

FRANZ LISZT

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Jim Samson

The making of the Transcendentals

The Making of the Transcendentals ¹

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This paper is concerned less with the Transcendentals themselves than with their pre-history. This will involve looking at the extant sources for the three versions of the études that became the Transcendentals, and at the same time offering some reflections on possible ways of approaching each of them. It is well known that Liszt composed his *Étude en douze exercices* at the age of 15. It was published by Boisselot in Marseilles in 1827 and shortly after by Dufaut et Dubois of Paris. It was designated *Étude en quarante-huit exercices dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs*, op. 6, and was therefore intended as the first of four volumes. In 1839 the work was re-issued by Hofmeister in Leipzig, designated op. 1.² As Busoni pointed out, Hofmeister's opus number registers that he considered this to be the first work of Liszt to be published in Germany.³ The title page has a vignette depicting a child in a cradle, together with the note: "Travail de la Jeunesse". There is no extant autograph manuscript.

The work was of course in part a legatee of the formidable pedagogical programme of Liszt's teacher Carl Czerny. However its title may well be significant, since it returns to Cramer's formulation of 1803-4 (that in turn had

¹ This paper was conceived as a preparatory study for my book *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt* (Cambridge, 2003). Accordingly, much of the material in the paper was subsequently incorporated into the book.

² Lina Ramann gives the erroneous date 1835 for the re-issue, and this date has been followed by several later commentators. *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1880), p. 87.

³ Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music*, trans. Rosamund Ley (London, 1957), p. 157. For a discussion of the rival claims to the designation op. 1, see Georg Schütz, 'Form, Satz- und Klaviertechnik in den drei Fassungen der *Grossen Etüden* von Franz Liszt', in Zsoltán Gárdonyi and Siegfried Mauser (eds.), *Virtuosität und Avantgarde: Untersuchungen zum Klavierwerk Franz Liszts* (Mainz, 1988), p. 71.

been taken from several prototypes emanating from the Paris conservatoire, which was in a very real sense the birthplace of the modern etude). By the mid 1820s Cramer's formulation *Étude en exercices*, popular for a while at the beginning of the century, had become outmoded – indeed more-or-less extinct, and Liszt's, or his publisher's, adoption of it seems on the face of it oddly anachronistic. It is possible to make a strong argument for relating Liszt's youthful *Étude* to both Czerny and Cramer, to *Die Schule der Geläufigkeit* and to what would later be known as the *84 Études*. I will not elaborate on that argument now.⁴ But I will say that at the time Liszt composed the work the reception of Czerny and Cramer etudes by critics and composers had reached a sharply polarised stage. Czerny, for all his fame as a pedagogue, was regarded as an “inkwell”, “bankrupt of fantasy” – a production line for etudes and exercises. Cramer, in contrast, was highly valued, and above all he was represented as an important bridge between the keyboard writing of Bach and the modern school of pianism. His etudes had by then acquired something of a seminal status; they were on every musician's piano, though it's only fair to add that a decade or so later all but the *84 Études* was more-or-less forgotten.

In other words, a double image of the piano is invoked by the reception of these two figures in the 1820s. On the one hand we have mechanical technique – performance-orientated figures – mere exercises, to adopt a later connotation of the genre title. And on the other hand we have a revival of Baroque expressive devices, work-orientated, studies *mit Geist*. The reception of Czerny and Cramer points to an incipient separation of virtuoso technique and Baroque-influenced expression, a separation that both catches a distant echo from the early history of the instrument and at the same time carries forward into the world of the Romantic piano. That separation was in turn part of a larger duality, which we might narrate as a tale of two pianos – the “real” piano of a mercantile concert life, and the “ideal” piano of a symbolic aesthetic universe. At root, this boils down to an incipient tension between what Lydia Goehr has called the “perfect musical performance” and the “perfect performance of music”.⁵ These are the opposed principles that Goehr identifies

⁴ The head motives of several of Liszt's exercises map closely onto Cramer's etudes. See Schütz, 'Form, Satz- und Klaviertechnik in den drei Fassungen der *Grossen Etüden* von Franz Liszt', p. 74.

