

Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology 13, 2013

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'Petrarch's Sonnets' by Liszt

ABSTRACT: The article '*Petrarch's Sonnets*' by Liszt revolves around the phenomenon of transformation, which dominated F. Liszt's works. His impressive composing achievements made Liszt an unequalled author of all types of elaborations, paraphrases, adaptations, transcripts of both his own and other composer's works, representing various styles and epochs. What is more, the transformation techniques employed by Liszt, different from the commonly applied evolutionary ones, coupled with extended tonality and harmony as well as new textures, resulted in an extremely broad scale of expression and subtly diverse expressive effects.

Three of Petrarch's *Sonnets* from the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* collection are dedicated to Laura and represent this article's major area of interest. The Hungarian composer worked on them three times: twice he composed them as songs and once as a piano triptych included in the *Années de Pèlerinage. Deuxième Année: Italie* series. His interpretation of the Sonnets, as well as the remaining works in the series, was inspired by the art of the old Italian masters married with the Romantic idea of correspondance des artes. While it is a part of artistic tradition to turn poetic works into songs (resulting in the vocal lyrics so typical of Romanticism), adding a musical dimension to a sonnet, a piece of poetry with a specific organisation of its content, a unique form and verse discipline, seems risky. It is extremely difficult to successfully transfer equivalent themes and structures onto a different medium i.e. piano music. By turning to Petrarch's Sonnets, Liszt created congenial palimpsests, reflecting the syntactical and formal rudiments of the verse but, first and foremost, managing to portray Laura in new incarnations, subtly changing in the eternal search for the ideal of femininity, the so-called "Ewig-weibliche". Especially in the piano version, Liszt seems to have accomplished the esoteric subtlety of the "Sprache über Sprache" available to and understood solely by poets and those in the know.

KEYWORDS: Franz Liszt, *Années de Pèlerinage. Deuxième Année – Italie*, piano music, *Sonnetto 47 del Petrarca*, *Sonnetto 104 del Petrarca*, *Sonnetto 123 del Petrarca*

Ferenc Liszt was one of the most extraordinary composers of the nineteenth century. Even just a fleeting glimpse of his creative output allows us to recognize that he was a unique phenomenon, extremely fertile in his production of elaborations, modifications, paraphrases, and transcriptions. In other words, we are struck with the great polyversity of musical works, his own and not his own.¹

This topic is complex and has wide ramifications. It deserves to be considered in its own right, while its determinants and numerous repercussions – cultural, social, historical, aesthetic, or technical – call for careful analysis and thoughtful evaluation. This essay touches on these wider questions, but will focus largely on the historical-genetic and intertextual issues directly relating to the subject introduced

¹ The terms introduced in this article certainly need to be defined or redefined. Here, however, we shall use them sparingly and clarify their meaning and range as necessary.

in the title. Since the narrow confines of the article prevent a more comprehensive treatment, only the most important problems can be indicated here.

The sonnets of Francesco Petrarca and Dante Alighieri, two outstanding representatives of the Italian *trecento*, are a paragon of lyrical poetry, taken up and developed by later generations of poets. Their narratives, stories typical of the genre, saturated with themes of love in a very broad sense, not only existential but also metaphysical, usually conclude with reflective-philosophical themes. The elaborate form of the sonnet, a demanding test of technical perfection, has in its main varieties (Italian and French) been the object of poetic endeavour in various times and epochs. Following a period of stagnation in the 18th century, the sonnet enjoyed a renaissance in the romantic period. This renaissance was evident in many different centres. The most distinguished poets tried their hand at this lyrical genre in England (William Wordsworth, John Keats), Russia (Alexander Pushkin), Germany (Heinrich Heine, Nikolaus Lenau), Poland (Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Seweryn Goszczyński), and France (Théophile Gautier, Théodore de Banville). Notably, fascination with the sonnet in the romantic age transcended the confines of literature to penetrate the territory of music. While the practice of putting poetic texts into the song form is quite understandable and true to the composing tradition, especially in romantic vocal lyrics, the elimination of text and the 'transference' of the sonnet, a strictly literary genre, to the field of instrumental lyrics is surely a unique, antynomic form of creative activity, one which undermines the fundamental principles of the literary-formal original model. This is precisely what Ferenc Liszt did and his complex activities in this field are in need of an explanation.

