

**Evocations of Nature in the Piano Music of Franz Liszt
and the Seeds of Impressionism**

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Abstract

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Liszt scholarship of recent decades has produced research along many lines of inquiry in an endeavor to increase recognition of the composer as one of the most important and influential musical figures of the nineteenth century. While a great deal of this discourse has been devoted to uncovering Liszt's influence on the twentieth century on many fronts, there has been a noticeable lack of substantive investigation of the ways in which Liszt sowed the seeds of the musical Impressionism of Debussy and Ravel through the evocative writing of his nature pieces for piano.

This study aims to fill that void by exploring the ways in which this influence came about, first through an examination of his most significant pieces of nature music, followed by an illumination of the innovative framework of suggestive writing that he pioneered through these pieces. Specifically, the study will detail the ways in which Liszt achieved vivid sensual and pictorial suggestion through a number of compositional strategies: 1) the subversion of common tonal practices; 2) the manipulation of the musical canvas to

influence perceptions of time and physical distance; 3) the development of a vocabulary for pictorial suggestion that was idiomatic to the piano; and 4) the use of performative gesture to enhance the meaning of such vocabulary.

Finally, this framework will be applied to the Impressionistic piano pieces of Debussy and Ravel to reveal their debts to Liszt's innovative writing, which have often been obscured by the differences in surface aesthetic. In the end, the conclusions drawn from this study suggest that Liszt's legacy in this regard extends well beyond the music of the French Impressionists, exerting direct and indirect influence on all subsequent composers of evocative piano music.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION: Liszt Reconsidered</u>	1
<u>PART I: BACKGROUND</u>	
CHAPTER I: The Role of Romantic Literature and Philosophy in Liszt's Nature Music	5
CHAPTER 2: Technological Developments in the Nineteenth-Century Piano and The Alchemy of Sound.	10
CHAPTER 3: Liszt and Impressionism	16
<i>"A useful term of abuse"</i>	16
<i>Liszt, impressionism and Impressionism</i>	18
<u>PART II: SURVEY OF LISZT'S NATURE MUSIC</u>	22
CHAPTER 4: The Swiss Pieces of <i>Album d'un voyageur</i> and <i>Années de pèlerinage</i>: Spiritual Resonance in a Journeyman's Sketches	24
<i>"Un soir dans les montagnes"</i>	26
<i>"Orage"</i>	32
<i>"Au lac de Wallenstadt"</i>	37
<i>"Au bord d'une source"</i>	42
<i>"Pastorale"</i>	49
<i>"Eglogue"</i>	53
<i>"Les cloches de Genève"</i>	56
CHAPTER 5: Nature Paintings as Romantic Manifestos: The Last Two <i>Transcendental Études</i>	62
<i>Transcending Execution: The Search for "Poetic Virtuosity"</i>	62
<i>"Harmonies du soir"</i>	65
<i>"Chasse-neige"</i>	72

CHAPTER 6:	Twitters, Murmurs, and the Sounds of Faith: Nature Pieces from the Roman Period	80
	<i>"Waldesrauschen"</i>	81
	<i>The Franciscan Legends</i>	84
CHAPTER 7:	Sensuality and Austerity in the Nature Pieces of Liszt's Final Decade	100
	<i>"Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este"</i>	100
	<i>"Nuage Gris"</i>	108
CHAPTER 8:	The Creation of a New Evocative Language: The Seeds of Impressionism	113
	<i>The Evocative Framework: An Alternative Syntax.</i>	115
	<i>The Evocative Vocabulary of Idiomatic Piano Writing.</i>	124
	<i>Performative Gesture and Meaning.</i>	129
<u>PART III: LISZT'S INFLUENCE ON THE IMPRESSIONISTS</u>		134
CHAPTER 9:	Liszt, Debussy, Ravel, and the Cross-Pollination of Influences	135
CHAPTER 10:	Crosscurrents in Water Music	143
	<i>Lisztian Virtuosity in Play: Ravel's "Jeux d'eau"</i>	144
	<i>Debussy's Response: The "New Manner of Writing" in "Estampes"</i>	150
	<i>Reflections of Liszt in Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau"</i>	153
	<i>Further Reverberations of Liszt</i>	159
CHAPTER 11:	The Air of Mystery: Synesthesia and Sensuality in Mythical Legends and Exotic Landscapes	165
	<i>Synesthesia in Evening Music</i>	166
	<i>Orientalism and Exoticism in Distant Landscapes</i>	178
	<i>Creating Aural Fiction: The Stuff of Myth and Legend</i>	184
CHAPTER 12:	Conclusion: "The Spears into the Future"	195
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>		201

Dedicated to my mother

For her unconditional love and support through all my years of schooling.

Introduction:

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Liszt Reconsidered

Etched into a generation of public imagination are the theatrics of Tom the Cat and Jerry the Mouse playing the “Cat Concerto”—a Hollywood cartoon rendition of Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2. The knuckle-busting bravura and virtuosity characteristic of the Hungarian Rhapsodies and other showpieces highlight a populist strain of Liszt’s music that often skews more toward popular entertainment rather than high art. However, more experienced audiences will also know Liszt as the intimate poet of *Années de Pèlerinage*, the grand architect of the B-minor Sonata and the Symphonic Poems, and the pious artist-priest who wrote more sacred music than any significant composer since Bach. Yet, he has been the target of much historical malignment—often from musicians themselves who are unable to look beyond his early excesses during his “virtuoso years.”

Figure 1.1. “Lisztomania” in 1842,
as depicted after a drawing by Theodor Hosemann (1807-1875)



In part, this inability to move past the stereotyped figure lies in the difficulty of reconciling Liszt as a man of many glaring contradictions. He was a charismatic man whose complex relationships with women resulted in a number of affairs, three children out of wedlock, and a thwarted attempt at marriage, yet took minor orders of the Catholic priesthood late in life and became an *abbé*. He was an ostentatious virtuoso whose magnetism brought *Lisztomania* to swooning female audiences across Europe, yet dedicated his compositional life to higher artistic ideals. He was a composer who at the start of his life crammed more notes onto a page of music than any of his contemporaries, yet at the end of his life composed with an unusual economy of means. His personal and artistic sources of inspiration ranged from painting, poetry, and sculpture, to folklore, religious scriptures and natural landscapes.

In recent decades, scholars have brought about a gradual rehabilitation of Liszt's image by increasing the recognition of both the value of his music for its own sake and its contributions to the 20th century on many fronts. One area of concentrated focus is the ground-breaking harmonic experiments of Liszt's later works which pioneered and foreshadowed many of the developments of the 20th century. Others have brought about increased scrutiny of his use of Hungarian and gypsy folk materials in ways that prefigured the work of Béla Bartók. Still others have renewed attention to his body of often-neglected sacred choral and organ works.

Far less attention, though, has been devoted to a branch of Liszt's output that depicts nature through the musical suggestion of its sights, sounds, and sensations. These works ran through the course of Liszt's entire career, ranging from the Swiss nature sketches of *Années de Pèlerinage* and several of the virtuosic *Transcendental Études*, to later

pieces such as the devout *Franciscan Legends*, the effervescent “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este,” and ultimately the austere pieces of final years like “Nuage Gris.” Together, they represent a remarkable intersection between various sides of the artist and the man—his artistic innovations and harmonic experiments, unparalleled virtuosity, philosophical beliefs, and religious convictions.

Furthermore, through these pieces, Liszt discovered a myriad of evocative capabilities of the instrument that opened up a realm of possibilities that Debussy and Ravel would later draw upon in their own works illustrating nature. Throughout his life, Liszt continually searched for new means of expression, in the broader sense through all types of music he composed, but particularly in his nature pieces for piano. He found ways to harness the increasingly rich resources of the instrument and its changing technical capabilities for poetic and illustrative ends. As the eminent Liszt scholar Alan Walker wrote, Liszt’s piano writing displayed an “unparalleled ability to draw strange sonorities from the piano.”¹ To be sure, Liszt used his innovative evocative language towards much different ends than the musical Impressionists, as his works were immersed in the zeitgeist of Romanticism despite their remarkably forward-looking techniques.

This seeming contradiction is especially remarkable given the work of his Romantic contemporaries. Considering his immediate peers, the generation of great pianist-composers all born within the span of several years in the early 19th century—Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt himself—none had a keener interest in the pictorial representation of nature through piano music than Liszt. Chopin’s music largely eschewed programmatic elements, while the character pieces of Mendelssohn rooted in

¹ Alan Walker, “Liszt and the Twentieth Century,” in *Franz Liszt: The Man and His Music*, ed. Alan Walker (New

extramusical inspirations were largely devoid of visual imagery, aside from rudimentary depictions of water in the “Venetian Boat Songs.” Meanwhile, Schumann, who can be rightly considered as the composer *par excellence* of the German Romantic character piece, was driven much more by an interest in the musical portraiture of characters both real and fictional—Kreisler, Florestan, Eusebius, Pierrot, Harlequin, Chopin, and of course, his beloved Clara—to name a few.³ In the few instances where his titles would seem to suggest nature and landscape—notably “Des Abends” from the Op. 12 *Fantasiestücke*, and *Waldscenen*, *Blumenstück*, and *Papillons*—Schumann’s primary concerns are still the expression of mood, character, and literary fantasy rather than pictorial description.

Thus, it was Liszt who was truly singular among Romantic piano composers in his sustained interest in musical naturalism. In light of his comparatively large body of works of this nature, it is a wonder why Walker and many others have largely limited their discussions to “Les jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este” as the seminal work that influenced the piano writing of Debussy and Ravel. Liszt started on the path towards illustrative music long before that, and yet there has been a dearth of concentrated study on this body of work as a whole, and a lack of a satisfying account of how the combined legacy of these works paved the way for musical Impressionism. It is on this front, then, that I hope to make a modest contribution to the wide-ranging contemporary effort to reconsider Liszt’s position in musical history.

³ Though in this respect, Schumann anticipated Debussy’s own musical portraiture, or caricature, of some rather colorful characters like Général Lavine, S. Pickwick, and Golliwog

Part I: Background

Chapter 1

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The Role of Romantic Literature and Philosophy in Liszt's Nature Music

Liszt's interest in natural landscapes reflected a larger trend in Romanticism which glorified nature as source of sublime beauty and power. For the Romantics, nature offered an untainted source of refuge from the constrictions of authoritarian society and the urban sprawl of Industrial capitalism, as well as a chance to pursue self-discovery and spiritual renewal. This spirit of self-realization through an escape from societal confines was encapsulated in Goethe's novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, a tour-de-force of Romantic literature whose themes reverberated throughout the art and literature of the period and became emblematic of its zeitgeist. Goethe's particular influence on Liszt is on display in the many of works of Liszt which explore the themes of the *Faust* legend. However, with regard to this particular genre of nature music in Liszt's output, the composer's worldview is most directly informed by Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and its focus on a world-weary soul in search of spiritual revelation through communion with nature. These Byronic themes of the wandering journeyman are not only referenced in the subject of Liszt's music, but also directly in Liszt's choice of titles in cycles

like *Album d'un voyageur* and *Années de pèlerinage*, and the poetic inscriptions attached to many of their component works.

Yet, this propensity towards inflecting literary themes through music does not fully account for the particular novelties of Liszt's nature music for piano. As mentioned earlier, Liszt's pieces exhibited a concern for vivid pictorial description that far surpassed those of his contemporaries. Even in the music of Schubert, whose penchant for the wanderer figure and natural landscapes is exhibited in *Winterreise* and *Die schöne Müllerin*, the musical vocabulary needed for visual illustration was rudimentary in its development, and largely aided by the symbiosis between the precise meanings of text and the abstract suggestions of music. For Liszt, though, his efforts in developing more advanced evocative vocabulary are rooted in the broader intersections among the many facets of his humanitarian interests. These interests are intertwined with the central role which religion played in Liszt's life, from early adolescence to the time he fulfilled his lifelong ambition of joining the Catholic clergy in 1865, and all the way up until his death.

In particular, Liszt adopted a set of socially-conscious religious philosophies during his early twenties when he resided in Paris, a time when he was profoundly influenced by the teachings of a new breed of social and religious thought expounded by the Saint-Simonians, Pierre-Simon Ballanche, and Felicite-Robert Lamennais. Though diverse in the particular tenets of their philosophies, the broad goals of these thinkers were encapsulated by *le sentiment humanitaire*, the "humanist spirit," which directed religion towards the central concerns of humanism and social progress. In particular, Lamennais sought to achieve this progress through an alliance of the arts and religion. Under this thinking, the

role of art was not for the sake of art itself, but to progress humanity towards a more perfect, egalitarian future. By implication, the role of the artists themselves, according to him, was to be the “Apostle of the Spirit” and “prophet of that future.”⁴

Liszt obviously subscribed to this view of the artist as a prophet. Responding to Ballanche’s declaration in his *Orphée* (1829) that “the poet is the living expression of God, of Nature, and of Humanity,” Liszt wrote to Marie d’Agoult, “Lord, what great and marvelous thoughts!”⁵ Moreover, Liszt’s preface to the score of *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* quotes Alfonso de Lamartine’s preface to his volume of poetry of the same name:

There are meditative minds, whom solitude and contemplation insensibly raise toward infinite ideas, that is to say—religion. All their thoughts turn into enthusiasm and prayer, their whole existence is a silent hymn to the Deity and hope; they seek in themselves, and in creation which surrounds them, degrees to raise them to God, expressions and images to reveal him to themselves, to reveal themselves to Him! Would that I could in these harmonies assist them! There are hearts There are hearts, broken by grief, crushed by the world's neglect, who take refuge in the world of their thoughts, in the solitude of their soul to weep, to expect, to adore; could they be willingly visited by a solitary muse like themselves, find a sympathy in his accords, they would exclaim sometime in listening: "We pray with your words, we weep with your tears, we invoke with your song!"⁶

From the perspective of this philosophy, works of art were manifestations of the divine, and all the various forms of art—music, poetry, drama, painting, and sculpture—were interconnected as different mediums in which the Divine worked through the artist. Nowhere else in the nineteenth-century piano literature can we see this philosophy more clearly manifested than in the works of Liszt, who sought to broadly unify the expression of

⁴ Quoted in Charles Suttoni, introduction to *An Artist’s Journey: Lettres d’un bachelier ès musique*, by Franz Liszt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), xxi.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁶ Quoted in Jonathan Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 195.

the various arts in his music, evoking the poems of Byron, the dramas of Goethe, the sculptures of Michelangelo, the paintings of Raphael, and Christian legend. For Liszt, no subject was off limits, and the breadth of his interests as a composer renders his contemporaries' interest in Romantic literature seemingly narrow in comparison.

Inevitably, his efforts at unifying the arts led him to become natural allies with the likes of Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner in the polemics over musical aesthetics in the 1850s and 1860s, which pitted these progressive composers and their championing of program music against the conservative forces of absolute music spearheaded by the Schumanns and the young Brahms. Admittedly, the radicalism of Wagner's music dramas and the degree to which they fused various art forms into a single work of art—his ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—far surpass Liszt's own efforts, even in his larger-scale efforts like the *Symphonic Poems*. Still, their shared concern for finding new means of unified expression remains particularly relevant. For Liszt, in his efforts working in the purely instrumental medium of piano music, the need for pictorially descriptive resources was of particular concern, one that found its solution in the equivalence of visual and aural color. This was perhaps best described by Charles Baudelaire in his 1861 essay to Wagner:

The only really surprising thing would be that sound could not suggest colour, that colours could not give the idea of melody, and that both sound and colour were unsuitable as media for ideas; since all things always have been expressed by reciprocal analogies, ever since the day when God created the world as a complex indivisible totality.⁷

Such close association between the colors of visual imagery and musical sound were central not only to the mid-century works of Liszt and Wagner that were contemporaneous

⁷ Charles Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner and *Taunhouser in Paris*," in *Selected Writings on Art and Artistis*, trans. P.E. Chavet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 330.

with Baudelaire's, but also to works dating all the way back to the birth of nineteenth-century program music in Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony and Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. Despite these precedents in orchestral music, there had been no parallel efforts of consequence in piano music prior to Liszt. Before Liszt, no composer thought the piano capable of such an effort—and perhaps, before the time of Liszt, the instrument was not. Yet, it is no coincidence that it took one of the greatest pianists in history to pursue this endeavor. In the following chapter, we will explore how a confluence of technological developments in the piano and Liszt's own attitudes towards the instrument enabled him to exploit its coloristic and evocative capabilities to an unprecedented level. Through this effort, Liszt would transform the piano from a domestic instrument of the *bourgeoise* home to a very public instrument of symphonic scope that had its place in a concert hall—one capable of realizing the expressive goals of his all-encompassing humanitarian view of the arts.

Chapter 2

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Technological Developments in the Nineteenth-Century Piano and the Alchemy of Sound

From a twenty-first century perspective—one privileged by the convenient study of urtext scores, neatly bound volumes of correspondences, and centuries' worth of historical commentary accessible by the click of a mouse—it is all too easy to lose sight of centuries-old compositions as products born from a living, breathing process of creation. As we have already seen with Liszt, composers and their works were influenced intellectually by the zeitgeist of their respective periods, the legacy of their artistic predecessors, and their dialogue with contemporary artists. Yet, at the most practical level, their compositions were influenced by the actual instruments necessary for their realization, as well as their accompanying capabilities and limitations. With this in mind, our study of piano music from a historical distance must necessarily be sensitive to the development of nineteenth-century pianos.

Today, the standardization of the modern Steinway behemoth has largely concealed the wide variation in piano technology put forth by a host of competing firms in the nineteenth century. In this golden age in the evolution of the instrument, pianist-composers were both beholden to the limitations of the instruments of their day and, by their genius, emboldened to challenge the limits of these capabilities and demand new ones. Beethoven was an early and prominent example of this: his sonatas and concerti had already pushed and expanded the limits of the piano in both range and power. By 1810, his

five concerti and first twenty-six sonatas had helped expand the piano's compass from the five octaves of Mozart's instrument to six. His monumental final sonatas pushed the envelope even further, such that by the time Liszt became active as a composer, the piano had acquired most of its seven-plus octave range today.

Still, many of the most important innovations were still in their infancy by the end of Beethoven's lifetime. One such innovation, the double-escapement action by Sebastian Érard in 1821, allowed for quick key repetitions that would have far-reaching implications for pianistic writing.⁸ Just a few years later, Alpheus Babcock's patent of the cast-iron frame in 1825 led to higher string tensions that paved the way for the powerful sound of the modern grand. The first patented use of cross-stringing, by Henry Steinway, Jr. in 1859, allowed for increased resonance and a blended, homogenized sound throughout the keyboard. Yet, developments were uneven among the various leading manufacturers, with each boasting its own distinctive capabilities, such that widespread standardization was not achieved until the turn of the twentieth century. This slow rate of standardization was not only symptomatic of patent restrictions, but also of the distinctive branding of rival firms as they sought competing endorsements from the pianist-composers of the day.

One such rivalry between the Parisian firms Pleyel and Érard exploited the distinctive musical personalities of Chopin and Liszt. The instruments of Pleyel, with their light action and delicate tone suited for intimate chamber performances, found a sympathetic voice in Chopin, the private, elegant creature of the aristocratic salon.

⁸ This advanced action must have contributed to Liszt's lifelong preference for Érard's pianos, evidenced by his penchant for writing quick repeated notes, not only in such ostentatious displays like those found in "La Campanella" and the first Mephisto Waltz, but also in the subtle liquid figuration of "Les Jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este."

Meanwhile, the instruments of Érard, with their powerful seven-octave range and robust sonority more appropriate for the platform of the concert stage, found a champion in the young Liszt, the populist showman for the masses. It was the Érard on which Liszt chose to perform for a concert in the great Scala opera house before three thousand people in 1837.

Of this unprecedented democratic display of the piano, Liszt wrote to Sebastian Érard:

Let them not tell me any more that the piano is not a suitable instrument for a big hall, that the sounds are lost in it, that the nuances disappear, etc. I bring as witnesses the three thousand people who filled the immense Scala theatre yesterday evening from the pit to the gods on the seventh balcony (for there are seven tiers of boxes here), all of whom heard and admired down to the smallest details, your instrument. Never before has a piano created such an effect.⁹

Indeed, Liszt, who once called the piano “the microcosm of music”¹⁰, held a much broader and more democratic view of the role of the piano than did Chopin. While Chopin conceived of the piano primarily as a bel canto instrument whose unique voice was singularly suited for his private expression, Liszt’s conception of the piano was on a symphonic scale, such that it was capable of evoking the cosmos. In his own words, the piano “holds the first place in the hierarchy of instruments...In the compass of its seven octaves it includes the entire scope of the orchestra, and the ten fingers suffice for the harmony produced by an ensemble of a hundred players.”¹² It is not surprising, then, that Liszt drew on the symphonic resources of the piano to evoke the entirety of his world: from Byron’s poetry, Raphael’s paintings, and Michelangelo’s sculptures, to Biblical legends, Faustian dramas, Hungarian revolutions, and Swiss landscapes. The list goes on.

⁹ Quoted in Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 316.

¹⁰ Quoted in Alan Walker, *Reflections on Liszt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 227.

¹² Ibid.

Yet, it is in describing the mysteries and wonders of Nature as a source of the Romantic sublime that Liszt was best able to exploit the new suggestive and evocative capabilities emerging from the instrument. It is not difficult to see why: as the piano grew more powerful in both sonority and its sustaining ability, so did the richness of its palette of overtones. Amplified by the use of the pedal, the piano therefore gained an ever-increasing ability to blend a variegated spectrum of colors and sonorities. This is the basis of the alchemy of sound responsible for the evocative atmospheres of Liszt's nature pieces. Not only do the harmonies in his pieces suggest this blending, but so do his pedal indications, which often demanded the melding of disparate harmonies under a single pedal. Alan Walker has lamented the under-recognition of this intention today, writing that "Liszt's pedalling is often impressionistic in nature, boldly mixing tonalities and textures in a manner requiring courage to implement it today."¹³

Yet, even as he intended such sonic chemistry within a close range, Liszt was not indiscriminate in his blending of sonorities. As we will see, his compositional techniques and his long-standing preference for the Érard suggest that he greatly valued the timbral distinctions among the various tessituras of the piano. In many of his nature pieces that we will discuss in this study, Liszt makes use of the distance between high and low registers of the piano and their distinct timbres to suggest physical distance and dimension in the natural landscapes he evokes. His preference for the Érard is notable in this regard, as it was one of the few pianos that remained straight-strung well into the turn of the century, and therefore preserved these timbral distinctions, whereas the increasingly popular cross-stringing technique among other pianos homogenized the

¹³ Alan Walker, "Liszt and the Keyboard," *The Musical Times* 118, no. 1615 (1977): 719.

sound across the entire range of the keyboard. Liszt's desire for a clear stratification of sounds can be further witnessed in his reaction to the invention of the sostenuto pedal. Upon receiving a new Steinway instrument equipped with the device in 1883, he wrote to the company:

in relation to the use of your welcome tone-sustaining pedal I inclose two examples: 'Danse des Sylphes,' by Berlioz and No. 3 of my 'Consolations.' I have today noted down only the introductory bars of both pieces, with this proviso, that, if you desire it, I shall gladly complete the whole transcription, with exact adaptation of your tone-sustaining pedal.¹⁴

The sostenuto pedal came too late in Liszt's life for the composer to have made any significant use of it in his compositions, but had it arrived earlier, it would have most certainly been a welcome addition.

While it may seem contradictory that Liszt took delight in both the blending of sonorities and the distinction of timbres, it is not difficult to reconcile the two. Alchemy, after all, is an enigmatic art of melding many disparate elements together. For Liszt, the piano that developed over the course of the century was symphonic in scope—an instrument that encapsulated the combined forces of many instruments, voices, and timbres on a smaller scale. It was just as capable of singing a bel canto melody as a flute-like birdsong, and just as adept at having its keys struck to suggest percussive bells as having them caressed to evoke crystalline streams of water. In his synthesis of this diverse spectrum of colors and sounds, Liszt celebrated their difference over their likeness to produce an entirely new effect. This same sonic chemistry behind Liszt's evocative

¹⁴ Quoted in James Huneker, *Franz Liszt* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1911), 394.

works would also prove central to Debussy's and Ravel's treatment of the piano in their Impressionistic pieces many decades later.

Chapter 3

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Liszt and Impressionism

“A useful term of abuse”

Before embarking on this study of Liszt’s evocative nature music and its legacy, we must appropriately define the premises upon which this legacy is to be understood. In relating Liszt’s legacy of evocative writing to the works of Debussy and Ravel, I have chosen to use the term “Impressionism” in the title and throughout the body of this study with a good deal of caution, realizing that it comes with heavy baggage. First, it would be an anachronistic and ahistorical descriptor for Liszt’s earlier works of nature-music, which predated even the movement in visual arts in the 1870s and 1880s, not to mention sympathetic developments in music in the *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Second, the term comes loaded with a host of preconceptions, and in fact was originally used as a derogatory term—one which denigrated its aesthetic as a hazy distortion of visual reality rather than an accurate portrayal. This haziness has come to embody the general public’s understanding of the music of Debussy and Ravel, the so-called musical Impressionists, as well, leading Pierre Boulez to once speak of the need to “burn the mists off Debussy.”¹⁵ In fact, Debussy himself famously called it a “useful term of abuse,”¹⁶ as he did also with the label “Symbolist,” for neither in itself fully accounted for his simultaneous fascination with visual images and his deep enchantment with the ineffable mysteries of thought.

¹⁵ Quoted in Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1996), 39.

¹⁶ Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977), 47.

We are left, then, to consider what is “useful” about the term, and why it has stuck after a century of objection. There is an obvious affinity between many aspects of Debussy’s and Ravel’s works and the stylistic traits of the Impressionist painters: the blurring of lines through the use of patchy brushstrokes, their concern for color, and the exploration of light in a mirage-like sense. Debussy himself spoke of the orchestral effects of *La Mer* in such visual terms, describing the “palette of sounds and by skillful brushstrokes designed to convey in gradations of rare and brilliant colors the play of light and shade, and the chiaroscuro of the everchanging seascape.”¹⁷ Consider also the comments by eminent Debussy scholar and performer Paul Roberts in regard to “Refllets dans l’eau” from *Images I*: “In ‘Refllets’ Debussy exploits the softer resonances and vibrations of the instrument, drawing our ear to the point where resonance fades, where the different elements of a sound shift and transform themselves—just as a visible object appears to change shape and substance under different aspects of light.”¹⁸ Of the same work, Debussy wrote to his publisher Durand that it was written “in accordance with the most recent discoveries of harmonic chemistry.”¹⁹

Thus, what “Impressionistic music” has come to mean is music that emphasizes color as an equally visual and aural sensation, along with an interest in blending such color for imaginative effect. It is music that tends to evoke rather than state, suggest rather than declare, and murmur rather than sing. Thus, the term “Impressionism” in its general musical usage has become a convenient term to describe some of its surface stylistic traits as applied to music rather than its core artistic values as a movement in painting—a

¹⁷ Quoted in Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind, II (1902-1918)*, (London: Cassell and Co., 1962), 16.

¹⁸ Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1996), 34.

¹⁹ Letter to Jacques Durand, 19 August 1905, in *Debussy Letters*, trans. and ed. François Lesure and Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 155.

shorthand for the interest in pictorial suggestion through music. As a result, we have come to describe works as Impressionistic when we simply mean that they are impressionistic. In this way, Debussy was perhaps correct in his diagnosis of the usefulness of the term, even if it remains imprecise. Accordingly, my use of the term “Impressionism” in this study refers to the aspects of Debussy’s and Ravel’s works that exhibit specific stylistic traits of Impressionism as well as the effects of a broader impressionism, while recognizing that the term does not fully account of all of their works, or even the aesthetic values of the entirety of a single work.

Liszt, impressionism, and Impressionism

Even as we accept the term “Impressionist” for holding legitimate value in describing some of Debussy’s and Ravel’s works, it is quite another matter to describe some of Liszt’s works as “pre-” or “proto-Impressionistic” as it is all too easy to find in CD liner notes or program notes to a piece like “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este.” Therefore, I have refrained from doing so, with keen awareness of the critiques of New Musicology regarding organicism and the inherent risk in privileging later works over earlier works by discussing changes in compositional styles as “development.” Liszt’s nature pieces were not pre- or proto-Impressionistic. They are full-fledged Romantic works in their own right. The majority of Liszt’s works that we will study could not be more Romantic, either in their hot-blooded fervor, or for their invocation of common Romantic tropes of yearning, wandering, and communing with nature. Yet, to call them impressionistic is no contradiction—as Liszt himself used the term “impressions” to describe some of these

pieces. After all, most of the nature pieces from the Swiss book of *Années de Pèlerinage* were originally collected in the *Album d'un voyageur* under the title of the first book, *Impressions et Poésies*. In his preface to the volume, Liszt writes:

I have latterly traveled through many new countries, have seen many different places, and visited many a spot hallowed by history and poetry; I have felt that the varied aspects of nature, and the different incidents associated with them, did not pass before my eyes like meaningless pictures, but that they evoked profound emotions within my soul; that a vague but direct affinity was established betwixt them and myself, a real, though indefinable understanding, a sure but inexplicable means of communication, and I have tried to give musical utterance to some of my strongest sensations, some of my liveliest impressions.²⁰

Both Alan Walker and Charles Suttoni have made the case that Liszt's travel sketches are the first substantive instance of musical impressionism. In transcribing those impressions into music, Liszt showed a great sensitivity to the interplay of color and light, writing:

At times, too in the dying flickers of the day, the white clouds hovering around the mountaintops take on pure, transparent colors. Their subtle tints change continually as they merge and produce an indescribable, shifting array of color and light, as though thousands of souls had been transfigured and were ascending to the heavens. But the sun, sinking behind the mountains, reclaims its magnificent rays, the clouds become thick, heavy, and dull again, and I resume my desolate and uncertain way.²¹

This concern for color and light would lead many to connect him to specifically Impressionist aesthetics. John Gillespie has written: "In some respects Liszt anticipated Impressionism much more than any of his contemporaries. He was not so interested in actual successions of sounds as in the simultaneous blending of sounds or tone clusters—

²⁰ Quoted in Alan Walker, *Reflections on Liszt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 227.

²¹ Quoted in *An Artist's Journey: Lettres d'un bachelier ès musique, 1835-1841*, trans. Charles Suttoni (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 97.

that is, in music for the sake of sound. As a marvelous showman and exhibitionist, he delighted in sounding together as much of the keyboard as physically possible.”²² The connection between sound and virtuosity in Gillespie’s comment serves to highlight his virtuosity as one of his greatest creative assets at the piano—after all, a lesser pianist simply would not have imagined writing the sounds and textures he did, because they technically could not even fathom their execution. Liszt not only revolutionized piano technique itself, but in doing so, he widened the palette of sonic and expressive possibilities of the instrument as well. We will discover later from his revisions of the *Transcendental Études* that in many cases, technical and sonic innovations go hand-in-hand. As Charles Rosen puts it, “Liszt’s feeling for sound was the greatest of any keyboard composer’s between Scarlatti and Debussy, and he surpassed them in boldness. Critics often write as if Liszt’s innovations in piano technique were merely was of playing lots of notes in a short space of time, instead of inventions of sound.”²³

Liszt’s final connection to the Impressionists lay in his championing of program music. Once again, it is important to remember that although program music had been established in the orchestral realm by such tours de force as Beethoven’s “Pastoral” Symphony and Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*,²⁴ it was largely uncharted territory in piano music. Earlier efforts such as Beethoven’s “Les Adieux” narrated emotions rather than images, while Schumann’s aversion to explicit programs rendered the language in his programmatic works more imaginative than descriptive. This language reflected his

²² John Gillespie, *Five Centuries of Keyboard Music: An Historical Survey of Music for the Piano* (New York: Dover, 1972), 239.

²³ Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 508.

²⁴ It is in fact through his transcriptions of these pieces that Liszt first learned to exploit the piano in a symphonic manner.

interest in conjuring abstract fantasy rather than in representing material reality. Thus, Liszt's output reveals him to be the first unapologetic champion of program music on the piano. His unparalleled pianistic acumen, coupled with his belief in the symphonic resources of instrument, led him to invent new ways to effect pictorial description through the instrument and to discover a new evocative language that the Impressionists would draw on many decades later. Simply put, if musical Impressionism were about evoking, suggesting, and murmuring, then Liszt was the pathfinder who pioneered the methods of achieving those goals at the piano. In the end, it may be that Liszt's impressionism paved the way for Impressionism.

Part II: Survey of Liszt's Nature Music

The main purpose of the following survey is to illuminate the most distinctive and innovative compositional devices that Liszt used to depict nature in his works. Therefore, these discussions do not purport to be comprehensive, bar-by-bar analyses of each piece. Instead, they aim to separate novel techniques from the commonplace, and to highlight fresh, captivating effects over well-worn tropes. Formal and tonal structures are analyzed only insofar as they depart from established norms for evocative purposes.

