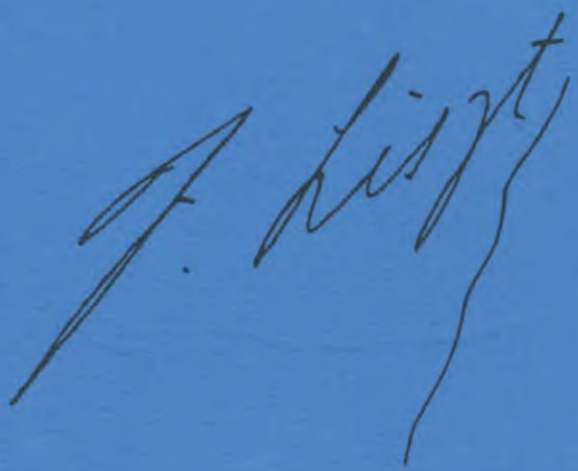
The Liszt Society Journal



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Contents

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The Devil and Liszt's Sonata in B minor

Why the Sonata is not a Faust Work

by Paul Merrick

How many pianists have studied Liszt's *Faust Symphony?* The question is relevant because it is common among pianists, at least here in Hungary, to say that the *Piano Sonata in B minor* is a Faust work. The argument is not *whether* the Sonata is programme music, but *what* the programme might be.

In the West the situation is rather different – there is a prejudice against programme music as such. That is to say, any really good composition, especially one entitled Sonata, must be 'absolute' music. The Bach fugues, the Beethoven sonatas, are absolute music. A work as good as Liszt's Piano Sonata, which to boot contains his best fugue, is obviously the great composition it is because for once Liszt abandoned his preoccupation with programme, and simply *composed*. The proof is the result – a perfect form.

The perfection of the form cannot be denied – neither can it be removed. The fact of this perfection remains, regardless of whether the work has a programme or not. But the extraordinary effect produced on the listener by the Liszt Piano Sonata is not its form, but its narrative. It moves with the swiftness of an arrow, and with the same linear trajectory, from one end to the other. Not a note is out of place. This in itself seems to set it apart from other works by the composer, none of which have elicited such superlatives from their critics, not even the two piano concertos. Indeed the *Faust Symphony* itself has sometimes been criticized for its choral ending, which some have felt to be out of place, and a stylistic incoherence. Again, such criticism is concerned with the form of the work, not its content. But as programme music, the *Chorus mysticus* is the perfect conclusion – it celebrates the defeat of Mephistopheles, and the melody of Gretchen – against whom Mephistopheles is powerless - played in the slow movement on the oboe and viola, becomes the radiant song of the tenor solo 'Das Ewigweibliche zieht uns hinan'.

Interestingly, Liszt faced a similar problem with the ending of his other symphony, the one based on Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Should it be soft or loud? A transfiguration or a triumph? Liszt could not decide, and the score contains a loud alternative second ending, marked ff. The programmes of both works are related – the salvation of Faust's soul from the devil becomes the salvation of the human soul (the souls of Paola and Francesca) from Hell; in the second of the work's two movements (Purgatorio) the theme of the soul's sorrow in the first movement (Inferno) - 'nessun maggior dolore' – reappears as the subject of a slow fugue as the soul journeys through purification towards heaven, represented at the end with a women's choir singing the Magnificat. The symphony ends quietly (marked ppp) – the preferred ending in all performances I have heard.

This ending matches perfectly that of the Piano Sonata, and in the same key, B major. The coincidence of key is important because the *Faust Symphony* is in C minor / C major. In other words, of Liszt's two symphonies, it is the *Dante Symphony* that Liszt's Sonata is closer to, because of Liszt's choice of a shared tonality.

Since writing my book *Revolution and Religion in the Music of Liszt* I have been researching the possibility that in Liszt there is a connection between key and content. This is a difficult topic to research, because the catalogues of Liszt's music do not indicate the keys of his works. I therefore have had to do their work for them – by looking for the music and leafing through the pages. I have seen around 500 works – what I would call the 'original' works – in all categories, namely piano (i.e. keyboard including organ), orchestral (including works for chamber ensemble), and vocal (songs, choral works, and the youthful opera *Don Sanche*). My conclusion is that there is a connection in Liszt's programme music between key and content – between the stated intention of the 'programme' (which can sometimes be just the title) or sung text, and what Liszt clearly thought of as the 'character' or 'personality' of each key. To extrapolate his thinking on this matter is of course not automatic – what emerges when works in a key, say G minor, are listed is a

portrait of their key. Although I have only published some of my results[1], in this article I want to make use of them in support of my claim that Liszt's Piano Sonata is programme music – precisely because of what *key* it is in. And I shall begin where I think Liszt began – which is at the 'wrong' end, namely B major.