Liszt chose three of Petrarca's sonnets from the collection *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*: *Sonetto 47* 'Benedetto sia l'giorno...', *Sonetto 104* 'Pace non trovo...' and *Sonetto 123* 'T' vidi in terra...'. He composed three musical versions to each poem. The circumstances of their creation and the reasons underlying their polyversity are interesting. Equally intriguing are Liszt's artistic objectives and his constructive-technical transformations of the different versions of each piece. A separate and no less important question is how to capture and explain their complex meanings.

Liszt originally turned these sonnets by Petrarch into songs, and Haslinger published them in 1846.² They provide testimony to the composer's fascination with the Italian master's poetic texts, as well as his deep-seated need to express his own attitude towards the poet's art. Another important factor behind the origin of these songs was Liszt's personal experience of his, at that stage still happy, relationship with Countess d'Agoult. Their travels to Italy had a very fruitful effect on Ferenc's work. He wrote in a letter to Berlioz:

The beauty of this blessed patch of the earth loomed before me in its purest and most sublime forms. Art revealed itself in all its wonder and uncovered its universality and

² In the catalogue of Liszt's works the first vocal version is dated 1842-6. Cf. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 14, 854.

unity before my amazed eyes. When I felt it and reflected upon it, every day strengthened in me the awareness that all products of the spirit are secretly related. Raphael and Michelangelo helped me to understand Mozart and Beethoven; John of Pisa, Fra Beato and Francia explained Allegri, Marcello and Palestrina to me; Titian and Rossini appeared to me to be related stars. The Colosseum and Campo Santo are not as distant as you may think from the *Symphonie [funèbre et] triomphale* and *Requiem*. Dante found his artistic expression in Orgagnia and Michelangelo; perhaps someday he will find his musical reflection through some future Beethoven.³

This fragment of Liszt's letter is very important. It contains fundamental observations on the composer's aesthetic opinions relating to the romantic 'correspondance des arts'; it emphasizes the unity of the arts and the capacity for different artistic disciplines not only to permeate one another but also to merge into one unity; it also underlies the ease with which Liszt sought naturally diverse inspirations and created different versions of his works and changed his means of execution to express them, and to capture their meaning and spirit.

In addition to the reasons given which may have led Liszt to choose Petrarch's Sonnets and to render them in song form, it is important to remember that the popular name of the poet's collection was *Il Canzoniere*,⁴ i.e. *A Book of Songs*. It seems unlikely that this had no effect on the composer's ideas and activities. Both the name of the volume and the poetic forms it included point quite clearly to their historically confirmed close connections with music. Ferenc Liszt soon transformed the three songs into pieces for the piano and he published this version in the cycle *Années de pèlerinage. Deuxième année: Italie*. We must remember that when he was composing his songs to Petrarch's texts, Liszt already had in his portfolio the pieces which he planned to include in this collection: the opening *Sposalizio* [Marriage] inspired by Raphael's painting, and number two, *Il Pensiero* [The Thinker], inspired by Michelangelo's sculpture of Lorenzo de' Medici. The three sonnets for the piano were thus an important addition to a broadly conceived whole, all the more so since outlines of the final parts of the cycle, with significant literary references, entitled *Après un lecture du Dante, fantasia quasi sonata*, were ready by 1837.⁵ Hence what we have here is probably the final phase of Liszt's work on the 'musical equivalents' of other disciplines, which began with the attempts inspired by the art of Raphael and Buonarroti and then Dante and Petrarch. Collecting them in one publication thus becomes very important for the composer, both aesthetically and ideologically. What is more, through these works Liszt underscores the poetic

³ Quoted after Stanisław Szenic, *Franciszek Liszt* [Ferenc Liszt] (Warszawa: PIW, 1969), 120-1.