⁵ Lydia Goehr, 'The Perfect Performance of Music and the Perfect Musical Performance', *new*

as regulating what she calls the “imperfect practice” of Western art music. I might add that Carl Dahlhaus represents much the same antinomy oversimply as a diachronic succession from virtuosity to interpretation in the nineteenth century.⁶ And I might add further that Goehr’s formulation advances some way beyond the influential watershed theory presented in her earlier book *The imaginary museum of musical works*, where she argues that around 1800 a work-concept took on a regulative rather than a constitutive role in European music.⁷ What she represents in her later essay is in reality (though she doesn’t quite say it in these terms) a dialectic between works and practices.

In an earlier study of nineteenth-century pianism I found it useful to emphasize this distinction by focusing on the practice rather than the work – and I mean by this the specific practice of post-classical virtuosity.⁸ This has a distinct bearing on the early exercises by Liszt. To my mind a useful way of approaching these exercises would be to prioritise musical materials over musical structures; if nothing else, this serves as a complement to the customary focus on work character in nineteenth-century music. My aim then would be to recover the shared material content – the commonalities – of post-Classical pianism, and to that end I have devised a methodology involving ideal types of musical material derived inductively from the wider repertory, rather in the way that analysis identifies ideal types of musical form. I suggest that we might identify mainly three ideal types of musical material, largely embodied in figures. These are respectively genre markers, musical-rhetorical figures and idiomatic figures. In general the approach is designed as one way of making concrete the point of intersection between the practice and its repertory. In practice it would involve partitioning the Liszt exercises along these lines, mapping out the cycle as a performative play of figures – stressing the tactile, the technical, the immediate. It is important to stress that what lies behind this

formations, vol. 27 (Winter 1995-6), pp. 1-22.

⁶ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J.-B. Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989).

⁷ Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992).

⁸ “The Practice of Early-Nineteenth-Century Pianism”, in Michael Talbot (ed.), *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 110-27.

approach is an exercise in critical hermeneutics: an attempt to recover commonalities in a practice where work character is not yet strongly developed.

It is clear from an unpublished letter to Ferdinand Hiller in 1835 that Liszt had already conceived a set of *Grandes Études* at that time.⁹ However, to my knowledge there is no evidence that he put anything on paper until his stay in Northern Italy during the autumn months of 1837. What, then, was the impetus for Liszt to turn to these pieces in 1837? Several things came together. In 1837 Czerny reentered the picture. In the years immediately following their early association, Liszt and Czerny were in touch only by letter. Then they met again in the spring of 1837, when Czerny visited Paris on one of his rare excursions from Vienna. He was clearly disconcerted by the radical change in Liszt's piano technique. "I found his playing rather wild and muddled in every respect, in spite of the great bravura".¹⁰ This comment neatly identifies the divide which had by then taken place between post-Classical and Romantic virtuosity. So it may have been that meeting with Czerny in 1837 that spurred Liszt to turn to the project he had announced in 1835.

But there may have been another incentive. By 1837, when Czerny visited Paris, Chopin was still involved with the Liszt circle at the Hôtel de France. As a matter of fact all three composers were involved in *Hexaméron* in the spring of that year. Now at just this time – the spring of 1837 – Chopin was preparing his op. 25 *Études* for the publisher, and we know that Liszt himself performed several of them in April 1837, prior to publication. Indeed op. 25 was dedicated to Marie d'Agoult, just as op. 10 had been dedicated to Liszt, spelling out that Chopin associated this particular genre with Liszt. The Chopin etudes might then have provided a further impetus for Liszt to turn again to this radical revision of his own etudes. At any rate he worked on them in Italy in the autumn. He almost certainly performed one of them in Milan, since an unidentified piece, called simply *Studio*, was on the programme of his concert in

⁹ This letter, published as part of a collection of 'unknown' letters edited by Gerhard Tischler, is quoted by Alan Walker in *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811-1847* (London, 1983), p. 219.