Liszt's B major has a clearly defined character. Let us consider works by Liszt in the key. I have found 9 works in B major, which I give here in chronological order:

1825 *Brillant asile doux et tranquille* (aria and chorus from opera *Don Sanche*) S1
1840 *Hymn du matin* S173a [piano]
1848 *Kling leise, mein Lied* [song] S301
1854 *Les cloches de Genève* (No.9 from *Années de Pèlerinage Book I*) [piano] S160
1855 *Gloria* (from *Gran Mass*) [choir and orchestra] S9
1855 *Magnificat* (from *Dante Symphony*) [orchestra with choir] S109
1857 *Künstlerfestzug* [orchestra] S114
1885 *En rêve* [piano] S207
1885 *Eötvös* (No.2 from *Hungarian Historical Portraits*) [piano] S205

The young Liszt notated the 1825 aria and chorus *Brillant asile doux et tranquille* in B major, but the conductor Rodolphe Kreutzer instructed the orchestra at the first performance to play it in Bb major – an instruction 'en si *b*' is written into the parts used by the players, who simply read the same notes as though they were in that key.[2] This serves to highlight an area of disagreement between the youthful composer and the seasoned musician − B major is a difficult, probably in Kreutzer's view unnecessarily difficult, key to play in. Its signature of 5 sharps stands out in the opera; it is preceded by the key of Ab and followed by the key of G. Liszt's task was to illustrate the words sung by the Page:

> Brillant asile doux et tranquille
> pour les amants toujours constants.
>
> [A splendid refuge, sweet and peaceful,
> For faithful and constant lovers.]

which describe the 'Castle of Love' of the opera's subtitle [*Don Sanche ou Le Château d'Amour*].

The second verse says:

> De douces flammes brûlent les âmes,
> dans se séjour tout n'est qu'amour.
>
> [Each heart burns with a sweet flame,
> All is but love in this place.]

The castle of love here is clearly for the immortals – there is no question of temporary residence. The story of the miniature opera is a series of trials that beset true love – a kind of *Magic Flute* idea, except that the Sarastro figure, here the wizard Alidor who rules the castle of love, is also the Queen of the Night in that he causes the events that threaten danger (a thunderstorm and a duel with an evil knight), his purpose being to make Princess Elzire requite the love of Don Sanche. As a kind of reverse Prospero, he 'brings Miranda to Ferdinand' instead of the other way round, as in Shakespeare's *Tempest*. In other words Alidor, as the bringer of true love, acts as a kind of divine providence − Don Sanche's 'death' in the duel with the evil knight (who is Alidor in disguise) becomes not only a 'resurrection' (he turns out to be only wounded) but an 'assumption' (he enters paradise – the castle of love). For this journey Liszt utilizes

1 My articles on Liszt and key are listed under publications.

2 See my article: "Doubtful or authentic? Liszt's use of key in *Don Sanche*" (Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 1992), pp. 427-434

the keys of D minor for the death, Ab for the love, and B major for the paradise – as he did the same keys later in life, but with a more evidently theological colouring. An obvious example of this theological usage is the 1855 *Magnificat* that ends the *Dante Symphony*. Although the famous story of Wagner trying to dissuade Liszt from setting the *Paradiso* is supposed to have affected how the composer treated the topic, it is evident that the ending of the symphony is in fact a vision of the ending of Dante's poem. The tonal journey from Hell to Heaven in the work is also D minor to B major. A similar journey towards B major – as regards the ending if not the beginning (which is in C major) - is found in the nine pieces of the Swiss book of *Années de Pèlerinage*, the last of which is the 1854 *Les cloches de Genève*. The cycle begins in a church (*William Tell's Chapel*) and ends with a reference to church bells – a symbolism that reflects a (religious) journey from earth to heaven. Voices from heaven may be the pictorial idea behind the B major key of the 1855 *Gloria* from the *Gran Mass*, a work whose main tonality is D major. The move from D major to the distant tonality of B major immediately after the *Kyrie* seems best explained by a tonal dramaturgy based on the character of the chosen distant key. The first *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* was of course sung by the angels (from heaven) at Christmas to the shepherds.

The remaining B major pieces are thus perhaps best understood if we accept that the key character of B major is celestial – we might say celestial harmony. Immediately we can see this in the 1848 *Kling leise, mein Lied* [Sound softly, my song], a song whose subject is itself. Verse one in English begins:

> Sound softly, my song, through the silent night,
> sound softly, so that my beloved does not awake!

But I think it was verse three that decided the key for Liszt (my italics):

> Do not wake her with a greeting too passionate,
> tread gently, *like a pilgrim walking through the holy temple*,
> let your greeting sound as *quietly as a soft prayer*.

This key association would make the choice of key for the 1840 *Hymn du matin* and the 1885 *En rêve* far from arbitrary. And if the same holds true for its use in the 1885 *Eötvös*, then perhaps it is revealing of Liszt's view of knowledge as having a divine source (as light, or illumination) since the piece is a portrait of the 19th century Hungarian minister for religion and education. Similarly, therefore, the B major of the 1857 *Künstlerfestzug* [Ceremonial March of the Artists] may be a reference to the divine source of Art, with artists as 'priests' or 'ministers'.

.....

I therefore suggest that the key of B major that ends the Sonata was chosen by Liszt as part of a programme. As in other programmatic works, he associated the key with heaven. Like the *Dante Symphony*, rather than the *Faust Symphony*, if the Sonata has a programme it is probably a theological one rather than Goethe's story of Faust and Gretchen.

Liszt's *Faust Symphony* is described by the composer as 'drei Charakterbildern' – three character pictures. The three movements each have their own title: I Faust, II Gretchen, III Mephistopheles. Of these three characters the one whose character is 'theological' is clearly Mephistopheles. If Faust is said to be in the Sonata, as so many insist he is, then what about Mephistopheles? The two go together. Indeed, in Liszt's *Faust Symphony* the chief character of his programme can arguably be said not to be Faust at all, but Mephistopheles. This is because 'Mephistopheles' is the greatest of the three movements. Indeed, it has been called Liszt's greatest orchestral composition. Certainly it is his greatest programmatic creation – perhaps the most original programmatic idea of the whole nineteenth century. Indeed, so original is this character, we can say he is no longer the one in Goethe's poem, but Liszt's own musical creation. Who is he?