In many ways, this prioritization of the study of innovative techniques over the conventional analysis of norms is in keeping with Liszt's own priorities and views about music. It was Liszt himself who railed against the strict adherence to conventions and forms in his 1852 biography of Chopin:

As the manifold forms of art are but different incantations, charged with electricity from the soul of the artist, and destined to evoke the latent emotions and passions in order to render them sensible, intelligible, and, in some degree, tangible; so genius may be manifested in the invention of new forms, adapted, it may be, to the expression of feelings which have not yet surged within the limits of common experience, and are indeed first evoked within the magic circle by the creative power of artistic intuition.²⁵

He saw rigidity as fetters to the divinely inspired genius. At the end of the survey, we will therefore attempt to find recurring patterns and techniques through which he freed his inspiration from such constrictions, highlighting innovations in harmony, texture, technique, and formal procedures. Naturally, not all pieces are given equal weight, as some

²⁵ Franz Liszt, *The Life of Chopin*, trans. Martha Walter Cook, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), 10.

especially groundbreaking works like “Au bord d’une source,” “Harmonies du soir,” and “Les jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’esté” warrant extra scrutiny. Finally, this survey does not represent an exhaustive list of all of Liszt’s piano pieces that are tangentially connected to nature. Some very fine works have been omitted because they have little to add beyond what the Liszt’s most important pieces of nature music will already have brought to our attention.

Chapter 4

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The Swiss pieces of *Album d'un voyageur* and *Années de Pèlerinage*: Spiritual Resonance in a Journeyman's Sketches

The pieces that comprise *Album d'un voyageur* and the first volume of *Années de pèlerinage* primarily originate from the time Liszt lived in Switzerland between June 1835 and October 1836. Together, they represent the lively musical impressions of various landscapes he encountered in his various travels with his mistress Marie d'Agoult, with whom he fathered his three children. The dating of these pieces are imprecise: though it is highly possible that Liszt may have sketched some musical impressions during his actual visit, he did not pen the complete pieces of *Impressions et Poésies*, what would become the first volume of *Album d'un voyageur*, until 1837-1838. The *Album* itself was not published until 1842. We have reason to believe that Liszt must have preferred the music of *Impressions et Poésies* over the other volumes of the *Album*, for two reasons. First, he positioned *Impressions* as Book I of *Album* even though the music of Book III, *Paraphrases*, had been written and published earlier in 1836. More importantly though, most of its pieces survived revision and made it into the first volume of *Années de pèlerinage*, in the form they are most often performed and recorded today. While the revisions for *Années* variously happened between 1848-1853, Liszt's letters suggest that he ran into problems that delayed the volume's publication for several years until its eventual release in 1855.

For the purposes of clarity and precision, I will refer to the revised pieces found in *Années* based on their publication date of 1855.

As we consider this music, it is first worth examining the question of what prompted Liszt's change in title from *Album d'un voyageur* to *Années de pèlerinage*, given their shared music material. First, at the most practical level, Liszt must have sought a new title for the revised cycle to emphasize their status as fresh, new works in the public mind, and therefore, secondarily to increase the demand for the new edition. Artistically, Liszt sought to refine this music based on his growing powers as a composer, and also to moderate the excesses of his youth and virtuoso years. Liszt wrote to Carl Czerny in 1852 that his pieces from *Album* would "reappear very considerably corrected, increased, and transformed."²⁶ It must be noted that Liszt bought back the rights to *Album* from his publishers and insisted that the earlier pieces no longer be circulated. He not only thought the revised versions of these pieces superior to their predecessors, but also that they in effect invalidated the old versions.

The specific language of the two titles, though, not only reflected the technical revisions at the most local levels of the individual pieces, but a broader effort to refine and recast their artistic vision. While *Album d'un voyageur* suggested a sort of travelogue of casual traveler, Liszt's new designation of *Années de pèlerinage*, with its simultaneous references to both Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahr* (Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years) and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, reflected a deeper spiritual purpose. Through this change in the title, as much as the revisions themselves, Liszt sought to

²⁶ *Letters of Franz Liszt*, ed. La Mara [Marie Lipsius], trans. Constance Bache (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 1:140.

reframe the terms on which the music would be interpreted: from the subjectivity of a tourist to that of a pilgrim, from the present tense of a diary to the past dense of a retrospective biography, and from the sights and sounds of casual impressions to deeper reverberations of spiritual significance. The importance of the pieces of *Années de pèlerinage* lies not only in their descriptive pictorial language, but also their poetic content and spiritual impact. As Alfred Brendel wrote, the Swiss book of *Années* “deals with nature in a two-fold sense: as nature around us, and as the nature within.”²⁷ It would difficult to overstate the importance of Brendel’s assertion: as we will see time and again, in the nature pieces with *Années* and beyond, we are studying both the illustrative quality of Liszt’s musical painting of the nature on the outside, and its resonance within human nature.

Un soir dans les montagnes (1836, rev. 1877)

To begin our discussion, let us examine a piece that reflects Liszt’s inheritance of programmatic nature music from Beethoven and his “Pastoral Symphony”—specifically the storm of its fourth movement. While the “Orage” of 1855 is perhaps the most well-known example of a musical storm in Liszt’s output of original piano music, it is not the first. Rather, the honor belongs to “Un soir dans les montagnes,” originally published as part of *Trois airs suisses* in 1836, and thereafter, reissued in 1842 as the part of *Paraphrases*, the third book of *Album d’un Voyageur*. Decades later, Liszt later revised and republished the volume as *Trois Morceaux Suisses*, S. 156a, in 1877. Although the two other pieces in

²⁷ Alfred Brendel, *On Music: His Collected Essays* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007), 255.

Paraphrases, “Ranz de vaches” (Cowherd’s Song) and Ranz de chèvres (Shepherd’s Song), invoke the pastoral through their use of folk material, the former is a flashy set of variations on the folk tune, while the latter is a concert rondo. Both are essentially salon pieces, and neither is truly akin to the nature sketches Swiss pieces in *Album* and *Années*. Like its companion pieces, “Un soir dans les montagnes” makes use of a Swiss folk melody—in this case, one by Basle publisher Ernest Knop. However, “Un soir” is much more evocative and pictorial in its language, and the depiction of a mountain storm in its central section in particular warrants attention as we examine the initial inheritance of programmatic writing from Beethoven to Liszt.

Jonathan Kregor has called the piece “one of the most explicit acts of homage toward Beethoven that Liszt the composer ever made.”²⁸ Like Beethoven’s fourth movement in the “Pastorale,” *Gewitter, Sturm* (Thunder, Storm), Liszt’s storm is surrounded by gentler pastoral music. Liszt’s piece is broadly cast in ternary form, with the central storm section set in stark contrast with the *nocturne pastorale* in the outer sections. The nocturne evokes the Swiss nighttime countryside, with the peaceful alphorn melody by Knop unfolding below a stream of inverted pedal points on G that represent tolling bells. Aside from these bells and the general suggestion of the pastoral atmosphere, this section contains little in pictorial description. It is in the central storm section that we see the influence of Beethoven’s own storm as well as Liszt’s transcription of it. Both storms are cast in F minor, and their common raw materials are readily apparent—tremolos, thunderous octaves, and violent waves of chromatic scales. Liszt’s storm begins ominously in measure

²⁸ Jonathan Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 125.

97 with a bass trill on D^b that is reminiscent of Beethoven's own, before it whirls its way up chromatically.

Example 4.1. Liszt, "Un soir dans les montagnes," m. 97-99 (1836)

Der Sturm
Allegro agitato M. M. $\text{♩} = 66$

tre corde

p sotto voce

⚙️

Example 4.2. Liszt, "Un soir dans les montagnes," mm. 130-141

sempre marcatissimo

f

rinforz.

rinforz.

rinforz.

molto rinforz.

⚙️

At measure 127, Liszt indicates *tremolando, tutta le forza*—pointing to the fact that Liszt must have been inspired by Beethoven's symphony to channel the cosmic forces of the

orchestra into the piano, demanding from it the most powerful and forceful sound possible to evoke the storm. Indeed, moments later at measure 134, Liszt conjures up a torrent of two-handed chromatic runs in unison which, in their single-minded ferocity, would foreshadow a similar passage in Liszt's later storm piece, "Chasse-neige" (1852).

This chromatic runs lead into an even more brutal and violent chordal theme in F minor at measure 142, marked *sempre fff marcatisissimo con strepito*. The passage is anchored by an unrelenting F-minor pedal point. At measure 146, Liszt superimposes a half-diminished ii⁷ chord on top of the f octave in the left hand, creating a thunderous clash in the bass that accompanies the cascade of right-hand chromatic octaves. As we will later see, Liszt will later revisit this technique, with more significant long-term implications, in his later storm piece, "Orage" (1855).

Example 4.3. Liszt, "Un soir dans les montagnes," m. 142-149

Furthermore, Jonathan Kregor has noted the similarity between this passage and the dynamic forces at the arrival of Beethoven's storm (Figure 4.4).

Example 4.4. Beethoven/Liszt, Symphony No. 6, IV, m 103-109

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top with the instruction *sempre più f*, a middle staff with a bass clef and the instruction *Ossia.*, and a bottom staff with a bass clef and the instruction *Ra*. The second system also consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, a middle staff with a bass clef and the instruction *Ra*, and a bottom staff with a bass clef and the instruction *fff*. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, chords, and dynamic markings.

He also notes that both composers' storms dissipate into chorale-like hymns (Figure 4.5), as well as the quotation of Beethoven's *Hirtengesang* from the finale of the symphony in the last motive of Liszt's *nocturne pastorale*.²⁹ Thus, in Liszt's first attempt at a musical storm, the echoes of Beethoven can be clearly heard. Many of these same techniques, as well as some new innovations by Liszt himself, will reverberate throughout the composer's later pieces in the genre.

²⁹ Ibid.

Example 4.5. Chorale Themes at the end of Beethoven's and Liszt's storms

Beethoven/Liszt, Symphony no. 6, IV, m. 146-155

Musical score for Beethoven/Liszt, Symphony no. 6, IV, m. 146-155. The score is in G major, 3/4 time, and consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system includes the instruction "Hob. u. Streicher" and "dolce". The second system includes "sempre più p" and "dolce". The music features a prominent bass line with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and a treble line with chords and melodic fragments.

Liszt, "Un soir dans les montagnes," m. 281-296

Musical score for Liszt, "Un soir dans les montagnes," m. 281-296. The score is in D major, 3/4 time, and consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system includes the tempo marking "M. M. $d = 76$ " and "tranquillo". The second system includes "poco cresc." and "pp". The music features a treble line with a melodic line and a bass line with chords and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Orage (1855)

“But where of ye, O tempests! Is the goal?
 Are ye like those within human breast?
 Or do ye find, at length, like eagles, some high nest?”

Byron: Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (Canto 3 LXII – CV):

Characteristic of the Romantic ideal of nature as a deeply personal and spiritual experience, Liszt’s “Orage” is not merely a musical depiction of an outward storm in the Swiss countryside, but one that also draws internal parallels in the human heart. The writing is fierce and muscular, equaling the relentless violence of storm. Here, we continue to see many of the same devices used to evoke the storm in “Un soir dans les montagnes”—lightning-fast octaves, thunderous tremolos, and whirling chromatic runs. Yet, it would be a mistake to credit the tumultuous effect of the piece solely to the hair-raising virtuosic effects.

The piece reflects Liszt’s predilection towards the use of symmetrical divisions of the octaves as melodic and harmonic material: in this case, chromatic scales, diminished 7th chords³⁰, and the tritone. He favored these materials because their symmetrical nature upended the traditional tonal hierarchy, freeing himself from many constrictions of the tonal tradition and allowing him to take his unexpected turns in his music. Meanwhile his penchant for diminished-seventh chords is displayed through the so-called “Lisztian octaves” in which the two hands rapidly alternate octaves in extended succession (measures 82-88) and an entire cadenza that modulates through of tumultuous arpeggios spanning four octaves (measures 93-106). It is the combination of these materials with

³⁰ The others being octatonic and whole-tone divisions of the octave, both of which Liszt employed to a significant degree in other works.

virtuosic gestures that makes “Orage” both effectively and affectively successful. His preoccupation with chromatic scales manifests itself in various textures through the piece: as single notes in each hand (measures 152-156), double-handed thirds (measures 38-52), notes embedded within chords (measures 90, 92), and in octave passages almost everywhere else in the piece.

On a local level, we can see the appeal of using the half step, the building block of the chromatic scale, as a dissonant device that captures the clashing of the elements depicted in the piece. Right at the onset of the main theme at the *Presto furioso* at measure 8, the continual use of B and F# as chromatic neighbor notes to C and G in the left hand—not to mention the tritone sounding between C and F#— adds a pungency to what would otherwise have been fairly ordinary outlines of the C minor harmonies.

Example 4.6. Liszt, “Orage,” m. 8-19 (1855)

The musical score for Example 4.6 shows Liszt's "Orage" measures 8-19. It is in C minor, 3/4 time, and marked "Presto furioso". The score is written for piano, with a right hand playing chords and a left hand playing a chromatic scale. Measure 8 starts with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. Measure 12 features a tritone (B and F#) in the left hand. Measure 14 has a "rinforz." (ritornello) marking. Measure 16 starts with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Meanwhile, the B and D^b in measures 12-14 serve the same function in punctuating the apparent F minor harmony (IV^{6/4}). These same pitches (with the exception of a D-natural

replacing the D^b) then form a simultaneous cluster-like chord in measure 16 that can be analyzed as an F-minor chord with added non-chord tones.³¹ The sheer brutality of the harmony would seem to support the argument that Liszt's use of the added pitches was for primarily aesthetic, not functional purposes. Any function would be further obscured by the simultaneous cascade of chromatic-scale octaves in the right hand. Going forward, consideration on a larger tonal scale reveals that the D^b initially introduced on top of the tonic pedal of C actually foreshadows the Neopolitan harmony of D^{b7} that fully reveals itself in measures 25-27—with important harmonic implications. The short-term function of this D^{b7} harmony is the tonicization of G^b major in measure 28. Ultimately though, in its enharmonic identity as C^{#7} in measure 54, its long-term harmonic goal is revealed to be its resolution to the F[#]-Major middle section—a full tritone away from C minor, the home key of the piece. We are left, then, to question what may have compelled Liszt to modulate from a key signature of three flats to one of five sharps.

On this end, the literature has thus far failed to fully account for the unusual tritonal key relationship. Paul Merrick has proposed that that the F[#]-Major middle section represents the divine, or the “high nest” from the Byron inscription.³² Furthermore, he has connected the opening of “Orage” to the opening theme of Liszt's youthful *Malediction* concerto for piano and strings, where the theme represents the curse, or the Fall in Christianity.³³ Yet he does not account for the tritonal distance itself. Humphrey Searle has similarly observed that in Orage, “the opening...has some parallels with the so-called

³¹ Debussy's penchant for added-note chords, such as those in “La cathédrale engloutie” come to mind, albeit their markedly different aesthetics

³² Alan Walker has made similar claims about Liszt's use of the key of F[#] major in connection to divinity, which will be discussed further in later chapters.

³³ Paul Merrick, “The Role of Tonality in the Swiss Book of *Années de pèlerinage*,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 39, 2/4 (1998): 378-379.

Malediction concerto,” but then dismisses the rest as “typical of Liszt in his more violent mood.”³⁴ Later in same book, Searle describes the short piano cadenza in the opening of the *Malediction* as a passage “mainly based on the clash of two chords a tritone apart—an effect not afterwards paralleled ‘till *Petroushka*.”³⁵

Example 4.7. Liszt, “Malediction” Concerto, S. 121, opening and cadenza (1833)

The image displays a musical score for Liszt's "Malediction" Concerto, S. 121, focusing on the opening and a piano cadenza. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes staves for Violinen (1 and 2), Bratschen, Pianoforte, Violoncelle, and Kontrabässe. The opening is marked "Quasi moderato" and "con furore". The piano part features dynamic markings such as *ff marcatis.* and *ten.* (tension). The second system shows a piano cadenza marked "molto cresc. e agitato" and "precipitato", with dynamic markings like *sotto voce* and *mf*. The score is in G major and 2/4 time.

³⁴ Humphrey Searle, *The Music of Liszt* (New York: Dover, 1966), 27.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

Curiously, Searle seems to have missed, despite his recognition of the apparent connection between the two pieces, that Liszt himself did something similar in “Orage.” This time, however, the opposition is not just based on two chords which themselves were a tritone apart (B major and F major), but a juxtaposition of the tonic (C minor) and the dominant-seventh in the key of the tritone (D^{b7} , or the enharmonic V^7 of $F^\#$ major), while the tritonal clash between C and $F^\#$ itself is relegated to the larger structural levels.

If we combine Merrick’s theory of key symbolism and Searle’s observations regarding the tritonal clash in *Malediction*, with our own observations of both the local and structural-level opposition between c and $F^\#$, we arrive at a much satisfying account for tonal dichotomy of the piece. That is, the tonal distance between the divinity of $F^\#$ major and the musical hell raised here in C minor would be that of the *diabolus in musica*. That would also explain why it was necessary for Liszt to later respell the D^{b7} and G^b harmonies as $C^\#7$ and $F^\#$ —after all, the journey to the “higher nest” of the divinity requires an ascent, as symbolically represented through the modulation up to the sharp side of the circle of fifths, rather than the descent implied by a modulation down to the flat side. Thus we can see how Liszt uses the dark, stormy-sounding material of chromatic scales, diminished sevenths, and tritones on the surface level and amplifies them through virtuosic pianistic effects to evoke the tempest of the outside world, while simultaneously employing the same underlying materials at the structural level to explore the themes of inner human nature and spirituality. Alfred Brendel’s observation about the “two-fold nature” of the pieces of *Années* could not be more relevant here.

“Au lac de Wallendstadt” (1837-38; minor revisions in 1855)

...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.”
 Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

As we turn to the pieces of *Années*, our first example of nature-painting offers a stark contrast to tumult of “Un Soir.” In inscribing Byron’s verse to “Au lac de Wallendstadt,” Liszt signals that same central theme in Romanticism discussed earlier—the desire to be in communion with nature, and a return to the simple, pure, and untainted pastoral landscapes that provide a refuge from the “troubled waters” of the rapidly industrializing world. On the surface, this piece—despite its beauty—appears to be a fairly standard evocation of a natural landscape, using characteristic techniques like pedal points, triadically-constructed melodies, and wave-like arpeggiated accompaniment figures to respectively signify pastoral and water imagery. The pastoral markers date back to the Baroque, while the undulating accompaniments had already become idiomatically commonplace for the piano through Schubert’s many song settings dealing with water imagery.

What is noteworthy here, then, is the actual lengths to which Liszt goes to convey this natural world of “stillness” described by Byron. First, Liszt adds a twist to the Schubertian accompaniment in the left hand: a distinct barcarolle-like rhythm which consists of three triplet sixteenth notes followed by four duplet sixteenth notes within a 3/8 meter. Marie d’Agoult, with whom Liszt was traveling at the time, described this

accompaniment figure as “a melancholy harmony, imitative of the sigh of the waves and the cadence of oars, which I have never been able to hear without weeping.”³⁶

Example 4.8. Liszt, “Au lac de Wallenstadt,” opening (1855)

The image shows the opening of Liszt's "Au lac de Wallenstadt" in A-flat major, 3/8 time. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1-6) is marked "Andante placido" and "cantabile". The right hand features a melodic line with triplets and slurs, while the left hand plays a rhythmic ostinato of eighth notes. Performance instructions include "pp dolcissimo egualmente" and "una corda". The second system (measures 7-12) continues the ostinato and includes the instruction "dolce".

The rhythmic ostinato here is so stubbornly persistent that it holds uninterrupted for more than the first three quarters of the piece. In effect, what Liszt creates through this regularity is an incredible stillness and a trancelike timelessness throughout the piece, as though the passage of time has been suspended.

Liszt goes to even greater lengths to create this same stillness in the harmony. Above the tonic pedal point in A-flat major which permeates the first thirty-six measures of the piece, Liszt actually slows harmonic activity almost to a standstill—reducing it to a regular alternation between I and V⁷ every two measures. Notably, the V⁷ harmony is weakened by its conspicuous lack of the leading tone during the entire duration of those

³⁶ Quoted in Humphrey Searle, *The Music of Liszt* (New York: Dover, 1966), 26

first thirty bars. Thus, the great tonic-dominant dialectic, the fundamental conflict which fuels tonality as a whole—and the metaphorical equivalent to the “troubled waters” of the outside world—is here rendered impotent: the dominant chord robbed of its leading tone, while both tonic and dominant are made to alternate with such lulling regularity above a tonic point that the two can actually be said to be in harmony.

Furthermore, the clarity of Liszt’s “purer spring” is achieved through a remarkable economy in pitch classes in the first section: Liszt uses only six pitch classes—all diatonic—in the first thirty-eight measures (the absent pitch-class is, of course, the leading tone of G). The right-hand melody is further constricted to a collection of five notes, A^b, B^b, C, E^b, F that forms a pentatonic scale. The pentatonicism of the melody and its general triadic outlines are yet another pastoral signifier—in this case it more specifically suggests the *ranz de vaches*—an alhorn melody associated with cattle-herding.³⁷ Taken together, both the selection and limitation of pitch-classes in use, as well as the use of the pentatonic itself, serve not only to evoke the purity of the pastoral imagery itself, but is also symbolic of the yearning for an inner peace. As Jeremy Day-Oconnell writes,

...beyond conveying an actual bagpipe, *ranz des vaches*, lullaby, or rustic dance, the pastoral pentatonic conveys more generally the innocence, purity, and simplicity of the outdoors and its (supposedly) childlike inhabitants. But the depiction of pastoral subjects also contains the possibility of a more nuanced, personal mode of expression, that of a nostalgic *longing* for innocence.³⁸

³⁷ The *ranz de vaches* makes more explicit appearances in the three pieces that comprise *Paraphrases*, the third volume of *Album d'un voyageur*. For a detailed account of the relationship between pentatonicism and horn calls, see Jeremy Day-O'Connell, *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 64-71.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

Only in the middle episode of the rounded-binary structure does this lull get broken. With the introduction of the subdominant harmony in measure 37, which wavers between D^b major and D^b minor, we see a major-minor juxtaposition that is highly reminiscent of Schubert.

Example 4.9. Liszt, “Au lac de Wallenstadt,” m. 37-48 (1855)

However, while Schubert employed the technique throughout his works for tonal and affective contrast, there seems to be more at play here when we consider the shimmering texture that permeates the foreground of the piece. Rather, optics and the play of light are also relevant here—the darkening of the crystalline water can almost be visualized. At measure 43, the enharmonic respelling of D^b minor into C^\sharp minor facilitates a further tonal shift to E major and an accompanying kaleidoscopic shift in the optics. These are Byron’s “troubled waters.” There is once again an alternation between the dominant and tonic, now in the remote key of E major, while the pedal point is now embedded in the middle of the texture as a suspended leading tone (D^\sharp). Through further chromatic shifts, Liszt

completes his masterful mirage as D[#] is enharmonically reinterpreted as an E^b, which serves as an inverted pedal point heralding the return to the “purer spring” and the harmonic stasis of our home key of A^b major which largely presides over the remainder of the piece.

While it may be surprising to find that so much commentary can be reaped from a relatively short and simple piece, it is important to recognize here the significance of Liszt’s subversion of tonality and suspension of the normal flow of time as evocative strategies he would continue to employ in later pieces. Liszt found the dialectic opposition that fueled the tonality of Classicism and drove its narrative forms unsuitable for the Romantic purposes of his suggestive nature sketches, in which a single moment in communion with nature could feel like a timeless eternity. Dramatically propelled narratives with predetermined goals meant little in an age which glorified the eternal wanderer as the ideal archetype. Thus, Liszt began to change the rules of the compositional game, so to speak. In doing so, he allowed his music the freedom to evoke the wonders of the nature on the outside while exploring the depths of the Romantic soul on the inside.

“Au bord d’une source” (1837-8, rev. 1855)

In the whispering coolness begins young nature’s play.

Schiller

If constancy and stillness were at the core of “Au lac,” then movement and play are the driving forces behind “Au bord d’une source.” In its sparkling, effervescent quality, the piece is unprecedented in the piano literature. It is the first to depict the movement of water not as a passive phenomenon, but an active, multi-faceted element imbued with life. It is also the first to extensively explore the crystalline sonorities of the piano’s upper register in both hands to conjure new sensations in aural and visual color. While Liszt’s own “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este” (1877) is often credited as the most significant example of pre-Impressionistic writing, and a model for Debussy and Ravel, it is “Au bord d’une source” that first paves the way for these later pieces. Indeed, the “play” invoked in the piece’s inscription, the essence of “Au bord d’une source,” is the same *jeux* behind both Liszt’s “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este” and Ravel’s “Jeux d’eau.” It is the play—and interplay—of color and light, of harmony and rhythm, and of pianistic texture and virtuosity. Liszt’s ability to play with his musical materials lies in the very nature of water and its fluid and mercurial qualities.

This can be observed at the most local level through the clashing seconds that are prominent in the opening and remain a vital material for the rest of the piece. Hardly a measure in the piece goes by without their appearance, and even though these dissonant seconds resolve downwards into thirds in each instance, they sound so briefly, resolve so quickly, and reappear in such constant succession that they cannot be understood through

the classical notions of tonality involving the feeling of tension and release. They are fleeting physical sensations rather than feelings, and mercurial coloristic devices rather than tradition harmonic entities. Through the constant flow of these seconds, Liszt evokes a stream of water that is alive and continuously changing through the smallest of gestures.

Example 4.10. Liszt, “Au bord d’une source,” opening (1855)

The image displays the opening of Liszt's piano piece "Au bord d'une source" in two systems. The first system is marked "Allegretto grazioso" and "dolce tranquillo". The right hand features a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the left hand plays a more rhythmic accompaniment with some triplet markings. The second system continues the piece, with the left hand marked "sempre staccato". The key signature is three flats (B-flat major/C minor) and the time signature is 3/8.

The same principles of play and change can be observed on a large scale as well. The piece is cast in a quasi-variations form, but not in the classical sense of theme and variations in which a theme maintains a rigid formal and harmonic structure while its surface figuration, topic, and affect run through a wide gamut of changes. Rather, the theme and its variants in Liszt's piece remain largely uniform in their overall effect, but are subjected to open-ended reinterpretations of their details. Liszt invites the listener to an aural exploration of the latent possibilities for subtle sonic transformations in the theme's

materials—much like an Impressionist painter who invites the viewer to observe a subject and see its colors from multiple angles of refraction through the kaleidoscopic lens of water.

Consider the eight-bar theme itself, for example: it consists of four measures in A-flat major, followed by four bars in which the same material is obliquely shifted to the remote keys of B major and B^b major, respectively. The first variant (measures 13-21) starts off once again in A^b major in the first four bars, but by its fifth measure, the material is somehow shifted to E major this time, then to E^b major two bars later. In the second E^b-major bar, Liszt throws in a twist in the form of harmonies borrowed from the minor mode: C^b Major (^bVI/E^b minor), and A^b minor (iv/ E^b minor). The passing, ethereal nature of these exotic harmonies mirrors the mercurial, mirage like nature of water. On top of this, Liszt has added shimmering *arpeggiato* octaves and chords in the high treble that ring above the rest of a texture that has been thus far largely consisted of single melodic and bass notes accompanied by arpeggiated patterns in the alto. While the second variant (measures 28-36) returns to the harmonic layout of the original theme, the textural transformations are more marked: the introduction of a 7-6 suspension chain in measure 29, coloristically descending parallel sixth chords in measures 31-32, and the introduction of a murmuring, bubbling trill embedded in the texture at the measures 33-37.

Separating each of these variants are brilliant cadenza-like passages (Example 4.12). The harmonic function of each of these is to invoke the V^7 harmony in preparation for the return to the tonic in the A^b theme. The first cadenza-like passage (measures 10-12) involves a chromatically decorated arpeggiation of the V^7 of A^b . The second (measures 23-27) features a more extended non-functional run of chromatic figurations before settling on the dominant. The rippling figures in measure 26 are reminiscent of those featured in the coda of “Au lac de Wallendstadt.” The third cadenza (measures 38-40) features a rising succession of parallel chromatic thirds leading up the dominant harmony in the form of a high shimmering tremolo in each hand. The final, climactic cadenza (measures 48-49) spells yet another V^7 , over which a stream of broken fifths and sixths forming a pentatonic collection descend from the pinnacle of the treble to the lowest depths of the keyboard. Each of these passages, despite their overall goal of invoking the dominant harmony, is first and foremost a moment of gratuitous color-play. In these cadenzas, the virtuosic element is only partially technical in nature—the display of awe invoked has just as much to do the pianist’s technique as it does with his role as a virtuosic conjurer of sounds and a master of sonic wizardry.

Example 4.12. Cadenza-like passages in “Au bord d’une source”

4.12a.

4.12b.

4.12c.

4.12d.

The confluence of pianistic and coloristic considerations is further illuminated through the examination of the revisions Liszt made between its first version appearing in *Album* and the revised version appearing in *Années*. Liszt once wrote to August Stradal, stressing “how necessary it was to revise the *Album*; because the technique of his virtuosity had

sometimes overrun the musical qualities, especially in ‘Au bord d’une source’ the ‘Vallée d’Obermann’ and in ‘Tell’s Chapel.’”³⁹

Example 4.13. Liszt, Opening of “Au bord d’une source,”

(1st version; *Album d’un voyageur*, 1837-8)



The *Années* version is more elegant in overall effect; it is less clumsy pianistically, and its sonority has been refined. Considering the first two bars alone, we see that Liszt has disposed of the awkward left-hand figurations that must have been difficult to control to the degree necessary to produce the lightness implied by his indication of *dolce con grazia*. Instead, Liszt has moved the sixteenth-note accompaniment to the alto of the right hand, where it can gently and comfortably murmur below the melody, which is now ingeniously divided between the two hands through the use of Liszt’s characteristic cross-handed technique. The physical movements involved not only allow for a more pointed attack on the third note of each beat that adds to the effervescence of the texture, but more crucially add a performative element that represents the “play” at the heart of the piece.

Furthermore, whereas the *Album* version employs a sixteenth-note accompaniment whose contour of high and low notes is in sync with the eighth-note melodic rhythm of the right hand, the *Années* version features a sixteenth-note accompaniment that highlights the

³⁹ Quoted and translated from German in William H. Hughes, Jr., “Liszt’s *Première Année de Pèlerinage: Suisse*: A Comparative Study of Early and Revised Versions” (DMA. diss., Eastman School of Music, 1985), 45.

rhythmic profile of *dotted* eighth notes juxtaposed against the eighth-note melodic rhythm of the right hand. Thus, Liszt's use of rhythmic play to create subtle crosscurrents in the texture of the *Années* version provides an overall lighter effect to the music. Ironically, even though the revised version is less difficult to execute technically, these revisions exemplify an advancement of piano technique and a reimagining of the textural possibilities of piano music. No one other than Liszt, the "king of pianists," would have thought of writing this way at the time. Only he could have demanded such creative physical approaches of piano-playing—not for the sake of technique itself—but for the purpose of drawing refreshing, novel sonorities out of the instrument.

"Pastorale" (1838, rev. 1855)

Originally the untitled third piece in *Album d'un voyageur II: Fleur mélodiques des alpes*, and also published separately c. 1840 as "Fête villageois," the simple yet delightful piece we now know as "Pastorale" was adapted for use in the first book of *Années de Pèlerinage* in 1855. In the process, Liszt, enlivened the tempo from *Allegro pastorale* to *Vivace*, excised a short contrasting middle section, and transposed the piece from G major to E major.⁴⁰ Placed between the two water pieces, "Au Lac de Wallendsadt" and "Au bord d'une source," it is the shortest piece in the first book of *Années*, and along with "Le mal pays," the only one not to bear an inscription in either in *Années* or earlier in *Album*. This is not surprising though, as the simple, light-hearted piece speaks for itself.

⁴⁰ The key of E major has long been associated with the pastorale, dating back to the Baroque. One familiar example that immediately comes to mind is Scarlatti's well-known E-major Sonata, K. 380.

The festive sounds of a peasant village are clearly audible: the droning fifths of bagpipes, and the lilting rhythms of rustic dance, and yet again, as Dolores Pesce observes, another cowherd's song—this time *Kühreigen* from Switzerland's Appenzell region.⁴¹

Example 4.14. *Kühreigen* melodies from the Swiss Appenzell region

Der 3/4-Takt in Nr. 7 (Seite 101) ist ebenfalls ein Kuhreigen:

Further pastoral markers, like the 12/8 and 6/8 meters, and the melodies doubled in thirds and sixths harken back to the Baroque pastorate. In fact, the writing is so limited in keyboard range, confined to only four of the seven octaves available to Liszt, and so devoid of idiomatic piano writing that one could not be faulted for mistaking the score for one of Scarlatti's harpsichord sonatas at first glance.⁴² Considering the anachronistic writing, it must be no coincidence that *Pastorale* is the only piece in *Année I* in which Liszt resorted to the explicit provision of the generic *Ped.* marking at the beginning—revealing that the need for the damper pedal here must not have been immediately obvious from the writing. In all other pieces, the use of the pedal must have been so apparent that Liszt either provided no indication whatsoever and left the subtleties of pedaling to the discretion of the performer, or prescribed very specific pedaling indications whenever he felt the need to clearly indicate his intentions.

⁴¹ Dolores Pesce, "Expressive Resonance in Liszt's Piano Music," in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. R. Larry Todd (New York: Routledge, 2013), 399.

⁴² Admittedly Scarlatti delighted in using his entire range of his keyboard, making the most out of the limited five-octave range available to him.