¹⁰ Carl Czerny, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, ed. Walter Kolneder (Strassburg, 1968; orig. ms., 1842). My excerpt is from the English translation by Ernest Sanders: "Recollections from my Life", *Musical Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3 (July, 1956), pp. 302-17.

La Scala in September 1837. Interestingly an extant autograph for the first of these new études has the title *Préludes* in Liszt's hand. It is unclear whether this refers to No.1, which was eventually labelled *Preludio*, or to the cycle as a whole, since the *Grandes Études* were indeed labelled 'Preludes' by Marie d'Agoult.¹¹ This autograph was almost certainly destined for the Haslinger edition, though it differs from the published form in several minor respects, all discussed by Mária Eckhardt in her book on the National Library manuscripts.¹² Incidentally there are intriguing attempts at new performance signs recorded on this autograph, several of them incorporated in the published edition.

Now although this new set of études is a work of formidable virtuosity, its links with the early set are clearly perceptible, and the tonal scheme remains the same. The one anomaly is that the original no. 7 was transposed from E^b to D^b and appeared as no. 11, while a new étude in E^b major replaced it as no. 7. Even this newly composed étude retained a link with the youthful Liszt, however, in that it reworked the introduction of his op. 3 *Impromptu*. There is an autograph of this newly composed no. 7, and the folio numbering suggests that it was at some point detached from the complete set. It seems plausible that this too was part of the Haslinger Stichvorlage, though there are some grounds for uncertainty (briefly, it is difficult to be absolutely certain that the manuscripts of nos. 1 and 7, the only extant autographs, were part of a single document).¹³ The manuscript for no. 7 has been heavily corrected. Most of these corrections are matters of notational convenience concerned with orthography and clef; but interestingly there is some suggestion that Liszt's first thoughts favoured an even denser texture. In other words the revisions represent an early stage of just the kind of pruning that would later be completed in the Transcendentals. Apart from some details of dynamics and pedalling, the engraver followed

¹¹ Many commentators, including Raabe, opt for 1838 as the date of completion for the *Grandes Études*. However, Marie's letter of October 1837 celebrates the fact that 'Franz has just finished his twelve preludes [*sic*]'. Moreover in January 1838, Liszt himself wrote to Adophe Pictet from Milan: 'With the 12 *Études* – monsters – and a small volume entitled *Impressions et Poésies* which I have just finished, I am not displeased'. See Adrian Williams (ed.), *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters* (Oxford, 1998), p. 80.

¹² Mária Eckhardt, *Liszt's Music Manuscripts in the National Széchényi Library* (Budapest, 1968), pp. 96-99.

¹³ Again the relevant discussion is in Maria Eckhardt's book.

Liszt's manuscript meticulously, though there are some changes to note values, and it seems likely that these were introduced by Liszt himself at proof stage.

Liszt had completed all twelve of the *Grandes Études* by the time he visited Czerny in Vienna the following April, when he played them publicly. Intriguingly, Czerny decided on this occasion – on his home ground – that Liszt's genius had “received a new impetus” and that his playing had taken on what he called a “still brilliant yet now clearer style”.¹⁴ It is tempting to ask just who had changed here. At any rate, the set was published the following year, and my suggestion of a dual impulse – Czerny and Chopin – underlying its composition is rather confirmed by Liszt's dedication on the published score. It was dedicated to Czerny in the simultaneous Schlesinger and Haslinger editions. This dedication was certainly a genuine tribute, but it was also no doubt a way of spelling out the considerable divide that now separated Liszt from Czerny, who had inspired the earlier exercises on which they were based. The Ricordi edition, however, registered a most intriguing change. Its first volume was again dedicated to Czerny, but its second volume was dedicated to Chopin – again a tribute, but at the same time a way of marking Liszt's separation from Chopin's neo-baroque virtuosity no less than from Czerny's post-classical virtuosity.