The first thing to say is that he is Faust – at least musically speaking. The Mephistopheles movement repeats the Faust movement almost note for note, but as caricature, or distortion. As the Spirit of Negation Mephistopheles attacks Faust by attacking his music. What was beautiful becomes ugly, decorated with trills and shrieks from the woodwind. Faust's idealism is mocked, all his aspirations towards heroism and goodness are 'debauched'. The technical skill Liszt exhibits in terms of thematic alteration and virtuoso orchestration is astonishing. But the real clue to who this character is lies in the composer's quotation of a theme from an earlier work, an unperformed piano concerto composed between 1833 and 1840 entitled *Malédiction* (S 121, LW H1). The theme Liszt quoted appears at letter A in the published score of the concerto. [The work is of course known today, but it was not published in Liszt's lifetime - thus his use of the theme was a private self-quotation.] In the manuscript of the concerto Liszt wrote over the theme the word 'orgueil' or pride. Transferred to the symphony [letter D], this theme became in fact the motivating force of the whole Mephistopheles movement, appearing many times. At letter Tt in the score it is stated as a full orchestral tutti marked fff. As far as I know this is the single loudest orchestral tutti in all Liszt's music.

Liszt's musical emphasis on pride as being the chief characteristic of Mephistopheles links him directly to the Christian tradition according to which pride was the sin of the devil that led to his rebellion against God and the fall of the angels. The many names given to this figure - Satan, Lucifer, the Prince of this world, the Devil - cannot disguise the one idea that lies behind them all. Liszt simply added the name of Mephistopheles to the list, a name whose etymology derives probably from the Greek *me* –not, *phos, photos* – light, *philos* – loving. Thus 'not loving light'. The idea is from St John's gospel chapter 3 verse 20: 'For every one that doth evil hateth the light'. Hence we can say that as music - or rather as *programme* music - Liszt's Mephistopheles and the Christian devil are one and the same.

Even in Goethe the context in which the drama takes place is Christian. The Prologue in Heaven has words spoken by the three archangels Raphael, Gabriel and Michael - as well as the Lord. In the First Part of the Tragedy: Night, a Chorus of Angels sings "Christ is arisen!" When in the 'poodle' scene of Part One of the poem, Faust asks Mephistopheles his name, Goethe writes a reply including the words:

In sprang the dog, indeed, observing naught;
Things now assume another shape,
The devil's in the house and can't escape.

In other words as programme music, Liszt's Mephistopheles is the devil. He is what St Ignatius Loyola called the Enemy. At this point let me quote from a letter I received in 1991 from the editor of the American *Journal of Film Music*, William Rosar:

P.S. Further to the Sonata, it might be of interest to you to know that somewhere along the way it acquired the nickname Teufelsonate ('Devil Sonata'). The man who told me that was Heinz Roemheld, a German-American pianist-composer who studied in the 1920s with Egon Petri who, as you may know, was a disciple of Busoni […] Petri groomed Roemheld to become a Liszt interpreter which, however, Roemheld did not pursue.

[Heinz Eric Roemheld 1901-1985. Born Wisconsin. Child prodigy. In 1920 studied with Busoni in Berlin.]

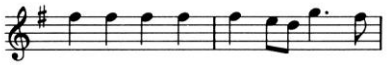
'Teufel' – devil – was the nickname given to the Sonata, not 'Faust'. We should begin, therefore, by looking for the devil in the music.

If there is a theme in the Sonata which can be called the devil, then we all know which one it is [see Ex.1].

Ex. 1

Furthermore this theme first appears at bar 13. Is this coincidence? Did Liszt count the bars? Certainly he had negative associations with the number 13. In her editor's preface to the Fernando Laires Festschrift[3] Rena Charnin Mueller says: "Liszt suffered from triskaidekaphobia and was known to have removed himself from any company in which the number 13 was obvious." This phobia is fear of the number 13, and certainly we can find instances where Liszt took steps to avoid the number. There is no thirteenth Transcendental Study, no thirteenth Symphonic Poem, these piano and orchestral works both being published in the Weimar period [1848 - 1861] in sets of twelve. The late symphonic poem *From the Cradle to the Grave* - in actuality the 'thirteenth' - is not numbered by Liszt. Other examples of Liszt's conscious treatment of the number thirteen can be found in his music, his aim being to avoid it, or overcome it. We should, I think, assume that the entry of the theme at bar 13 is deliberate. What does the theme tell us about itself?

The theme we are talking about has a double identity - it appears in two forms, or with two characters. The other character is marked 'cantando espressivo' [bar 153] - the opposite of the 'marcato' marking of the 'devil' version [see Ex.2].



Ex.2

Actually, Liszt displays duality here by employing the two basic styles of playing the piano - the lyrical and the percussive. The piano, as we know, can be classed as a percussion instrument because it has hammers. The 'devil' theme makes use of this percussive identity of the piano. Indeed Liszt himself referred to these two characters in a letter he wrote to Louis Köhler from Weimar in June 1854, saying Köhler had made a "very perspicuous discovery of my intention in the second motive of the Sonata - [Liszt quotes music example no.2] in contrast with the previous hammer-blows - [Liszt quotes music example no.1] ..."[4] We thus have the composer's authority for characterizing the theme as 'hammer-blows'. This characterization, taken in conjunction with the theme's entry at bar 13, certainly suggests that in Liszt's mind the theme is not intended to be anything but antithetical. It is not an illogical step on our part, knowing Liszt's superstitious attitude to the number 13, to think that the theme was associated by him with the devil.

