830s. According to Auguste Boissier, the composer moved his audience equally with his playing and his recitation.<sup>35</sup>

How did the composer succeed in creating this most perfect synthesis of poetry and music? He did it in a very simple way. When creating a piano version of a vocal piece, Liszt preserved the poetic text above the staff, as a result of which the pianist follows the vocal line and text, its articulation, accents, breaths, and intonation. The meaning of the poetic text in this piece is also emphasised by the subtitle, *Gedicht von Rückert*, but the title itself is also quite explicit – the poetry is dominant here, and has to be followed (ex. 6).



Example 6. *Ich liebe dich*, b. 1-7

<sup>35</sup> See Auguste Boissier, *Liszt pédagogue. Leçons de piano données par Liszt à Mademoiselle Valérie Boissier à Paris en 1832* [Liszt Teacher. Piano Lessons Given by Liszt to Miss Valerie Boissier in Paris in 1832] (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1976), 41.

In comparison with the vocal original, there are not many changes in the piece: the composer preserves the tempo, key, and texture in the majority of the piece, also the length of the piece is similar to the original version. The absence of a vocal medium means that the juxtaposition of *quasi*-chorale parts and monody becomes more audible, which creates a kind of dialogue, while the differentiation between the song's antecedents and consequents is even more apparent. The impression of the existence of two sound planes is deepened by the application of terraced dynamics (juxtaposition of *piano* and *forte* segments), contrasting combination of *legato* and *portato* segments, and changes in tone by means of the right and left pedal (*tre corde* and *una corda*).

There is also significant emphasis on the harmonic layer of the oeuvre; it is full of interjections, unexpected and deceptive solutions, ellipses, chords of dominant ninth without prime with the fourth, chords with diminished elements (often the fifth), modulation shifts, enharmonic. The timbral and melodic elements expressively emphasise the poetic content, unspoken in this version of the oeuvre (e.g. the composer uses imitation of the harp and *arpeggio*, high register and *piano* dynamics when the text speaks of the will of heavens and the highest feelings).

Interestingly, some fragments of the transcription are simplified (e.g. smaller range of chords) when compared with the song. Changes in comparison with the *Lied* may be noted mainly in the second part, which opens with an extended piano part. This change comes at the point where the poet used inversion in the anaphora which opens each line ('love you'). At times the melody is also led below the accompaniment, by the left hand; at other times the melodic line of the song disappears, in particular in the penultimate line, where there are only broken chords aiming at the musical and poetic climax. The whole, just as in the song, dissolves in the feeling confessed in a hushed tone, in the closing cadence with its prolonged sound of a gentle chord in A flat major, in one and two-line octaves, played *una corda*. There are no virtuoso elements except for the necessity to play long passages with a small number of notes with a very slow tempo.

Despite the fact that the poetic text remains unspoken, the poetry is one of the key elements of this work – the pianist follows it while creating the piece on the stage. This symbiosis of the two arts takes place in the pianist's mind, and in the notation of the oeuvre the text becomes one of the elements of the piece, influencing the shape of each musical parameter (from single motifs to the form), and with very specific musical notation.

In the song, the poetic text is raised to the second power, in the words of Mieczysław Tomaszewski<sup>36</sup>, and one cannot but agree when analysing Liszt's songs or listening to them. How then is one to describe the piano transcription of songs? Is it poetry raised to the third power? Or maybe just another stage of musico-poetic fusion? Another step in the history of instrumental music? Or maybe it is just Liszt's

<sup>36</sup> See Tomaszewski, 16.

way of applying the principle that instrumental music can become a language equal to, or even better than poetry, as he wrote in the foreword to *Album d'un voyageur*. The coexistence of the word and the music in a piano piece allows the musician to reconstruct the intonation of human speech, or more precisely, the human song, held by Rousseau and Herder to be the *primaeval* human speech. Piano music becomes then a language capable of expressing emotions and, symbolically and with the help of a programme, ideas. Piano transcription of songs is undoubtedly a special genre of piano music, and its extremely strong expressiveness appeals both to the pianist and the listener.

The programme is the title, the motto, a quotation preceding the score, a poetic text placed above the staff; it is the poetic element of the music, its poetic idea that penetrates the sound matter but also changes its own status. The two arts gain new contexts; sometimes the audience associates a literary piece more closely with a song or a piano piece; sometimes the latter acquires a new emotional, psychological and cultural dimension stemming from the text and its relationship with the music. Such relationships were emblematic of Liszt's epoch, while Liszt himself was closely linked to the French romanticism; his works testify to that, imbued as they are with the ideas of the epoch, and particularly its literature.

Translated by *Natalia Maciak*