Example 4.15. Liszt, “Pastorale,” opening (1855)

The image shows the opening of Liszt's "Pastorale" in E major, 6/8 time. The first system consists of two staves. The right staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 6/8 time signature. It is marked "Vivace" and "pp". The left staff begins with a bass clef, the same key signature, and a 6/8 time signature, marked "pp con 2a.". The second system continues with two staves. The right staff has a treble clef, the same key signature, and a 6/8 time signature, marked "pp". It features a triplet of eighth notes and a group of four sixteenth notes. The left staff has a bass clef, the same key signature, and a 6/8 time signature, marked "pp".

In addition, the double-binary form of the piece (A-B-A-B), raises questions about its function. On one hand, the use of the binary itself—perhaps the most ubiquitous of Baroque forms—clearly harkens back to the past. However, the scheme of repetition is curious, since a standard binary consists of an A-A-B-B form. Also, here, A and B are each more like fragments or episodes than complete, self-contained sections of a binary form. The A episode is grounded in the tonic key of E major by a tonic pedal point throughout. The B episode, in the dominant key of B major, arrives unprepared, through neither gradual modulation nor brute-force modulation. In fact, there is no modulation at all. As it as though we are transported to another scene, where the tonal (B major) and temporal (6/8) dimensions are different yet closely related. The scene cuts back to the A theme once more, and yet another time back to B. As we shall see, this abrupt cut-scene technique, so simply and innocently employed here, is a narrative device which Liszt will use in a number of nature pieces to come.

It must also be noted that Liszt went to great lengths to keep the piece as soft—and distant-sounding—as possible. The piece begins *pp* with the rocking accompaniment, and only two bars later, Liszt reminds the performer that the entrance of the melody should be played no louder, also at *pp*. At the B theme in measure 11, he adds accents in each hand and prescribes *un poco marcato*, yet does not commit to a higher dynamic level, as though to warn the performer that the dance, though vivacious, must not be too raucous. We get no further dynamic markings until measure 30, where Liszt indicates *ppp*. The performer can hardly get quieter after this point, but Liszt is insistent: for the remainder of the piece, there are three extended hairpin decrescendo signs, a written-out diminuendo, and finally, *ppp* and *smorzando e ritenuto* indications in the penultimate bar. In effect, the second half of the piece reprises the same material of the first half, heard from increasingly far away. The piece does not so much end as it fades into a distance. Taken together, it is clear that we—the performer and the listener—are not partaking in the village scene in person and up close, but are observing from afar, separated by physical, and perhaps temporal and historical distance. Paul Merrick seems to confirm this notion when he writes that “the composer seems here to be watching the dancing peasants as an outsider, perhaps because they are happy. In the Obermann sense, they are not real people, only part of the scenery.”⁴³ Thus, through intentionally anachronistic writing veiled behind the softest of dynamics and filtered through the rosy hues created by the damper pedal, Liszt’s writing exemplifies the Romantic fetishization of the idyllic past through musical means.

⁴³ Paul Merrick, “The Role of Tonality in the Swiss Book of *Années de Pèlerinage*,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 39, 2-4 (1998): 380.

“Eglogue” (1855)

The morn is up again, the dewy morn,
 With breath all incense, and with cheek all bloom,
 Laughing the clouds away with playful scorn,
 And living as if earth contained no tomb!"

Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Along with “Orage,” “Eglogue” was one of two pieces that Liszt specifically composed for the 1855 *Année*. The title takes its name from a literary genre of bucolic poetry: an eglogue is a short classical poem about a pastoral subject. Despite the evocation of the pastoral *topos* through the inscription, the use of bass and inverted pedal points, and the use of pastoral pentatonic in another *Ranz de chèvre* melody (see example 4.16),⁴⁴ the piece itself does not fit neatly in the historical genre of the *pastorale* genre.

Example 4.16. *Ranz de chèvre* melody in Liszt’s “Eglogue,” m. 6-9 (1855)



Unlike “Pastorale” from earlier in the collection, “Eglogue” is written in a 2/4 meter, not the typical 6/8 or 12/8 for the genre, and employs more typically Romantic and idiomatically pianistic textures. Here, Liszt paints a straightforward, continuous scene, as the emerging activity of the morning can be heard lightly bustling through the continuous eighth notes and triplets embedded in the middle of the texture, interrupted only by the

⁴⁴ Jeremy Day-O’Connell, *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 202

“laughter” and “playful scorn” of the chordal dialogue at measures 35-42 and similar passages throughout, as well as a twittering, birdlike trill at the measure 84.

There are a few harmonic surprises, nevertheless. First, The *Ranz de chèvre* in measures 6-9, originally in A-flat, reappears in C major on two separate occasions (measures 77-81, and measures 89-93)—affirming Liszt’s penchant for mediant key relationships rather than the traditional tonic-dominant axis. Additionally, Humphrey Searle has noted “some unusual twists of harmony, particularly in the use of unrelated 6/3 chords, which were to have an influence on a whole generation of later composers (cf. for instance the Flower maiden scene from *Parsifal*).”⁴⁵

Finally, Liszt’s use of dominant-ninth chords here (measures 21-25 and measures 52-55) is notable for the length of time in which the harmony dangles coloristically, only to resolve in the weakest of manners, on the last eighth note of measures 26 and 56, respectively. Yet, this is only a foretaste of his more extended use of ninth chords later, particularly in “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa D’este,” as well their use by the Impressionists. Here, though, its use is most poignant at the end of the piece, where a surprise Neopolitan harmony resolves to the dominant ninth before the piece fades into the distance.

⁴⁵ Humphrey Searle, *The Music of Liszt* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1954), 28.

Example 4.17. Liszt, “Eglogue,” m. 14-23.

The image shows a musical score for Liszt's "Eglogue" from measures 14 to 23. The score is written for piano and is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of three systems of music. The first system starts at measure 14 with a piano (p) dynamic. The second system starts at measure 22 and includes the instruction "sempre dolce". The third system starts at measure 28. The music is characterized by a simple, flowing melody in the right hand and a steady accompaniment in the left hand.

Despite these minor surprises, the piece remains simple in its charm and affect. John Bell

Young has described this delightfully unassuming piece quite fittingly:

Liszt's 'Eglogue' is all light and air, a cheerful and easygoing work without pretense; it evokes the famous statement, attributed to Freud, that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. Indeed, there is nothing in the least melancholy or troubling rumbling beneath the work's pristine surface, no dark signifiers that point to anything particularly profound or even religious.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ John Bell Young, *Liszt: A Listener's Guide* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009), 39.

“Les cloches de Genève: Nocturne” (1837-8, rev. 1855)

I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me

Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Originally bearing the above inscription along with a dedication to the birth of Liszt's eldest daughter Blandine on December 18, 1835, “Les cloches de Genève” is another piece from *Impressions et Poésies* that Liszt included in the Swiss *Année* after revision. The scope of the 1855 revision is extensive and significant; Liszt reduced the piece from 289 measures to 188, removing an extended section in A^b and a barcarolle in D major, and replacing it with a *cantabile* section with the eloquent melody we know today. Notably, the Byron inscription and the dedication to Blandine were removed. While the original version is more disparate in affect and key, the revised version provides a more unified statement that largely stays within the key of B major. The 1855 version conveys an emotional arc, where the tranquil evocations of the night in the opening and the coda of the piece frame the increasing emotional intensity in the central nocturne, first starting in the *cantabile* and culminating at the apotheosis in the *Animato*.

As a piece of evening music, “Les Cloches” brings together the evocation of a serene nighttime atmosphere with the sound of pealing bells and their religious connotations, awakening latent inner passions. The piece begins with impressionistically tolling bells in the treble, which alternate between one succession of three notes that outlines a broken C[#]-minor triad and another which outlines a broken B major triad—the respective supertonic and tonic chords diatonic to our key of B major. However, in the third measure, the harmonization of the F[#] minor triad with the additional A[#] introduces an element of

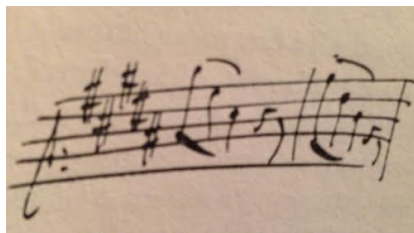
harmonic ambiguity. Yet, the harmonic implications of the bell-tones are not a primary concern when we consider that Liszt likely intended for these notes to represent actual sounds of bells rather than to imply harmonies.

Example 4.18. Liszt, "Les cloches de Genève," opening bells (1855)

The image displays two staves of musical notation. The top staff shows the opening of the piece, marked with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. It features a series of notes in the right hand and rests in the left hand, representing the sound of bells. The bottom staff begins at measure 5, marked *Quasi allegretto* and *pp dolcissimo*, with the instruction *una corda* below the bass line. This section consists of a flowing melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

We have reason to believe that the six notes of the opening two bars are transcriptions of the literal sounds of the church bells that Liszt heard in Geneva. In a letter to Olga von Meyendorff on December 18, 1872 (Blandine's birthday), Liszt wrote:

My best wishes for your trip. I would like to alter geography and place Geneva at Pressberg. If you hear the bells:



let me know. I listened to them many times during the six or eight months I spent in Geneva by the clear and placid Léman.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Franz Liszt, *The Letters of Franz Liszt to Olga von Meyendorff, 1871-1886*, in the Mildred Bliss Collection at Dumbarton Oaks, trans. William R. Tyler (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979), 66.

Conspicuously, Liszt provided no tempo indication to the first four bars, which along with the four fermatas—one separating each of the opening measures—creates a sense of an unmeasured passage of time. Thus, for the first four bars, we are almost “timeless.” The movement truly begins in measure 5, now marked *Quasi Allegretto*, with the steady flow of eighth notes in 6/8. Here, the succession of the six bell-tones are embedded within the texture and veiled under the *una corda*, accompanying a scalar melodic gesture with a trance-like lull that mirrors the regularity of the ostinato accompaniment of “Au lac de Wallenstadt.” Though this music is more lyrical than the opening bars due to the melodic nature of the scale gesture, Liszt still hints at a bell-like articulation through his *portato* indications on each note of the gesture. When the tranquility begins to give way as the bell-like accompaniments spell a diminished-seventh chord in measure 15, we are led to a surprising modulation by way of a fioratura passage in *ppp*, and what William Hughes describes as “a feeling of hushed expectancy during the timeless pause that follows” before the completion of the modulation to the Neapolitan key of C major.⁴⁸ The shift is not only unexpected, but happens in an almost cinematic matter—a cutscene or flashback that appears without the benefit of a smooth transition. Our sense of color, too, has been obliquely shifted, as we are transported briefly away from the inner world of the lyricism and back into observing the outer world where we hear a dialogue between low and high tolling bells. The antiphonal quality of these faraway bells further clarifies the dimensions of our nighttime landscape.

⁴⁸ William H. Hughes, Jr., “Liszt’s *Première Année de Pèlerinage: Suisse*: A Comparative Study of Early and Revised Versions” (DMA. diss., Eastman School of Music, 1985), 232.

Example 4.19. Liszt, "Les cloches de Genève," m. 15-27

The image shows three systems of musical notation for Liszt's "Les cloches de Genève". The first system (measures 15-18) shows a melodic line in the right hand with a *ppp* dynamic marking. The second system (measures 19-22) includes a *un poco marcato* instruction and dynamics of *ppp* and *pp*. The third system (measures 23-27) continues the melodic development with various dynamics and articulations.

After the harmony modulates back into B major, Liszt resumes the scalar melodic gestures, now in the tenor, with a strengthening sense of lyricism. Liszt replaces the earlier *portato* markings with a prescription for *cantando*—signaling that the same gesture that was earlier struck, albeit gently, is now to be sung. This process of absorbing the exterior world into the personal interior voice is completed after a brief foray into D major in measures 40-43 gives way to the affirmation of B major in measure 44, heralding in the central nocturne of the piece.

This ensuing nocturne in 2/4 meter replaces the timid lyricism of the previous section with an unabashed bel canto manner of singing. Liszt is particularly unsubtle about his intentions, marking the section *Cantabile con moto (sempre rubato); la Melodia*

accentato assai. This nocturne's texture, consisting of an eloquent melodic line over a *quasi arpa* accompaniment, remains rather consistent throughout, save for a few rhetorical fioratura passages that temporarily halt its flow. The same melody and texture are amplified through octave writing in an impassioned *Animato* statement employing typical Lisztian histrionics. I will abstain from a detailed bar-by-bar analysis here, because it does little to further discussion of Liszt's innovative evocative techniques. This nocturne, for all its beauty and its melodic and harmonic inspiration, is qualitatively not unlike the specimens of night music put forth by Liszt's contemporaries like Chopin and Schumann. We need only to consider examples like Chopin's many nocturnes and Schumann's "Des Abends" from his Op. 12 *Fantasiestücke* to understand how their lyrically based night-music in their various guises and manifestations are to some degree akin to each other. Liszt's central nocturne here, even with its characteristic Lisztian apotheosis, is no exception. It inhabits solely the inner world. What is notable, though, is the musical atmosphere that remains after this inner world once again recedes. As the nocturne fades out in measures 155-162, we are left again to hear the tolling bells of the Genevan night. This time, however, the bells ring with new harmonies: B⁷, G major, and E major with an added sixth—three functionally unrelated chords, save for the fact they are successively an interval of a third apart—a move which William Hughes calls an "interpolation of vague color-play."⁴⁹ Indeed, these chords serve no tonal functional other than for coloristic purposes—Liszt wrote these chords for the pleasure of their sound.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

Example 4.20. Liszt, "Les cloches de Genève," coda

The image displays a musical score for the coda of Liszt's "Les cloches de Genève." The score is arranged in four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. The first system begins at measure 160 and features a prominent crescendo leading to a series of sixteenth-note runs in the right hand, with a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) and the tempo marking *Tempo I*. The second system starts at measure 164 and continues the melodic lines. The third system begins at measure 172 and includes the tempo marking *Più lento* and the instruction *dolce* (sweetly), with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The fourth system starts at measure 181 and concludes the piece with sustained chords and melodic fragments.

Yet, given the thoroughly Romantic aesthetic of this piece overall—and more broadly, of all the Swiss pieces we have discussed so far—it is not surprising that such impressionistic moments are often overlooked in the commentary surrounding Liszt's contribution towards evocative piano writing.

Chapter 5

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Nature Paintings As Romantic Manifestos:

The Last Two *Transcendental Études*

Transcending Execution: The Search for Poetic Virtuosity

It would at first seem doubtful that a set of twelve virtuosic études, which as a whole represents a pinnacle of pianistic challenges within the entirety of the instrument's repertoire, would harbor illustrative nature pieces. While the most direct implication of the title of Liszt's *Études d'exécution transcendante*, the *Transcendental Études*, is that of the all-encompassing transcendental technique required to perform them, the descriptive titles and vivid, evocative content of the individual pieces point towards a cycle that is much more than a collection of impossibly hard pieces. In fact, Claude Rostand has called the *Transcendental Études* the "the first state of an embryo which will evolve into the core of the programme-music."⁵⁰

To solve this apparent conundrum, it is worth retracing the well-known evolution of these pieces through their three distinct versions. The earliest version, *Étude en douze exercices*, S. 136 (1826), is the work of the adolescent fifteen-year-old Liszt, written in the post-Classical, pre-Romantic style. These youthful works are both far less technically demanding and musically more rudimentary than either of the subsequent versions. We

⁵⁰ Claude Rostand, *Liszt* (New York: Grossman Pub., 1972), 75.

may consider them as germinal sources of motivic and melodic material to be used in the two later sets, which in many cases vary greatly in tempo, figuration, style, and even overall affect from the originals. Next came the *Douze Grandes Études*, S. 137 (1837), which were completely reinvented pieces of monstrous difficulty, typical of Liszt during his virtuoso years of touring until he gave up that life to settle in Weimar in 1848. The final versions of the pieces, the *Études d'exécution transcendante* (1852) that are most often performed today, bear a strong resemblance to their 1837 predecessors, but are more musically refined and less technically difficult.

In many ways, the revisions between 1837 and 1852 mirror Liszt's artistic aims in his revisions of the Swiss nature pieces between the time of *Album d'un voyageur* and the first book of *Années de pèlerinage*. In both cases, Liszt engaged in a process of aesthetic distillation which tempered his earlier extravagances, trading their flamboyance and acrobatics in favor of greater poetic refinement. Also, in both cases, Liszt assigned new titles to the cycles, signaling to the public the way in which he had hoped for them to be considered. It is perhaps telling that the *Grand Études*, are ironically, *more* difficult to execute than the loftier-sounding *Transcendental Études*. Liszt's choice of the word, transcendental, was one loaded with meaning—by “transcendental execution,” he was not just referring to a “transcendentally difficult execution,” but to a virtuosity that transcended execution itself, and showmanship for its own sake, such that the rhetorical power of the performance itself imparted poetic meaning. In these pieces, virtuosity in performance is fundamentally wedded to the poetic impulse, in what Robert Schumann termed “poetic virtuosity.” Pianist Russell Sherman once commented that in Liszt's *Transcendentals*, “there is a health and vitality in the way he ropes together the public

rhetoric, the inner working of the musical form, the erotic impulse and the feeling of generosity and religiosity.”⁵¹

Thus, despite the parallels between the evolution of these études and the Swiss nature pieces, it is no surprise that the études are generally more hyperbolic in effect and affect, even when we are only considering the ones that directly evoke nature—“Paysage,” “Harmonies du soir” and “Chasse-neige”—pieces which are virtuosic in a manner that are from the knuckle-busting “Mazeppa.” While there is something more unassuming about the Swiss nature sketches⁵², the relevant études in this cycle are much bolder manifestos of the Romantic ethos. Jim Samson describes this manifesto in all-encompassing terms:

It was here that the concept of virtuosity, allied with Romantic notions of the composer-performer as a free, in some sense otherworldly, spirit, achieved real dignity. For the Romantic virtuoso was no mere technician; nor was he a slave to the musical work. Liszt did indeed speak of the need to show the ‘most profound respect for the masterpieces of great composers...’ But he also argued that ‘virtuosity is not a submissive handmaid to the composition’. Reconciling these two statements into a single ‘two-fold truth’, in Dahlhaus’s phrase, is the sense of a potency, a capacity to choose without the constraints of a limitation of technique, associated with the Romantic virtuoso. He stood for freedom, for Faustian man, for the individual in search of self-realisation – free, isolated, striving, desiring. Heroically overcoming his instrument, he was a powerful symbol of transcendence.⁵³

In the following discussion, we will explore how this manifesto is inflected in the last two études of the set, in which Liszt employs novel manners of poetic description and impressionistic representation to portray Romantic Nature from dichotomous perspectives: one of sensual, sublime beauty and one of wild, untamed terror.

⁵¹ Allan Kozinin, " Philosophy Provides the Key to a Pianist," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1989.

⁵² This of course, does not include “Vallée d’Obermann,” the centerpiece of the Swiss *Année*, which is more of a symphonic poem for piano than a nature sketch that evokes imagery

⁵³ Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work* (West Nyack, NY; Cambridge University Press, 2003), 75-76.

Étude No. 11: “Harmonies du soir”

We now turn to one of the most vivid instances of pre-Impressionistic writing in the first half of the nineteenth century. Taken as a whole, this piece may not bear an immediate resemblance to the works of Debussy and Ravel. Its effect on the listener is markedly different, due in large part to the impassioned histrionics and thoroughly Romantic nature of its climax. For the current study, most of our interest lies in the remarkably forward-looking opening that constitutes a treasure trove of impressionistic devices later used by Debussy, as we will see in subsequent chapters. Rosen’s charge that Liszt’s “feeling for sound was the greatest of any keyboard composer’s between Scarlatti and Debussy” is rightly justified in this piece. Here, the suspension of normal tonal functions and of the forward flow of time creates a sense of timelessness that allows Liszt to freely evoke the sounds, fragrances, and visual wonders of twilight. It is important to note Liszt’s use of the plural *Harmonies* in the title—suggesting a variegated gamut of harmonies that parallel the kaleidoscopic array of colors of light in the sunset. The two are connected through the *Soleil Couchant* theme in French poetry, to which Liszt has related this piece through the addition of the title in 1851. As Sara Zamir and Juliette Hassine have noted, “the visual aspects of sunset, such as the chromatic spectrum of colors and ever-changing combinations of light and shadow motivated a rich collection of metaphors that were easily recognizable in French poetry from as early as 1817 (Lamartine, *L’Isolement*).”⁵⁴ It is this same theme which inspired Baudelaire’s “Harmonie du soir” from

⁵⁴ Sara Zamir and Juliette Hassine, “Reading Liszt’s *Harmonies du Soir* through the *Soleil Couchant* (Sunset) Theme in French Romantic Poetry,” *Journal of Music and Meaning* 7 (Fall-Winter 2008, Section 5).

Les Fleurs du mal of 1857, which postdates both versions of Liszt's étude, but inspired several of Debussy's compositions, as we will study later in Chapter Eleven.

For now, it is most important to recognize the correlation between the sunset imagery and Liszt's interest in optics here—a concern for light and color in both the visual and aural sense at an unprecedented level. These concerns are immediately apparent in the atmospheric opening of the piece. To begin with, the repeated low A^b octaves that open the piece, which Liszt marked *glocken* in the 1837 version, serve not only to suggest the distant toll of bells but also as pedal points. However, whereas pedal points usually anchor and define the tonality in a passage of music, here they create ambiguity. Above this dominant pedal point in the home key of D^b, the right hand plays coloristic chordal passages consisting of F^b major, and B^{bb} major, and E^{bb} major chords.

Example 5.1. Liszt, "Harmonies du soir," opening (1851)

The musical score for Liszt's "Harmonies du soir" opening (1851) is presented in two systems. The first system begins with the tempo marking "Andantino" and a tempo of quarter note = 80. The key signature is D-flat major (three flats). The piece starts with a low A-flat octave pedal point in the left hand. The right hand features coloristic chordal passages, including F-flat major, B double-flat major, and E double-flat major chords. The score includes dynamic markings such as "p" (piano) and "un poco marcato *". Other markings include "rit." (ritardando) and "dolce" (dolce). The score is numbered 5 at the beginning of the second system.

On paper, the awkward spelling of these chords is justified by the interpretation of the F^b and B^{bb} major as the borrowed mediant and submediant from the parallel minor, functioning through a cycle-of-fifths relationship to tonicize the Neapolitan harmony of E^{bb} major. However, the later revelation of E major as the secondary key of the piece seems to suggest that the first right-hand chord of the piece, F^b major, is actually an enharmonic foreshadowing of E major. This dualism is furthered by the harmonies on the downbeats of measures 5 and 6 (E^b, G^b, E^{bb}, C) which can be enharmonically respelled to function as the diminished seventh (D[#], F[#], A, C) of E major (borrowed from the parallel minor). Its resolution to the F^b/E major harmony in measure 7 indeed fulfills that function. Yet, the same chord in measure 9, when also taking into account the A^b pedal tone such that the entire chord (A^b, C, E^b, G^b, C) spells a dominant ninth chord, functions to resolve to the home key of D^b major in measure 10. This interpretation amounts to a veiled bitonality in this opening, implying the coexistence of two tonal centers, D^b and E. Yet another view holds that the soprano line of these chordal passages form two separate pentatonic collections sounding above the pedal point, to be later developed throughout the piece.⁵⁵ These competing theories may not actually be mutually exclusive, for the seductive power of this opening lies not in its clarity but its ambiguity. After all, the mysteries of the *soleil couchant* lie not in analysis, but in its ineffable mystery and variegated beauty. Since Liszt liberates these chords from their function, using them for the sake of their sound and color above all else, it is perhaps the harmony's effect on the ears that is the most important. Here, Liszt privileges the moment and elevates sensuality. In its pursuit of sensuous evocation, Liszt's opening has important implications for the aesthetics of Impressionism.

⁵⁵ See Minna Shin, "Liszt's Compositional Procedures (harmony, form, and programme in selected piano works from the Weimar period, 1848-1861)" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2000), 51-53.

The suspension of normal tonal functions here is compounded by the suspension of the normal metrical flow of time. In a sense, Liszt creates temporal ambiguity through repeated use of fermatas, an extension of a similar technique he used in the opening of "Cloches de Genève." Here, fermatas appear in measures 3-5 to separate each statement of the pedal point in the left hand and the coloristic chordal passages in the right hand, and then three more times within the span of measure 9. Through the fermatas, Liszt enables the exotic mixture of harmonies—the alchemy of sound—to hang in the air, its sensations to be fully felt while time is temporarily suspended. Moreover, through these first nine measures, the tessitura expands from the both hands in the bass register to a full five measure five octave range sounding in measure 9, revealing of wide physical dimensions of the landscape that Liszt evokes.

The full statement of the first theme of the piece in measure 10, now firmly in D^b major despite some chromatic shading, confirms these physical dimensions through the use of the Lisztian "three-handed effect": the chordal theme, now played in the middle of the keyboard by the left hand, is surrounded on both ends by the right hand playing bells alternately in the bass and treble registers in an antiphonal manner. While the normal metrical flow of time has seems to take hold in the thematic statement, our sense of normalcy is again interrupted when the harmonic ambiguity of the opening returns in measure 16. Here, a descending succession of parallel diminished-seventh chords in the right hand alternates with a descending succession of chords framed by parallel sixths. This remarkable display of tone-painting through nonfunctional chord foreshadows the Impressionist's use of "sound for sound's sake."

Example 5.2. Liszt, “Harmonies du soir,” m. 14-21

After a second iteration of these parallel chords, Liszt takes an unexpected turn towards the chromatic chords of the opening, now enharmonically respelled as E major, A major, and D major. Here, Liszt’s intentional recasting of these chords in their enharmonic forms serves to clarify that the opening chordal passages function not only to emphasize the Neapolitan harmony of the D^b major key (E^{bb} major), but on another level, to suggest another tonal area. In fact, the chords at measures 19-20 not only point backwards to clarify the opening, but also forward to the modulation to E major that begins in measure 30. Thus, the remote D^{bb} harmony in measure 2—the first one to sound above the pedal point—now retrospectively seems to foreshadow the E major tonality later to come, which suggests that the opening bars might be operating almost at a bitonal level. The renewed ambiguity of the enharmonically respelled chords do not last, however, as Liszt seizes the opportunity to use the D major chord’s Neapolitan function to lead the music back into a powerful cadence reaffirming D^b major in measure 21-24.

Thereafter, Liszt orchestrates an emphatic restatement of the first theme, *arpeggiato con molto sentimento*, to summon the richest and fullest wash of sonorities from the instrument. The chords in each hand are alternated, offset by a sixteenth, packed with

as many as four notes per hand and then arpeggiated—it is as though Liszt is trying to fill the harmonies with as many notes and in the densest way possible. This passionate statement is again short-lived, though, as harmonic ambiguity returns when the theme lands on a surprising C^b major chord on measure 30 (soon to be respelled as a B major pedal point). Here again, in a cinematic cut-scene effect, the listener is thrown back to the descending parallel chords in measure 16, now enharmonically respelled with sharps rather than flats due to the a key signature change to E major.

Example 5.3. Liszt, “Harmonies du soir,” m. 29-35

The image displays a musical score for Liszt's "Harmonies du soir," measures 29-35. The score is presented in two systems. The first system, measures 29-31, features a dense texture with many notes per hand, including arpeggiated chords. The second system, measures 32-35, continues this texture, with a "non arpegg." marking in measure 32. The key signature changes from three flats to three sharps between the systems.

However, though the key signature here changes, the pedal point on B in measures 31-35 fails to resolve to the expected E major in measure 38. In fact, Liszt withholds a full cadence that convincingly resolves to E major for nearly another 30 measures, until the arrival of the second theme in E major. Instead, the cadence at measure 38, failing its expected dominant-to-tonic function, resolves down a third to G major for the first appearance of the refrain theme. Liszt then runs this refrain through a gamut of tonal shifts,

moving to A minor and C major, before landing on another B major pedal at measure 49. These are not so much traditionally prepared modulations as they are tonal juxtapositions—oblique shifts in the kaleidoscopic spectrum of light given off by the sunset. The tonal movement finally stabilizes, though, when the B major pedal this time fully and convincingly resolves to the E-major tonality in the second theme at measure 59.

This theme is notable for its heartfelt eloquence; yet its chromatic tendencies are standard fare for Romantic composition, containing little of the exotic and evocative ambiguities of the opening. Instead, our interest here lies in the growing emotional arc, from the *Molto animato – trionfante* section in which the chordal motive from the opening is cast in E major and further modulated, and then finally to the *fff* climax at measure 98, where Liszt returns to D^b major in an emphatic exclamation of the second theme which Schumann called the most fervent climax in all of Liszt's music up until that time. Passionate climactic sections are common in Liszt, as we have already seen in examples such as "Cloches de Genève," but the degree of red-blooded fervor in this apotheosis is unprecedented in his work. To understand why this may be so, we may again turn to the *Soleil Couchant* theme. As Zamir and Hassine write, the Romantics "recruited natural phenomena to the aesthetics of the self-focused yearning to the unattainable and converted them into a vehicle for sentimental inconsistency and to the transformation of the sensation into a vision. A cause-and-effect relation between nature and overflowing powerful feelings was gradually established as an imminent part of the Romantic tradition, where nature turned into an expressive, mediating artistic language." In other words, the observation of nature and the raw sensations that its sights, sounds, and smells stimulate in the Romantic individual goes on to ignite deeper, revelatory experiences. It speaks to the

same duality between “outer nature” and “inner nature” that Alfred Brendel referred to in his comments about the Swiss volume of *Années*—only here taken to an extreme. It is important to recognize this trope, as it is one of the primary drivers behind the transformation of the seemingly impressionistic aesthetic of the opening into the thoroughly Romantic passion at the height of the piece. It is therefore also a primary distinguishing feature distinguishing Liszt’s nature pieces and those of the Impressionists.

Étude No. 12: “Chasse-neige”

It must be no coincidence that Liszt saved the most powerful and visionary piece in the *Transcendental Études* as the finale of the cycle. Although the title “Chasse-neige” translates to “snow plow” in modern French usage, its meaning during Liszt’s time can most closely be likened to “snowstorm” or “snow-whirls.” Busoni has described this piece as “the noblest example, perhaps, amongst all music of a poetizing nature—a sublime and steady fall of snow which gradually buries landscape and people.”⁵⁶ Thematically, it can be considered as a complement to the previous étude. If “Harmonies du soir” represents man’s awe of the wondrous beauty of nature, then “Chasse-neige” depicts him trembling before the relentless and violent forces of nature. Like two sides of the same coin, these études reveal contrasting sides of Romantic Nature; one that inspires admiration and stirs the passions, and another that inspires fear and invokes terror. The dichotomous relationship between these two études is further supported by their relative key relationships: D^b major in “Harmonies du soir”, and B^b minor in “Chasse-neige.” The

⁵⁶ Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music* (London: Dover 1965), 162

relative major to relative minor pairing is a key scheme that Liszt deliberately maintains for the entire cycle, thereby creating six pairs of études—it is here in the final pair, though, where the relationship between the two études goes beyond a tonal dichotomy and into a topical one.

Further examination reveals the full extent of the duality between the two pieces. Both pieces begin with atmospheric openings characteristic of the emotions to be later amplified. In “Harmonies du soir,” the opening conveys a myriad of enchanting sensations through an impressionistic evocation of light and color. While the affect of the opening in “Chasse-neige” is quintessentially Romantic in its despair and yearning, the evocation of the atmosphere and the elements through quivering tremolos enshrouds the music in what can be likened to the “mists” of Impressionism. Both pieces begin in key signatures of five flats, and somehow end up modulating in to the remote key of E major with four sharps. Both pieces rely on cycles of thirds on large-scale tonal level: in “Harmonies du soir,” the mediant tonal pairing of D^b major and E major is furthered by the prominence of G major, while “Chasse-neige” moves from B^b minor to E major by way of D^b major. Despite these remote shifts, both pieces recapitulate to their original keys at their respective climaxes. There, “Harmonies du soir” reaches an apotheosis which projects passion of the highest order, while “Chasse-neige” builds up to a point of crisis invoking the utmost terror. From there, each piece pacifies into its respective conclusion. “Harmonies du soir” ends with a feeling of intimate warmth, while “Chasse-neige” ends in isolated despair.

In spite of the significance of this relationship between the last pair of *Transcendental Études*, our interest in “Chasse-neige” lies well beyond it. On the surface,

“Chasse-neige” appears to be an étude on tremolo technique, but what is most remarkable about the piece in its more fundamental level as a poetic work is its ability to supersede—*transcend*, if you will—the use of the tremolo as a merely pianistic technique or effect as its own sake, and as a means toward a higher evocative and poetic end. Through “Chasse-neige” Liszt elevated the tremolo from an oftentimes crude effect and transformed it into an organically integrated part of the texture. While most of the foremost composers of piano music largely avoided tremolos due to the difficulty in artfully incorporating them, Liszt employed the device regularly to varying levels success in many contexts—not only in the nature-pieces of the current study, but also in his transcriptions, paraphrases, and virtuosic showpieces.⁵⁷ Even in his own storm pieces, Liszt’s use of tremolos in “Chasse-neige” is quite different from the previous works discussed in this study. Tremolos in the previous storm pieces represented discrete *events* like thunder and protruded from the musical texture. As Jonathan Kregor writes of “Un soir dans les montagnes” and the fourth movement of Beethoven’s *Pastorale* Symphony before it, “in both...peals of thunder serve as important structural markers, appearing regularly to help add definition to a quasi-rondo form.” Here, they are not discrete events that serve as temporal markers, but a continuous presence throughout the piece.