If the theme we are talking about has two identities, then this double identity is itself a musical clue towards defining Liszt's portrait of the devil in the Sonata. The devil undergoes thematic transformation. That is to say, *both* themes are connected to the devil - Liszt makes the act of transformation itself a feature of the devil. Yet it is still the case that in the Sonata these are two separate tunes, each independent of the other in terms of its musical character. The question is, which of them for Liszt constituted the 'first'? Which one is the alteration, which is the original?

The answer to this problem lies precisely in the concept of distortion or corruption found in the *Faust Symphony.* As I have said, in the symphony it is Faust whose themes are subjected to distortion in the Mephistopheles movement, not Gretchen's. The one theme not distorted is her love theme. This is a basic distinction between the *Faust Symphony* and the Piano Sonata: in the Sonata it is precisely the lyrical theme which is distorted, the 'cantando' theme which, if the Piano Sonata were a Faust work, we would have to call the Gretchen theme. Here we have the main reason for saying that the Piano Sonata is not a Faust work - the devil *does* distort the theme which in a 'Faust' work would not be subjected to such treatment. Thus we can say that part of the identity of the devil in Liszt's Piano Sonata is precisely his

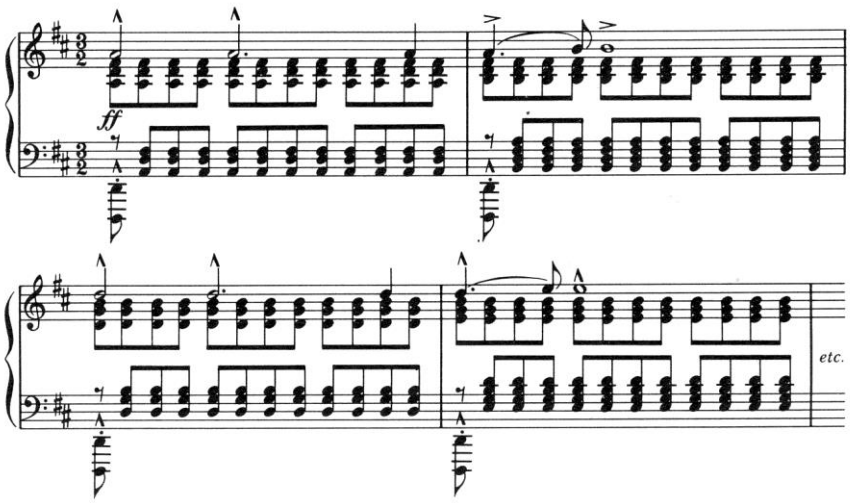
3 See Journal of the American Liszt Society [JALS], volume LIV/LV/LVI (2003 - 2005)

4 Extract from a letter of Liszt to Louis Köhler, June 8th 1854. English translation in *Letters of Franz Liszt* [translated by Constance Bache] (London 1894, Greenwood Reprinting 1969), vol.I, p. 190

corruption of the 'love' theme. If you like, we can say he appropriates it - in a word steals it. More accurately the devil, as a spirit whose 'incarnation' can only be 'possession' of an already existing 'body', in fact *occupies* the melody. Liszt's transformation process here matches traditional centuries-old Christian theology quite literally.

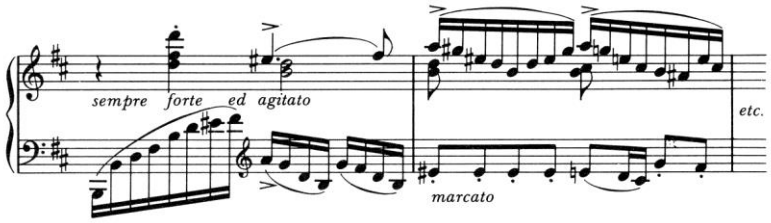
Thus we are looking at a programme in which the devil's theme is a corruption of another theme, a love theme. This theme first appears in D major in what traditional analysis would call the 'second subject' group. It is a group because there are *two* second subject themes: the love theme is preceded by the great D major 'grandioso' theme [bar105, see Ex.3].

Ex.3



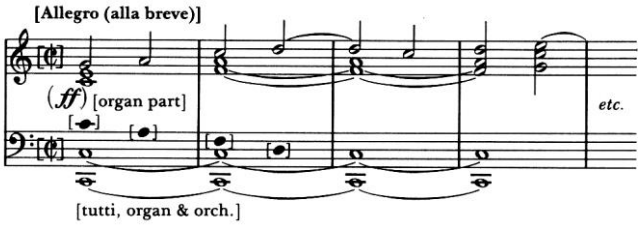
It is the relationship between these two themes that may help us identify the role of the devil in the Sonata. Liszt's programmatic idea I think is that these two themes form/formed a symbiosis - the one should always have the other. This is how they appear at the end of the work, where they 'return' to how they were meant to be, with no separation. But in the exposition the two themes are separated. This 'separation' represents an idea very basic to the Sonata - the idea of 2 as one (or 1 as two). Liszt is not thinking of these numbers as digits - rather of one as 'whole' and two as 'divided'. In other words what we mean by 'harmony' in its non-musical sense, expressed by him as the 'heaven' of B major. Disharmony, or duality, is where this 'harmony' is disrupted. After the disruption the 2 joined together become 2 in conflict. This is what we see in the first subject theme in B minor, where the 'devil' theme is in the LH, and a different theme in the RH [see Ex.4].