⁴ The *Canzoniere* contains sonnets, canzones, sextines, ballads and madrigals, that is, poetic forms, most of which have their musical equivalents.

⁵ Suffice it to say here that Liszt performed the fantasia as an autonomous piece in Vienna in 1839, prior to the publication of the cycle.

nature of music and the musicality of poetry. He also strives to elevate the poetic message by treating music as a romantic form of 'Sprache über Sprache' which, being a universal language, freely transcends the boundaries between the different artistic disciplines and also transcends the cultural, historical and ethnic framework.

It is surprising that Liszt should have produced a new version of the three songs based on Petrarch's sonnets in 1861. This suggests that he had important reasons to undertake the effort of composing new versions of the already existing vocal pieces and their instrumental mutations. What is more, as in the case of the piano versions, Liszt changed the original order of the songs, reversing the order and numbering of songs one and two.⁶

Version and date of publication	Collection number	Metre	Means of execution	Main key	Main tempo and its variations	Bars
Sonnet 47 (39)						
I 1846	2	4/4	Tenor with piano	A flat	Lento, ma sempre un poco mosso	92
II 1858	1	4/4 6/4	Piano	D flat	Preludio con moto/ Sempre mosso con intimo sentimento	95
III 1883	1	4/4	Baritone or mezzo-soprano with piano	D flat	Andante un poco mosso	93
Sonnet 104						
I	1	4/4	Tenor with piano	A flat	Agitato assai/ Lento Allegro con strepito Più agitato/Lento	110
II	2	C 3/4 C	Piano	E	Agitato assai Lento	79
III	2	C 3/4 C	Baritone with piano	(E)	Molto agitato e presto/ Andante/ a tempo quasi allegro	110

⁶ Establishing precisely when the different versions of the sonnets were composed requires a separate source research project. There are several reasons for the existing lack of clarity, including the pieces' polyversity, their incorporation in cycles differing in content and chronology, different times of composition of the various components of the cycle, and different times and places of publication. Information on these issues varies and has been edited in different ways. Therefore, the main source of information here will be the most detailed and already quoted entry in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd edition, 2001).

Version and date of publication	Collection number	Metre	Means of execution	Main key	Main tempo and its variations	Bars
Sonnet 123						
I	3	4/4 3/4 4/4	Tenor with piano	A flat	Andante	62
II	3	4/4	Piano	A flat	Lento placido/ sempre lento/ Più lento	84
III	3	4/4	Baritone or mezzo-soprano with piano	F	Molto lento e placido/ Un poco meno lento / Molto lento	98

Several general conclusions can be drawn from these data:

1. Only the first version of the collection retains the same main key for all the *Sonnets* whereas the next version gradually introduces a change of key until finally each *Sonnet* has a different key and the second one, like Liszt's *Bagatelle sans tonalité*,⁷ which has no central key and basically draws its inspiration from Fétis's idea of *ordre pluritonique*;⁸

2. The last, vocal version of the *Sonnets* has longer musical texts than the remaining versions;

3. Both vocal versions are meant for male voices: the first one for a tenor and the second one for a baritone, although a mezzo-soprano is an accepted alternative for the first and third *Sonnet* [the elimination of a female alternative for the second *Sonnet* would require a separate explanation];

4. The first and last *Sonnet* develop the narrative in slow tempos, oscillating between *Adagio* and *Andante*; only the second *Sonnet* contrasts the tempos in all its versions by introducing not only slow tempos but also fast ones, *Allegro* and *Presto*; the additional notations alongside the tempos unequivocally indicate their expressive character, determined by the content of the *Sonnets*.

We must begin our analysis of the different versions by briefly characterising the sonnet form, which served as the inspirational model for Liszt. Structurally, a sonnet has fourteen lines grouped into two quatrains and two tercinas (triplets). These produce two basic formal segments. Each segment usually forms a separate

⁷ I discuss the problem of tonality in: Wojciech Nowik, "Symptomy przełomu tonalnego w twórczości Chopina i Liszta w świetle teorii Chorona i Fétisa" [The symptoms of tonal crisis in the work of Chopin and Liszt vis-à-vis Chorona and Fétis's theory], in: *Musica theoretica - musica practica. Muzyka i jej konteksty*, vol. 9, ed. Teresa Brodniewicz, Hanna Kostrzewska, Janina Tatarska (Poznań: Akademia Muzyczna, 1995), 103-111.