⁵⁷ We only have to look at any of the *Hungarian Rhapsodies* to see that Liszt himself was susceptible to rather tawdry uses of tremolos.

Example 5.4. Liszt, “Chasse-neige,” opening (1851)

Andante con moto [♩=100]

p

simile

Admittedly, Liszt had already begun exploring the technique of near-constant use tremolos in the first of the six *Paganini Études*, which were initially written and revised around the same time as the twelve *Grandes Études* of 1837 and the subsequent *Transcendental Études* of 1851. The first *Paganini Étude* poses a similar technical challenge as “Chasse-neige”: projecting a clear and smooth melodic line while maintaining control of continuous tremolos. However, the *Paganini Étude*’s tremolos, however constant, are still extremities in either the top or bottom of the texture, and are still primarily drivers of drama and tension. As a pianistic emulation of Paganini’s Sixth Caprice, after all, Liszt’s étude still treats the tremolo primarily as a sound effect. In “Chasse-neige,” however, Liszt has subtly absorbed the tremolo into the inner part of the texture itself, encompassed by the melody above and bassline below as it undulates often simultaneously in both hands. In

comparison, the tremolos of “Chasse-neige” have become an ever-present element in the atmosphere—the vibrations of the forces of nature themselves. An examination of some of the technical revisions that occurred between the 1837 and 1851 versions reveals how Liszt refined his writing towards removing cumbersome technical obstacles in favor of more refined and artful textures. This can be seen in the revisions to measure 22 of the 1837 version, and its analogous place in measure 9 of the 1851 version (see Example 5.5), where his decision to remove the difficult leaps in both hands from the melodic and bass lines to the tremolos, and instead to embed the tremolo within the right hand melodic octaves, frees the performer to direct greater focus and control towards shaping the melodic line.

Example 5.5a. Liszt, *Douze Grandes Études*, No. 12 (1837), m. 9

espressivo (141) 109

Example 5.5b. Liszt, “Chasse-neige,” opening (1851)

By sacrificing virtuosity—and perhaps some technical value in the work as an étude—in favor of greater poetic expression, he confirms that the addition of the titles were no mere afterthoughts, but a part of a greater process of refinement and clarification in vision in which he actively made revisions in service to these poetic and evocative ends.

Of course, the undulating inner-voice texture had precedents in the finale of Beethoven's Op. 109 Sonata, though those undulations were trills rather than tremolos.

Example 5.6. Beethoven: Sonata in E major, Op. 109, III., m. 158-159; mm. 165-165 (1820)

From Beethoven, Liszt learned that the most gentle of vibrations could intensify into the most powerful of tremors. From his own earlier work, "Un soir dans montagnes," Liszt learned to transform gently undulating texture into stormy chromatic-scale waves.

Example 5.7. Liszt, "Un soir dans les montagnes," (1835-6), m. 97-99

Der Sturm
Allegro agitato M. M. $\text{♩} = 96$

However, the extent of the sheer brutality and violence of Liszt's chromatic deluge as it grows through a span of fifteen measures, from measures 38-52, is unprecedented in the literature. As Jim Samson writes, "Liszt allows his iridescent backgrounds to gather cumulative complexity until they begin to advance somewhere close to front of stage, not just shading in the space around the melody taking over from it the responsibility for articulating the larger structural crescendo that characterize the étude."⁵⁸ It must also be noted that these chromatic passages were additions to the 1852 version; the analogous passages in the 1837 version continued the double-tremolo texture in the two hands. Instead, the 1852 transforms the "snow-whirls" of the tremolos into a full-scale blizzard of tremendous force. Here again, it is apparent that Liszt's titles are not mere afterthoughts; he actively made changes to the music to depict and support the pictorial images evoked by the title.

Example 5.8. Transformation of Texture from 1837 to 1851

Liszt, *Douze Grandes Études*, No. 12 (1837), m. 37-39

⁵⁸ Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work* (West Nyack, NY; Cambridge University Press, 2003), 91.

Liszt, "Chasse-neige" (1852), m. 47-51

After the last chromatic run, the piece gradually pacifies through canonic statements of the thematic material. While the left hand in the 1837 version participates in this canonic dialogue with octaves marked *rinforzando*, in the 1852 revision Liszt thins out the octaves into single notes and removes the *rinforzando* indication, and instead later marks *poco a poco decrescendo to mezzo piano*.

It is noteworthy that the piece—and the entire cycle—ends on an introspective note. With as grand a title as *Études d'exécution transcendante*, one might rightly expect a virtuosic ending of the highest order, but instead Liszt ends his cycle poetically. This lends further support to the assertion that as a whole, Liszt's *Transcendental Études* sought not to showcase transcendently difficult execution for its own sake, but to impart deeper poetic meaning made possible only by a virtuosity that was unhindered by physical limitations.

Chapter 6

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Twitters, Murmurs, and the Sounds of Faith:

Nature Pieces of the Roman Period

Following a failed marriage attempt in October 1861 and the death of his daughter Blandine in September 1862, Liszt suffered through a dark period in his personal life in which he increasingly turned to his faith and spirituality. It was during this time that he took minor orders of the Catholic Church, became an abbé, and went into semi-religious retirement. These personal events left a distinct mark on his music during this period. While his spirituality was clearly on display throughout his earlier works, it intensified into a more overt display of religiosity in many of the pieces of his Roman period (1862-1868), especially the two *Franciscan Legends*. On the other hand, the innocent delight in sensual pleasure during his earlier music, most notably in “Au bord d’une source,” has also intensified in a more luxuriant sensuality and exploration of mysticism in his two Concert Études of this period. Broadly speaking, his music during this time displayed a further refinement of his virtuosity that started during the Weimar years. There is no shortage of brilliance, but with the possible exception of the “Spanish Rhapsody,” his penchant for the personally glorifying bravura of the Romantic-heroic variety seems to have receded in favor of a more poetic virtuosity. The bold creative spirit of Weimar remains, but tempered by age, experience, and tragedy, and an increasing reliance on religious spirituality.

“Waldesrauschen,” from *Zwei Konzertetüden*, S.154 (1862-3)

Written in 1862 for the Sigmund Lebert and Ludwig Stark *Klavierschule*, the *Zwei Konzertetüden* represent Liszt’s first essays in the genre for more than a decade since the publication of the *Transcendentals* in 1852. Alan Walker described the two études as “nostalgic annotations to the spectacular keyboard pieces of the Weimar period” that “[stir] old memories of the *Transcendental Études*.”⁵⁹ Indeed, these two études, though somewhat understated in comparison, seem to pick up where the *Transcendentals* left off. “Waldesrauschen”—most closely translated as “Forest Murmurs”—is the first in the pair and evokes the mysterious sounds of the forest and the rustling of the wind blowing through a woodland landscape. Forest imagery might at first seem to point to the pastoral topic in this piece, but the piece exudes a seductive, mystical quality that belies the usual idyllic innocence of the pastoral affect. Rather, the elements of enchantment and mysticism seem to be related to the supernatural subject matter of its sister piece “Gnomenreigen,” and the earlier “Feux Follet,” though its decidedly sensuous aura recalls the opening of “Harmonies du soir.”

Just as he did with the clashing seconds that filled the soundscape of “Au bord d’une source,” Liszt here also makes coloristic, nonfunctional use of tightly packed dissonances for evocative purposes. The quivering figure in the right hand’s opening spells out a dominant chord (A^b major) with an added sixth in the form of an F. As we will later discuss, the added-sixth chord was a favorite harmony of Debussy’s, while Ravel made notable use of it as well. Similarly, the tonic harmony (D^b major) in the fourth bar includes an added second in the form of an E^b. We can surely imagine the harmonic function of the passage

⁵⁹ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Final Years* (New York: Alfred A. Knof, 1996), 41.

remaining intact if Liszt had omitted these added tones, but the music would lose a great deal of its spellbinding enchantment. It is the subtle additions of these exotic tones that enable Liszt's aural seduction.

Example 6.1. Liszt, "Waldesrauschen," opening (1862-3)

The musical score for Liszt's "Waldesrauschen," opening (1862-3) is presented in two systems. The first system is marked "Vivace" and "pp dolcissimo". The right hand part features a descending chromatic scale starting on F, with fingerings 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 4, 3, 2, 1. The left hand part features a similar descending chromatic scale starting on F, with fingerings 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 4, 3, 2, 1. Performance instructions include "una corda" and "vibrato" in the first system, and "dolce con grazia" in the second system. The second system continues the chromatic scales, with the right hand starting on F and the left hand starting on F. Fingerings for the right hand are 5, 4, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2. The score includes a "3" above the first measure of the second system and a "*" above the first measure of the second system.

Liszt treats the opening melody in a similar manner, coloring the forest's mysterious song with chromatic tones that imbue an otherwise ordinary diatonic scale with a sense of exoticism. In measures 2-4, the chromatic neighbors of D \flat , B \flat , G \flat , and E \flat in the left hand each respectively embellishes the diatonic D \flat , C, A \flat , and F. Melodically, the piece is largely monothematic, relying almost exclusively on the transformation of material in the opening (measures 2-5) that consists of the two-bar downward scale described above, followed by a one-bar upwards arpeggiation that is then immediately sequenced upward once more. It is this chromatic and sequential nature of the thematic material that harbors the latent potential for continual transformation in this piece through modulation and sequence. William McIntosh has remarked that the theme is "treated in an almost Baroque manner, in

that it is continually spun out and unfolded in something like a ‘stream of consciousness’ fashion. The theme is sequential in nature and lends itself to further sequential expansion.”⁶⁰

Indeed, it is the exploration of this same material from many different angles and harmonic lenses that captures our interest. Liszt here again displays his penchant for oblique modulations to keys related through mediant rather than dominant relationships. The tonality of the piece from the opening until measure 26 oscillates between D^b to E major—like the harmonic movement in “Harmonies du soir.” From there, it shifts to F major (the mediant of D^b itself) and then up another mediant to A major. As Dale John Weiler has noted, this mediant ascent in keys through D^b, F, and A outline an augmented triad, a favorite sonority of Liszt that he employed with increasing frequency in his later music.⁶¹ Harmonic ambiguity reaches a high point when Liszt cancels the key signature at measure 45, not because the section is in C major or A minor, but because the music is keyless for more than a page (Example 6.2). Here, Liszt takes the thematic materials he previously cast in various shades of mediant-related keys and instead subjects them to sequential modulation in his favored diminished-seventh harmonies. At the same time, he treats them in canonic, invertible counterpoint to further the buildup of tension in this section. The tonal context here is not a “key,” but a sonority—that of the diminished-seventh chord.

⁶⁰ William McContish, “A Study of the Technical and Stylistic Innovations of Franz Liszt as Demonstrated in an Analysis of Selected Études.” (D.Ed Diss., Teachers College at Columbia University, 1993).

⁶¹ Dale John Weiler, “Franz Liszt’s Solo Piano Music from his Roman Period, 1862-1868” (DMA diss., University of Oklahoma, 1999), 75-76.

Example 6.2. Liszt, “Waldesrauschen,” m. 45-48 (1862-3)

The image shows a musical score for Liszt's "Waldesrauschen" measures 45-48. It is presented in two systems, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system begins at measure 45 with the instruction "poco a poco più agitato" and "tre corde marcato". The second system begins at measure 47. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and dynamic markings like "p" and "f".

The effect of this is to build ever-increasing tension until the climatic statement of the full theme in its original D^b major at measure 61. What follows is characteristically Lisztian in its fervor, and it is only when the passion has completely cooled at measure 88 that we are left to hear the murmurings of the forest once again. Thus, as in many of the other pieces we have already seen, the music that is painted so impressionistically at the beginning of the piece rises in an emotional arch towards a heated Romantic climax—although here, perhaps not to the revelatory heights of the apotheosis in “Harmonies du soir.” And yet again, the piece ends impressionistically in a recall of the opening material.

The Franciscan Legends, S. 175 (1862-63, published 1865-66)

Exploring famous legends about miracles performed by Liszt’s patron saints, the *Deux Légendes* exemplify the complex intersectionality between art, nature, and faith in this strain of Liszt’s output. While most of the works discussed thus far can be primarily

considered as nature works infused with a strong sense of spirituality, the two Franciscan Legends tip the balance in the opposite direction, such that nature recedes into the backdrop of the narrative, while spirituality emerges and becomes outright religiosity. Like the previous works, these Legends evoke images, moods, and sensations, but here their purpose is to enhance the musical storytelling. Thus, the Legends are first and foremost religious pieces. In fact, Liszt deemed them worthy for a performance for Pope Pious IX in 1863 when the Pope paid the composer a private visit in his quarters at the church of the Madonna del Rosario.⁶²

Once again, as in the two water pieces from *Années* and the last two *Transcendental Études*, these two pieces form a complementary pair. Here, the two Legends depict miraculous acts, one in the most peaceful of pastoral settings as St. Francis of Assisi preaches to a flock of attentive birds in the forest, and the other on the tumultuous sea as St. Francis of Paola walks on water to silence non-believers. While the former uses the high treble register to express its miraculous charms, the latter counterbalances it with its reliance on bass sonority to convey power and grandeur. While the majority of Liszt's solo piano pieces are rooted in a specific source of extramusical inspiration, few come as close as the *Legends* to being actual program music⁶³—a genre that in its purest form had hitherto been reserved for the evocative powers of the orchestra. Yet, as we will see, Liszt's remarkable treatment of the piano's resources here shows that his favored instrument was equally up to the task of musical storytelling.

⁶² Adrian Williams, *Portrait of Liszt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 389.

⁶³ "Mazzeppa" and the "Dante" Sonata come to mind here, although in neither case did Liszt purposely include literary passages that could serve as programs to the publications of his music, as he did with the first edition of the Legends.

Legend No. 1: “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds”

The captivating first Legend has often been overlooked in discussions surrounding Liszt’s contributions toward musical Impressionism. In harmony and texture, it builds on Liszt’s earlier experiments and offers vivid new possibilities. In its musical storytelling, the programmatic layout of the narrative is unlike any of the pieces discussed previously.

Liszt’s growing concern with discovering novel coloristic possibilities in the piano here continues his experiments from the contemporaneous “Waldesrauschen.” Indeed, the opening in this piece is just enchanting as the étude. The downward figuration arpeggiates a ninth chord with an added sixth, reminiscent of the shimmering figures in the opening of “Waldesrauschen.” What follows is a remarkable compendium of onomatopoeic sounds which Alan Walker has described as “ornithological effects.”⁶⁴ The quivering trills can be either heard as representative of bird trills themselves, or of their wings fluttering in the air (Example 6.3). Their devolution into swirling chromatic figuration at measure four, suggestive of flight, would seem to point to their latter, while the embellished thirds seem to represent the voices of the birds themselves in the form of individual chirps and twitters. Here, the alternating sounding of these chirps, one octave apart, serves not only to create the impression of chatter among the birds, but also suggests a physical distance between the birds— one chirping here, another over there, in an antiphonal dialogue centered around the fluttering trills. At the conclusion of a more extended, colorful wash of the opening arpeggiated figuration at measure 13, Liszt returns to the trills and twitters—this time adding the playful element of his favorite cross-handed technique, further emphasizing the antiphonal nature of the bird twitter (Example 6.4).

⁶⁴ Alan Walker, *Liszt: The Final Years* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996), 57.

Example 6.3. Liszt, “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” opening

The image shows the opening of Liszt's piece, marked *Allegretto*. It consists of three systems of piano music. The first system (measures 1-4) features a right-hand melody of eighth notes and a left-hand accompaniment of chords. The second system (measures 5-8) shows a more complex right-hand texture with sixteenth-note patterns and a left-hand accompaniment. The third system (measures 9-12) continues the right-hand melody and includes a *p* dynamic marking.

Example 6.4. Liszt, “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” m. 12-15

The image shows measures 12-15 of the piece. Measure 12 begins with a right-hand melody of eighth notes and a left-hand accompaniment. Measure 13 features a *p dolce* marking and a right-hand melody of sixteenth notes. Measures 14 and 15 continue the right-hand melody and include a *p* dynamic marking.

Soon, the birds' fragmentary chirping grows into a full-fledged birdsong in the right hand at measure 18. The birdsong itself is light, innocent, and charming. Like the earlier

twitters, it is also composed of thirds, but here they are used for both lyrical and ornamental purposes. Meanwhile, the bottom line of the left hand accompanies with repeated thirds, and occasionally, more cross-handed chirps. What is most remarkable though, is the inside of the texture, which consists of a continually vibrating filigree of incredible intricacy and variety. These colorful vibrations are ever-changing, starting as neighbor-note trills that continually move about different pairs of notes, inserting an extra note for chromatic embellishment here and there. While they usually flutter in thirty-second notes, they are occasionally interrupted by sixteenth-note triplets and rests (measures 21 and 26), widened into tremolos between notes that are a third and fifth apart (measures 30-35), and eventually transformed into wavering chromatic clusters of notes (measure 39). These continual vibrations embedded within the inside layer of the texture were first explored extensively by Liszt in “Chase-neige,” but what a different effect (and affect) they produce here! While the bleak, desolate landscape evoked in the étude left the patterns in its tremolo vibrations mostly unchanged, Liszt shows here their full potential for limitless variation of color.

As the birdsong dies down, we move into the central section of the piece as it depicts St. Francis’s sermon, starting in measure 52. In marked contrast to the suggestive chirps and birdsong of the opening section, Liszt represents the sermon through the use of monodic recitativo—a musical-rhetorical device first invented for the purpose of elevating speech to the ethos of Greek drama in Monteverdi’s landmark opera, *Orfeo*.

Example 6.5. Liszt, “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” m. 51-57

Recitativo
Un poco ritenuto il tempo

Its use here may seem unexpected, since such heightened, declamatory rhetoric is antithetical to the very nature of Liszt’s evocative pieces. As stated in Chapter 3, impressionistic music tends to suggest rather than states. Yet, considering this piece as a work of religious storytelling first and foremost, it is no wonder that the recitativo, a favorite rhetorical device of Liszt’s, is employed here when it is so absent in most of his evocative nature pieces. Preaching, after all, is one of the oldest forms of persuasive rhetoric. Liszt’s notation here even mirrors the actual vocal notation of operatic recitativo, as he elects not to beam together metrical groupings of notes.

The four statements of the recitativo in the middle register are each followed by the bird’s fluttering and twittering response in the high treble. Here, the contrast of texture and tessitura not only separates St. Francis from the birds, but their continual juxtaposition is itself reminiscent of the call-and-response type prayers so common in Catholic services between a priest and his congregation. Following the sermon, St. Francis offers his blessing

to the birds in a D^b passage (enharmonically, another mediant relationship), represented by the cross motive (A^b, B^b, D^b) at measure 72, after which the birds scatter north, south, east, and west.

Example 6.6. Liszt, “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” m. 72-76

In the end, the first *Legend* represents an unprecedented attempt at musical naturalism: never before had birdsong been so vividly captured in keyboard music. Lacking the chromatic resources of the nineteenth century and an instrument capable of the colored nuance, the attempts by Baroque masters like Couperin’s “Le coucou” understandably seem two-dimensional. John Ogdon has maintained that there was no successor to Liszt’s attempt until the work of Olivier Messiaen, whose more scientifically precise transcription of birdsong naturally reflected the concerns and resources of the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Liszt’s purpose, after all, was not scientific transcription, but imaginative evocation.

⁶⁵ John Ogdon, “Solo Piano Music 1861-86,” in *Franz Liszt: the Man and his Music*, ed. Alan Walker (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970), 137-8. Ogdon leaves out any mention of Ravel’s “Oiseaux tristes” from *Miroirs*—perhaps understandably so, since Ravel’s listless, depressed birds bear little resemblance to Liszt’s charming, cheerful creatures.

Legend No. 2: “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves”

While water is a central element of the miracle portrayed in this legend, it is water of a much different nature. It is neither the water of the serene lake in “Au lac de Wallenstadt,” nor that of the effervescent spring in “Au bord d’une source”—it is the tumultuous waters of the violent sea. In this regard, this work is as much a piece of storm music as it is water music. Thus, Liszt draws from the same raw materials—trills, tremolos, arpeggios, and chromatic scales—used in his earlier water and storm pieces, to be amplified here to majestic Biblical proportions. For Liszt, the visual and pictorial inspirations for this piece are not purely abstract, as he owned an actual painting of the miraculous scene by Eduard Jakob von Steinle, displaying it on the walls of his study in Weimar. His admiration for the painting is well documented, as he once wrote to Wagner of the “*Saint Franciscus*, whom Steinle has drawn for me quite splendidly.” Liszt’s description of the painting illuminates for us the visual imagery he must have associated with the legend: “on his outspread cloak he strides firmly, steadfastly over the tumultuous waves—his left hand calmly holding burning coals, his right hand giving the sign of blessing.”⁶⁶

These “tumultuous waves” begin ever so calmly in the piece, though, as the piece begins monophonically, almost in a manner of a cantor’s intonation before a Psalm. Whether or not we accept this interpretation of the opening gesture as an intonation, its performative quality and rhetorical effect are undeniable, setting both the tone of the narrative and the theatrical stage of the ensuing drama. What follows, though, is indeed an

⁶⁶ Letter to Richard Wagner on May 31, 1860. Quoted in *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters*, trans. and ed. Adrian Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 500.

entrance of a chorale-like hymn theme, exuding a feeling of the utmost religious devotion while accompanied by a tremolando left hand which projects an awe-inspiring grandeur.

Example 6.7. Liszt, “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves,” opening

The image shows the opening of Liszt's piece "St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves." It consists of two systems of musical notation. The first system is marked "Andante maestoso" and "mf*". The second system is marked "non troppo lento" and "p tremolando". The left hand features a prominent tremolo pattern of repeated notes, while the right hand plays a melodic line with occasional wave-like scale fragments and arpeggiated figures.

Yet, these same tremolos also carry an ominous feeling, and a latent potential to be stirred into more “troubled waters”—to borrow Byron’s words as they were inscribed to “Au lac de Wallendstadt.” This potential is gradually realized as the tremolo figures are occasionally interrupted by wave-like scale fragments and rolling arpeggiated figures containing repeated notes (measure 20). At measure 32, Liszt introduces more extended waves of chromatic scales that further feed the brewing ocean storm. Moreover, the aural pictorialism of these musical effects is enhanced by the visual notation itself. Consider the striking effect of the many black noteheads laid out across the page in various wave-like visual patterns—their up-and-down contours tracing the crests of the waves, with their

visual compactness or expansiveness on the page representing the relative breadth of the multitude of waves. One could even observe an artful visual aesthetic to this notation.⁶⁷

Example 6.8a. Liszt, “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves,” m. 20-23

The musical score for Example 6.8a shows measures 20-23. The right hand (treble clef) plays chords and moving lines, while the left hand (bass clef) plays a complex, rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth-note runs. The score includes performance markings such as 'cresc.' and 'legato'.

Example 6.8b. Liszt, “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves,” m. 32

The musical score for Example 6.8b shows measure 32. The right hand (treble clef) plays chords and moving lines, while the left hand (bass clef) plays a complex, rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth-note runs. The score includes performance markings such as 'p'.

Meanwhile, as the texture grows more agitated, its range is increasingly widened as well. While the opening intonation begins with both hands in the bass register, the right hand subsequently moves up to the tenor when the main hymn enters, and then sequentially higher and higher until we reach the soprano. Yet, all the various figures that evoke water remain firmly rooted in the bass, owing to the gravity of the subject. Unlike

⁶⁷ At the risk of extending this pictorialism too far into the realm of visual arts, I would point out that the cumulative impression conveyed by the many individual black noteheads can be likened to the effect of Pointillism.

When the main melody returns at measure 42, the wavelike scales in the left hand are diatonic—their chromaticism having been flushed out in the previous passage. If we were to take diatonicism to represent spiritual purity here as it did in “Au lac de Wallenstadt,” then it is possible to interpret this moment as symbolic of St. Francis taming of the unruly forces of nature through miraculous and divine power. Indeed, Alan Walker relates that the moral of the Legend, according to Liszt, “was to show that the laws of faith govern the laws of nature.”⁶⁸ Moreover, Liszt’s use of the piano’s registers to suggest physical dimensions here is two-fold. First, the up-and-down contour of each individual scalar run suggests a vertical dimension of height for these cresting waves, in a manner closely related to the pictorial and visual implications of the notation that was described above. Second, the antiphonal alternation of the scalar runs sounding one octave apart adds a horizontal dimension to the musical canvas. Like the “raging waters” of the Steinle’s painting, the cresting waves of the Liszt’s ocean storm stretch across the horizon.

As the dramatic force of the narrative builds towards a highpoint, Liszt uses every resource at his disposal to project the ferocity of the waves and thunder of the ocean storm. The storm effects of “Un soir dans les montagnes,” “Orage” and “Chasse-neige”—chromatic scales, octaves—are combined, transformed and amplified here in violent, cluster-like chromatic figures (measure 73), double-note chromatic thirds (measure 79), diminished-seventh chords played by quickly alternating hands (measure 86), and his trademark alternating “Liszt octaves” (measure 91).

⁶⁸ Alan Walker, *Liszt: The Final Years* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996), 59.

Example 6.10. Liszt, “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves,” virtuosic storm effects

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Liszt's "St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves." The first system (measures 72-83) features a dense, chromatic texture with markings for *stringendo f* and *rinforz. f*. The second system (measures 84-88) includes the marking *accelerando legato*. The third system (measures 89-92) is marked *più stringendo non legato*. The notation is complex, with many beamed notes and dynamic markings throughout.

The sound produced from the instrument here is massive, and one must imagine how much more raw and robust these tumultuous bass passages would have sounded on Liszt’s straight-strung Érard rather than the homogenized sound of the modern cross-strung piano. The symphonic scope of Liszt’s piano is on full display here. In their sheer scale and awe-inspiring effect, these chromatic and arpeggiated runs surpass even those at the height of “Chasse-neige” in what must have been the most extended and magnificent display of

musical pictorialism in his output. To call the passage from measures 85-98 a musical “tsunami” would not be an exercise of hyperbole. Yet, unlike “Chasse-neige,” the brutality and violence of malevolent Nature here are victimless—its unruliness again tamed into submission by divine power and the “laws of faith.” This is apparent as the peak of the storm is not the actual climax of the piece—instead it functions to build towards the triumphant return of the main hymn melody at the *Allegro maestoso e animato* at measures 99-103.

The magnificent arrival of this section recalls the similarly glorious arrival of the *Grandioso* in the B-minor Sonata. It is not a coincidence, perhaps, that John Ogdon has pointed to the parallels between the end of this *Allegro maestoso* and the end of the Sonata, writing that “the use of the caesura towards the end is a dramatic gesture characteristic of the Weimar period (the B minor Sonata, for instance); this gesture in which sincerity and theatricality combine, is one of the most imaginative uses of *silence* in the music of the nineteenth century, producing an almost physical impact; we literally hear the piano cease playing.”⁶⁹ The totality of this section, the buildup to it, and the culminating gesture at the end serve to separate it from the apothotic sections of the other nature pieces we have discussed. Whereas the climaxes of the previous pieces were intense utterances of personal spirituality, the culmination of this Legend is a public proclamation of communal faith. Following the caesura, though, Liszt offers a quiet soliloquy in the *Lento* section, where recitative is again invoked, just as it had been in the first Legend (Figure 6.11). Although the vocal line here is not explicitly marked as recitative like the “sermon” section

⁶⁹ John Ogdon, “Solo Piano Music 1861-86,” in *Franz Liszt: the Man and his Music*, ed. Alan Walker (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970), 139.

of the first Legend, it clearly recalls operatic *recitativo secco* in its disjointed rhetorical nature, marked by periodic punctuation in the form of short, harpsichord-like rolled chords. This amounts to a private confession, perhaps, but its momentary expression of doubt and uncertainty are laid to the rest as the piece ends in a bold, optimistic affirmation of faith.

Example 6.11. Liszt, “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves,” climax and recitative

The image displays two staves of musical notation. The upper staff, starting at measure 136, features a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It contains a complex, rhythmic passage with numerous slurs, accents, and dynamic markings such as 'ten.' and 'sf'. The lower staff, starting at measure 139, is marked 'Lento accentuato assai con somma espressione' and features a more melodic line with slurs and accents. Both staves include fingering numbers and other performance instructions.

To conclude, the two Franciscan Legends demonstrate just how far-reaching the evocative powers of the piano could be in Liszt’s hands. They encompass opposite ends of the spectrum of the natural world: from picturesque depictions of the twittering of birds, the fluttering of their wings, to violent projections of waves and thunder. As religious pieces, they invoke the affective power of public sermon and personal confession in the form of operatic recitative, as well as communality of faith through congregational hymn. Given the wide-ranging natural and spiritual world represented in these pieces, it is perhaps not a coincidence, then, that Liszt also wrote orchestral versions of these works. While these remained undiscovered until 1975, the matter of whether they preceded the piano works, or vice versa, is still subject to scholarly debate. It is telling, however, that

while Liszt published and performed the piano works in public a number of times, he made no attempt at bringing the orchestral versions to light through performance or publication. Nor did he ever make mention of them in his correspondences. Whichever version came first—and it may very well be that Liszt worked on both more or less concurrently—the piano versions were no mere “transcriptions” of orchestral works. They are piano works in their own right. Each Legend makes a remarkably successful use of the piano’s evocative, pictorial, and affective resources, contrary to Liszt’s false humility in his preface. In the end, these pieces convincingly justify Liszt’s faith in the instrument as “microcosm of music” that was symphonic in scope.

Chapter 7

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Sensuality and Austerity in the Nature Pieces of Liszt's Final Decade

“Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este,” from *Années de pèlerinage: Troisième année*, (1877)

Having examined a few often-overlooked works of Liszt's Roman period, we now turn towards the magnificent “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este,” a pinnacle of achievement in Liszt's evocative writing and the most often cited example of so-called “pre-Impressionistic” writing. The study of the numerous nature pieces that preceded it, however, has revealed that “Les Jeux d’eaux” is not singular among Liszt's output in its impressionistic qualities, nor even completely as groundbreaking as it is often made out to be. It is rather a culmination of the many prior experiments that had laid the groundwork. In this piece, we see a confluence of many of the compositional techniques discussed earlier. As a piece of water music, it builds upon the earlier “Au bord d’une source.” Yet, Ferruccio Busoni called this late piece the “model for all musical fountains that have flown ever since” for good reason, as many new techniques also come into play.

The fountains which inspired this piece were located in the *Villa d'Este* in Tivoli, near Rome. In Liszt's later years, the *Villa d'Este* became a physical and spiritual sanctuary to which he would retreat every spring and summer between 1867 and his death. Its gardens must have held a great deal of personal significance for him, as they are the subject matter of three of the pieces of his *Années de pèlerinage: Troisième Année* of 1877: the

current piece under discussion, as well as the two “Threnodies: Aux cyprès de la Villa d’Este.” The latter reference the great cypress trees in the Villa d’Este gardens which provided him with solace during his darkest times of depression. It is yet another hallmark of a man of remarkable contradictions that Liszt could write such a joyously sensual piece alongside the two austere Threnodies that precede it in the cycle. Yet, “Les Jeux d’eux” is not as merely about superficial sensory delight—its spirituality runs much deeper than the “play” at the heart of “Au bord d’une source.” Alan Walker has noted that Liszt cast this piece in his “religious” key of F# major, pointing to the F#-major second theme of the “Dante Sonata,” which he believes to be representative of heaven, as well as the “beatific music” of “Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude” and the last section of “St. Francis of Assisi preaching to the Birds.”⁷⁰

This confluence of sensuality and spirituality is already apparent in the opening of the piece. The opening jets of upwards arpeggios shoot forth a series of parallel ninth harmonies in a remarkable display of musical pictorialism that is satisfying in the visual, aural, and tactile sense. Of course, by the time of this piece’s conception, the use of arpeggiated figures to represent water was commonplace across the literature, but the effect of this opening is remarkably fresh. These are not the motions of gently undulating waves; they are depictions of the one-way motion of energetic jets of water in a fountain. Yet, as captivating as this opening is, it is often overlooked that these upwardly streaming jets of ninth-chord sonorities are more or less inversions of the sparkling downward figurations in the opening of “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” written more than a decade before. Still, like the Legend’s opening and the earlier “Au bord d’une

⁷⁰ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 154, n. 49.

source,” the remarkable exploration of the crystalline timbral possibilities of the piano’s highest registers here is unparalleled elsewhere in the piano literature up to that time.⁷¹ However, this sparkling display recedes after nine measures, as musical (and physical) gravity take hold as these arpeggiated jets of water reverse direction and fall back down towards the middle of the keyboard.

Example 7.1. Liszt, “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este,” opening (1877)

The image shows the opening of Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este" in G major, 2/4 time, marked "Allegretto". The score consists of two systems of piano music. The first system (measures 1-4) is marked "p vivace" and features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a supporting line. The second system (measures 5-8) is marked "cresc." and "poco a poco", showing a dynamic increase and a gradual change in tempo. The music is characterized by parallel motion in both hands, creating a shimmering effect.

What follows is a passage that contains enough parallel fifths to earn any first-year theory student a failing grade on a four-part writing exercise many times over. This is no exercise for the great maestro, though. For Liszt, the rules of proper voice-leading are upended here in favor of the laws of pictorial motion. The broken parallel fifths in each hand combine to form parallel seventh harmonies that move up the keyboard in what must have been the most extended instance of parallel chord-planing in the piano literature up until that time—decades before Debussy would employ the technique as one of his favorite harmonic devices.