Ex.4



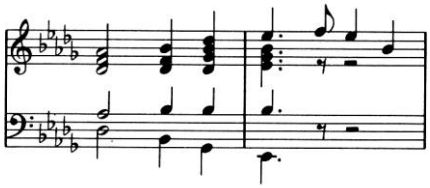
These two, still joined in conflict, reappear as the first subject in the recapitulation. Clearly Liszt portrays here dual as 'duel'. Significantly, the devil is in the *left* hand (*sinister* in Latin). Here Liszt extends the concept of 2 even to characterizing the two hands on the keyboard. Liszt makes the idea of 'the separated two' the whole basis of the exposition section of the Sonata.

The 'grandioso' D major theme bears a resemblance to the chorale 'Crux fidelis' which Liszt made use of in his symphonic poem *Hunnenschlacht* [see Ex.5].



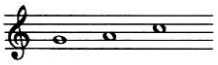
Ex.5

The characteristic rising four-note melodic phrase with which it begins, together with the harmony so much favoured by Liszt [chords I, VI, IV, II, see Ex.6 which shows this progression as it appears in the study *Il Sospiro*]



Ex.6

appears here in the Sonata.[5] The religious identity of this great theme I think is crucial to the dramaturgy of the Sonata, because it is this theme which is the main target of the devil – not 'Gretchen'. It is this theme which makes the narrative 'theological'. 'Crux fidelis' is a medieval Latin hymn, sung in the Good Friday liturgy at the veneration of the Cross. Indeed, the theme itself contains the three notes that Liszt used in various works as a 'Tonisches Symbol des Kreuzes', usually called his Cross motive [see Ex.7].



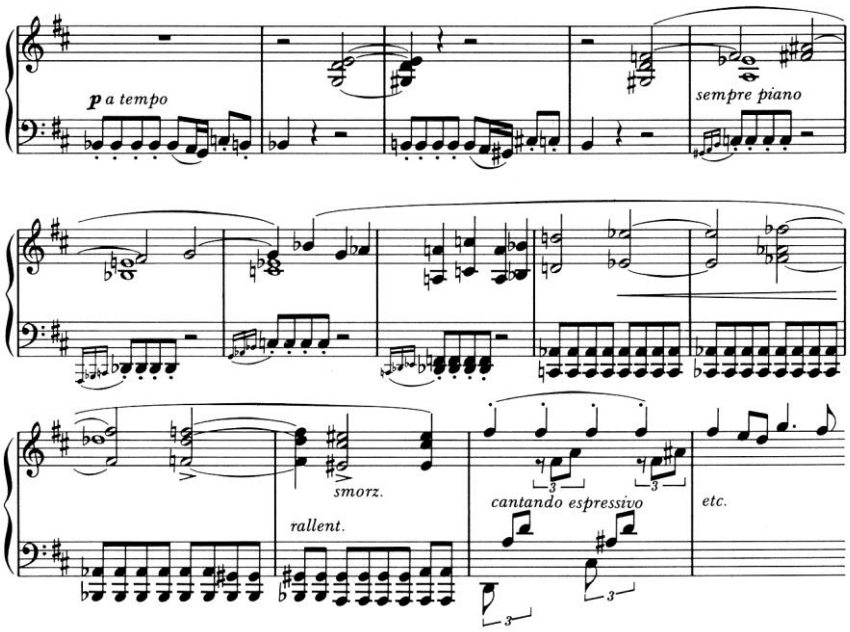
Ex.7

This motive can in fact be seen embedded in the outline of the RH main theme of the first subject [marked 'x' in Ex.10, the main theme used by Liszt as the fugue subject]. In other words the first subject theme of Liszt's *B minor Sonata* incorporates the Cross motive.

When the 'Crux fidelis' theme first appears in the 'exposition' of the Sonata (there are many ways of analysing the form, but one way is to see it as Liszt's four-in-one sonata form, where the exposition matches a first movement, the development a slow movement followed by a scherzo/fugue, and the recapitulation the finale), it is at this point that Liszt illustrates before our eyes how the devil operates. He shows him in the act of causing a separation - he places the devil between the two 'second subject' themes. Furthermore, he shows us that the devil theme and the love theme are versions of each other - by letting the devil 'transform' himself gradually *into* the love theme [bars 141-154, see Ex. 8].

5 Further on this see my book *Revolution and Religion in the Music of Liszt* chapter 14: Liszt's Cross motif and the Piano Sonata in B Minor.