⁸ François-Joseph Fétis, *Traité complet de la théorie et de la pratique de l'harmonie* (Paris: Schlesinger, 1844).

thematic unit.⁹ Also important for this literary genre are the syntactic-intonational elements of each segment and the stanza rhyme systems. In other words, sonnets are short and concise literary works and they have their own specific formal-architectural discipline. In order to create their musical counterparts, Liszt would have to compose forms which were succinct and compact, similar to Chopin's aphoristic *Preludes* op. 28, or Alban Berg's charming vocal miniatures op. 4 composed to Peter Altenberg's *Ansichtskartentexten* [Postcard texts],¹⁰ also laconic in their poetic-musical expression, which followed more than half a century later.

Liszt took a different path. He preferred romantic grandiloquence.¹¹ Hence, as far as these pieces are concerned, we merely find loose formal-syntactic analogies with the literary original. Even in the song versions the composer no longer observes the discipline imposed by the caesuras and clauses of the poetic original; he produces reduplications or multi-reduplications of fragments of the text, using expressive, emphatic quotations, e.g. of the name of Laura, or repeating phrases relating to the feelings of the lyrical subject and by so doing he obviously interferes with the poem's original construction. Liszt retains the rudimentary syntax in the form of the six bars (3+3) or eight bars (4+4) structure, the equivalents of the sonnet's quatrains or triplets. Interestingly, this sort of syntax dominates the version of the *Sonnets* for solo piano.

The unique expression of the *Sonnets*, as far as genre generalities are concerned, and the simultaneous retention of obvious differences, is achieved by means of many subtle, or even sublime, closely united technical means. This observation needs to be developed further. Liszt eschewed a priori form in favour of expressive form. This change of approach to form is associated with various techniques of development of contexts and their transformation, retaining the composer's dominant and characteristic technique of metamorphic change. Equally important are the extremely rich and innovative textures which determine the subtle changes of mood, so exquisitely outlined in Petrarch's *Sonnets*.

Sonnet 47, 'Benedetto sia l'giorno...', is an apology of time in its various dimensions and moments, and of the places where Francesco met Laura. In the piece's conclusion, words of praise are addressed to poetry which allowed the author to render Petrarch's ideal image of Laura in verse, and to make his name famous.

Time and its musical measures are the very essence of Liszt's *Sonnet* and are also essential to the music's symbolic message. The composer measures out this

⁹ Cf. Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Janusz Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich* [A dictionary of literary terms] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1998); entry: "Sonet" [Sonnet], 517-8.

¹⁰ Italian and Spanish sonnet songs of the Renaissance originally retained the two-part form of the poetic structure. This pattern was later rejected. Cf. Józef Chomiński, Krystyna Wilkowska-Chomińska, *Formy muzyczne*, vol. 3: *Pieśń* [Musical forms, vol. 3: Song] (Kraków: PWM, 1974), 190-3.

¹¹ As did Stanisław Moniuszko when he composed his cantata *Sonety krymskie* [Sonnets from the Crimea] in 1867 to a cycle of poems by Mickiewicz with the same title. Cesar Cui composed songs to Mickiewicz's *Stepy akermanskie* [The Akerman Steppe] from the same cycle. Thus composers chose various routes.

time with a clocksmith's precision. He also does it with great finesse, applying different, structurally integrated rhythmic means in each version. In order to do so he uses a stratomorphic texture whose different layers have a different metric (this needs to be particularly emphasized). These layers complement one another, producing a very consistent *continuum*. Into this *continuum* the composer has wound the main melodic theme whose motifs can also be found in the different layers of the accompaniment, which undoubtedly has an integrating influence. It is also noteworthy that in the last vocal version the composer modified the melodic and based it on the trochaic metre. *Trochaïos* (Gr.) means 'running', which may be interpreted as a metaphor of continually running time, thus intensifying the piece's musical-poetic message. The meticulous treatment of time in all the versions of this sonnet can be seen in the composer's numerous performance directions: *Preludio con moto*, *sempre un poco mosso*, *quasi in tempo*, *in tempo ma sempre rubato*, or their occasional variations, whose function is to speed up or slow down the narrative. We also find a number of more detailed comments combining references to time with subjective expressive notations, e.g. *sempre mosso con intimo sentimento*.