It may be worth adding a further word on that. Historically, it seems to me, Chopin's contribution in his etudes was to recover or reinstate an essentially eighteenth-century equilibrium between virtuosity and work character, two qualities which had developed in tandem during that century but came to be viewed as oppositional in the early nineteenth century. I have argued elsewhere that this opposition between virtuosity and work character can ultimately be understood as an opposition between two essential meanings of Romanticism.¹⁵ I will not elaborate on that now, other than to say that it was expressed as a tension between presentation and idea, between heard effect and

¹⁴ “Recollections from my Life”, p. 316. For an interesting perspective on Liszt's changing approach to performance in the 1830s, see Katherine Kolb Reeve, 'Primal Scenes: Smithson, Pleyel, and Liszt in the Eyes of Berlioz', *19th-Century Music*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1995), pp. 211-35.

¹⁵ “Romanticism”, in Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (eds.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn. (London, 2001), vol. 21, pp. 596-603.

immanent knowledge, between, in a way, performance and text. More straightforwardly, we might say that virtuosity came to be viewed as a magnet drawing the listener away from the qualities of the work towards the qualities of the performance. On one level this recapitulated an ancient argument about vocal music: that virtuosity ultimately threatens meaning. But on another level the terms of the argument were changed through the offices of an ascendant Romantic individualism, so that the performer, no less than the composer, might claim the high ground of a liberal ideology. That is partly what Goehr means by a “perfect musical performance”, as opposed to a “perfect performance of music”. And it is just this kind of Romantic (as opposed to post-Classical or neo-Baroque) virtuosity that is perfectly exemplified by the *Grandes Études*.

In a nutshell, Liszt exploded the figures of his earlier exercises into performance-orientated events, effectively generating a narrative of virtuosities, in an “ever-changing array of masks and guises”, to quote Dahlhaus.¹⁶ The materials of the *Grandes Études* are in this sense unamenable either to figurative recycling or to thematic working. They are excessive in several senses, including the sense in which they threaten to exceed the work. Liszt's reworking, then, changes the earlier exercises utterly. Any element that remains intact in the journey from exercises to etudes is in no sense an essence. What we have are not even different configurations of an idea, for the idea (to use a loaded term) has itself changed. Even in the first etude, where the figuration seems little more than an elaboration of the original, the work character of the earlier exercise, predicated on conventional formal symmetries, has been replaced by a single anacrusic, performance-orientated gesture – a piece is replaced by a flourish. (Incidentally the general tendency is to replace rounded forms by variation or developmental forms.) Elsewhere – as in no. 2 – a hidden feature of the original emerges centre stage to initiate a sequence of variations and episodes of cumulative technical complexity, driven by what Maurice Bourges called the “demon of mechanism”. Or, conversely, as in no. 5, the principal theme of the original is relegated to a subsidiary status, allowing the centre of gravity to shift subtly from motive and design to texture and sonority. Or the original figure becomes an accompaniment, as in nos. 3 and 4, or

¹⁶ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), pp. 134-42.

intercuts with a new theme, as in no. 10, where the new theme incidentally is a Chopin reference. The play of echoes, in other words, has a new impulsion, severed from the original tone – and leaving audible only the remnants of conventionally articulated work character.

I have not as yet devised a methodological approach to the *Grandes Études*. However, I can at this stage propose that any such approach needs to address three major subtexts of virtuosity, not least because these subtexts lie behind the opprobrium that's often been attached to "virtuoso music". The first subtext I describe as an occlusion – a blocking-out – of reference. When composers prescribe virtuosity, I suggest, they weaken or obfuscate any sense of an idea represented, a story told, a meaning rendered, or even a form articulated. To put it rather colloquially, the telling is destined to exceed the tale. Our unease about virtuosity is partly due to this implicit challenge to expression and form – to the kind of idealisation invited by work character. Virtuosity presents, rather than represents. It offends our sense – our hope – that there may be something behind the music. My second subtext can be described as a surrender to mechanism. The point here is that unlike vocal music, instrumental music deals with a material base that needs to be penetrated and transformed, to be humanised and even socialised, before it can become music. The larger point behind this concerns the reification of instrumental technique, the suggestion that instruments effect what Max Weber calls a "disenchantment of the world". And finally my third subtext. Here I suggest that virtuosity can wear the stigma of the gratuitous. It is surplus or supplement, a surplus of technique over expression, detail over substance, even (implicitly) facility over quality.¹⁷ By composing in the difficulty (and difficulty may need to be differentiated from complexity here), the composer allows the work to be conceptualised as a (simple) idea, substance or structure overlaid or "surfaced" by ancillary or decorative detail.¹⁸

¹⁷ Susan Bernstein comments interestingly on this in relation to journalism. See her *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt and Baudelaire* (Stanford, 1998).