⁷¹ Schubert’s music, especially in pieces like the A-flat Major Impromptu, Op. 90 no. 4, may be considered a precursor in this sense, but what is most remarkable about Liszt’s efforts in “Au bord d’une source” and “Les Jeux d’eau” is his placement of both hands in the treble register for most of each piece, most often without any counterbalancing sonority in the bass.

Example 7.2. Liszt, “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este,” m. 14, parallel 5ths passage

compounded with a trill of its own, the enchanting effect of the texture is similar. When the main theme finally enters in measure 40, *un poco più moderato*, we are treated to a full-fledged melody for the first time in the piece. Unlike the disjunct melody of “Au bord d’une source,” with its playful leaps, the melody here is linear in quality, outlining a triad within the range of a fifth. It is therefore a much simpler and more naturally vocal melody in line with the devout spirituality of the piece. This triadically based melody, along with the counter-melody involving triplets that emerges in measure 45 and the new sequential melodic idea introduced in measure 88, are variously accompanied by an assortment of undulating figurations: trills (measure 45), single- and double-note tremolos (measures 43 and 44), waves of staccato thirds and fourths (measure 53), and liquid arpeggiated runs (measure 108). Most notably, these figurations adorn the melodic lines from above, below, around, and within. In other words, “Les Jeux d’eaux” makes use of all the textural techniques Liszt used in the previous nature pieces, combined to evoke atmospheric and coloristic vibrations that surround the melodic voice(s) from every direction.

Moreover, Liszt makes further innovations, creating figurations whose originality and intricacy had yet to be seen in his previous work. Consider the right hand figures at measure 128 which seem to be a hybrid of a trill and a tremolo, or the figures at measures 108 and 137 which combine repeated notes with arpeggiated figures: these novel combinations and alterations of stock figurations create shimmering sonorities that foreshadow even more imaginative passagework in later works such as Ravel’s “Ondine.”

Example 7.3. Liszt, “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este,” water figuration

Remarkably, Liszt has so thoroughly entranced the listener with these high crystalline sonorities that the general absence of bass resonance in the first half of the piece seems to go almost unnoticed. This is remedied in measure 142, a turning point in the piece where the texture goes through a transformation in which the two hands expand to a range encompassing more than four octaves. This textural change parallels the spiritual transformation described in the Biblical quotation from John 4:14 that Liszt inscribes specifically to this section: “Sed aqua quam ego dabo, fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam” (For the water I will give him will become in him a fountain of eternal life).

Liszt’s textural transformation here is most acutely manifested in his notation. Though his use of three-staff notation in this piece is not his first⁷³, the manner of his usage here foreshadows the way in which Debussy and Ravel would later employ the notation. At first, the use of three staves at measure 144 is indicative of the large span of the left hand’s

⁷³ A prominent example would be his use of three staves of the concert étude, “Un Sospiro”

arpeggios, providing a tidy way of notating their notes without intruding on the notational space of the right-hand chords.

Example 7.4. Liszt. “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este,” textural transformation at m. 144

...sed aqua. quam ego dabo ei, fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam.
(Evang. sec. Joannem 4, 14.)

144 8

pp dolciss.

m.s.

pp

legato

Ped.

While this may also be true at the reappearance of three staves at measure 182, there, it also serves as a clear visual representation of the three-layer stratification of sound that Liszt wished to convey, much as Debussy and Ravel would later do. In visually separating each of the imitative voices in the left hand by notating each on its own staff (in addition to the third staff used to notate the right hand’s tremolos), Liszt not only creates visual distance between the layers, but demands extra care from the performer to promote aural stratification in the sound as well. In effect, Liszt’s notation helps create a three-dimensional soundscape.

Meanwhile, Liszt amplifies the effect of the textural transformation in this section with a series of harmonic transformations. While the first half of the piece revealed in brilliant yet largely diatonic sonorities of F# major, this section is marked by harmonic instability. Even before the section officially begins at the point in which Liszt changes to three-staff notation and inscribes the Biblical quotation, Liszt had already begun to move away from F# major by casting a statement of the main triadic theme down a step in E

major at measure 132. Just twelve bars later at measure 144—the aforementioned starting point of the section—Liszt pivots further down to a D major presentation of the triadic theme, followed by one in which B^b is tonicized. While F[#] major is temporarily reasserted for the return of the countermelody that originally appeared in measure 48, the harmonic transformation resumes when the third melodic idea—the sequential motive from measure 88—is reintroduced in A major.

After the piece settles back to F[#] major in measure 206, the music reaches a point of climactic grandeur in which the evocation of physical dimensions most pointedly comes to bear. Here, the three-fold ascent from the murky depths of the keyboard to its most brilliant heights exploits the piano's compass to signify the depths of our fountain. Like "St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves," this is a suggestion of the vertical dimensions of space rather the horizontal.

In the end, it is not difficult to see why Alan Walker considered this one of the most important pieces Liszt wrote. While the composer had already experimented with many of the ingredients that make this a magnificent piece—the mercurial water figuration, free treatment of dissonances, nonfunctional use of harmonies, and the use of tessitura to stimulate visual and aural sensations—it is their magnificent confluence here in a single piece, and their further advancement, which left an important legacy for the Impressionists. Remarkably, never again would Liszt show this much concern for sensuality and color after this piece, turning continually inward in his last years towards an aesthetic of austerity.

Nuage Gris (1881)

In striking contrast to the sensuous “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este” written just four years earlier, Liszt’s “Nuage Gris” is emblematic of this bleakness and severity that marked the piano music of Liszt’s final years. The piece is notable for its stark economy of means, lasting only two pages that contain a surprising dearth of notes for a piece by Liszt. The music is as much descriptive as it is metaphorical; the “grey clouds” of the title refer to the nebulous sky as much as they do the gloomy uncertainty clouding the mind. If “Les Jeux d’eaux “ was an exploration of the variegated colors of the everlasting spiritual life of Liszt’s faith, “Nuage gris” is a contemplation on the endless shades of a monochromatic grey that blanketed Liszt’s interior world at the time. Alan Walker has ascribed the bleakness of the piece to what he suggests are its autobiographical origins, noting that he suffered severe injuries from having fallen down a staircase the month before the piece was composed. That injury, compounded by other conditions including dropsy and failing eyesight, Walker writes, led Liszt to feel like “the night was closing in, and *Nuage gris* was the soundscape that symbolized his feelings of desolation.”⁷⁴

As such, this is not the storm music of his youth, but the turbulent music of an old soul. Gone are the full-blown storms of Liszt’s youth and maturity, with their tremendous force and violence. The grey clouds that have taken their place represent an ever-present threat of distress, and its accompanying sense of omen and foreboding. Remarkably, Liszt utilizes the same raw materials of his earlier storm music—tremolos, semitonal oscillations, and chromatic scales—mixed with new ingredients to create an entirely new effect. The opening uses an ostinato containing a spelled-out quartal harmony (D-G-C#),

⁷⁴ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Final Years*, 441.

with the C[#] coming from the Gypsy scale, before resolving to G minor. The pedal-point tremolo in the bass is on B^b, rather than G, putting the music on more ambiguous and less stable tonal ground. Starting in measure 10, this tremolo alternates between B^b and A—a half-step oscillation that can be seen as a protracted form of the half-step trills in early storm pieces, dating back to “Un soir dans les montagnes” and his transcription of Beethoven’s *Pastoral* Symphony. Above these tremolos, Liszt writes a string of five augmented chords that further weakens the sense of tonality.

Example 7.5. Liszt, “Nuage gris,” opening (1881)

For the remainder of the piece, Liszt continues to simultaneously employ various combinations of these elements—the quartal harmony ostinato, elements of the gypsy scale, the half-step oscillation between B^b and A, as well as augmented chords—to subvert the sense of tonic. The piece ends with a slow chromatic ascent that leads to a G major chord in the right hand over an ambiguous, nonfunctional harmony in the left hand that leaves the ending both difficult to analyze and unsettling to hear. From beginning to end, the piece exhibits an unprecedented freedom in the treatment of dissonance, and a lack of

cadential resolution to this dissonance. The fact that even the last sonority of the piece is left unresolved is particularly striking and prophetic of the atonal developments to come in the twentieth century.

Example 7.6. Liszt, “Nuage gris,” ending



For all our previous discussion of vivid color and the many surface-level constructions Liszt pioneered to achieve it, we must note the irony of how Liszt here has deconstructed those constructions to achieve a monochromatic grey. The advanced tremolo figurations which vibrated throughout the pages of “Chasse-neige” and “Les Jeux d’eaux” have here been pared down to slow, bleak, and repetitive tremolos in the bass. Meanwhile, the neighbor-note trills of “Un soir dans les montagnes” have slowed down so much that they oscillate between the semitones only once per measure. The brilliant chromatic runs and the thunderous chromatic octaves in all of the previous storm pieces have also slowed to the crawl of half and whole notes.

The cumulative effect of this slow unfolding of stark raw materials, along with the overall harmonic ambiguity and lack of cadential drive in the piece, is a trance-like suspension of time that deprives the music of all forward motion. The deconstruction of previously intricate figuration into slow-moving notes and the resulting lack of rhythmic

motion in all parts of the texture create a perception of time that is hard to measure. John Ogdon has remarked that the sadness of this piece and some of his other late works “leads Liszt occasionally to abandon all sense of rhythmic pulse; the aping waves of sound in *La Lugubre Gondola* and *Nuages Gris* reflect the auto-hypnosis of a tired mind which approaches at these times Beethoven’s direction ‘ermattet’—exhausted.”⁷⁵ The suspension of time here permeates the entire piece, in contrast to earlier pieces where it was used in discrete sections to allow for a sense of timelessness while perceiving the imagery of the natural world. Here, there is no clear distinction between the “nature around us” and its reflection in the “nature within” that Alfred Brendel alluded to in reference to the Swiss book of *Années*. Unlike many of the earlier pieces, there is no spiritual epiphany that results from reflective communion with nature. In its place, we are left with ambiguity and an answered question posed by the lack of harmonic resolution.

It is this artistic vision in the piece, just as much as its specific stylistic qualities and techniques, that has left a legacy that has intrigued performers and scholars alike. While we may point to its use of augmented and quartal harmonies, unhindered treatment of dissonances, and lack of cadential gestures as signs of prophetic writing, they are aesthetic qualities that are all symptomatic of an underlying shift away from Romantic ideals and sensibilities. Compared to a piece like “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este,” the aesthetic soundscape of “Nuage Gris” seems much further away from those created by Debussy and Ravel. However, the rejection of the nature piece as a vehicle for Romantic spiritual manifesto here is just as notable a legacy for the twentieth century as Liszt’s bold technical attempts to liberate harmony from function. As pianist Russell Sherman once put it,

⁷⁵ John Ogdon, “Solo Piano Music 1861-86,” in *Franz Liszt: the Man and his Music*, ed. Alan Walker (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970), 151.

There is also something prophetic in Liszt...something that anticipates the entropy, stasis and mystical emptiness that 20th-century artists have fleshed out much more. In the late pieces I'm playing, people sometimes object to what seems a lack of compositional process and operation. They create a bleak landscape which is very haunting and unresolved. But that unresolved issue is a definite statement of the cataclysms to come, which will despoil and debase all the common conventions of art, and will leave us in a naked, empty world, where we have to reconstruct the language. This is absolutely implicit in the music. His insight is astonishing.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Quoted in Allan Kozinin, "Philosophy Provides the Key to a Pianist," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1989.

Chapter 8

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The Creation of a New Evocative Language: The Seeds of Impressionism

Having completed a survey of this diverse array of nature pieces that spanned the entirety of Liszt's career, we may now take a broader view of their innovative techniques in hopes of drawing conclusions about their shared legacy. As we have seen, these pieces certainly do not embody a monolithic genre; instead, they represent a complex intersectionality between the composer's art, philosophy, spirituality, and faith. They are manifested in different ways in each period of Liszt's life according to his personal circumstances and outlook at the time. The Swiss nature pieces reveal a wandering Byronic figure whose impressions of the sights and sounds of nature lead him to reflect on his own inner spirituality. If these are mostly rosy sketches of the idyllic, then the last two *Transcendental Études* are full-scale manifestos of a more hot-blooded Romanticism. Personal tragedy in the early part of the 1860s led him to turn his private spirituality to a greater public commitment to the faith and institution of the Catholic Church during his Roman period. This is reflected in a temperance of his bravura, and the exploration of more mystical elements in "Waldesrauschen" and of unabashed religiosity in the Franciscan Legends. Amid recurring bouts of depression in his last decade, Liszt was able to produce a sparkling, sensuous, and hugely consequential piece in "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este," as well as more private and austere—yet equally prophetic—pieces like "Nuage Gris."

Throughout his career, he also displayed a tendency to pair together pieces which offered dichotomous portrayals of the same subject. This can first be observed in the pair of water pieces in the Swiss book of *Années*, as “Au lac de Wallenstadt” and “Au bord d’une source” alternately render water as an element of tranquil passivity and of playful activity. Meanwhile, the last two *Transcendental Études* portray Nature as a force that is at once a benevolent source of sublime beauty and a malevolent force of terror and violence. The two Franciscan Legends relate tales of miraculous acts that are set against starkly contrasting backdrops: in one, a peaceful forest filled with innocent, charming creatures waiting to be enlightened through sermon; in the other, a tumultuous ocean storm filled with unruly forces of nature to be tamed by divine power.

Yet, behind this disparate array of topics, effects, and affects, there are underlying common threads that connect these pieces. These works are all programmatic in conception to some degree, ranging from the modest visual and literary inspirations of “Au lac de Wallendstadt” to the full-scale programmatic storytelling in the Franciscan Legends. But as a subgenre of program music, all of these nature pieces demand the ability to effect pictorial description through music. This ability was surely not to be found in the rhetorical language and formalism of absolute music. Nor was the expressive language of the Romantic character piece, most aptly exemplified by Schumann, sufficient for these purposes. Schumann was, after all, more interested in conjuring abstract fantasy than in representing material reality. Thus, in order to write these nature pieces, Liszt’s challenge was to create a new evocative language idiomatic to the piano that was capable of suggesting the visual, aural, and tactile imagery of the natural world through the instrument. Through his efforts to weaken and suspend the rules of tonality and the

normal flow of time, as well as his ingenious use of pianistic resources to signify the images and dimensions of the physical world, Liszt sought to describe, suggest, and evoke. This new way of communicating through the instrument would prove crucial to the piano music of the musical Impressionism. The discussion in this chapter will therefore follow the ways in which each of these specific techniques contributed to Liszt's evocative language and ultimately sowed the seeds of musical Impressionism.

The Evocative Framework: An Alternative Syntax

The Subversion of Tonality

To begin with, Liszt's first challenge was to reconcile the limitations of the tonal system with the expressive freedom he needed for the purposes of musical pictorialism. At its core, common-practice tonality in Western music was a hierarchy of pitches, as well as a set of rules governing the progression of harmonies and the movement of their individual voices. Chords and sonorities had predetermined functions, such that general procedures led to expected outcomes. In addition, the ideals of the tonal system that Liszt inherited from his German predecessors were inextricably bound up in the sonata form of high Viennese Classicism—a dialectical scheme based not only in the dichotomy between consonance and dissonance and the polarity between the tonic and the dominant, but also in the conflict between contrasting thematic ideas in need of ultimate resolution.

Naturally, the Classical language, rooted in this deterministic hierarchy and propelled by a dialectic narrative, was ill-suited for evocative writing, which required a

greater freedom to wander, explore, and relish in the natural world—to “stop and smell the roses,” so to speak. The solution lay partly in the increased chromaticism of the Romantic language and its weakening of the tonal hierarchy. The development of this heightened chromaticism was no accident. In an age which privileged the question over the answer, the journey over the destination, and revolution over authority, it is easy to see how the chromatic language of Romanticism was well-suited to its ethos. Yet, the chromaticism practiced by many of Liszt’s contemporaries like Chopin and Schumann amounted to elaborate adornments to the same hierarchical tonal language rather than a real challenge to it. The harmonic surprises of their music only somewhat loosened the deterministic course of tonality, offering a more roundabout way through the same overall path.

For Liszt, this was not enough. Throughout his creative output, he sought ways to undermine the normal functioning of tonality, and to bend—and ultimately break—its rules. This trend can be seen in all genres of his work, but is especially apparent in his nature pieces. Even from the earlier pieces, we can observe Liszt’s free use of dissonance that bypasses Classical notions of tension and resolution. In “Au bord d’une source,” the clashing seconds that fill almost every bar of the piece are used purely for their cool, piercing color, while the gratuitous chromaticism of the cadenzas mixes technical virtuosity with enchanting sonorities to create a striking pictorial effect. Meanwhile, the added sixths and seconds to the opening figuration of “Waldesrauschen” had a similarly coloristic effect this time with a more mystical, seductive tinge. In his freer treatment of sonorities, Liszt suspended many of the normal rules of harmonic function and voice leading. We have witnessed this in his extended use of parallel intervals and harmonies for coloristic

purposes: from the parallel fifths in “Les Jeux d’eaux” and the parallel sixths in “Au bord d’une source,” to the parallel diminished chords in “Harmonies du soir” and the parallel ninth harmonies arpeggiated throughout the opening of “Les Jeux d’eaux.” While this comparatively modest use of parallelism does not reach the level of Debussy’s outright chord planing, it was remarkably forward-looking for the time in its consideration of sound over function. As Charles Rosen wrote, “in his concentration on tone color, Liszt may be seen as the most radical musician of his generation.”⁷⁷

In his other Swiss landscape pieces, Liszt can be seen subtly weakening tonality’s deterministic, forward drive through harmonic stasis. In “Au lac de Wallenstadt,” the continual alternation between tonic and dominant harmonies over a tonic pedal deprives the piece of forward momentum, thus creating the stillness and placidity ascribed to the lake. Ironically, the repetition of the dominant-to-tonic progression—the most fundamental progression of tonal system—occurs with such regularity here that it loses all its force. The extended use of pedal points can be observed in many of the other pieces: “Un soir dans les montagnes,” Pastorale,” “Eglogue,” and “Harmonies du soir.” In the case of the first three, their use can be partially attributed to their pastoral topics and the musical conventions of the Baroque *pastorale*. Nevertheless, these pedal points still serve to suspend normal tonal functions in favor of a tranquil stasis which allows us to relish the idyllic scenes. In “Harmonies du soir,” the opening dominant pedal point creates an additional, more striking effect, as Liszt superimposes a number of remote, nonfunctional harmonies for coloristic purposes. Here, the pedal tones allow Liszt to explore sound for sound’s sake, revealing a growing interest in sensuality in his music.

⁷⁷ Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 507.

Furthermore, Liszt's subversion of tonality was also reliant on symmetrical structures and relationships that deviated from the usual asymmetries of the diatonic system. Busoni was the first to notice this, noting that Liszt repeatedly showed a preference for symmetries over hierarchies.⁷⁸ These symmetrical structures result from the division of the octave into equal portions, starting from a division into two parts (resulting in tritones), to four (resulting in the diminished-seventh chord), six (the hexatonic whole-tone scale), and eight (an octatonic scale), and finally twelve (a chromatic scale). Liszt favored these structures because their symmetry offered him greater freedom from the restrictive tendencies of their asymmetrical, hierarchical counterparts. Consider the diminished-seventh chord, for example, which can be enharmonically re-spelled to resolve to four major triads, four minor triads, and through the lowering of any one of its four notes by a half step, four dominant-seventh chords. It is because of this chameleon-like quality that diminished-seventh chords became one of Liszt's favorite sonorities. In the middle of "Waldesrauschen," Liszt even treats the diminished seventh as an independent sonority when he cancels the key signature and modulates through several diminished sevenths, casting the main thematic material in these diminished "keys." It was similarly used as a sonority in its own right in "Harmonies du soir," where Liszt, as mentioned above, used parallel diminished-seventh chords in a coloristic wash of sound. Besides the diminished seventh, Liszt also made use of other symmetrical structures on the local level: the octatonic scale in the coda of "Harmonies du soir," and the chromatic scale in all of his

⁷⁸ Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music*, (London: Rockliff, 1957).

storm pieces (“Un soir dans les montagnes,” “Orage,” “Chasse-neige,” “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves,” and Nuage Gris).⁷⁹

Beyond the local level, Liszt also made prominent use of symmetrical relations on a larger scale. The minor thirds of the diminished-seventh chord are also inflected in the cycle of thirds which form the key relationships in “Harmonies du soir” (D^b major and E major, with G major also prominent), “Chasse-neige” (B^b minor to E major, via D^b major) and “Waldesrauschen” (D^b major and E major). These mediant key relationships also extend to major thirds, as they do in “Au bord d’une source” (A^b major and E major, enharmonically) and “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds” (A major and D^b major, enharmonically). Overall, we see in Liszt a penchant for tonal wandering, as Liszt, much like Schubert before him, seemed to enjoy many detours in his harmonic tourism, rarely willing to make a straightforward modulation to the dominant. Jim Samson writes that Schubert “[avoided] dynamic goal-directed narratives in favour of more leisurely scenic routes, where essentially similar melodic-motivic material...are allowed to drift freely through third-related regions in a gradual, spacious, and in a sense anti-heroic, teleology.”⁸⁰

In addition to mediant-related key relationships, we have also observed his use of tritonal pairings of keys in “Orage” (C minor and F[#] major) and “Chasse Neige” (B^b minor and E major).⁸¹ Even modulations by whole and half step can be seen: “Les Jeux d’eaux à la

⁷⁹ Aside from its generally stormy sonority when played in quick succession, the utility of the chromatic scale lies in its nearly endless possibilities—its twelve semitones can destroy any sense of tonal center, lending the scale to convenient entrances and exits at any point. Liszt found this flexibility especially useful in creating wave-like contours and effects.

⁸⁰ Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, 166. It must be noted, too, that Beethoven made several excursions into the mediant, notably in the first movements of the G Major Sonata, Op. 31 no. 1, and the “Waldstein” Sonata. These were the exceptions rather than the norm.

⁸¹ Liszt’s fascination with the devil led him to invoke the *diabolus in musica* in many of his pieces, but this symbolism does not fully explain its use in pieces not topically related to evil.

Villa d'Este" (F# major, E major, D major), "Les cloches de Genève" (B major to C major), and "St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds" (A major and B^b major), "Les cloches de Genève" (B major to C major). In the two instances, one in the middle of "Waldesrauschen" and another in "St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves," Liszt cancels the key signature amid extended harmonic instability. This signals not so much outright atonality as it does a wayward keylessness; the ingredients of tonality are still there, but the music proceeds without a single defined tonal center, in a harmonic no-man's land.

Finally, in addition to these symmetrical divisions of the octave, Liszt used a number of alternate modalities and sonorities in lieu of diatonic structures. We have seen his use of pentatonic collections in "Au lac de Wallendstadt," "Au bord d'une source," "Eglogue," and "Harmonies du soir." Meanwhile, "Nuage gris" exemplified his increasing use of gypsy modalities, quartal harmonies, and augmented triads in his late music. While some of these were intentionally used in folk-related contexts ("Al lac" and "Eglogue"), they all served to offer Liszt alternative means of expression that were less deterministic, allowing him to take unexpected turns and exploring. While it is not until such late works as "Nuage gris" that Liszt can be truly said to turn towards atonality, we can see through this gradual progression of his works Liszt's long-ranging effort to weaken tonality's grip on music.

The Suspension of Time

The nature of music as a performing art necessarily entails that it unfolds across the canvas of time. Unlike an Impressionist painting whose audience has the luxury of standing before it indefinitely to examine its visual details, Liszt's musical evocations of nature

cannot remain stationary in time. He nevertheless makes an attempt at doing so. In our survey of Liszt's nature pieces, we repeatedly witnessed Liszt's suspension of the normal flow of time in an attempt to allow the listener to luxuriate in the aural, visual, and tactile sensations given off by the natural world.

One of the most rudimentary ways he accomplishes this is to undermine the forward flow of metrical time through a combination of rests, long-held notes, and repeated use of fermatas. This can be seen in "Les cloches de Genève," and even more so in "Harmonies du soir," where we are invited to experience the sensations of the evening atmosphere in a timeless manner. It is the equivalent of what we mean when we say colloquially that "time stood still."

On the other hand, Liszt also weakens our perception of time by rendering the marker of musical time—rhythm—so repetitive that we "lose track of time." In "Au Lac de Wallenstadt," he does so by maintaining the lull of the barcarolle-like ostinato rhythm for almost the entire piece. In "Chasse-neige," he maintains the trance-like perception of time in the opening by withholding any sort of rhythmic action or event other than a steady stream of eighth notes for the first thirty-odd seconds of the piece, all the while maintaining the undulating tremolos for most of the piece—a sort of textural ostinato, so to speak. This technique comes to bear most pointedly in "Nuage gris," where the combination of slow-moving notes and the lack of rhythmic action throughout the entirety of the piece renders the whole listening experience hypnotic.

If homogeneity and sameness disrupted our perception of musical time, Liszt has also shown us that their repeated juxtaposition alongside contrasting elements can also

yield a similar effect. Our discussion of “Pastorale,” “Les cloches de Genève” and “Harmonies du soir” made numerous references to the cinematic, cut-scene effect in which Liszt repeatedly juxtaposed the sudden recurrence of an episode of musical material with a contrasting one with little or no transition. In the case of the latter two pieces, this episodic formal organization facilitates Liszt’s Byronic trope—one where we are transported between the inner and outer worlds of the protagonist as his communion with nature ignites a deeper spiritual revelation.

The Signification of Distance and Physical Dimension

While music naturally has a temporal dimension which Liszt aptly manipulates for his descriptive purposes, the suggestion of visual imagery necessarily requires a way to represent physical dimensions that is not germane to all forms of music. In Beethoven’s “Pastoral” Symphony, the use of the orchestra as the performing medium allows for a built-in manipulation of space: a tympani roll in the back of the orchestra representing distant thunder naturally sounds farther away than the more proximal voice of the violin section. The problem is more complex for solo piano music, where a single instrument emulating orchestral resources must evoke the natural world on its own. Liszt meets the challenge by making an unprecedented use of pianistic space and sound to invoke physical dimensions. His use of tessitura to equate the pianistic and musical distance between sounds with the spatial dimensions of the evoked landscape is a technique that can be found in the great majority of his descriptive pieces. Given our ears’ conditioning to the homogenized sounds of the modern grand piano, these effects must be considered in the context of Liszt’s

straight-strung pianos, where their full impact can be heard through the distinct timbral differences of the instruments' various registers.

To begin with, Liszt implies proximity through the use of middle registers of the keyboard. This seems fitting whether we consider the subject observing the natural phenomena to be the composer, the performer, or some other protagonist. After all, the natural human voice (discounting operatic extremes) resides within the span of several octaves surrounding middle C. For example, the recitative of St. Francis's sermon to the birds spans a range from middle C to approximately one octave above it, while the birds in the distance respond in the high treble. Meanwhile, the texture in "Chasse-neige" offers a more intriguing example, as Liszt takes the tremolo—a figuration he previously used in the extremities of the keyboard to represent distant thunder—and embeds it within the middle of the texture to evoke the vibrations of the circumambient atmosphere.

It follows, then, that Liszt would use the extremities of the keyboard to signify distance. This occurs most often to signify horizontal dimensions, either to suggest the distance between the subject and the object, or between multiple objects. The former is exemplified by the storm of "Un soir dans les montagnes," which starts off in the faraway distance of the low bass before making its way up the keyboard in proximity to the listener. The latter can be heard in the antiphonal sounding of bells in "Les cloches de Genève" and "Harmonies du soir," or the similarly antiphonal chatter of birds in "St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds." The signification can also occur in the vertical dimension, as in "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este," where deep bass sonorities are used to suggest the vertical depths of the fountains while sparkling treble sonorities are used to suggest the

height of its most magnificent jets. In the case of “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves,” the signification of vertical and horizontal dimensions occurs simultaneously, as the up-and-down contours and the breadth of the wave figurations represent their height and width, while the antiphonal sounding of individual waves suggests their relative distance in the horizon.

Furthermore, Liszt also uses dynamics to imply distance. Naturally, our ears tend to equate louder sounds with proximity and softer sounds with distance. Liszt uses this simple intuition to great cinematic effect in “Pastorale,” where his prescription of *pianissimo* and *pianississimo* renderings of boisterous folk material illuminates the physical and temporal distance that separates the listener from an otherwise rowdy village scene. At the end of the piece, the continual diminuendo from an already *pianississimo* dynamic, almost *al niente*, can be cinematically likened to a camera zooming out from a landscape.

The Evocative Vocabulary of Idiomatic Piano Writing

The techniques described above have provided the framework and parameters upon which music can successfully represent natural imagery. The subversion of tonality created an alternative, less deterministic syntax to be used for an evocative musical language, while the suspension of time allowed this language to be fully absorbed by momentarily slowing or halting the passage of time. All this by itself though, only created the space in which imagery of the natural world could be conjured up; to effect actual pictorial representation, Liszt would need a vocabulary pianistic figurations to capable evoking vivid imagery.

The foundation for this vocabulary can be found in the music of Liszt's predecessors. The use of arpeggios to represent water was hardly a new device by Liszt's time, having been well codified in the dozens of Schubert songs that make reference to water. Meanwhile, Beethoven's use of trills, tremolos, chromatic scales, and diminished-seventh chords in the storm of his "Pastoral" Symphony set an example that Liszt followed not only in his piano transcription of the symphony, but also in all of his own original storm pieces. Yet, the use of these raw materials and figurations do not come close to accounting for the full evocative power of Liszt's compelling nature pieces. In Schubert's songs, for example, the water represented by the piano accompaniment's wavelike arpeggios amounts to symbolic text-painting, far short of the vivid imagery that Liszt brings to life in such pieces early pieces as "Au bord d'une source," let alone the seminal "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este." The techniques described earlier in this chapter certainly made a large contribution, but the ability to conjure vivid imagery itself lay in Liszt's unparalleled pianistic acumen and imagination.

This is a significant contrast to his predecessors. Beethoven's interest in pictorial depiction at the piano itself was limited: the "pastoral" and "tempestuous" programmatic associations ascribed to the A^b Major Sonata, Op. 26, and the D minor Sonata, Op. 31, no.2, may be fitting but are conjectural, with little supporting evidence from the composer himself. Meanwhile, for all the beauty and imagination in Schubert's music, its power primarily rests in its ability to communicate through its scarcity of notes. As a pianist, Schubert himself was known for his eloquent, lyrical playing, but was by no means a virtuoso. His most overtly virtuosic piece, the "Wanderer" Fantasy, proved too great a challenge for his own pianistic ability, as he famously threw up in his hands and gave up in

the middle of a private performance for his friends. “Let the devil play the stuff!”, he declared.⁸² The fact that Schubert never again attempted such a virtuosic piece reveals a certain discomfort in virtuosity and a desire to remain true to his characteristic lyricism as his primary expressive vehicle. Thus, Schubert’s conception of the piano was partly limited—if we can call it a limitation at all—by his own lack of physical mastery of the instrument.

For Liszt, there was no such hindrance. As one of the greatest virtuosos in history, his conception of what was possible at the piano was limited only by his imagination, a quality which he also possessed in abundance. His unparalleled pianistic acumen led him to transform the raw materials he inherited from Schubert and Beethoven into figurations entirely idiomatic to the piano and its increasingly rich capabilities. We have already seen how Liszt’s revision of “Au bord d’une source” from the version in *Album d’un voyageur* to the one found in *Années* refined and transformed a rather standard Schubertian arpeggio accompaniment in the left hand to the much more intricate murmuring figuration in the inner part of the texture. Along the same lines, Liszt employed an undulating inner texture in “Chasse-neige” by embedding tremolo figurations inside the respective melodic voices of the right and left hands.

This characteristic texture—in which a vibrating medium is represented by delicate and intricate figurations—is one of Liszt’s most important legacies in evocative piano writing. These figurations can be manifested in some variation or combination of trills,

⁸² Otto E. Deutsch, ed., *Schubert: A Memoir by his Friends*, trans. Rosamund Ley and John Nowell (New York: MacMillan, 1958), 194. Ironically, Liszt, the pianistic “devil” of the nineteenth century, not only played the piece but held such deep admiration for the piece that he arranged it for piano and orchestra.

tremolos, arpeggios or more complex quivering figures. Of the continuous tremolo figure in “Chasse-neige,” Jim Samson writes:

[its] evocative shimmering sonority is designed to create an unbroken layer of sound against which the melody may unfold... [By] allowing them to function as delicate backcloths to a ‘canto,” Liszt created an effect of remarkable poetic beauty, one which again looks to textures that would later be associated with Debussy and Ravel...⁸³

The same principle can be observed in the opening of “Waldesrauschen,” where a seductive alto melody unfolds against another manifestation of these “delicate backcloths”—here, the vibrations are intricate arpeggio figures colored by added sixths and seconds. We have also seen these coloristic vibrations at work in the fluttering birds of “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds” and the variegated water imagery in “Les lieux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este.” Paul Roberts has noted this relationship between color and vibration: “Gauguin said that ‘color...is vibration just as music is,’ a phenomenon he would have observed at work in Impressionist paintings despite his eventual rejection of Impressionism.”⁸⁴ Through this synthesis, Liszt pioneered a new way of drawing sound from the piano—a suggestive, veiled murmur which represents a striking departure from the bold proclamations of Beethoven’s heroic style, the unassuming lyricism of Schubert, and the embellished bel canto of Chopin.