The image shows a musical score for Example 1, Sonnet 47, b. 1-15. It is divided into three systems of music. The first system is titled "Preludio con moto" and consists of a piano accompaniment with a melody in the right hand. Performance directions include "mf", "crescendo", and "molto". The second system is titled "Ritenuto accentuato" and features a vocal line in the right hand and piano accompaniment in the left hand. Performance directions include "f" and "riten.". The third system is titled "Sempre mosso con intimo sentimento" and features a vocal line in the right hand and piano accompaniment in the left hand. Performance directions include "il canto mezzoforte espressivo e un poco marcato" and "l'accompagnamento sempre dolce". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 1. Sonnet 47, b. 1-15

It is worth mentioning that the musical form of *Sonnet 47* 'Benedetto sia l'giorno...' has a number of analogies with the tripartite form with reprise features, where the second part is a modified repetition of the first part in a tritone relation while the third part is a synthetic, selective repetition of material from the introduction and from the preceding parts: time goes round in a circle but does not repeat events, it merely seems to recall them, to reflect them.

Sonnet 104 'Pace non trovo...' describes the poet's internal conflict, uncertain hopes and expectations concerning his love for Laura. The intensity and pain of conflicting feelings which keep tormenting the poet, feelings ranging from joy to profound misery, from hope to doubt, from fiery passion to coldness, from life to death, this stream of forever-changing thoughts leads to extreme despair and spiritual prostration, against which poetry is the only refuge.

The musical elaboration of this *Sonnet* recalls the variation rondo, a very popular or even fashionable form at the time, but Liszt introduces a number of his own solutions in terms of structure and expression. This is a monothematic rondo, with refrains but without episodes, which develops in three quite different phases: 1. *Molto espressivo... cantabile con passione*, 2. *Molto appassionato*, 3. *Dolce dolente*. The musical theme undergoes very intensive metamorphoses. This is achieved by introducing new accompaniments, changing the registers, diversifying the texture, adding new melodic themes, changing the tempo and dynamics. The considerable density of these operations serves to portray a variety of states of romantic affectation, associated with sudden, frenetic changes of feeling, and intense passion. In the piano version every phase has a caesura created by a cadenza which is quite unusual in both form and expression. These are typically virtuoso cadenzas requiring great technical skill but their purpose is not just to make an impression by producing as many sounds as possible in a given period of time. Earlier, in 1844, Chopin demonstrated the new colouristic potential of virtuoso piano textures in *Berceuse in D-flat major* op. 57 (originally called *Variantes*), a cycle of variations based on the ground bass.¹² The impressionists were later to utilize this potential widely. Liszt took the path originally indicated by Chopin. His intention, however, was not only to demonstrate the new sound qualities inherent in virtuoso cadenzas but above all to show the subtle references to the poet's state of mind, the *Sonnet's* main theme.

Compared with the piano versions, the vocal versions of this work restructure the material differently, have a different texture, but also differ with respect to the recitatives and arias. They do not have the virtuoso cadenzas with their characteristic architectural-expressive functions. Also, in the second vocal version, which has no central key, the composer resegments and adapts the material in an original

¹² Cf. Wojciech Nowik, "The Expression of Form and Form of Expression. Fryderyk Chopin's *Berceuse in D-flat major*, Op. 57, in the Interpretation of Josef Hofman", in: *Chopin in Performance: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Artur Szklener (Warszawa: NIFC, 2004), 273-286.