¹⁸ "Rameau's Nephew" complained of technical difficulty replacing beauty. See Denis Diderot, "Rameau's Nephew (with d'Alembert's Dream)", trans. Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth, 1966; orig. ms., c.1761-c.1779), p. 100.

Whatever approach I adopt in the end, it will have to register the powerful dialectic of performance and work character represented by this music, the sense in which virtuosity threatens to explode the work. There is a paradox then in this journey from exercises to etudes. Just as the post-Classical virtuosity of the exercises undermines work character through its material commonalities with the wider repertory, so Romantic virtuosity does the same, but from a quite different, almost opposite standpoint (here work character is swamped by the singularity of the performance orientation – the sense that only Liszt can perform this music). Now I think that as historians we perhaps need to address the balance of power between performance and composition here. It seems to me reasonable to value the autonomy character attributed to performance by the rise of Romantic virtuosity, just as we value the autonomy character attributed to composition by the rise of the musical work. We can invest something, in other words, in each of the “torn halves”. The great performers, like the great composers, can stake their claim on our reading of music history, and not merely as faithful servants of the text. Their qualities are in part redemptive. They can complete the incomplete, improve the mediocre, give expression to the expressionless, transform all that they touch through a focus on sensuous surface and heard effect – through what Susan Sontag has described as an “erotics” of art.¹⁹ I suggest that the qualities of Romantic virtuosity – freedom and subjectivity, spontaneity and chance, charisma and presence, a capacity to overcome, to attain the unattainable – can make their own statement, and in doing so they can draw us away from our investment in the work. Incidentally the flexibility in the new performance signs devised by Liszt for these pieces has a kind of symbolic value in relation to these qualities.

In 1840 (Peter Raabe’s date),²⁰ Liszt drafted yet another version of the fourth etude, involving an added introduction and a new ending, and on this occasion he gave it the poetic title *Mazeppa*, after Victor Hugo. It was published as a separate piece by Schlesinger in 1847, with a dedication to Hugo, and (shortly after) issued by Haslinger in Vienna. The date of composition has been

¹⁹ Sontag urges an appreciation of the “sensuous surface” of art objects, arguing that this has been a casualty of the quest for multiple layers of meaning and deep structures. See “Against Interpretation”, reprinted in Elizabeth Hardwick (ed.), *A Susan Sontag Reader* (London, 1983).

²⁰ Peter Raabe, *Liszts Schaffen* (Tutzing, 1968; orig. edn., 1931).

disputed.²¹ However, the documentary evidence supports something close to Peter Raabe's original date for this intermediate version of *Mazeppa*, at least for the new title and the added introduction. Not only is there is an extant *Gedenkblatt* dated 4 February 1841 with the title *Preludio*, containing the introductory eleven chords appended to the opening of the intermediate version of *Mazeppa*.²² There is also a letter from Liszt to Schlesinger, dated 1839 from internal evidence (at the latest 1840), making specific reference to this *preludio*.²³ It is even possible that Liszt had the Hugo poem in mind when he composed the *Grandes Études*; he did, after all write to his mother from Geneva in 1835 requesting that she send not only a copy of the early exercises but also a copy of Hugo's *Orientales*, from which *Mazeppa* is drawn (interestingly, two other titles from the *Transcendentals* – *Vision* and *Paysage* – have counterparts in Hugo's poetry; on the other hand his poem *Le chasseur noir*, paralleling Liszt's *Wilde Jagd*, postdates the composition of the *Transcendentals*).