Ex.8

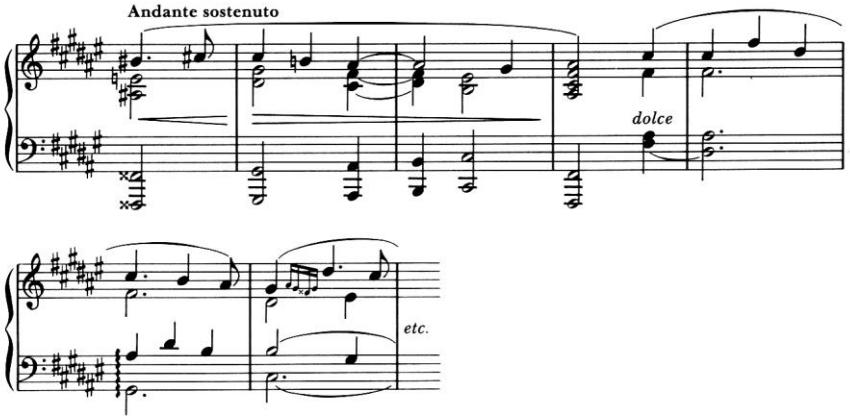


It is at this point that the relationship of the devil theme to the love theme becomes the focus of our attention. How can something so ugly turn into something so beautiful? And more importantly, why?

This space between the D major 'Crux fidelis' theme and the D major 'cantando' or love theme is omitted at the end of the work where the two themes are recapitulated in B major. It is also in this space in the exposition that the RH theme of the 1st subject dual theme is heard by itself [bar 125], without the devil's LH accompaniment. The devil is also heard by himself [bar 141] - so he can transform into the 'cantando' theme. In other words, *another* separation occurs. We hear four themes (the Grandioso *Crux fidelis* [bar 105], the RH theme [bar 125], the devil theme [bar141] and the 'cantando espressivo' theme [bar 153]) each separate.

So far one of these themes has not been identified, namely the RH 1st subject theme - the one in conflict with the devil. Returning to the *Faust Symphony* we would have to say that the parallel there is the relationship of Mephistopheles and Faust. But as we have already identified what would be the Gretchen theme in the Sonata and noted that unlike in the symphony this theme is itself the devil – as a corrupt version of the theme – then we have to say there is no Gretchen in the Sonata. In which case there can be no Faust as such. Then who is the devil's adversary in the Sonata? Following the logic of theology, we must concur with what it tells us - that on earth the devil has only one adversary, namely humankind. Thus in the *Sonata* 'Faust' becomes simply Everyman.

Here we arrive at the point of the whole work. The separation Liszt is talking to us about is the separation of Man and God, expressed as the devil 'turning into' the love theme in order to 'turn love away' from the 'God' theme, the 'Crux fidelis'. That is why the Devil is the chief character. It is also why the slow movement section in F# major [bars 330 - 459] is the greatest music Liszt composed for the piano. The devil theme does not appear in this part of the work; in its place is a new theme marked Andante sostenuto [see Ex.9]



Ex.9

which begins the section - the only time during the course of the work that a new theme appears. It is the turning point of the work's programme, in Christian language the salvation. The chief ingredients of the 'slow movement' are the 'Crux fidelis' theme and the RH Everyman theme. Liszt even singles out the three note Cross motive from this RH theme and plays it in the bass with the right hand marked ff (bars 385 and 389) – *crossing* the hands in the process (not just a verbal pun - I think the double 'cross/Cross' reference is intentional here on Liszt's part). This is symbolic – the left hand space, now empty of the presence of the devil, is filled by the Cross. This programmatic interpretation has been dismissed in some quarters, for example by Kenneth Hamilton, who says:

Merrick constructs an amusing fantasy from which we learn, among other things, that 'the "slow movement" can represent only one thing: the redemption of Man after the Fall'.[6]

This may be Hamilton's opinion of my suggested programme, but the date Liszt wrote on the manuscript of his *Sonata* is February 2nd 1853. This is the feast of Candlemas. Other names are the Presentation of the Lord and the Purification of the Virgin - forty days after Christmas. The child Jesus is taken to the Temple, and recognised by two old people, Anna and Simeon, as the redeemer of Israel. The Sonata was composed at the time when Liszt was reported by a visitor to the Altenburg in 1851 to have returned strongly to the Catholicism of his youth after the upheavals of the 1848 revolutions in Europe:

Liszt joins in. He undertakes the apology for strict canonical Catholicism, which forbids any individual opinion or conviction... he has decided to *se rejeter fortement dans le système catholique...*[7]

1853 was the year Liszt began the idea of composing an oratorio on the life of Christ, a project that took until 1868, when he finished *Christus* in Rome. The Piano Sonata is a summation of his entire musical life to date, on the instrument that gave him his historic career as a travelling pianist throughout Europe in the decade 1838 - 1848. Concerning sonata form as such Liszt himself wrote to a fellow musician at the time:

Certainly you very rightly observe that the *forms*...'First Subject, Middle Subject, After Subject, etc., may very much grow into a habit, because they must be so thoroughly natural, primitive, and very intelligible.' Without making the slightest objection to this opinion, I only beg for permission to be allowed to decide upon the forms by the contents.[8]

6 Kenneth Hamilton: *Liszt: Sonata in B minor* (Cambridge University Press 1996), p.29

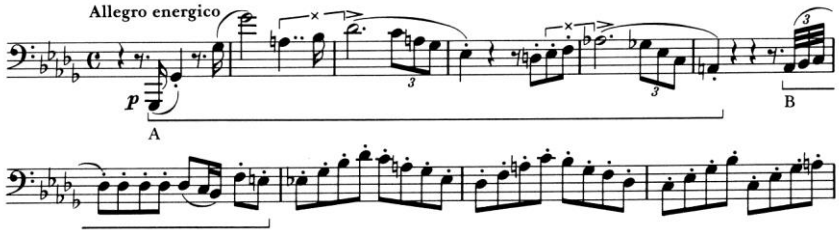
7 Extract from Theodor von Bernhardi: *Aus dem Leben Theodor von Bernhardis* (9 volumes, Leipzig 1893-1896). English translation in Ernest Newman: *The Man Liszt* (London 1934, rev. 1969), p. 179.