Ossia

45

48

52

stringendo

ff vibrato

dolce dolente

una corda

smorzando

pp

crescendo e rinforzando

riten.

poco rall.

rall.

dim.

[5 2 4 5]
[1 2 1 2]

[5 2 4 5]
[1 2 1 3]

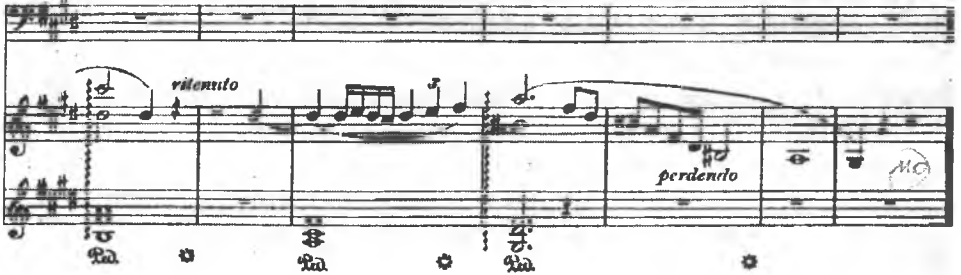
[4]
[4]
[4]

1 3 2 1 3 2 1 3 2 1

Z. 6785

Example 2. Sonnet 104, b. 44-53

way, especially in the introduction to the piano part where the second, recitative segment, absent at first, now appears in the work's final part as a sequence of sounds of the ninth G-sharp major chord which has no resolution. Its sounds, ascending at first in a broad harp *arpeggio*, lose their impetus at the peak, and begin to descend more and more slowly until, held back, they disappear altogether. All is now silence.



Example 3. *Sonnet 104*, b. 104-110

The symbolism of this conclusion is complex. It refers directly to the poet's frustrated hope and prostration; more generally, it may symbolize a lost goal, confusion, emptiness. This symbolism also fits into the particular historical and cultural context. The second version of the *Sonnets* was published in the year of Wagner's death. Wagner was Ferenc's friend and son-in-law and the most outstanding representative, alongside Liszt, of the so-called New German School. He was also a leading representative of the changes in music which were eventually to dismantle the major-minor tonal system, i.e. those trends which Fétis prophesied and whose final phase he termed *ordre omnitonique*.

Sonnet 123 'Tvidi in terra angelici costumi...', the last of Liszt's *Sonnets*, is an apotheosis of Laura. Petrarch's poetic rendering paints a dreamy portrait of the beloved: she has exquisite spiritual and intellectual virtues, harmoniously united, which situate her at heights accessible only to the gods. Her presence evokes concealed jealousy and general admiration which gives way to enchantment. Words seem to be insufficient to portray Laura's captivating grace and unearthly beauty and so the *Sonnet* does not tell us anything about her bodily attributes. But it is here that Petrarch climbs to the summits of poetic lyricism; he describes nature and the environment as they express their admiration for Laura, descriptions which animate our imagination more powerfully than any verbalized presentation could do.

Liszt's task was certainly very difficult indeed. He had to find musical equivalents with which to convey both the subject and the scale of the poetic original. He seems to have achieved this most perfectly in the version for the piano. We find here reflections of the sonata form, a strictly musical form, based on specific, dialectic constructional – principles, as some theorists think.¹³ It is therefore risky,

¹³ Cf. Carl Dahlhaus, "Zur Theorie der Sonatenexposition", *Musica*, 6 (1986/6).

to say the least, to try and transfer it to the lyrical realm. In practice, however, the rules are not really violated. Liszt may have based his work on historical precedents from the Italian school, or Haydn and Beethoven's sonatas containing slow, extremely lyrical movements based nonetheless on the sonata form.¹⁴ It was not until romanticism, however, that these forms were applied in works belonging to the piano lyrics genre, and even then only to a limited extent.¹⁵ Remember that Liszt already had experience with producing contaminations or mutations of the sonata form in *Les Cloches de G** [Genève] from the cycle *Impressions et poésies*, published in *Album d'un voyageur*. Also, as I said before, the composer already had *Fantasia quasi Sonata*, which concluded the cycle *Années des Pèlerinage, deuxième année: Italie*, also containing the *Sonnets*, in his portfolio. This way, the composer placed side by side the 84-bar sonata miniature and the extremely elaborate, 377-bar sonata-fantasia. The numbers and one to four ratios speak for themselves.