Beyond this delicate murmuring texture portraying the elusively sensuous side of nature, the pieces that we have studied also boast an array of more directly brilliant-sounding devices. From the double-note and two-handed tremolos of “Les jeux d’eaux,” to the cross-handed effects of “Au bord d’une source” and “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to

⁸³ Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, 91.

⁸⁴ Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, 34.

the Birds,” these effects capture the sparkling exuberance of the imagery. Meanwhile, “Un soir dans les montagnes,” “Orage,” “Chasse-neige,” and “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves,” all feature unprecedentedly massive swells of chromatic scales—not only in single notes, but hyperbolized in effect through double thirds, clusters, traditional octave technique, as well as alternating “Liszt octaves”—that swallow up the entire keyboard, surpassing in violence any music previously written for the keyboard. In all these figurations, textures, and techniques, we see Liszt taking the raw materials of his predecessors, transforming them through added intricacies, and amplifying them in both the most subtle and ostentatious ways. He did so through both his unparalleled concern for color and sonic alchemy, and the application of his immense virtuosity to demand unprecedented masses of sound from the ever-more powerful instrument.

Yet, the full evocative powers of these various effects cannot simply be accounted for by the sounds they draw from the piano at any given time. The images they conjure are not frozen frames, but vivid animations. For all our references to the visual arts and Impressionism in this study, we must also diverge from them to recognize, again, that music is a performing art laid out across the canvas of time, capable of truly capturing and depicting motion from one moment to the next. Even in our discussions surrounding the suspension of time, we are really referring to the slowing of our subjective *perception* of time, and the relishing of the moment. Actual musical time is fleeting and must always flow forward. Therefore, meaning is not only imparted by the specific vocabulary representing the images of each moment, but also, crucially, in the value we assign to those moments due to the transient nature of time.

Performative Gesture and Meaning

This vital meaning is realized by the performative quality that is so central to music as a performing art. It is this element which lifts the music off the page and makes the it come alive, but it is routinely overlooked amid analyses of harmony and form that privilege the understanding of the musical work on paper. This truth applies to all music, but is especially important in Liszt's. As Jim Samson writes,

Liszt liberated the performer (initially himself) from the work, elevating presence and presentation, celebrating the body, the space, the occasion. The performer here is an orator, who gives life to music through nuances and inflections that are indispensable to its being...He is a painter, who draws on an expanding palette to add layer upon layer of colour to an original pencil sketch. He is a conjurer, who juggles precariously with an often unlikely collection of disparate musical ideas. A prejudice against this performative quality, perfectly embodied in the criticisms of Liszt by the Schumanns, went hand in hand with a developing conviction that the musical work must be a significant phenomenon rather than a mere source of sensuous pleasure...⁸⁵

Therefore, to fully grasp the effect of Liszt's communication, we must look beyond the page and recognize the tremendous meaning and value imparted by the performance itself. It is especially important in the nature pieces, because they are as much about depicting the natural world as our human reaction to it. Therefore, the vocabulary representing natural imagery has not fully fulfilled its communicative function if it fails to stir up a reaction from the audience.

In the most ostentatious examples, Liszt uses performative virtuosity to rouse the passions, inspire awe, and inflict terror in the audience. We have already discussed how the virtuosic left hand solo at measure 36 of "St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves"

⁸⁵ Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, 102.

signifies the Saint's magisterial command of the waters through divine power. It would be a mistake to assume that Liszt employed virtuosity here for its own sake. Here, virtuosity imparts meaning. The full effect of the passage cannot be heard alone—it must be seen and witnessed, as the physical display of the left hand performing this miraculous passage surely enhances its meaning. Similarly, the full terror of the extended chromatic deluges elsewhere in this piece, as well as similar ones in "Chasse-neige," cannot be fully appreciated through listening alone—we must see the pianist inflict the ferocity of nature across the entire compass of the keyboard. Their violence is an act that must be physically witnessed. After all, as we have discussed in Chapter Five, the *Transcendental Études* are not only transcendental in the mechanics of technique, but in the realization of the music itself—the études draw their poetic expression from the very power of the performance itself. The performative quality is the crucial link that bridges the gap between pure poetry and empty virtuosity.

Virtuosity, though, represents this quality only at its most ostentatious; there are subtler shades of it to be found in Liszt. As I noted earlier regarding the cadenza-like passages of "Au bord d'une source," the virtuosity that fuels the wonder and brilliance of the passage lies not only in the performer's physical command of the keyboard, but his ability to conjure up enchanted sonorities through sonic wizardry. In other words, the marvel inspired at these particular moments lies in the pianist's dual role as both a master instrumental performer and master sorcerer of sound. In the same piece, the cross-handed technique at the beginning is a physical demonstration of the element of leisurely play described in the inscription. Later in the same piece, though, Liszt's revisions between the earlier and later versions of the piece demonstrate how a refinement in technique and

sonority can also adjust its performative meaning. The original version included much more difficult leaps, a specialty of Liszt as both a pianist and composer. In reference to this passage, Alan Walker has noted that “Liszt himself clearly enjoyed taking risks, and there are times when he asks the pianist to perform some difficult feats.”⁸⁶ There is indeed risk in the passage, but assuming the performer is able to execute all of the leaps accurately, there is also a question of whether he or she possesses the technique in excess to make this look like mere child’s play rather than a high-wire act fraught with danger. Perhaps noting that this, Liszt revised the passage to more reasonable demands, thus refining its meaning from a sense of daring thrill to casual play more appropriate to the piece.

The performative quality in Liszt’s pieces also serves to highlight moments of distinct contrast. In “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” the use of recitative in the same piece is not only supposed to mimic the faithful sounds of the Saint’s sermons, it is a moment of rhetorical performance aided by the dramatic visual contrast of the pianist executing a simple phrase with one hand, when moments before he or she was busy conjuring up the sounds of fluttering birds and their antiphonal chirps using what seemed like three hands. Along those lines, the grandiose expression of communal faith in the *Allegro maestoso* of “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves” ends in a dramatic arpeggiated gesture, punctuated by an equally theatrical caesura, and followed by the private confession performed through *recitativo secco*. To convey the proper meaning and effect, the pianist must be sensitive to the theatrical imperatives that demand, for example, that he or she refrain from physically moving in preparation for the recitativo until the very last moments of the caesura. It is the same performative sensibilities, on a less theatrical

⁸⁶ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years*, 303.

level, that inform the performer not only to observe the many fermatas at the beginning of “*Harmonies du soir*” by sustaining the sonorities through the pauses, but also to savor in the moment through physical stillness as well.

This relishing of the moment presents one further aspect of the performative quality that is hugely consequential—the celebration of the ephemeral sensuality. This aspect does not require display from the performer so much as it does subtle sensibilities. In Samson’s comments quoted above, this sensibility is what he was referring to when wrote that the performer “gives life to the music through nuances and inflections that are indispensable to its being.” In other words, the performer must, in the moment of performance, give life to the fleeting delights of passing dissonances and gratuitous color-play first found in “*Au bord d’une source*,” then exoticized in the luxurious sonorities of “*Harmonies du soir*,” mystified in the murmurs of “*Waldesrauschen*,” and finally combined through brilliant synthesis in “*Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este*.” These pieces validated music as a source of sensuous, momentary pleasure. No composer before Liszt had ever been more interested in tingling our surface sensations rather than just inspiring the human intellect or stirring the passions of the human soul. This celebration of sensuality would become central to the music of Debussy and Ravel, even if it is sometimes overplayed in the hands of inexperienced performers.

In the end, the performative quality enhanced the meaning of the vocabulary used throughout Liszt’s nature pieces to many different ends. These meanings were manifested both in the forward-looking emphasis on sensuality that Debussy and Ravel would later adopt, but also in quintessentially Romantic expressions of spirituality and the sublime.

This inextricable link between Liszt's nature pieces and his faith and spirituality cannot be overstressed—it is highlighted time again in these pieces, many times where sensuous reflections on the natural world roused deeper passions and sparked spiritual epiphanies. Debussy and Ravel, both products of their time, would rarely engage in the same sort of histrionics. Yet, they benefited from the legacy of the Liszt's evocative language: first, by the development of an alternative syntax that bypassed the deterministic rules of tonality; second, by novel ways of manipulating the musical canvas to alter perceptions of time and to signify physical dimensions; third, by the creation of specific vocabulary to depict natural imagery on the piano; and finally, to enhance the meaning of such vocabulary through performative gesture. Taken together, these developments began to undermine what Jim Samson called the previously “uncheckable momentum of the German canon, predicated on a view of the musical work that coalesced historically and analytically around Beethoven's heroic style and its aftermath.”⁸⁷ By the end of the century, this “uncheckable momentum” of the German canon was challenged by emerging alternative canons—by the Russian school in the East, and by the movements of *fin-de-siècle* France in the West, spearheaded by the “Impressionism” of the Debussy and Ravel. In the remaining chapters, we will turn our focus to the interaction between these two composers and the Lisztian legacy.

⁸⁷ Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, 102.

Part III:

Liszt's Influence on the Impressionists

Chapter 9

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Liszt, Debussy, Ravel, and the Cross-Pollination of Influences

Having explored Liszt's evocative techniques that sowed the seeds of musical Impressionism, we now turn to a discussion of the ways in which the Impressionists harvested the fruits of those seeds, so to speak. It should go without saying that this discussion does not purport to assert Liszt as a primary influence on the totality of Debussy's and Ravel's respective compositional styles. Such a suggestion would do a great disservice to these Frenchmen, obscuring their own ingenuity as well as the myriad of other figures who influenced them across the musical, literary, and visual arts. As artists of the *fin-de-siècle* Paris, Debussy and Ravel was not only aware of the musical inheritance from the French *clavecinists*, to Mozart, Chopin, and Schumann, but also their more immediate French predecessors Fauré, Chabrier, Saint-Saëns. They read the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé, and admired the paintings of Monet, Renoir, and Cezanne. Further complicating the matter is the fact that Debussy and Ravel, though often lumped together under the "Impressionist" label, had distinct artistic philosophies. In broad terms, Debussy was a Modernist who sought to break with tradition, while Ravel was a Classicist who was interested in expressing new ideas within the tradition he inherited. Their relationship was complex, characterized both by mutual respect as well as an uneasy rivalry. Meanwhile, their music reflected mutual dialogical influence—perhaps more than either composer would like to admit. The full complexity of the relationship between the two, though, is beyond the scope of this study, and in any case is well

documented throughout the critical literature. Our primary interest is in the way in which the two Frenchmen's respective influences, worldviews, and artistic philosophies led their music to inflect Liszt's evocative legacy differently. It has been an unfortunate and all-too-common cliché to simplify the pianistic styles of the two composers along neat lines of musical genealogy. This has been echoed by Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, who associates Ravel with Beethoven and Liszt "in a line of composers seeking essentially to give the piano a symphonic character," while Chopin was "was the only musical genius of the nineteenth century whose pianism does not emulate the orchestra of his era" and was therefore "Mozart's heir and Debussy's precursor."⁸⁸ Although there is a fair amount of truth in that observation, it does not tell the full story. After all, the historical progression of music can rarely be described through clean, simplistic lines of influences; they are more often muddled webs of intersectionality and cross-influences.

As we begin to disentangle this web, let us first consider the actual interactions between the three composers. While Ravel never met the old master (he was only eleven years old at the time of Liszt's death), Debussy was old enough to have met Liszt once, in 1884, after Debussy won the coveted *Prix de Rome*. In that meeting, Liszt played three pieces for the young composer: "Au bord d'une source," his own transcription of Schubert's "Ave Maria," and a third composition of unknown identity. Years later, Debussy would remark on Liszt's remarkable pedaling technique, a "kind of breathing" that would leave a

⁸⁸ Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils*, ed. Roy Howat, trans. Naomi Shohet, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 21.

lasting impression on him.⁸⁹ Beyond this, there is not much in Debussy's biography that would point to an affinity towards Liszt.

Admittedly, there was a deep philosophical difference between Liszt and Debussy. As Debussy's biographer Edward Lockspeiser wrote, "there was also a fundamental divergence between them. Liszt was a Byronic figure stimulated by the outside world...However much a product of his time, Debussy suspected the march of events by which an artist is submerged."⁹⁰ The Frenchman did not share Liszt's devout Catholic faith, and did not practice religion in any traditional sense. Yet, looking past the surface, we begin to see some similarities between the two men. Despite Debussy's aversion to organized religion, he did find a certain spirituality in nature that is somewhat reminiscent of Romantic ethos:

I do not practise religion in accordance with the sacred rites. I have made mysterious Nature my religion. I do not believe that a man is any nearer to God for being clad in priestly garments, nor that one place in a town is better adapted to meditation than another. When I gaze at a sunset sky and spend hours contemplating its marvelous ever-changing beauty, an extraordinary emotion overwhelms me. Nature in all its vastness is truthfully reflected in my sincere though feeble soul. Around me are the trees stretching up their branches to the skies, the perfumed flowers gladdening the meadow, the gentle grass-carpeted earth, ... and my hands unconsciously assume an attitude of adoration. ... To feel the supreme and moving beauty of the spectacle to which Nature invites her ephemeral guests!...that is what I call prayer.⁹¹

In fact, the effect that nature had on him and his art was so profound that he sometimes felt the need to defend against charges that his work was devoid of spirituality, as he did in an interview regarding his incidental music for the play *Le martyr de St. Sébastien* (1911):

⁸⁹ Quoted in François Lesure & Roger Nichols, ed., *Debussy Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 301.

⁹⁰ Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His life and mind: Volume 1, 1862-1902* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 83.

⁹¹ Quoted Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 225.

Do you really think that my music is devoid of religious antecedents? Do you wish to put an artist's soul under restraint? Do you find it difficult to conceive that one who sees mystery in everything — in the song of the sea, in the curve of the horizon, in the wind and in the call of the birds — should have been attracted to a religious subject? I have no profession of faith to utter to you: but, whichever my creed may be, no great effort on my part was needed to raise me to the height of d'Annunzio's mysticism. I can assure you that my music was written in exactly the spirit as if it had been commissioned for performance in church. Have I succeeded in expressing all that I felt? It is for others to decide. Is the faith which my music expresses orthodox? I do not know; but I can say that it is my own, expressed in all sincerity.⁹²

In fact, this expression of the internal world has led to the alternative characterization of his works as Symbolist rather than Impressionist. In Chapter Three, we discussed the various stylistic traits that justified the use of the label “Impressionist”—one of the two “useful terms of abuse”—in describing certain aspects of Debussy’s style, and how Liszt’s visually evocative language foreshadowed them. Having now explored how this interest in the surface qualities and raw sensations of the natural world resonated through Liszt’s inner world, we begin to see how we may draw connections between Liszt and Debussy through the other “useful term of abuse” by considering their Symbolist tendencies. Like Impressionism, the Symbolist movement formally emerged only at the end of Liszt’s life⁹³, decades after the composition of most of the works in our discussion. Liszt’s interest in combining the various art forms through a unified means of expression presaged one of the central ideals of the Symbolist movement and is reflected throughout his output—from more modest efforts exemplified by the pictorial description in his nature pieces and in

⁹² Quoted in Vicki Woolfe, *Dancing in the Vortex : The Story of Ida Rubinstein* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 56.

⁹³ While the Symbolist aesthetic itself can be traced back to Baudelaire’s *Les fleurs du mal* of 1857, and was furthered by Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine in the 1860’s and 1870’s, the literary movement did not emerge in full force until the 1880’s, culminating in Jean Moréas’ publication of the *Symbolist Manifesto* in 1886.

such works as “Il penseroso” and “Spozalizio,” to his bolder experiments in the *Symphonic Poems*. None of these, however, come close to the level of unification between the arts in Wagner’s music dramas.

Yet, in our interest in the smaller canvas of descriptive nature pieces, the ways in which Liszt prefigured the Symbolist tendencies in Debussy are apparent. They even shared interests in the kinds of visual stimuli which stirred their inner world. In his essay, “Definition of Music as a Free Art” (1903), Debussy wrote that “music is the expression of the movement of waters, the play of curves described by changing breezes. There is nothing more musical than a sunset. He who feels what he sees will find no more beautiful example of development in all that book which, alas, musicians read too little—the book of Nature...”⁹⁴ If we did not know the author of this quote, we may surmise that these words would serve as equally apt descriptions of both composers: Liszt in “Au bord d’une source,” “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este,” and “Harmonies du soir”; and Debussy in “Reflets dans l’eau” and “Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir”—not only for the sensory stimuli suggested by their titles, but also for the reverberations in the inner world that they induce. After all, the crucial phrase in Debussy’s statement is “he who *feels* what he sees.” Yet, this affinity between Debussy and Liszt is partially obscured by the way in which these themes were manifested in Debussy’s music. After all, Debussy’s literary influences in this regard—Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe—skewed towards the darker, more occult undercurrents of Romanticism in comparison to the breast-beating, Byronic worldview to which Liszt ascribed. Further obscuring their affinity is the difference in their pianism.

⁹⁴ Léon Vallas, *The Theories of Claude Debussy, Musicien français*, trans. Maire O’Brien (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 8.

Debussy's initial style of keyboard writing, as exemplified by works up to *Pour le piano* (1901), was influenced most directly by the pianism of Chopin, and more remotely by the keyboard style of the French *clavecinists*, Rameau and Couperin. Brilliant as his writing could be, he was seldom interested in the ostentatious virtuosity of Liszt. This gap between the Debussy and Liszt would be partially bridged by the way in which Liszt's influence was mediated through Ravel. We will see in later chapters that in many cases, Liszt's reverberations through Debussy's music can be heard through the more direct influence Ravel had on Debussy.

It may seem ironic that the younger Frenchman, who never met Liszt, expressed a great deal more open admiration towards the old master than did Debussy. In his collection were dozens of scores by Liszt, accompanied by a good amount of Rameau, Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, and Schumann.⁹⁵ Unlike Debussy, Ravel took a great interest in pianistic virtuosity, and would come to find in Liszt a model for the very intricate figurations he enjoyed. This affinity is reflected through both composers' preference for Érard pianos, which possessed the lightness of action to execute such intricate figuration with ease. Their shared delight in virtuosity goes beyond simply writing fast notes, but of finding a certain aesthetic value in the pianistic challenges. Vladimir Jankélévitch has referred to this as a "beautiful difficulty" in the music of Ravel, and writing of the composer's delight in "complicat[ing] with pleasure the rules of the game."⁹⁶

This "beautiful difficulty" is not unlike Liszt's "transcendental execution"—the notion of that there is something poetic, beautiful, and sublime to be found in virtuosity.

⁹⁵ Benjamin Ivry, *Maurice Ravel: A Life* (New York: Welcome Rain, 2000), 107.

⁹⁶ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ravel* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), 84.

Meanwhile, his pleasure in “complicating the rules of the game” is reminiscent of Liszt’s piano music in general, but especially of the manifestation of virtuosity as play in “Au bord d’une source” and “Les jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’esté.” Echoes of this playful virtuosity reverberate through the pianistic games of Ravel’s own “Jeux d’eau” (1901).

It was also in this, Ravel’s first masterpiece, that Liszt’s explorations of color through brilliant, virtuosic figuration found further advancement. At the same time, the ingenuity of Ravel’s breakthrough would set Debussy’s own piano writing on a different path starting from his *Estampes* (1903), in which Ravel’s influence can be clearly heard. Yet, to Ravel’s dismay, musicians and critics sometimes failed to recognize this debt, and instead implied that it was Ravel who was influenced by his elder colleague:

As one often-cited correspondence between Ravel and the influential music critic Pierre Lalo illustrates, the young composer could be quite sensitive to this matter. Upon hearing Ravel’s *Miroirs*, Lalo wrote in his review:

The principal new work of the evening was a suite of five piano pieces by M. Maurice Ravel, which do not resemble students’ exercises. I have often spoken of this musician, one of the most finely gifted of his generation, despite several very apparent and annoying faults. The most striking is the strange resemblance of his music to that of Claude Debussy.

Following Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt, M. Debussy has created a new manner of writing for the piano, a special style of particular virtuosity . . . Today, one hardly hears any pieces which do not contain the arabesques, passagework, and the arpeggios discovered by M. Debussy.

In a sharp response, Ravel objected to Lalo’s mischaracterizations:

You dwell upon the fact that Debussy invented a rather special kind of pianistic writing. Now, *Jeux d’eau* was published at the beginning of 1902, when nothing more than Debussy’s three pieces, *Pour le piano*, were extant. I don’t have to tell you of my deep admiration for these pieces, but from a purely pianistic point of view, they

contain nothing new. As a point of information, I would like to mention the *Menuet antique* (composed in 1895, published in 1898) in which you will already find some attempts at this writing. I hope you will excuse this legitimate claim.⁹⁷

Indeed, it was the ingenuity of Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" that led Debussy to embark on this "new manner of writing for the piano." Ravel was correct in stating that the confident piano writing of his elder colleague's *Pour le piano* were nothing new; they are largely derivative of a keyboard style that can be traced back both to the *clavecinists* in the distant past, and more recently to Chopin. It was only after Ravel's "Jeux d'eau," with its marked advancements founded on Lisztian technique, that this "particular virtuosity" could be heard in Debussy, starting from his *Estampes* of 1903, and continuing onto both sets of the *Images* and the *Préludes*.

Once again, though, the purpose of this study is not to follow the well-trodden path of outlining the mutual influence between the two Frenchmen's works *per se*, but to uncover how the Lisztian legacy is inflected through the dialogical influence between their works. In the following chapters, we will survey Ravel's "Jeux d'eau," and select pieces from his *Miroirs*, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, and Debussy's *Estampes*, *Images*, and *Préludes*, to see this legacy at work on multiple levels. While some of Liszt's influence will be found in singular instances of surface quotations, others will be manifested through the shared vocabulary of surface figurations inherited from Liszt's body of evocative works. On the deepest level, however, we will see how Debussy and Ravel appropriated Liszt's framework of evocative language, even when they have employed their distinctively new vocabularies. One may question whether these links are causal or casual, deliberate or coincidental.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Arbie Oreinstein, *A Ravel Reader; Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 79.

Indeed, in some cases Debussy and Ravel may not have intended direct references to Liszt. However, as the instances of these affinities grow, recurring patterns surface, and the evidence mounts, it would be hard to deny the existence of the underlying intertextuality and influence, however complicated the web may be.

Chapter 10:

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Crosscurrents in Water Music

It is perhaps fitting that we begin our discussion with music that seeks to depict water—an element of great symbolic significance to the Impressionist movement in both the visual arts and music. Water, with its ability to reflect and refract light, is an ideal medium to display the Impressionist concern for the play of color and light, the blurring of lines, and its fascination for mirage-like atmospheres. Impressionist art has become inseparable to the public by such works as Monet's *Water Lilies*, while Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau" and Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" have gained similar standing in Impressionist piano music.

It seems, then, even more appropriate that it was Ravel's groundbreaking "Jeux d'eau," with its debt to Liszt's water pieces, that sparked the Impressionist impulses in the piano music of both Ravel and Debussy. Thereafter, water would remain one of the most frequent sources of pictorial inspiration for both composers—not only in the works we have already mentioned, but also in a number other pieces such as Ravel's "Une barque sur l'ocean," "Ondine," and Debussy's "Poissons d'or," and "L'isle joyeuse."

Lisztian Virtuosity in Play: Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" (1901)

Despite our efforts to illuminate the full breadth Liszt's evocative style, the connection between Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" and Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este" remains a vital focal point around which Liszt's legacy is inflected in Impressionist piano music. Remarkably, "Jeux d'eau," in all its bold ingenuity, was written when Ravel was still a student at the Paris Conservatoire. In it, we see the emerging voice of a Classicist who sought to give expression to new ideas within traditional frameworks. "Jeux d'eau" exhibits clean, crisp textures, symmetrical structures, and a creative use of sonata form. As the composer himself described, "this piece, inspired by the sound of water and the music of fountains, waterfalls and streams, is built on two themes like the first movement of a sonata, without being entirely subjected to the classical scheme of tonality."⁹⁸

Yet, echoes of Liszt are immediately apparent. Initially, even the title seems to reference Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este," but Ravel's musical game points further back to the "Au bord d'une source" and its ingenious portrayal of water as play. Even the quote by Henri de Régnier which Ravel wrote on the manuscript, "Dieu fluvial riant de l'eau qui le chatouille..." (River god laughing as the water tickles him...), is reminiscent of Liszt's inscription in "Au bord d'une source": "In the whispering coolness begins young nature's play." As Paul Roberts has noted, these quotations are somewhat pagan in nature,⁹⁹ suggesting that topically, these two pieces have more in common with each other than they do with "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este" and the Catholic spirituality expressed by the central Biblical quotation in that piece. Here, Ravel even imitates Liszt's performative

⁹⁸ Cited in Alexis Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, trans. Cynthia Jolly (London: Dennis Dobson, 1938), 31.

⁹⁹ Paul Roberts, *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2012).

display of playfulness through the use of the cross-handed technique (measures 29-32), as well as virtuosic cadenzas. The celebration of ephemeral surface sensations of “laughing,” “tickling,” and “whispering coolness” can be felt through the fleeting dissonances. The momentary clashes of seconds found throughout “Au bord d’une source” are here manifested as dissonant sevenths right in the opening of the piece, as well as the dyads of seconds accompany the pentatonic second theme in measures 19-21.

Still, the scintillating surface effects owe much to Liszt’s vocabulary of liquid pyrotechnics that reached its pinnacle in “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este” as well. On the most fundamental basis of timbre, this shared vocabulary rests in the exploitation of the piano’s treble register in both hands. His manipulation of distinct tessituras and utilization of three-staff notation is informed by Liszt’s similar practice, as is his judicious use of low bass sonorities at times to signify the depths of the fountains. Like Liszt, he used intricate figurations derived from arpeggios, trills, and tremolos as raw materials. The Lisztian roots of these figurations are apparent even from the first bar, as Ravel’s use of extended ninth chords in the arpeggios recalls Liszt’s opening jets of parallel ninth chords.

Example 10.1. Ravel, “Jeux d’eau,” opening (1901)

Ravel also shares Liszt's interest in symmetrically balancing the upward sprays with downward streams, but whereas this happens in Liszt's piece over the course of ten measures, Ravel's symmetrical balance occurs both at most local level (within the first measure) and on a longer-term basis (also over the course of the first ten measures). Next, at measure 19, the arpeggiated figurations of dyads, inflected symmetrically over repeated notes, can be related to similar passages at measure in "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este," although as mentioned earlier, the dyads themselves are reminiscent of the sonorities of "Au bord d'une source."

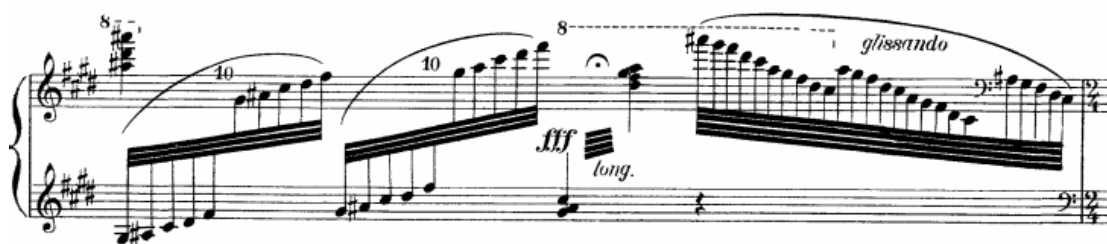
Example 10.2a. Ravel, "Jeux d'eau," m. 19-20

Example 10.2b. Liszt, "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este," m. 112-119

Meanwhile, Ravel's double-note tremolos at measure 26 are used throughout Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eau," and his alternating two-handed tremolo at the cadenza in measure 48 are

reminiscent of the same technique in the climax of Liszt's "Waldesrauschen," although Ravel's represents an advancement in brilliance.

Example 10.3. Ravel, "Jeux d'eau," extended tremolo techniques, m. 26; m. 48



This last point, though, reminds us again that although Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eau" was a seminal work, his legacy of intricate figurations started long before it. In fact, one of Ravel's most striking passages in "Jeux d'eau," the coloristic wash of rapid arpeggios filled with extended seventh and ninth chords with added sixths at measure 66, appears to be lifted right off the pages of Liszt's earlier piece, "St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds."

Example 10.4a. Ravel, "Jeux d'eau," m. 66-67





Example 10.4b. Liszt, “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” m. 9-12



Considering this myriad of liquid figuration we have discussed, it is not difficult to imagine why both Liszt and Ravel preferred the light, easy action of Érard pianos. Beyond this figuration, though, we can also see some general affinities between the two composers’ use of alternative pitch collections. Ravel’s use of the use of pentatonic and whole-tone scales can be related Liszt’s usage of the same materials, albeit to a much greater extent. Ravel’s use of the coloristic wash of a rapid whole-tone scale (Example 10.5) and his ingenious exploitation of the “play” of black keys in the second theme (Example 10.2a, left hand) and the black-key glissando of the cadenza (Example 10.3b) far surpass any of Liszt’s efforts.

Example 10.5. Ravel, “Jeux d’eau,” whole-tone scale, m. 6



It would be impractical to cite every instance of Lisztian virtuosity in Ravel's music, but the way in which Ravel appropriated Liszt's technical style has been well illustrated by the examples here. We have seen how Ravel took many aspects of Liszt's writing and advanced—and in some cases reinvented—them through his own ingenuity to create a bold new style. The Lisztian legacy as inflected through this innovative style will have significant reverberations across the Impressionistic piano music of both composers over the course of the next decade.

Debussy's Response: The "New Manner of Writing" in *Estampes*

The three pieces that form *Estampes* marks a striking departure from his prior keyboard style; it is no doubt the "new manner of writing" Lalo was referring to in his review quoted earlier. As we have seen, it was actually Ravel's ingenuity in "Jeux d'eau" that set the precedent for this bold new style for both composers. Ironically, Debussy's answer to Ravel's discoveries was not primarily to be found in his own water piece, "Jardin sous la pluie," the final piece in the set. In this piece, the link can only be seen through several moments of near quotation (Example 10.6). First, the coloristic washes of extended-chord arpeggios at measure 118 can be traced immediately back to Ravel's "Jeux d'eau," but ultimately originated from Liszt's "St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds." There is another moment at measure 136 involving a quick, rising arpeggio in the left hand, followed by a trill, which recalls a similar effect in measure 68-69 of Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eaux." Aside from these, the pianism of "Jardin sous la pluie" is largely toccata-style writing that he had already employed in the Toccata of *Pour le Piano* and can be traced back

all the way to Bach. What is remarkable though, is how Debussy manages to repurpose a centuries-old style of writing to pointillistically evoke a flurry of raindrops and its patter.

Example 10.6a. Lisztian figurations in m. 36-37 of Debussy's "Jardin sous la pluie"



Example 10.6b. Lisztian figurations in m. 118-121 of Debussy's "Jardin sous la pluie"

Rapide

While the middle piece of the set, "La soiree dans Grenade," does feature distinct echoes of both Liszt and Ravel, it does so primarily without the virtuosic style that is central to the discussion of water music in this chapter. We will therefore save the discussion of this piece for its more appropriate place in the next chapter. It is ironic, then, that we are left to find the most striking echoes of Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" in the first piece of Debussy's set, "Pagodes," which is not even a piece about water. The pentatonicism of Debussy's piece can be simultaneously traced back to its use in evoking the exotic Orient

that is suggested by the title, and the black-key play found in Ravel's piece.¹⁰⁰ The latter is most conspicuous in the respective codas of both pieces. Debussy's ending seems to be lifted right off the pages of Ravel's final page—even down to the unresolved dissonance at the end (in Ravel, a tonic seventh chord with an added sixth; in Debussy, a tonic seventh chord with an added sixth *and* an added second). Of course, if we momentarily set aside the starkly contrasting surface aesthetics involved, the disregard for dissonance resolution in the final chord of the piece can be traced back further to Liszt's "Nuage gris." However, the most immediate and striking correlation is between Debussy and Ravel.

Example 10.7. Echoes of Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" in Debussy's "Pagodes"

Whether we consider this as an instance of respectful homage or near-plagiarism, it is easy to see why Ravel was infuriated by Lalo's claim that Ravel's writing seemed to be modeled after a "particular virtuosity" filled with "arabesques, passage work, and the arpeggios *discovered* by M. Debussy"! Perhaps, Ravel should have taken comfort in the fact that such "particular" passagework should ultimately be traced back to Liszt. Besides the

¹⁰⁰ Ravel's own use of the pentatonic can likely also be attributed to his fascination for the gamelan sounds, though his use of the scale in "Jeux d'eau" owes more to its general exotic-sounding quality than a desire to specifically evoke the Far East.

pentatonic passagework, Debussy's recurring use of seconds as a sonority for its sake—with no particular need for resolution—is reminiscent of similar dyads in Ravel's piece, and ultimately, the clashing seconds that occur through Liszt's "Au bord d'une source."

All this is not to minimize Debussy's own remarkable ingenuity in "Pagodes"—there are many, but the "particular virtuosity" was not one. In that regard, we will revisit "Pagodes" and its evocative language in the next chapter from a different angle. At this point, though, it is most important to recognize through this preliminary survey how *Estampes* was a crucial juncture in Debussy's piano writing—one in which the infusion of the evocative virtuosity of Liszt and Ravel set him on a new course that would inform his piano writing for the next decade.