8 Extract from a letter of Liszt to Louis Köhler, July 9th 1856. English translation in *Letters of Franz Liszt* [trans. Constance Bache] (London 1894, Greenwood Reprinting 1969), vol.I, p. 273.

If Liszt 'decided on the form by the contents', and if the chief ingredients, in line with the two symphonies, were heaven, man and the devil, then what I say about the F# major slow movement is not fantasy, but logic. Furthermore, it explains the narrative logic of the fugue that follows.

The fugue [bars 460 – 522] begins the process of conquering the devil, which is the main aim of the programme (see my book *Revolution and Religion in the Music of Liszt* Chapter 13 'Liszt's programmatic use of fugue', and Chapter 14, page 294). Liszt notates the first note as Gb, having ended the slow movement with an F# - a change of notation that indicates the reappearance of the devil and his theme.[9] Liszt cleverly constructs a fugue subject in which the Man theme and the Devil theme are joined together to form a line [see Ex.10].

Ex.10



This is the first stage of removing the conflict. Then half way through the fugue he drops the devil theme, leaving the Man theme alone **[**bar 509] - a foretaste of the triumph to come.

In the recapitulation the Man/Devil conflict returns - it is the matter in hand, which can return both as programme and as sonata form. The Man theme now after the slow movement's Passion scene appears with fantastic energy (bar 582) leading to what is clearly the collapse of the devil (bars 595 to 599). The devil disappears - though like in real life he is defeated, not destroyed. The difference now for the Sonata is that the 'Crux fidelis' theme and the beautiful 'cantando' love theme can follow upon one another without interruption, and in B major, having been re-united. This is why Liszt's programmatic starting point was B major, not B minor – he began with the 'end' because it was – in terms of the programme – the beginning. That is to say, the devil has already acted – already 'stolen' the love theme – *before* the Sonata begins. And the place he stole it from was its home – Heaven. He stole a B major theme, and put it into B minor, then jumped into the narrative at bar 13.

In other words, the devil is a 'minorizer' – he changes the major mode to the minor as a form of corruption. He is responsible for the work being in B minor.

The key of B minor also appears for the first time in Liszt's output in *Don Sanche* - and furthermore in a context which I think can be directly linked to this dual/duel main theme of the Sonata. The key appears as the tonality of the duet *Tremble, tremble,* which in the action of the story is a duel. The idea is a clever one, a ruse on the part of the Lord of the Castle, the wizard Alidor, to make the Princess Elzire declare her love. He disguises himself as the evil knight Romualde, fights Don Sanche, and makes him fall to the ground. A Marche Funèbre in D minor follows. At the sight of his body Elzire reveals the love in her heart. When he turns out to be only wounded, and not dead, she is overjoyed, and the road to a happy ending now lies open. The couple can enter the Castle of Love.

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9 See my articles on Liszt and the key of Gb major: "G flat or F sharp? The cycle of keys in Liszt's music" in: *Liszt 2000. Selected Lectures given at the International Liszt Conference in Budapest, May 18-20, 1999 (*Magyar Liszt Társaság, Budapest, 2000), p.188; and " "nach Ges dur": Liszt's inscription in the score of Handel's opera *Almira*" (Studia Musicologica 2001), pp.349-372.

The duel therefore shows the two sides of Don Sanche's destiny brought into conflict. Either he will win Elzire, or he will lose her. On this depends his being able to enter the Castle of Love – the B major "*Brillant asile doux et tranquille pour les amants toujours constants*." Thus the B minor of the duet relates to Liszt's choice of key for the place of eternal happiness – where the lovers are united. In other words they enter the place of 'oneness' – a concept whose name both musical and non-musical is simply 'harmony'. Alidor's action in disguising himself is done to bring this about – to create a 'two' (combat) that will resolve as 'one' (love). Liszt makes him be musically both, by 'creating' B minor – the key that represents 'two'. It only appears once in the opera, and significantly *after* he had written music in B major, a key which also appears just the once. Thus the minor refers back to the major – a literal 'minorization' - and Alidor is responsible for both keys in the work. In this context the B minor of the duet/duel is clearly the obverse of the B major of the 'celestial' chorus. Its character reflects what in everyday parlance is meant when we say discord leads to harmony. B minor is *division*.

This idea – of a split, or *separatio* (severing) – can be expressed in another way as *duplex animo* or division in the mind. This is what we find in number 10 of the twelve symphonic poems, *Hamlet* (I858, S1O4), as far as I know Liszt's only orchestral work in B minor. The Latin Vulgate Bible uses the phrase in James 1,8 "vir duplex animo inconstans in omnibus viis suis" [he is double-minded, and never can keep a steady course]. This matches Shakespeare's Hamlet, and Liszt's symphonic poem on the subject. The composer said of his musical portrait: "- he remains still the same, pale, feverish, suspended between heaven and earth, the prisoner of his doubt and indecisiveness!"[10] The idea of 'two' that lies behind the word 'doubt' is obscured in English; it is more obvious in the Latin *dubitum* and the German *Zweifel*. Even the Biblical doubting Thomas has a name in Greek expressive of one split into two – *Didymus* or twin[s].