The sonata form of *Sonnet 123* takes on special features in Liszt's approach. True, we can find here many of the solutions typical of the Italian school described by Francesco Galeazzi,¹⁶ for example the *preludio* introduction which will not find the main key until the final phase, or the first theme – *motivo principale* – with its elaborate modulation and characteristic *uscita di tono*, the second theme – *passo de mezzo*, incorporating motifs from the first theme, in accordance with the theoretical postulate *unità delle idee*, or finally the shortened reprise, found in this school, and the coda based on thematic material and realising the aforementioned 'unity of ideas' postulate. These are structural analogies. They are testimony to Liszt's erudition and his rich artistic skill. However, realization of these ideas was not what the composer essentially set out to do. Liszt did not produce a two-part form, in accordance with the Italian school principle. He produced an extremely compact and expressively condensed three-part form. His aim was to find musical means adequately befitting the *Sonnet's* content and its poetic message.

Only the piano version has obvious connections with the sonata form. Although the first vocal version had a number of material and formal similarities to the piano version, i.e. analogous introduction and conclusions providing the framework for the composition, the three-part form, so clearly developed in the second vocal version, is poorly articulated here. Both vocal versions also lack the secondary

¹⁴ Cf. Wojciech Nowik, *Chopinowski idiom sonatowy* [Chopin's sonata idiom] (Warszawa: UMFC, 1998); idem, "Joseph Haydn – klasyk, romantyk, konstruktywista w sonatach fortepianowych dedykowanych Esterházyom" [Joseph Haydn – classicist, romantic, constructivist in the piano sonatas dedicated to the Esterházyom], in: *Händel, Haydn i idea uniwersalizmu muzyki* [Handel, Haydn and the idea of musical universalism], ed. Ryszard Daniel Goliańek, Piotr Urbański (Poznań: Katedra Muzykologii UAM, 2010), 85-92.

¹⁵ Mendelssohn, Schubert, Liszt, Brahms composed not only piano sonatas but also piano miniatures based on the sonata form and their mutations.

¹⁶ Francesco Galeazzi, *Elementi teorico-pratici di musica* (Roma: Pilucchi Cracas, 1796).

theme and characteristic thematic work. So now let us discuss the most original version, i.e. the piano one.