The chronology of the *Mazeppa* works is indeed complicated. It seems that shortly after composing this third version of the etude, where for the first time he associated this music with Hugo's poem, Liszt gave some thought to an orchestral 'overture' with the title *Mazeppa*. In the so-called "Lichnowsky" sketchbook (D-WRgs N8), used by Liszt between 1841 and 1845, there is a reference to 3 Overtures: *Corsaire*, *Mazeppa*, *Sardanapale*, though at this stage it was no more than an intention; there are as yet no musical sketches. The overture was eventually drafted as a *particella*, a rough score laid out in anything between 2 and 6 systems, with general indications of scoring provided by the composer, and this source, known as the "Mazeppa" draftbook (D-WRgs N2), is extant. It was completed in January 1851, though there is no clear evidence of the precise period of drafting. Most of Liszt's early overtures were written in this form, and were then usually handed on to August Conradi or Joachim Raff, who orchestrated them more fully. Thus, the so-called "Esquisse

²¹ See, for example, Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of his Life in Pictures and Documents*, trans. Stewart Spencer (New Jersey, 1989), p. 167.

²² The *Gedenkblatt* is to be found in Bayreuth, in the Richard Wagner Archiv (D-BHrwa Hs 121 A/2).

²³ The letter was published with its facsimile and in translation by Albi Rosenthal: 'Franz Liszt and his publishers', *Liszt-Saeculum*, vol. 2, no. 38 (1986), pp. 4-6. Rosenthal wrongly associates the *preludio* with the first of the *Transcendentals*.

pour Mazeppa” held in the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris (F-Pc Ms. 155) is a manuscript draft in the hand of Joachim Raff with copious annotations by Liszt,²⁴ including *Korrekturblätter*. It was certainly based on the *particella*, and it differs in many respects from the final version of the piece. For the early symphonic poems Liszt's usual practice was to correct the first version (often a Conradi score) in the light of early rehearsals and performances and then to give this corrected score to Raff, who would produce a definitive version in close collaboration with the composer. Accordingly, there is a further manuscript of *Mazeppa* in Raff's hand (D-WRgs A6), with minor corrections and additions by Liszt, which functioned as the *Stichvorlage* for the work and was almost certainly produced just before publication in 1854.

To return to the *particella* for *Mazeppa*. Liszt dated this draft precisely, writing “Eilsen 1^{re} Semanie [*sic*] de 1851”. It occupies pages 1-33 of the draftbook, and on page 34, immediately following it, Liszt wrote the title *Wilde Jagd – Scherzo* at the top of the page. The music for that piece then occupies pages 34-74, and at the end Liszt again signed and dated the piece, this time “Eilsen, 2^{de} Semaine de Janvier 1851”. Surprisingly, however, the music here is not the eighth of the *Transcendentals*, which he had not yet begun revising, but the *Scherzo* and *March*. In other words, even after he had drafted the symphonic poem *Mazeppa*, he was considering using the title *Wilde Jagd* for a quite different piece, and had no difficulty at all in transferring the title to the eighth etude. All of that of course predates the final page of the *Stichvorlage* for the *Transcendentals*, which was signed and dated by the composer “Eilsen 2 avril 1851”. Liszt had returned to Bad Eilsen in mid February and stayed there until 3 April, the day after he completed the *Stichvorlage* of the *Transcendentals*. So we can date the revisions fairly precisely. They took place between 18 February and 2 April of 1851.

The *Stichvorlage* itself consists of the Haslinger edition of the *Grandes Études*, with revisions effected at different levels. For three of the etudes (nos. 4, 10 and 12) the printed text was replaced by an entirely new manuscript, though in nos. 4 and 12 there are paste-overs with brief sections of printed text from the

²⁴ For a general description of this manuscript, see Michael Saffle, “Liszt Music Manuscripts in Paris”, in *Liszt and his World* (New York, 1998), p. 120.