Of the many striking features of the Sonata it is perhaps this dual theme as its main one, or first subject, that is the most original - and at the same time the most programmatic. Liszt is again Alidor, his aim as a composer thirty years later being to create once more the 'two' (combat) that will resolve as 'one' (love). And to use the same keys for the same reason. Today we can now, like Liszt when he was composing the Sonata, compare the main 'double' (two simultaneous but contrasted hands) theme of the piano work with his youthful thinking in *Don Sanche.* (The opera was staged in Paris in 1825, the score then being lost in a fire and only in 1903 were the orchestral parts discovered to have survived. A modern revival took place in 1977 in London.[11]) Clearly the role of the evil knight is given to the *left* hand.

<u>The programme</u>

On the basis of what I have said above, the programme Liszt had in mind begins in heaven in B major. It is/was in heaven that the devil steals/stole the B major love theme before he first appears with it at bar 13 in B minor as 'hammer-blows' - and it is to heaven that the stolen theme must return. Liszt's idea for the work is to 're-unite' what has been divided - in Latin *religare* [to tie up, make fast] from which comes the English word 'religion'. The theme the devil 'left behind' in heaven in B major was the 'Crux fidelis' theme – now standing alone. This is why it appears 'on earth' in the 'royal' key of D major – it is a stern majestic assertion of absolute rule. It is also why this theme undergoes the most transformation – of key and mood. At bar 297 it even becomes angry in C# minor – and leads to a desperate cry of the Man theme in the RH against the devil theme pounding low in the bass (bar 319). Then silence – a discord suspended in the air (bar 329). Its resolution is the new 'salvation' theme in F# major. After *the defeat of the devil* in the recapitulation the 'Crux fidelis' theme and the beautiful 'cantando' love theme can follow upon one

10 Extract from a letter of Liszt to Agnes Klindworth dated 26th June 1858 in *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, ed. La Mara (8 volumes, Leipzig, 1893-1902), vol. III, p.111.

11 The opera *Don Sanche* is recorded on Hungaroton Classic HCD 12744-45

another without interruption, and in B major, having been re-united [*religare*]. As a result the B minor Man theme makes a final appearance in B *major* (bar 682) and in both hands, first the RH then the LH. This shows us that the devil's 'left' has now become the domain of Man. To all this Liszt adds a 'dance'-like accompaniment. Man can now enter heaven - and return to his true home.

As usual with this programme - remember the *Dante Symphony* - the question arises what kind of ending is more suitable, a loud triumph or a quiet transfiguration. In the Sonata Liszt cleverly combines the two by first stating fff the 'Crux fidelis' theme in B major at bar 700. I suggest the bar number 700 is not coincidence - as the counterpart to the devil's bar 13, it marks the end of a human life by referring to its seventy-year span. After the loud music Liszt quietly recapitulates in B major the beautiful Andante sostenuto theme of the slow movement, followed by a coda with the devil theme in the LH marked *piano sotto voce* - as it were 'down below' as meanwhile simple sustained chords rise in the RH, the whole passage evoking vividly the distance between earth and heaven, and reminding us that on earth the devil never sleeps. The final chord of B major is ppp, held for what feels like an eternity until cut off by the staccato octave B in the bass.

Is this the programme of Liszt's *Sonata in B minor*? Does the work have a programme? Are we entitled to speculate that it might have one without documented authority from Liszt? A documented 'authority' is of course Liszt's autograph of the Sonata. At one point in the recapitulation Liszt tries to combine the Crux fidelis theme in the RH with the Man theme in the LH, afterwards crossing out the theme in the left hand - presumably for musical reasons. But the attempt is indicative of a probable programme. [This crossing out can be seen on You Tube (Franz Liszt Sonata Tanski Music Autograph) where the work is performed by Claudius Tanski while showing the autograph score. The crossed out theme appears at 23'11''.] With a combining of these two themes Liszt I think here wanted to convey a summing up of the whole work, namely its programme, the idea of Man redeemed - his return to "two as one", to Man and God being (once again) *together*.

If indeed the Sonata does not have a programme then it is unusual, if not unique, in the output of Liszt - which otherwise consists of around a thousand compositions of which the instrumental works, whether for piano or for orchestra, are as a general rule 'illustrative' in some way, either of a programme or just their title. As for the absence of a written programme, we might turn our attention to works by him for which he provided no 'programme' as such, but which nonetheless are still programme music. For example the symphonic poem *Hamlet* has only its title. This alone is the programme - everybody is expected to know the story of Shakespeare's play. What title would Liszt have given his Sonata? The Redemption? Christianity? The Crux fidelis Sonata? Or even *Teufelsonate*? We should be grateful that he did not - and grateful for two reasons. The first is that nobody today would pay any attention to its title when performing the work. The modern approach is to begin and end with the 'form' - as though form can actually be *played*. The second is that it would confirm the view of Liszt as a *poseur* vis à vis religion and the Church, instead of pointing to the reality, which is that as Liszt matured 'programme' and 'religion' in his music became virtually synonymous concepts. 1853 was the year when the two came together. Which is why Liszt was silent about it.

To perform Liszt's *Sonata in B minor* involves taking all these things into consideration. I would claim that without knowing what is meant by the Fall, and the Passion, it is impossible to play properly even the first hesitant notes that begin the work. Its greatness lies in its narrative, and it is largely because the genius of Liszt captured this narrative so perfectly that the Sonata is a great work. But as Liszt would have himself protested, the greatness lies first in the story he elected to tell.

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