The *Sonnet* begins with a *Lento placido* introduction which is crucial for the creation of an appropriate climate. The poet-composer develops the narrative *dolcissimo* and *espressivo*, as he searches for the right tone amidst unconventional harmonies and melodic lines. In the repetitions of the final cadence, ultimately suspended on the E-flat 7-6 dominant (the Chopin chord), he finally seems to have found the right way. The gradual musical narrative of the first theme, progressing *sempre lento*, alludes to the rhapsodic style. The melody, so crucial for the whole work, is rendered *cantando et dolcissimo* and is complemented with 'harp' chords, based on the stable A-flat note, validating the found, proper tone. The subsequent narrative, with articulated threads, echoing the motifs, leads us toward the second theme in minor key of the dominant E-flat. Structurally, this key combines motifs from the introduction and the previous theme and is a concentration of a special lyricism. The vocal nature of the work also helps to achieve this. The main melodic motif is produced from melodically complex, multi-layer material as a first-plan element: fundamental sounds and motifs appear 'monophonically', anticipating the accompaniment which follows in its wake. This principle is applied to almost complete thematic areas of the *Sonnet*, whatever the texture. The theme, with its dreamily rocking melody, gradually transforms, ascending ecstatically in chord progressions, finally to culminate. It comes to a halt in the high register, reduced to one, repeated sound (e³), forming a bridge with the sonata transformation. Now, in C major, following theme one in its simplest form, we have motif work which combines, either successively or simultaneously, the motifs of the introduction and the themes. In the final phase the transformation creates a very powerful culmination which is discharged in an original sequence of chords which create a new type of cadence: E-flat⁷, C⁹ (with 5>), B-flat minor, G-flat⁷, E-flat⁹ suspended on the dominant and correlated with a separate metre (3/2), meant only for it. Then comes the reprise (A-flat), ascetically concise, radically reduced to the initial theme phrase which emerges *dolcissimo armonioso* from the delicate background of the 'harp' chords. This phrase transforms in the high register into a *quasi cadenza*, suspended amidst vibrating trills and sequences of arabesques, which gradually weaken to a murmur, subside, and become a *quasi niente*, finally to plunge into silence. This metamorphic form of theme one in the reprise, a type of literary *pars pro toto* synecdoche, is completed only by the coda resting on the material of the introduction and theme. The coda closes with an extraordinary final cadenza consisting of 'harp' repetitions of two chords, E⁷ – A-flat, against the background of which is suspended a sleepily rocking second oscillation of motifs of a homogeneous figure, pulsating in delicate polyrhythm. Dreams seem to disappear in the echoes of repetitions, but fascination remains.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Liszt's setting of Petrarch's Sonnet 123. The first system, starting at measure 78, shows a vocal line with a melodic line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a characteristic chord sequence (D, G, A, D) in the bass. The score includes markings such as 'perdendo', 'ritenuto', and 'pp'. The second system, starting at measure 81, is marked 'a piacere.' and shows a more complex piano accompaniment with a 'ppp' dynamic marking.

Example 4. *Sonnet 123*, b. 78-84

This work, which closes Liszt's *Sonnet* triptych, highlights yet another important feature of the collection. All the *Sonnets* have a characteristic chord sequence, although its clarity and context may differ. Depending on their specifics and context, this creates a 'sonnet chord' or 'Laura motif'. Its basic form is present in the cadenza which closes the last *Sonnet*. Its varieties can be found in the introduction and the beginning of the coda closing the second *Sonnet*. It dominates in the introduction to the first *Sonnet* and the beginning of its third part. In other words, it makes its presence felt at moments which are crucial for form development and produces various melodic-textural contexts.

In music of the past there were 'reminder motifs' or 'leitmotifs'. It looks as if the 'Laura motif' demonstrates a tendency to stress the triptych's integrity. This may have inspired Wagner and his so-called 'Tristan chord'. The *Sonnets*' harmonics are so heterogeneous and involve so many problems that they would need a separate study vis-à-vis the metamorphoses of tonality which were typical for their times.

The polyversity of Liszt's *Sonnets*, based on three texts from Francesco Petrarch's *Sonnets to Laura*, bears the characteristics of a palimpsest. The composer superimposed his own texts onto the Italian master's poems. This superstructure differs in form, syntax and technical means although of course in many ways it corresponds with the original. These correspondences can mainly be found in the content plan and expression. In the content plan we find Petrarch's four main themes: woman, love, nature, and time. These themes are archetypal. Liszt portrayed the feminine ideal not only in the *Sonnets* but also in many other works

of music, including his apology of 'Ewig-weibliche' in his *Faust Symphony* after Goethe; love, as 'Hohe Liebe', gained a perfect rendition not only in Liszt's songs but also in his *Sonnets* where he conveyed its elations and apprehensions; nature is 'humanized' and elevated to the role of a characteristic actor; time is ubiquitous and the main director of musical events.

Liszt's creative achievements in his treatment of Petrarch's *Sonnets* cannot be overstated. They are complex and multidimensional. They are rooted in his need for resonance and empathy with masterpieces and with those who created them. They are also an attempt to find his own means of expression for the meaning of these masterpieces, a form of noble rivalry. From a historical perspective, what we see here is an actualization of the past, creating in the general awareness a sense of what Cyprian Kamil Norwid meant when he said 'history is today, just a bit further away'. In a cultural sense, Liszt made a significant selection of masterpieces, creating a pantheon of art, art which is unforgettable and unscathed by the passage of time.