Reflections of Liszt in Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau," from *Images I* (1905)

Following Debussy's new direction in piano writing displayed in the *Estampes* of 1903, the composer would go on to write "Reflets dans l'eau" (1905) a seminal piece of water music whose very title suggests its preoccupation with visual imagery, justifiably representing Debussy's "Impressionism" to the general public perception much as Monet's "Water Lilies" does for the original Impressionist movement in the visual arts. In "Reflets," Debussy continues to appropriate Ravel's new virtuosic style towards his own expressive ends. However, here, we can also observe Debussy beginning to experiment more directly with the legacy of Liszt's evocative language, independent of Ravel's negotiation. As we will see, Debussy engages in an exploration of sonic alchemy that furthers Liszt's efforts in "Harmonies du soir." As Debussy wrote to his publisher, the piece was "based on different

ideas in accordance with the most recent discoveries of harmonic chemistry.”¹⁰¹ Unlike previous water pieces that primarily depict the water through activity and play, “Reflets” is the first to also explicitly emphasize the reflective nature of water in relative calm and stillness, revealing its illusory and mirage-like qualities in the process. In this respect, the piece is thoroughly Impressionistic on the surface level. As Roberts writes, “in ‘Reflets’ Debussy exploits the softer resonances and vibrations of the instrument, drawing our ear to the point where resonance fades, where the different elements of a sound shift and transform themselves—just as a visible object appears to change shape and substance under different aspects of light.”¹⁰²

Indeed, Debussy’s fixation on the optics of reflection is almost single-minded in this piece. It is manifested in symmetrical writing throughout, where upward motion is always balanced by reflective downward motion. This recalls similar concerns for symmetry in Ravel’s “Jeux d’eau” and Liszt “Les Jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este,” but Debussy far surpasses either in his commitment: almost every moment of the piece takes part in this symmetry, either within a single bar, or spread over two- or four-bar units that see rising action correspondingly reflected by nearly equal and opposite reaction.

Example 10.8. Debussy, “Reflets dans l’eau” (1905), opening



¹⁰¹ Letter to Jacques Durand, 19 August 1905, in *Debussy Letters*, trans. and ed. François Lesure and Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 155.

¹⁰² Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, 34

The word *nearly* is crucial there, as the reflection is never quite the same as the original image; the reflection is always altered and varied in some way. Such distortion became fodder for early critics of Impressionism like Symbolist poet Jules Laforgue: “The [Impressionist eye] reaches a point where it can see reality in the living atmosphere of forms, decomposed, refracted, reflected by beings and things, in incessant variation.”¹⁰³ Of course, this illusory mirage is actually what Debussy intended. As Paul Roberts writes, it is “reflection not as imitation, but as transformation, that Debussy is concerned with. He is exploring sound as it evolves and distorts as the reflection of an image in water is transformed by movements on the surface.”¹⁰⁴

This fixation on variation and transformation is reminiscent of “Au bord d’une source” and “Waldesrauschen,” but at the most immediate level, the opening reflections bear an uncanny resemblance to the opening of Liszt’s “Harmonies du soir.” The D^b major key of Ravel’s piece recalls that of Liszt’s piece, as does the tempo *Andantino molto* (just *Andantino* in Liszt). They begin in harmonic stasis with bass pedal points, over which the right hand plays a series of chordal passages that are nearly, but not perfectly symmetrical in their rising and falling shapes. Marguerite Long has commented on the circular symmetry of these shapes, claiming that Debussy described the opening passage as “a little circle in water with a little pebble falling in it.”¹⁰⁵ In fact, it is this circularity that characterizes most of the near-symmetrical thematic material in “Harmonies du soir,” from the opening passages to the main chordal theme at measure 10, and the refrain theme starting in measure 38.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Linda Nochlin, *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism: 1875-1904* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), 15-20.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Roberts, *Images: the Piano Music of Debussy*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Debussy*, trans. Olive Senior-Ellis (London: J.M. Dent, 1972), 25.

Example 10.9. Symmetry in Chordal Themes of Liszt's "Harmonies du soir"

In "Reflets" the left hand plays an additional motive (A^b , F , E^b) between the pedal notes and the chordal passages (see again, Example 10.8); it may not be mere coincidence that these three notes form an exact intervallic transposition of the first three notes in the "soprano" voice of the right hand chords in "Harmonies du soir." Paul Roberts has made the case for Debussy's use of these three notes to exploit the nuances piano's overtones. That may be true, but it does not rule out the veiled link to Liszt, especially considering that the evidence for the affinity between the two continues to mount thereafter. In both pieces, the nearly symmetrical chordal passages similarly explore coloristic possibilities through tessitura: the right hand in the first nine measures of "Harmonies du soir," explores a range of F^b_3 through A^b_6 through gradual expansion, while the right hand in the first eight bars of "Reflets" explores an almost identical range of G^b_3 to A^b_6 , although the expansion of range happens immediately within the first two measures.

Subsequently, measures 9 and 11, Debussy engages in chains of extended quartal harmonies, organized in pairs which give the false impression of tension and resolution by way of stepwise motion, when in fact this harmonic motion is largely nonfunctional. This bears a striking similarity to Liszt's own chains of chords at measures 16 and 18 in his piece, where a series of diminished-seventh chords each resolve to triads in parallel succession, in a display of non-functional colorism.

The remainder of the pieces seem to take very different directions, as the sonorities of Liszt's piece remain chordal, while Ravel goes on to use the virtuosic liquid figuration we have already seen in the previous water pieces by Liszt and Ravel, and which Debussy had already begun to employ in "Pagodes." Yet, beneath this surface, both pieces exhibit an arch form, reaching emotional climaxes before returning to the calm of the openings.

Liszt's, unsurprisingly, is a hot-blooded Romantic outpouring, filled with his characteristic histrionics. Meanwhile, Debussy writes a dramatic central climax as well, one which Roberts describes as "almost Lisztian in intensity." He goes on to note, "the climax of 'Reflets dans l'eau,' so close to the unashamed emotion of Romanticism, is not of the kind usually associated with the music of Debussy. It is characteristic of him, nevertheless, especially in the way it is all over before we have time to be swept in (which is why such moments can be overlooked in the popular view of Debussy's art)."¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Roberts is correct—Debussy's climactic moment almost matches the nature and intensity of Liszt's apotheosis, but only for a brief moment. Where Liszt's initial evening harmonies resonate through his inner world using the aesthetics of the Romanticism of his time, the initial surface ripples in Debussy's water are reflected and reverberated through his inner world

¹⁰⁶ Paul Roberts, *Images: the Piano Music of Debussy*, 25.

in the Symbolist terms of his time. Yet, as the passion in both pieces winds down, we are left with echoes and reflections of the opening material and its calm. In the final bars of both pieces, both Liszt and Debussy use open sonorities and an expansive keyboard range to suggest the distant calm. Where Liszt marks his coda *dolce, armonioso*, with thick, dense chords giving way to wide, openly spaced ones, and finally slow arpeggiations across the span on the keyboard, ranging from D^b_1 to D^b_7 . Meanwhile, Debussy indicates *Lent, dans une sonorite harmonieuse et lointaine*, using open octaves, as well as the three-staff notation pioneered by Liszt, to suggest expansive distance.

Example 10.10. Debussy, “Reflets dans l’eau,” signification of distance in the end

The final bars encompass largely the same span as Liszt’s, also starting from D^b_1 but extending an extra fifth to A^b_7 .

It goes without saying that Debussy’s remarkable ingenuity in “Reflets dans l’eau” and his bold new experiments in “harmonic chemistry,” well-documented in the analytical literature, go far beyond its connection with “Harmonies du soir.” To point out its debts to Liszt’s piece is not to diminish its achievements, but rather to clarify the foundation upon which he builds. In the process, we have once again seen how Debussy, using the distinct

vocabulary of his language, drew on and advanced an existing framework towards much different evocative ends.

Further Reverberations of Liszt

After their first masterpieces in the genre of water music, both Ravel and Debussy had assimilated a great deal of the liquid figurations from Liszt's music. These figuration would become ubiquitous in their writing, both in water pieces and other types of descriptive pieces. Yet, some of the subsequent water pieces would assimilate some other Lisztian textures that had yet to be explored in the first pieces.

To begin with, Ravel uses of a number of Lisztian techniques from "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este" in "Une Barque sur l'océan," the third of five pieces in *Miroirs*. In the opening, the wide-ranging left-hand arpeggios, spanning two octaves plus a third, bear an immediate resemblance to the ones Liszt used in the central section of his "Les jeux d'eaux." These arpeggios, modified in one way or another, form the basis for the most prevalent texture in the piece. Other arpeggio-based effects, such as the six-octave cascade at measure 43, the circular figurations at measures 83 and 100, as well as the right hand's chordal tremolos in measures 19 and 71 all show Liszt's influence from "Les jeux d'eaux." Yet, these are largely techniques that Ravel already learned to use several years earlier in his own "Jeux d'eau."

What sets "Une Barque sur l'océan" apart, then, is a more consistent use of the water figuration throughout the entire keyboard range than either Ravel's own "Jeux d'eau" or Debussy's "Reflets." In "Jeux d'eau," Ravel made occasional use of the bass as contrast the brilliance of the treble, while Debussy's "Reflets" used the bass mostly for grounded

sonorities like pedal points and chords, only using left hand arpeggiated figuration in the climax. “Une Barque sur l’ocean,” however, makes a much more extended effort to explore the sonority of water through left-hand figuration in the middle of the keyboard down to the low bass—necessarily so, since we are not dealing here with a fountain, stream, or pond—but the mighty expanse of the ocean.

In this way, it is reminiscent of Liszt’s only water piece set in the sea, “St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves.” While in sound, Ravel’s ocean is perhaps even more expansive than Liszt’s sea, it lacks the latter’s wild ferocity. Even the grandest of Ravel’s waves convey more of a sense of majesty rather than of the violent force of Liszt’s stormy torrents. And while Liszt’s storm at sea marks an eventful occurrence within the piece, Ravel’s largest surges do not give the impression of eventfulness, but rather just normal happenings in the ocean—though they inspire marvel and wonderment nonetheless. This highlights a crucial quality of Ravel’s structure: unlike the narrative structure of Liszt’s *Legend* and its depiction of events, Ravel’s piece seems timeless, owing to the harmonic stasis of pedal points, rhythmic ostinatos, and general uniformity of texture. These are all techniques contributing to the suspension of time, as discussed in Chapter Nine. In this respect, the entrancing lull of this piece recalls Liszt’s “Au lac de Wallenstadt,” but on a much grander scale.

If Ravel’s “Une barque” is somewhat predictable in its trancelike lull, the hyperactive goldfish of Debussy’s “Poissons d’or” offer the perfect antidote. In contrast to the great expanse of Ravel’s ocean, Debussy offers us a glimpse into life inside the confines of a fishbowl, illustrated by the relatively dense, claustrophobic texture of the opening. Within

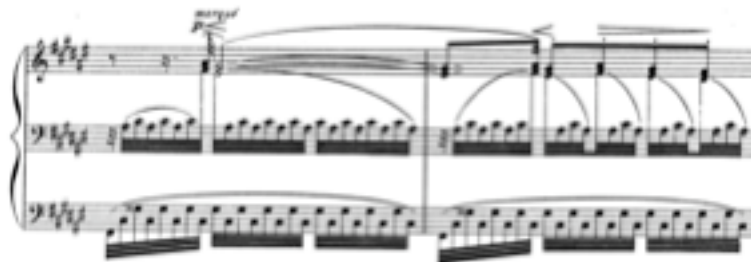
those confines, though, these fish exhibit a remarkable freedom through their bustling activity. It is fitting, then, that in this piece Debussy displays an almost Lisztian brilliance in his dazzling, exuberant display of virtuosity—one that is unparalleled in almost any of his other piano pieces, with the exception of “L’isle joyeuse” and “Feux d’artifice.” As Paul Roberts writes, “pianism, of the transcendental kind, was one of the many inspirations for ‘Poissons d’or.’”¹⁰⁷

Surprisingly, these gregarious fish owe their portrayal not primarily to one of Liszt’s water pieces, but to the garrulous birds of Liszt’s “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds.” Where the double tremolos represented the fluttering motion of the birds in Liszt’s piece, here they represent the buoyant, quivering motion of the goldfish. Of course, on a purely pianistic level, the double-handed tremolo texture in Debussy’s piece traces back further to vibrating atmosphere of “Chasse-neige,” now involving the medium of water rather than the air. However, in its portrayal of life and activity, as well as its effervescent quality, the *Legend* is a more relevant predecessor. The gesture of quick decorative thirds above the vibrations of trills and tremolos in both pieces leaves a distinct aural impression unlike any other pieces.

Figure 10.11. Debussy’s vibrating texture in the opening of “Poissons d’or” (1907)



¹⁰⁷ Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, 191.



According to Maurice Dumesnil, a student of Debussy, the composer wanted the opening passage to be “almost immaterial, so one could hear ‘two clarinets’ above.” Such a comment debunks Eigeldinger’s earlier assertion, which too neatly categorized Debussy in a lineage of composers whose treatment of the piano was not orchestral.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, we need only to replace Ravel’s two clarinets with Liszt’s two flutes to arrive at the strikingly similar aural imagery in Liszt’s *Legend*. Even the playful cross-handed technique at measure 18 seem to be lifted right off of the pages of Liszt’s piece (Example 10.12). In fact, the first section of these two pieces not only sound but look similar on the page.

Example 10.12a. Cross-handed figures in Debussy’s “Poissons d’or,” m. 19-23; m. 30

 A musical score for Debussy's "Poissons d'or" in 4/4 time, marked *pp*. The score is written for two pianos. The upper piano part features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata, while the lower piano part plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The two parts are cross-handed, with the right hand of the upper piano playing the lower register and the left hand of the lower piano playing the upper register. The score includes dynamic markings such as *Un peu retenu*, *più p*, and *pp*, and tempo markings like *au Mouvt*.

¹⁰⁸ Further support for the view that Debussy thought in orchestral terms at the piano can be found in the fact he approved of Bernardino Molarino’s effort to orchestrate “L’isle Joyeuse” in 1917, as well as the fact that he originally conceived of his *Images pour orchestre* as a work for two pianos.



Example 10.12b.

Cross-handed figures in Liszt, "St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds," m. 12-15

Once again, though, what begins similarly leads to divergences in both pieces that lead to distinctly different overall effects. The innocent charm at the beginning of Liszt's *Legend* is only a prelude to the expression of reverent faith later in the piece. Meanwhile, the playful humor in the beginning of "Poissons d'or" leads to mischievous irony and sarcasm in the middle episodes, marked *capricieux et souple* and *espressif et sans rigueur*.

This way in which Liszt's influence is manifested in this piece is one primary reason why such connections between his evocative music and the Impressionist piano literature have largely been overlooked in the critical commentary. Debussy and Ravel appropriated the same figurations, effects, and textures for much different evocative purposes as compared to Liszt. The more easily recognizable crosscurrents among the water pieces

like Liszt's "Au bord d'une source" and "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este," Ravel's "Jeux d'eau," and Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau" have been repeatedly noted. However, the more complex cross-pollination of influences between water pieces and other types of descriptive nature pieces has been largely veiled by their divergent subject matter and overall effect. As we have seen now, the evocative language that Liszt left behind and that Ravel first reappropriated would be inflected in many different contexts, in the most unsuspecting of places. The fact is that Debussy and Ravel each thoroughly incorporated this vocabulary, transformed it, and ultimately made it his own, towards much different expressive ends. The coloristic washes which Liszt first used to depict the whirling flight of birds were subsequently used by Ravel to describe the delicate mirage of water streams, and by Debussy to represent a downpour of rain. Meanwhile, the same playful pentatonicism of Ravel's water game is manifested as Oriental imagery in Debussy's "Pagodes." In "Jardin sous la pluie," Debussy adapts centuries-old toccata writing to pointillistically evoke a rainstorm.

This highlights the imprecision of the musical language that holds the key to its mysterious communicative power. For all our discussion of an evocative language in this study, its vocabulary is still in precise—capable of imparting shared impressions, but many different context-dependent meanings. That is why the titles in all the works discussed in this study were not meant to denote specific meanings or inhibit the listener's imagination, but to provide a context and a starting point from which stir the imagination. Much of the remaining discussion will be filled with this cross-pollination of ideas that resists neat categorization.

Chapter 11

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The Air of Mystery:

Synesthesia and Sensuality in Mythical Legends and Exotic Landscapes

In Chapter Nine, we explored how the performative quality of Liszt's music elevated the importance of the moment and celebrated sensuality to a level that was unprecedented at that time. This emphasis on sensuality runs through much of the music of Debussy and Ravel that we consider Impressionistic. For example, the same delight in fleeting surface sensations and skin-tingling pleasures that we find in Liszt's "Au bord d'une source" and the beginning of "Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este" can be felt in Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" and Debussy's "Poissons d'or." The ephemeral nature of these sensations is rooted in constant motion, activity, and change in the music, both in the surface figuration and the underlying harmonies. There is also a tinge of exoticism in these sensations, whether it is created through the use of extended harmonies like ninth and eleventh chords and added-tone chords, or use of non-diatonic materials like pentatonic or whole-tone scales.

Yet, in many other pieces, these fleeting pleasures do not fully account for the opulent sensuality of the music. In these pieces, starting from Liszt's "Harmonies du soir" and "Waldesrauschen" and extending to, among others, Debussy's "La soirée dans Grenade," "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir," and Ravel's "Ondine," there is a much deeper infusion of sensations and impressions pervasive in the atmosphere. Common to this music is a sense of timelessness that allows us to luxuriate and indulge in

the intoxicating sensuality and exotic mystery of the atmosphere—pleasures we experience only in passing transience in the first group of pieces.

Synesthesia in Evening Music

The musical aesthetic of these pieces has its roots in Liszt's "Harmonies du soir," though its thematic underpinnings had literary origins. To recall our discussion in Chapter Five, the indulgence in exotic harmonies that we find in Liszt's "Harmonies du soir" can be read as a musical manifestation of the *Soleil Couchant* theme in French Romantic poetry—an interpretation first proposed by Sara Zamir and Juliette Hassine.¹⁰⁹ This recurring theme portrayed the evening sunset as a time of heightened sensitivity to both physical and emotional sensations, the engagement with which would lead to a transcendent spiritual vision. While this theme was prevalent in the Romantic poetry throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, from the works of Alphonse de Lamartine and Alfred de Vigny to those of Victor Hugo, it is its manifestation in Charles Baudelaire's poem, "Harmonie du soir" from *Le fleurs du mal* (1857) that best informs our discussion.

The first stanza of the poem reads:

*Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!*

Now comes the time, when vibrating on its stem
Each flower sheds its scent like a censer;
Sounds and scents turn on the evening air;
Melancholy waltz and languorous vertigo!¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Sara Zamir and Juliette Hassine, "Reading Liszt's Harmonies du Soir through the Soleil Couchant (Sunset) Theme in French Romantic Poetry," *Journal of Music and Meaning* 7 (Fall-Winter 2008, Section 5),

¹¹⁰ English translation by Paul Roberts, in *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, 74.

Paul Roberts has highlighted the central importance of synesthesia in the poem—a condition he calls “the fusion of the senses into a single harmonious sensation.”¹¹¹

Meanwhile, Zamir and Hassine have observed that the term *Harmonie* in French “possessed highly symbolic connotations transformed mostly into an emotional state.”¹¹²

Thus, in reading Liszt’s title, *Harmonies* refers as much to actual sounds as it does to a unified physical and emotional sensation during a the state of synesthesia. It matters little that Liszt’s étude predated Baudelaire’s poem and therefore did not make specific reference to it, because the concept of the *Soleil Couchant* was entrenched both in the literature and the *zeitgeist* of the age. Proof of the extra-aural nature of the imagery and sensations that inspire this piece can be found in Liszt’s own teaching: his great pupil Arthur Friedheim once recalled a lesson one late afternoon in which he played the piece for Liszt, who pointed towards the window at the delicate, mellow rays of the declining sun outside and said, “Play that! There are your evening harmonies!”¹¹³ Surely, Liszt’s blending of sonorities in this piece parallels the blending of many other senses. Besides the obvious implications for visual color and imagery, it is hardly possible to listen to these “harmonies” without having tactile senses engaged by skin-tingling sensation. Whether or not scent and taste are explicitly invoked matters little—they are implied in the stirringly sensual atmosphere all around.

However, what Liszt leaves to implication is made explicit by Debussy in his evening pieces. His prélude, “Les sons et les parfums” (1910) and the more recent discovery, “Les

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Sara Zamir and Juliette Hassine, “Reading Liszt’s *Harmonies du Soir* through the *Soleil Couchant* (Sunset) Theme in French Romantic Poetry,”

¹¹³ Arthur Friedheim, *Life and Liszt: The Recollections of a Concert Pianist*, ed. Theodore L. Bullock (New York: Dover, 1961), 52.

soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon" (composed in 1917; discovered in 2001) respectively make reference to Baudelaire's own lines in "Harmonie du soir" and "Le balcon." The former is concerned with the sounds and scents in the line of poetry referenced by the title, while elsewhere in the poem, references are also made to visual images ("The sun has drowned in his blood which congeals") and emotional sensations ("a tender heart"). Meanwhile, "Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon" evokes visual images ("The evenings lighted by the glow of the coals"), and in the rest of the poem referenced, Baudelaire makes additional allusion to the tactile senses ("fireside evenings in their warmth and beauty) and scent ("I breathed the perfume of your blood in flower").¹¹⁴

While the thematic parallels between Liszt's and Debussy's evening pieces are apparent, there has been little to no connection made between these pieces in the critical commentary thus far. Perhaps this is due to Liszt's étude predating the Baudelaire poems that Debussy references¹¹⁵, but using the general thematic framework of the *Soleil Couchant*, it is also possible to illuminate a clear musical relation between the two composer's works. In fact, we will see that the musical evocation of the literary theme requires the engagement with two of the most important pieces of Liszt's evocative framework—the suspension of time, and the suggestion of distance and physical dimensions.

Having already explored the way in which "Harmonies du soir" (and to a more modest extent, "Les cloches de Genève") employs this framework in earlier chapters, we may now turn directly to Debussy's first evening piece, "La soirée dans Grenade." While this

¹¹⁴ Translation by Roy Campbell, *Poems of Baudelaire* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952).

¹¹⁵ In fact, it is entirely possible that Baudelaire, who was an admirer of Liszt's work, may have drawn inspiration from the composer's earlier piece.

piece, the second of the *Estampes*, bears no explicit relationship with Baudelaire's poems, the broad outlines of the *Soleil Couchant* theme are apparent. Through this music, we not only hear the sounds of Andalusian Spain, but also visualize its vibrant images, and taste and smell the aroma of its air. Admittedly, the rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic material have clear debts to Ravel's "Habanera" of the two-piano suite, *Sites auriculaires* in 1895, the score of which Debussy had borrowed in 1898. Yet, it is the broad mechanics of Liszt's evocative framework that allow the successful evocation, even if specific details and vocabulary are borrowed from elsewhere. Right from the beginning, we can hear the echoes of Liszt's techniques in "Harmonies du soir" in Debussy's atmospheric opening. Both pieces start in harmonic stasis, through the use of low dominant pedal points at the depths of the keyboard range (A^b_1 in Liszt, $C^\#_1$ in Debussy). On top of this, Debussy, like Liszt, gradually moves the right hand from the bass up to the high treble, such that eventually both hands encompass the extremities of the keyboard (exactly five octaves in Liszt, from A^b_1 to A^b_6 ; exactly six octaves in Debussy, from $C^\#_1$ to $C^\#_7$). In opening up physical space on the keyboard between the hands, both composers metaphorically and aurally signify the expansiveness of their respective evening landscapes. This aural creation and awareness of space form a dimension that Debussy repeatedly and deliberately points out: he prescribes *lointain* (faraway, in the distance) three separate times in the piece (measures 7, 109, and 115), and at the end, indicates *en allant se perdant* (getting farther away, disappearing).

Example 11.1a. Debussy, “La soirée dans Grenade,” signification of space in the opening

Mouvement de Habanera
Commencer lentement dans un rythme nonchalamment gracieux

PIANO *ppp*

8

pp *expressif*

Example 11.1b. Debussy, “La soirée dans Grenade,” signification of space in the ending

p

Meanwhile, Debussy creates through the regularity of the ostinato *habanera* rhythm a trancelike suspension of time in much the same way Liszt did with his pervasive rhythmic ostinato in “Au lac de Wallenstadt” and the lulling repetitive accompaniment in the opening pages of “Les cloches de Genève.” Admittedly, the folk materials here—the Arabic scale in the Flamenco melody (more specifically, the *cante jondo* of the Andalusian region), and the *habanera* rhythm—color the evening atmosphere with an exotic tinge. Yet, the technique of superimposing exotic material on top of stationary pedal tones is not new, but

reminiscent again of “Harmonies du soir.” This static introduction is suddenly interrupted by a new theme at the *tempo giusto* at measure 17, with is an emulation of guitar strums, only to have the opening ostinato interject. Several more themes are presented later in the piece, but are interrupted with unexpected recollections of earlier material.

Example 11.2. Debussy, “La soirée dans Grenade,” cinematic splicing effect

This fragmentary and episodic construction emulates Liszt’s cut-scene cinematic quality—but here, more akin to that found in Liszt’s “Pastorale” than in “Les cloches” or “Harmonies du soir.” After all, Debussy’s abrupt juxtapositions here, like in Liszt’s “Pastorale,” do not explicitly differentiate between the outer world and inner world, but between diverse images taken from fragmentary scenes of the outer world. This can be partially attributed to the influence of the pictorial technique in the Japanese prints which inspired *Estampes*, which as Roberts points out uses “distorted perspectives and drastic foreshortenings, and the way the artist blithely cut off a view of the complete scene or

object with the picture frame to give a sense of intense activity, or presence, just out of sight.” Roberts goes on to write, “we realize only in retrospect that the authentic Andalusian atmosphere is created from just glimpses of the full picture, from snatches of guitar rhythms, and languid flamenco melodies that appear to lead nowhere. There is even a suggestion of cinematic process, of flickering of moving pictures where one frame can be cut to another without transition.”¹¹⁶ This sounds remarkably like Liszt’s “Pastorale,” if we substitute the guitars for the bagpipes, *cante jondo* flamenco melodies for *Kühreigen* cowherd melodies, and the atmosphere of Spanish Andalusia for Swiss Appenzell. And to Robert’s observation about the cinematic process, I would also add that both landscapes fade into the distance, like a camera slowly zooming away from the scene.

In a way, Liszt’s “Pastorale” is his own *Estampe* in miniature, depicting the picturesque scene of the Swiss folk countryside. Debussy’s piece is much more complex in both language and form, but the echoes of Liszt’s underlying technique remains. Even though the central episodes in Liszt’s two evening pieces, “Harmonies du soir” and “Les cloches de Genève,” redirect our attention inward towards characteristically Romantic self-focused yearning, their opening material still reverberates through multiple time indexes in the piece. Despite the fact that the music in each of these pieces transports us into many different scenes both in the outer and inner worlds, the continual return of the opening material, especially in the pieces’ closing moments, is a constant reminder that we never really went anywhere at all.

Turning now to a piece directly inspired by Baudelaire, “Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir,” we can see similar strategies at play. In a manner reminiscent

¹¹⁶ Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, 62.

of “La soirée dans Grenade” and Liszt’s “Harmonie du soir,” Debussy employs functionally ambiguous harmonies over opening pedal points to conjure a mysterious atmosphere. Once again, he also interjects the opening material within the body of the piece and reprises it at the end, which serves to suspend the flow of time both at a local level and on a larger scale. The suggestion of distance again comes into play in measure 51, where he indicates *comme une lointaine sonnerie de cors* (like a distant ringing of horns), followed two measures later by *encore plus lointain et plus retenu* (even slower and more distant). As in the end of “Pastorale” and “La soirée dans Grenade,” the camera slowly zooms away from our landscape.

Beyond these echoes, Debussy pays explicit homage to Liszt’s “Harmonies du soir,” to the point of near-literal quotation of two important elements. First, Debussy makes several allusions to Liszt’s primary motivic material—a succession of chords with a distinct, wave-like contour. This is initially rooted in the right-hand chords in measures 2-4 of the étude, though the contour takes its most distinct form in measures 17-20, and finally forms the basis of the refrain theme at measure 38. In “Les sons et les parfums,” Debussy quotes a fragment of Liszt’s material almost literally in the right hand of measure 14 of his prélude, and mimics the contour in a more extended fashion in measures 34-36.

Example 11.3. Motivic connections between

Liszt's "Harmonies du soir" and Debussy's "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir"

11.3a. Liszt, "Harmonies du soir," m. 17; m. 31; m. 38-39

The image shows three musical excerpts from Liszt's "Harmonies du soir". The first excerpt (measure 17) is marked "arpeggiato" and shows a descending sequence of parallel fourths in the right hand. The second excerpt (measure 31) shows a similar texture. The third excerpt (measures 38-39) is marked "Poco più mosso", "dolcissimo", and "ppp", with a "una corda" instruction. It features a descending sequence of parallel fourths in the right hand.

11.3b. Debussy, "Les sons et les parfums," m. 14; m. 34-36

The image shows two musical excerpts from Debussy's "Les sons et les parfums". The first excerpt (measure 14) shows a descending sequence of parallel fourths in the right hand. The second excerpt (measures 34-36) shows a similar texture, marked "p" and "la basse un peu appuyée et soutenu".

Second, Debussy takes Liszt's descending sequence of parallel fourths at measures 16 and 18 of the étude (later enharmonically re-spelled and slightly altered to form a sequence of uniformly perfect fourths at measures 30 and 32) and reappropriates the fourth interval as a motivic centerpiece in his prélude. Initially, it is a rising perfect fourth that forms the basis of the recurring gesture that opens the piece. Beginning in measure 4, though, Debussy hints at Liszt's descending perfect fourth, and proceeds to dangle a veiled echo in front of the listener in measure 5. Here, we need only to transpose the bass pedal point and the treble line to expose the fragment as an outline of the beginning of Liszt's sequence of descending fourths in measure 16 of his étude. Debussy withholds a more complete quotation of the fourths sequence until measures 28-29, and again in measures 45-46.

Example 11.4.

Parallel 4ths sequence in Liszt's "Harmonies du soir" and Debussy's "Les sons et les parfums"

11.4a. Liszt, "Harmonies du soir," m. 16; m. 30



11.4b. Debussy, "Les sons et les parfums," m. 5; m. 28-29; m. 45-46



Not surprisingly, clear echoes of "Les sons et les parfums"—and more remotely, of Liszt—resound in Debussy's last piece of Baudelarian evening music, "Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon." The connection in Debussy's mind between the two poems which inspired these pieces, "Harmonie du soir" and "Le balcon," can be traced back several decades before, when Debussy set both of their texts in his collection of songs, *Poèmes de Baudelaire*, in 1889. Though the song settings and the piano pieces are independent of each other, it is nevertheless unsurprising that "Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon" is cut from the same cloth as the prélude that predated it by seven years. By this time in 1917, Debussy's rapidly declining health, coupled by wartime conditions, led to a deepening depression. He was near his end, and perhaps this—the last piano piece he

wrote—was a grim, private recollection of his earlier evening music.¹¹⁷ The lines of Baudelaire’s poem provide clues to this sense of reminiscence: “*Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses*” (“Mother of Memories, mistresses of mistresses”¹¹⁸); “*Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses*” (“I know the art of evoking happy moments”¹¹⁹, or “I can relive the ecstasy that Time has slain”¹²⁰). Notably, this art of recalling the ecstasy of the “Les sons and les parfums” can be heard right at the outset: the melodic and harmonic underpinnings of the opening rising-fourth gesture is taken almost verbatim from the earlier *prélude*, cast in even quarter notes and transposed half-stepped down, resulting in the original pedal point on A to be transposed down to A^b (curiously, the same pedal tone in Liszt’s “*Harmonies du soir*,” though this likely coincidental connection is less important than the overall effect). Unlike the previous pieces, though, this pedal point remains uninterrupted for the entirety of the work, making the piece thoroughly timeless in effect.

Example 11.5. Debussy, “*Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon*” (1917)

¹¹⁷ This marks an interesting parallel to Liszt and his “*Nuage gris*,” another sparse and austere piece composed during a time of depression and declining health at the end of the composer’s life. Both composers wrote these brief pieces in private, knowing that they would not be discovered during their lifetime, and indeed they were not discovered until well after their deaths.

¹¹⁸ Translation by William Aggeler, *The Flowers of Evil*, (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Translation by George Dillon, *The Flowers of Evil* (NY: Harper and Brothers, 1936).

Oddly, for all the obvious connections drawn between this piece and the earlier “Les sons et les parfums,” since its discovery, it seems that there has been no notice of the brief but unmistakable quotation in measure 8 of this piece to the ornamented triplet figure in measure 16 of “La soirée dans Grenade.” Marianne Wheeldon has suggested that these single notes are echoes of a similar contour in measures 7-8 of Debussy’s earlier prélude “Canope”¹²¹, and the feeling of near-stasis in both pieces are indeed similar. However, the quotation from “La soirée”—a piece which is much closer in subject matter—is nearly literal: transposed one octave lower, the pitch content of the figure in “Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon” is otherwise exactly the same as in “La soirée,” along with its A^b pedal (enharmonically G[#] in “La soirée”), and expressive indications (“*rit- au Mouvement*” in the former, “*retenu – tempo giusto*” in the latter). This also colors our perception of the following bars, which recalls the texture of repeated chords followed by parallel stepwise chords in the “guitar” episode of “La soirée.”

Example 11.6. Echoes of “La soirée dans Grenade” and “Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon”

“Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon,” m. 5-10

¹²¹ Marianne Wheeldon, *Debussy’s Late Style* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 41.

“La soirée dans Grenade,” m. 15-18



While endeavors to trace musical allusion seldom lead to clear conclusions, the possibility of one reference here may not necessarily preclude the other. Admittedly, cross-references among Debussy's pieces are not the focus of this study. What is most important, though, is how this intertextuality between his own works illustrates his desire to return and repeatedly comment on and renew his own evocative atmospheres, revealing the common strain of influence in all three evening pieces that stem not only thematically from Baudelaire, but musically from Liszt. Though the traces of Liszt are only distant reverberations by the time this last piece of evening music was composed, the suspension of musical materials recalling ineffable memories and sensations above a static sense of time and tonality remains the common mode of narration of these miniature tone-poems.

Orientalism and Exoticism in Distant Landscapes

While the *Soleil Couchant* theme and the Lisztian framework enabling its musical expression have thus far informed our understanding of Debussy's evening music, the underlying concepts are not exclusive to pieces which explicitly evoke the evening. After all, if sensuality and mystery are the currency of the evening air, it can be found in other,

equally exotic landscapes. The intoxicating aura of the opening in “La soirée dans Grenade,” for example, owes just as much to the evening atmosphere as it does to foreign aromas of the Andalusian air and the exotic flavor of *habanera* and *flamenco* music. The exoticism of its companion piece, “Pagodes,” works in much the same way, through the evocation of Javanese gamelan music and the pentatonic mode. In fact, “Pagodes” is not really about pagodas—it is about transporting our imagination to an exotic locale, and about conjuring up a picturesque impression of the Far Eastern atmosphere. The way in which Debussy specifically evokes gamelan music—his web of intricately layered counterpoint, and his exploitation of the percussive nature of the piano and the decay of its sound—are marks of his incredible ingenuity that have been discussed everywhere in the literature many times over.

However, beneath the surface mechanics of mimicking the gamelan, Debussy uses the same underlying Lisztian framework for evoking a spacious landscape and enchanting atmosphere as he does in the second *Estampe*, “La soirée dans Grenade”: harmonic and temporal stasis through pedal tones and ostinatos and the representation of space through keyboard tessitura. While some of these techniques conveniently double as gamelan effects, we need only to look at measures 4 and 6 in the opening to see what Paul Roberts calls the “picturesque pentatonicism”¹²² in this piece rather than a faithful transcription of gamelan music. In these measures, Debussy opens up the pianistic space all the way to D[#]₇ through three iterations of the main motive, each successively one octave higher than the previous. This is not true gamelan writing—it is the same expansion of pianistic space in the first five measures of “La soirée dans Grenade” (there, four successive iterations of the

¹²² Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, 159.

C# traverse a four-octave range), dressed on the surface with pentatonic gamelan vocabulary.

Example 11.7. Debussy, “Pagodes,” opening

The image shows the opening of Debussy's "Pagodes" for piano. The score is in 4/4 time and G major. It begins with a tempo marking of "Modérément animé" and a dynamic of "pp". The right hand features a melodic line with a "m.g." (mezzo-gusto) marking. The left hand has a steady accompaniment with "2" and "8" markings. The piece concludes with a "Rit." (ritardando) marking and a return to "a Tempo". The instruction "délicatement et presque sans nuances" is written above the final measures.

Similarly, where the opening of “La soirée” used the *habanera* rhythm as an entrancing rhythmic ostinato, here in “Pagodes,” Debussy uses regular gong strikes on the offbeats to accomplish a similar effect. In this manner, Debussy suggests the spacious breadth of his foreign landscapes, one in Far East and one in Spain, and suspends time for the listener to absorb the exotic sensations of the atmosphere.

Having observed the interchangeability of the exotic elements but the constancy of the evocative framework, we could imagine that “Pagodes” could very well have been titled “La soiree dans l’orient.” Though not quite as effective as a title, it points the same underlying Orientalism in both pieces. After all, despite its relative geographic proximity to France, Spain was almost as foreign to Debussy as the Far East. The only time Debussy ever spent in the country was a few hours in San Sebastian, near the French border. Roberts has defined this Orientalism in terms of the nineteenth-century vogue in France

known as *le japonisme*, which he describes as an outgrowth from “the earlier Romantic fascination for the Orient, by which was meant almost anywhere exotic which lay vaguely to the south and east.”¹²³ We can detect a similar, though slightly less pronounced, fascination in Liszt: his interest in ethnic folk material is manifested not only in such examples as his “Spanish Rhapsody” and his inclusion of gypsy musical material in his late music, but also his extensive use of Swiss folk music in the pastoral pieces of *Album d’un voyageur* and the first book of *Années de pèlerinage*. The affinity for folk material displayed in these pastoral pieces was rooted in the Romantic glorification for the idyllic, unspoiled countryside—a sort of innocent fetishization of the picturesque folklife. It is this understanding that illuminates my earlier suggestion that “Pastorale” could have been Liszt’s own miniature *Estampe*.

If we are to broaden the scope of our consideration of exotic landscapes, then surely fictitious ones may be included as well. In this way, we may understand Ravel’s “La Vallée des cloches” through a similar framework as the previous pieces in this chapter. Where Ravel’s valley lies has been somewhat of an enigma. Ravel once told Robert Casadesus that the piece was inspired by the sounds of many Parisian bells tolling at noon, both near and faraway. However, it is clear from the quiet, mysterious aura of the piece that we are nowhere near the bustling cityscape of Paris. Perhaps even Ravel himself did not know, any more than Debussy knew where his pagodas resided (there are in fact no pagodas in Java—a detail conveniently lost on a *fin-de-siècle* Parisian, but of little musical consequence for the piece). Ravel’s valley is a fictitious dreamscape, and the lack of clarity on the matter itself feeds into its aura of mystery.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 47.

By now it is hardly necessary to mention the broad strokes with which this landscape is painted: harmonic and temporal stasis through pedal tones, rhythmic ostinatos, and the suggestion of spaciousness through keyboard tessitura. Yet, in the finer details we uncover some new discoveries as Ravel engages in further intertextual dialogue with the music of Debussy and Liszt. For all our earlier mention of Ravel's influence on Debussy's new style in *Estampes* through "Jeux d'eau," here we see the other side of the exchange, as Ravel responds to Debussy's discoveries in *Pagodes*, along with some further assimilation of Lisztian techniques. Following Debussy's emulation of gamelan effects through the percussive qualities and sound decay of the piano, Ravel here explores his own gamelan-like bell effects. Both composers held an enduring fascination with the sounds of the Javanese gamelan after initially hearing it at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, but it was Debussy who first attempted such a bold attempt at its emulation. Here though, Ravel takes Debussy's intricate gamelan counterpoint to a new level, explicitly separating the various layers through Liszt's three-staff notation. Whereas Debussy depicted the breadth of his landscapes in his first two *Estampes* by gradually expanding the pianistic space in the opening of each piece, as Liszt did in the opening of "Harmonies du soir," here Ravel learns from elsewhere in Liszt ("Les cloches de Genève," "St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds", and the first theme of "Harmonies du soir") the technique of antiphonal juxtapositions of sound. Here though, this antiphonal sounding of bells is so thoroughly pervasive, so precisely placed throughout the keyboard that it far surpasses any of Liszt's efforts. Equally meticulous is the placement of the bells in counterpoint with the gamelan-like ostinato accompaniments starting in measure 3. There is also an added complexity in

the lull of the hypnotic ostinato as it interacts with Ravel's deliberate placements of the bells, which in their overlapping arrangement exploits the decay of piano resonance.

Example 11.8. Ravel, "La Vallée des cloches," opening.

The image shows the opening of Ravel's "La Vallée des cloches" in G major, 3/4 time. The tempo is marked "Très lent" with a quarter note equal to 50 (♩ = 50). The dynamics are *pp* (pianissimo) and *p un peu marqué* (piano, slightly accented). The score is written for voice (m. a.) and piano (m. b.). The piano part features a complex, overlapping texture of chords and arpeggios, with a prominent ostinato in the right hand. The voice part consists of a few notes, including a bell-like chord in the first measure. The overall mood is serene and hypnotic.

Through all this careful placement and definition of the bells in time and space, we may again appreciate why Ravel, like Liszt, preferred Érard pianos, but in this case for reasons beyond their light touch. To recall our discussion from Chapter 2, the Érard firm not only produced straight-strung instruments during Liszt's time, but it was also one of the last manufacturers to continue to do so past the turn of the century, when most other instruments by this time were cross-strung. As such, the Érard and its distinct timbral possibilities across the various tessituras of the piano could do full justice to a piece like this, allowing for the listener to experience a vivid sense of echo-location within Ravel's fictitious landscape. In the end, "La Vallée des cloches," and "Pagodes" before it, provide us insight into how the composers used titles not to denote actual locales and define specific

imagery, but rather to transport the listener to exotic landscapes faraway, where a heightened sensory experience allow for an indulgence in images and impressions of ineffable mystery.

Creating Aural Fiction: The Stuff of Myth and Legend

If mystery and exoticism were the currency of the air in these enchanting landscapes, they are also the very forces behind the power which myths and legends hold over our imaginations. In this regard, such tales became prime material for the imaginations of Debussy and Ravel, as evidenced through such works as Debussy's "La Cathédrale engloutie," "Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest," "L'isle joyeuse," and "Ondine" and Ravel's tales of "Gaspard de la nuit." Like the enchanting landscape pieces, such works require the composers to conjure an air of mystery and exoticism to separate the distance between the listener and the myth.¹²⁴ This distance is three-fold: temporal, such that the story occurred "once upon a time," so to speak; physical, such that the tale being told occurs "in land far, far away"; and fantastical, such that the various happenings in such works can be bridged from reality only by a stretch of the imagination. The air of mystery and exoticism which enable this scene-setting can largely be achieved through the same Lisztian framework we have already described in the evening and landscape pieces. However, unlike such pieces, the story-telling nature of the music under consideration here requires the musical resources to represent action and movement, so that narrative time flows forward in at least part of the piece.

¹²⁴ As an example, we may imagine such scene-setting through "mists" of Debussy's indication, *dans une brume doucement sonore* (in a gently resonant mist) at the beginning of "La cathédrale engloutie"

As such, many of these pieces again employ the liquid figuration of the water music discussed in Chapter 10 for their ability to depict movement and activity, in addition to stormier aspects of Lisztian pianism. These pieces also require a greater performative burden on the pianists than the others: after all, the pianist's oratory skills are required for a convincing act of storytelling in these myths. We can detect these traces of Liszt throughout these pieces, but our discussion will focus on the two pieces which display the greatest amount of Lisztian influence, Debussy's "Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest," and Ravel's "Ondine" from *Gaspard de la nuit*.

On the merit of the subject matter alone, Debussy's "Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest" invites comparison with Liszt's various pieces of storm music. On the most fundamental level, Debussy uses the same raw materials that Liszt used in his storm music—trills, tremolos, chromatic scales, and harshly dissonant chords—all of which can be traced further back to Beethoven's *Pastorale* Symphony (and Liszt's piano transcription of it). What seems uncharacteristic of Debussy here is that he amplifies these materials with Liszt's same rigorous virtuosity and theatricality, from the tumultuous arpeggiated waves reminiscent of Liszt's "St. Francis of Paolo Walking on the Waves" and the hair-raising chromatic passages involving the Lisztian alternating-hand technique recalling the same piece, to the myriad of advanced tremolo and tremolo-like techniques found in all of Liszt's storm pieces from "Un soir dans les montagnes" to "Chasse-neige" and "Orage." Paul Roberts suggests that Debussy must have studied Liszt's music closely, and has even pointed out instances of virtual quotation:

Example 11.9. Debussy's quotation of Liszt's "Orage,"

Debussy, "Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest," m. 15

Commencer un peu au-dessous du mouv!

pp *pp*

un peu marqué

Liszt, "Orage," m. 1-4

Allegro molto

ff

However, Roberts has noted the stark differences in the effect of the two pieces:

How characteristic it is of Debussy that a piece which sets out to evoke storm and fury should begin *pianissimo*. And how equally characteristic it is that, employing an impressive arsenal of Lisztian pianistic fireworks, the piece should reject all vestige of Romantic expression. ...in descriptive intention the prelude is utterly different. Debussy presents Liszt's storm without Byron's poem, conveying the tumult without breast-beating. Its harsh resonances and jagged rhythms owe nothing, it seems to me, to Romantic images of heroic man pitting himself against malevolent Nature or against the supernatural.¹²⁵

Perhaps with stereotypical Lisztian theatrics in mind (and rightly so, in the case of

"Orage"), Roberts does not mention that Liszt, too, is capable of starting a storm softly, as

he does in "Chasse-neige" and in the beginning of the central storm section of "Un soir dans

¹²⁵ Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, 159.

les montagnes.” Yet, his essential observation is correct: Debussy’s piece is inherently antithetical to nineteenth-century Romanticism. While the two composer’s storms are equally ferocious and destructive, Liszt tends to evoke a live, first-person portrayal of human suffering and tragedy, while Debussy paints the storm and its destructive path in a third-person narrative. Therein lies the crucial difference—while Liszt encourages us, especially in “Orage” and “Chasse-neige,” to experience the human toll of Malevolent Nature firsthand, Debussy invites us to watch from a fantastical, temporal, and physical distance.

It is not merely a matter of soft dynamics, though; Debussy introduces his mythical tale through scene-setting techniques. While the opening’s tumultuous quality is derived from its agitated surface figuration, the ominous suspense and mystery of the atmosphere are rooted in an unwavering low F# pedal point. Even as the intensity of the storm picks up at measure 15, the F# pedal point still stubbornly persists, up through the *fortissimo* outbursts at measures 23-24. Thereafter, as the F# relents, it is replaced by the ostinato of a trill-like alternation between C and D with both hands in the middle of the keyboard. In measure 35, a new pedal tone, D, comes into play in the bass while the right hand plays an ostinato of broken octave figures. Amidst all the intense action of the pianistic fireworks continuing through the rest of the piece, almost every moment of the tale is grounded in the Lisztian technique of temporal stasis, employing either a pedal tone, an ostinato accompaniment, or both simultaneously. Thus, it is this dichotomy between simultaneous stasis and action that allows Debussy’s audience to hear the story from a distance, such that his storm grows from an ominous agitation to its full destructive ferocity without ever eliciting emotions of true terror or passion from his audience. In the end, Debussy’s storm is a myth vividly told, but in the past tense, set in a land far away, and about fantastical

events. In this way, we can see how Debussy used so much of Liszt's pianistic effects, coupled with some devices of his evocative framework, towards much different artistic ends.

Through this same perspective, we may see how Ravel told a tale not of violence and destruction, but of sensual seduction in his masterpiece, "Ondine," from *Gaspard de la nuit* (1909), a set of three pieces inspired by the poetry of Aloysius Bertrand in his collection of the same title. In another example of the muddled web of cross-influences, Ravel aimed not only to represent Bertrand's poetry through music in this set, but also specifically in the third piece, "Scarbo" to write a piece more fearsome and challenging than Balakirev's "Islamey," which was in turn heavily indebted to Lisztian pianism. Ravel once told the pianist Vlado Perlemuter, "I wanted to produce a caricature of Romanticism. Maybe I got carried away."¹²⁶ While Ravel was commenting directly about "Scarbo," he might as well have been talking about *Gaspard* as a whole, as it is undoubtedly Ravel's most rousingly intense and passionate offering to the piano literature. It is specifically in the first piece, "Ondine," which we hear the most direct reverberations of Liszt.

Texturally, the piece makes use of the arpeggio-based water figuration that we discussed in the previous chapter. Roy Howat has observed that the basic texture of the piece, "a long entrancing melody spun out over rippling harmonies," can be traced back to Chopin's A^b Major, Étude, Op. 21 no. 1.¹²⁷ However, in terms of the sheer intricacy and invention of the liquid figuration, the lineage from Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este"

¹²⁶ Vlado Perlemuter, Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, trans. Frances Tanner, (London: Kahn & Averil, 1988), 35.

¹²⁷ Roy Howat, "Ravel and the piano," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82.

to Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" and subsequently to Debussy's water music via Ravel, seems most pertinent. In "Ondine," Ravel continues his explorations and extensions of the figurations of "Jeux d'eau" and "Une barque sur l'océan," finding new intricacies and creative permutations. Alfred Cortot once remarked,

It is positively a kind of miracle that he knew how to renew, after the precedents of 'Jeux d'eau' and 'Une Barque sur l'océan' the pianistic effects destined to evoke, yet another time, the captivating mirage of water and its mysterious movements. Because far from becoming dulled by his exceptional descriptive successes, the imaginative power of Ravel found here the occasion to express itself without repetition, without imitation of himself, and with a constant spirit of invention and instrumental discovery.¹²⁸

For all of Ravel's maturation since his initial essays in water music, Liszt's influence over the over this piece remains unmistakable, especially in the opening. Where Liszt deepened the sensuality of "Au bord d'une source" into the spirituality of "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este," Ravel's intensification works in the opposite direction, transforming sensuality into more overt sexuality

To evoke Ondine's "murmured song," Ravel looked to Liszt, who learned to coax new sounds out of the piano, first in the "whispering coolness of young Nature's play" of "Au bord d'une source," but even more so in the "mysterious murmurings of the forest"¹²⁹ he evoked in "Waldesrauschen." In a sense, Ravel also completes the evolution from the innocent, playful babbling of the spring in "Au bord d'une source," to the enchanting murmur of the forest in "Waldesrauschen," and ultimately to the sexually seductive

¹²⁸ Quoted in the Foreword to Ravel, *Gaspard de la nuit*, ed. Nancy Bricard, 10.

¹²⁹ Liszt's description in his letter to Princess Alexander Bibesco, quoted in *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters*, trans. and ed. Adrian Williams (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1998), 906.

murmur of the mystical seductress of “Ondine.” In this piece, the Impressionistic seduction of the listener’s ears has now become a seduction of his soul.

To recall the origins of how Liszt initiated this aural enchantment through his innovative texture in “Waldesrauschen,” let us once again consider Jim Samson’s characterization of this effect as an “evocative shimmering sonority...designed to create an unbroken layer of sound against which the melody may unfold.” He continues, “[By] allowing them to function as delicate backcloths to a ‘canto,’ Liszt created an effect of remarkable poetic beauty, one which again looks to textures that would later be associated with Debussy and Ravel...”¹³⁰ This is manifested in the opening murmurs of “Waldesrauschen” through a gently undulating figure in the right hand, under which a mysterious alto melody unfolds. Notably, the shimmering sonorities are exotically tinged with added sixths and seconds. The resemblance in “Ondine”—a piece in the same key—is striking, as Ravel replaces Liszt’s shimmering figuration with his own delicate, irregular tremolos, while adding a minor sixth to his triad instead of Liszt’s major sixth, thus making the triad an augmented chord in effect.

Example 11.10. Ravel, “Ondine” (1908), Ondine’s “murmured song” in the opening

The image shows the opening of Ravel's "Ondine" in G major, 3/4 time, marked "Lent". The score is in piano (ppp) and consists of two systems. The first system shows the right hand with a shimmering tremolo of chords and the left hand with a simple bass line. The second system continues this texture. The tempo marking "Lent" is at the top, and the dynamic "ppp" is in the first system. The instruction "très doux et très expressif" is written below the second system.

¹³⁰ Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, 91.

To further the spellbinding effect of these sonorities, Ravel casts Ondine's song in a different key from this ostinato tremolo—such that the veiled bitonality generates further exoticism to the atmosphere. By now we recognize this practice of superimposing foreign tonalities on a static ostinato as one that originates from “Harmonies du soir” (another piece in Db major) and is further explored in Debussy's evening pieces, as we discussed earlier in the chapter. They are used here towards similar exoticizing ends, not only to characterize Ondine herself, but again, to create distance between the audience and myth. As Siglind Bruhn has observed, the allusions in Bertrand's poem “point very much to the realm of the not-clearly lit, the dream-like, the surreal.”¹³¹

This dreamlike quality is enabled not only through the suggestive murmurs of the opening, but its continuation throughout the largely uniform soundscape of the piece, even as the piece intensifies, and as Roberts puts it, “the murmur grows to a passionate cry.”¹³² Though the piece is not essentially monothematic like Liszt's “Waldesrauschen,” it also heavily relies on the gradual variation and transformation of its principal theme, increasing in intensity through the piece. Here, it is as though Ondine relies on progressively more flamboyant variations of her alluring gestures at each passing recurrence of the theme as the piece builds towards its climax. Although the piece can be analyzed through sonata form¹³³, its continuous song and unbroken texture veil the dialectical contrast inherent in sonata form and lead the listener to perceive its trajectory more broadly as an arch-form—a characteristically Lisztian mode of narration.

¹³¹ Siglind Bruhn. *Images and Ideas in Modern French Music* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1997), 181.

¹³² Paul Roberts, *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Milwaukee, WI: Amadeus Press, 2012), 88.

¹³³ For a discussion of sonata form as inflected in this piece, see Roy Howat, “Ravel and the piano,” 82.

Also characteristic of Liszt is the performative element that runs through the piece. In fact, it would be difficult to find another instance in Ravel's output where the use of "poetic virtuosity" would be more appropriate as a descriptor. As Paul Roberts writes, "In *Gaspard de la nuit* Ravel's piano, in the Lisztian manner, is transformed into a theatrical stage, upon which the pianist 'plays.'¹³⁴ Indeed, the pianist plays many performative roles on this stage: not only is he or she the narrator of the story, but also the painter of its mercurial backdrop, and, most strikingly, the one who gives voice to Ondine's song—and by implication, performs her aural seduction. Roberts has related the Lisztian origins of this performance of sexual allure: "Ravel takes the voice and style of sexually charged musical symbolism directly from the nineteenth century. He interprets Bertrand through the virtuoso pianism of Liszt, and thereby briefly dons the mantle of sexual charisma worn by Liszt himself. It is this aspect of romanticism which, surely, 'carried [him] away.'"¹³⁵

The irony of Robert's comment is that in the most overt instance of myth-telling in Liszt's piano pieces—his own *Legends*—he calls on the pianist to perform a role completely devoid of sexuality. Admittedly, the pianist's other roles on the theatrical stage are similar: as narrator of the stories, and painter of their respective backdrops (a bird-filled forest in *St. Francis of Assisi*, the turbulent sea in *St. Francis of Paola*). However, where Liszt, the handsome celebrity widely reputed to be a serial womanizer,¹³⁶ calls on the performer to play the part of a saint as he engages in the rhetorical persuasion of his sermon, Ravel, the

¹³⁴ Paul Roberts, *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Milwaukee, WI: Amadeus Press, 2012), 86.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

¹³⁶ Of course, closer scrutiny of the biographical evidence finds these claims of his womanizing behavior to be unfounded—a product of the public myth of Liszt as a celebrity figure, further fueled by outright slander by Olga Janina, the "Cossack countess." For a full account of Liszt's unfortunate dealings with this colorfully unstable character, see the chapter by Alan Walker, "Of Cossacks and Countesses," in *Franz Liszt: The Final Years* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

reserved, self-conscious man of diminutive stature, calls on his pianist to play a sexual seductress as she attempts persuasion of a markedly less holy nature. These performative parallels and contrasts are at their greatest during the moment in “Ondine” where the pervasive water figuration of the piece dies away, leaving Ondine to sing her recitative-like solo in D minor.

Example 11.11. Ravel, “Ondine” (1908), Ondine’s cry



This use of dramatic recitative parallels a moment in Liszt’s “St. Francis of Paola,” where its placement after a passionate climax in the narrative (the *Allegro maestoso*) carried dramatic import through its stark contrasts of texture and affect. Here, where, Liszt calls on the pianist to convey the Saint’s sincere, private utterance of his devout faith, Ravel asks the performer to deliver a feigned cry of grief from a soulless creature. Ondine’s soliloquy, if executed correctly, is performative posturing at its best—so convincing and affectively moving that the listener, for a moment, buys into her sincerity, only to realize his own gullibility just moments later when Ondine, in the words of Bertrand’s poem “bursts out laughing” and returns to the depths of her ocean world.

In this way, we have once again come full circle, witnessing the way in which Ravel’s initial engagement with the legacy of Liszt’s pictorialism in his “Jeux d’eau” found its way back into his last work of “Impressionism,” aided by a broader Lisztian framework of

performative narration to tell a mythical tale of Romantic theatricality. Yet, as we have seen in so many other instances throughout this study, Ravel, like Debussy, combined these Lisztian elements with his own ingenuity and a myriad of other artistic influences, both historical and contemporary, towards much different artistic ends.

While the common soundscapes of some pieces have created obvious associations in the public perception between works like Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este" and Ravel's "Jeux d'eau," the differences in the surface language of other works, such as Liszt's "Harmonies du soir" and Debussy's "Pagodes" and "La soirée dans Grenade," have obscured the underlying manner of poetic communication which they share. In yet another case, the shared pianistic figuration and virtuosity at the surface level between Liszt's various pieces of storm music and Debussy's "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest" betray the stark differences between their underlying artistic intents. In the end, the act of unveiling these connections and common techniques among these pieces should not detract from our appreciation for the ingenuity of this music, but rather enhance our admiration for the imaginative ways in which these composers fashioned such disparately wonderful creations out the same musical cloth.

Chapter 12

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Conclusion: “The Spears into the Future”

The pieces we have discussed in this study offer the most illuminating connections between the nature pieces of Liszt and the Impressionist music of Debussy and Ravel, but there are surely countless others—in some cases more direct, and others more subtle. In fact, the totality of his legacy and impact may rest not primarily on the instances of direct influence in which his fingerprints are most visible, but the broader context in which his techniques have been so thoroughly assimilated, adapted, and transformed by subsequent composers that their Lisztian roots have become hardly noticeable. After all, the contemporary effort to understand works of art through an intertextual perspective requires that we consider not only the specific ties between individual composers' works and the musical ideas and techniques they employ, but also the development of a broader collection of musical conventions and shared meanings that result from these relationships. In the case of Liszt's evocative writing, it is less important to attribute each instance where his ideas and techniques appear in the subsequent literature to his direct influence, than to recognize that his pioneering experiments led to a common framework for all composers of piano music to later draw from, comment upon, and ultimately modify with their own contributions.

Therefore, as we move beyond the specific focus of this study, we may anticipate multiple avenues of further research for musicians and scholars to pursue along related

lines of inquiry. Surely, efforts have already begun in some of these areas, but they could be refocused through the context of the evocative framework brought to light in the current study. To begin with, it would be worthwhile to examine how Liszt, Debussy, and Ravel each thought about orchestral resources at the piano by studying the ways in which they negotiated the considerations of timbre and texture through transcription. For Liszt, such an effort would start with his piano transcriptions of Beethoven's Symphonies, Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and *Harold in Italy*, and his various operatic paraphrases, and continue onto an in-depth comparison of his own original works which exist in both piano and orchestral forms—namely “Mazeppa,” the two Franciscan Legends, and the first two Mephisto Waltzes. For Ravel, the endeavor would naturally center on his orchestral transcriptions of his own piano music (*Miroirs* being the most relevant for our purposes) as well as his transcription of Mussorky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. As for Debussy, who personally penned no orchestrations of his piano music aside from *La plus que lente* and *Berceuse héroïque*, we may find clues in his *Images pour orchestre*, which he originally conceived as a two-piano sequel to his first series of *Images* for solo piano. Of special interest would be “Les parfums de la nuit,” from *Iberia*, the second section of the set. Given that the title anticipates his later prelude, “Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir,” and that the piece itself is yet another example of his evening music, the exploration of possible connections may be a valuable endeavor.

Moreover, having examined the unprecedented breadth and depth of Liszt's efforts to draw new sounds and colors out the piano to achieve musical impressionism, we may also see how his legacy in this regard extends far beyond the Impressionism of Debussy and Ravel. Indeed, all composers who followed him in writing descriptive, pictorial music

for the piano are indebted to his experiments that first coaxed a fundamentally percussive instrument into murmuring the enchanting sounds of the forest, painting the glistening images of musical fountains, and conjuring the ineffable mysteries of the evening air. Moving beyond *fin-de-siècle* Paris, then, we can also observe the influence of this part of his legacy at work in other parts of the continent and beyond, starting from nearby Spain, to Russia in the East, and even across the globe in the United States.

Liszt's influence in Spain can be detected most readily in the music of Isaac Albéniz, who greatly admired Liszt and at one point even attempted to study with him. Particularly in the masterpieces contained in *Iberia*, we can clearly hear the influence of Liszt's transcendental pianism and evocative writing, uniquely tinged with the sights and sounds of Albéniz's native Spain.¹³⁷ Meanwhile, Liszt's tours of Russia in the 1840s helped introduce Western music—and his own brand of transcendental virtuosity—to the nation for the first time. It is no wonder, then, that a whole generation of Russian musicians held him in great esteem. In fact, at the time of this writing, the American Liszt Society is preparing to hold its annual festival, centered upon this year's theme, "Liszt and Russia." The festival promises to trace Liszt's influence as a pianist, conductor, and composer on the Russians during his tours by presenting lectures and concert programs on Liszt and his influence on the music of Glinka, Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Glazunov, Arensky, Scriabin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and others.

Of particular relevance to our focus is a concert dedicated to Sergei Lyapunov's *Twelve Transcendental Études*, Op. 11, which the composer wrote as a tribute to Liszt in an

¹³⁷ For a study of Liszt's influence on *Iberia*, see Myungsook Wang, "Isaac Albéniz's *Iberia* and the Influence of Franz Liszt" (DMA diss., City University of New York, 2004).

effort to fulfill the latter's original intention of writing twenty-four études in all major and minor keys. Recent attention on these historically neglected works has only begun to examine the debts that Lyapunov's work owes to Liszt's pianism and evocative techniques.¹³⁸ With suggestive titles like "Térek" (The River Terek), "Nuit d'été" (Summer Night), and "Tempête" (Tempest), Lyapunov's études should be considered as nature paintings much like those in Liszt's own set of *Transcendental Études*. Accordingly, it may be entirely possible to apply our framework of Liszt's pictorial writing to these Russian pieces to uncover the full extent of his influence.

More broadly, there may also be ways in which Liszt's effect on Debussy and Ravel were in part facilitated through the Russians. Such attempts to uncover indirect influences are often muddled, but we have already mentioned one such case, in which Liszt's devilish virtuosity found its way into Ravel's "Scarbo" through the intermediate of influence of Balakirev's "Islamey." Given the degree to which both Debussy and Ravel looked to Russian composers as sources of influence, there are surely more examples remaining to be uncovered.

On the other side of the world, one of the earliest and clearest cases of the influence of Liszt's evocative legacy in American music can be heard in Charles Griffes' "The Fountain of Acqua Paola," from his *Roman Sketches*, Op. 7 (1915). Coincidentally, the piece is a musical portrayal of a Roman fountain, just like Liszt's fountains at the Villa d'Este. Yet, by the time of Griffes' piece, it would be difficult to claim Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eaux" as the primary source of direct influence. All of Debussy's and Ravel's masterful water pieces had

¹³⁸ See Sergei Nikolaevich Saratovsky, "Sergei Lyapunov's Douze études d'exécution transcendante, op. 11 : a performer's perspective" (DMA diss., University of British Columbia, 2012).

already been written by then, and it is more likely that they are the intermediaries through which Liszt's influence was inflected. It is unclear if Busoni knew of this American work when he referred to Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eaux" as the "model for all musical fountains to come," but regardless, the reverberations of Liszt's writing reached further than even Busoni might have predicted. In a more recent example of American piano music, Lowell Liebermann's *Gargoyles* (1989) employs a watery soundscape in its third movement that is often described as "Debussyan," though such crystalline sonorities and the almost exclusively treble-dominated textures and figurations can be traced back not only to Liszt's "Les Jeux d'eaux" but also to "Au bord d'une source." Elsewhere in the suite, Liszt's influence can be heard in the demonic dances of the first and fourth movements, while the fourth requires physical stamina and transcendental virtuosity of truly Lisztian proportions.

Given the wide-ranging impact of just this one branch of Liszt's art, it is all the more important to recognize that Liszt wrote his incredibly forward-looking pieces of music amid an environment of bitterly hostile critical reception, resigned to the fact that any substantive recognition of his contributions towards the "the music of the future" would not surface during his lifetime. He only hoped that recognition of his impact would materialize in posterity, and that subsequent generations would view his music in a more favorable light. Perhaps, it would have offered him some comfort to know that the musical world today, having celebrated the bicentennial of his birth not too long ago, has indeed come around to increasingly recognize his greatness and importance as a composer, a revolutionary artist, and one of the most fascinating figures of the nineteenth century. His mistress Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein once predicted that Liszt had "thrown his

spear [far] into the future” and that “several generations will pass before he is really understood.” Yet, she probably could not have anticipated just how wide-ranging his influence would become—that there were actually many different spears that he threw into the future, and in just as many directions. The current study has been an effort to examine just one of them, and it is my hope that this line of inquiry will be further explored as Lisztians around the world continue to work to promote his cause.

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