Haslinger edition. In other études (notably no. 6) the printed text was retained, but manuscript pages with revised text were stitched on to several of the pages. Elsewhere, and most commonly, the printed text was retained but manuscript paste-overs were used for the major corrections, while minor corrections were effected either by using a blade to scratch out notes, or by making tesselations and additions in brown crayon, black ink or maroon ink (engraver's markings are in grey pencil). Although the practice was by no means consistent across the études as a whole, it is possible to deduce something of the temporal sequence of corrections from the colour of crayon or ink. It seems that Liszt's tendency here was to revise in layers. To begin with, he made significant textual changes either with paste-overs or in brown crayon. Then, at least in some cases, he returned to the text to make further changes either in black ink or occasionally pencil. And finally he used maroon ink to make more detailed changes to dynamics, pedalling and expression marks. Since this forms a kind of archetype of the revision process, deviations – for example, maroon ink to effect a major change – can sometimes be indicative of a “last minute” decision.

Three guiding principles seem to have been in his mind as he reshaped the études in Bad Eilsen. First, as with the revisions to the *Paganini Études*, Liszt was anxious to tone down what he then took to be gratuitous virtuosity. In part this was a matter of simple pragmatism, but it also reflected a shift in motivation, as Liszt thought of the work increasingly as an object to be contemplated at leisure rather than designed for a particular performance. Some of the more extreme difficulties of the *Grandes Études* were excised; the textures were in numerous instances thinned out in support of greater clarity; and some of the “piled-up” density of information was reduced. Paradoxically the effect of taking out some of the notes in this way – removing the clutter – was to make the music yet more brilliant in effect. As Busoni remarked: “first he learned how to fill out and later learned how to leave out”.²⁵ Knowingly or not, he was following Schumann's advice to the letter. In his review of the *Grandes Études*, Schumann argued that Liszt could have been a remarkable composer, but that he would have had “to initiate the reverse process with his compositions – that of simplification rather than of complication”.²⁶ Secondly, the revisions recorded Liszt's growing concern for formal coherence and for the

²⁵ Busoni, *The essence of Music*, trans. Rosamund Ley (London, 1957), p. 158.

²⁶ Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, trans. P. Rosenfeld, ed. K. Wolff (London, 1946), p.148.

“weight of the past”. In the early Weimar years the several strands of his thinking about thematic and formal organisation began to come together in novel and interesting ways, and there are indications of this in the changes made to the *Grandes Études*. And finally, the revisions in several cases supported the poetic dimension Liszt introduced to the music by adding titles to ten of the etudes.

There is space to do no more here than to summarise the effects of the revisions. One impulse at work here was quite simply the quest for greater formal clarity, where Liszt would adapt or reduce the original material to approach something akin to a sense of Classical balance. But in other cases an original, often diffuse, architectural ground plan was transformed into an evolving structure that focused its energies on a single point of tonal and thematic reprise, functioning as the climax, fulcrum or “expressive goal” of the piece. In practice this tended to mean stripping away material, often developmental material, that impeded the sense of a single large-scale intensity curve. The second and third of the etudes may serve to illustrate these two impulses. The more substantial changes to the second etude are symptomatic of the first of them, of Liszt's return to what I called a sense of Classical balance, even in some ways a return to the formal principle (and work character) suggested, though inadequately realised, by the original exercise. The crucial difference from the second version is the rethinking of the C-major material. Rather than the monothematicism of the second version, Liszt here presents a “new”, if derived, theme (as in the exercise), replacing through-composed development with a genuine contrast of mood and tonal quality.

The changes to the third etude exemplify the second impulse. Here Liszt changed the formal conception significantly by removing the developmental *Presto agitato assai* section entirely. Apart from altering the proportions of the piece, this change had the effect of weakening the sense of successive strophes and strengthening the sense of a unitary arch-like design with an obvious fulcrum. It is certainly no coincidence that the other major revision concerned precisely that fulcrum. In the 1837 version there is a real sense of thematic arrival and definition at bar 65, whereas in the revision there is greater continuity promoted both by the voicing of the right hand and by the rhythmically activated supporting chords in the left hand. A moment of

articulation is replaced by a more continuous process of tension and release that “composes through” the climax. Moreover this intensity curve can be extended in both directions from this fulcrum to embrace the entire span of the etude within a single, relatively uniform process, characteristically reaching its point of maximum intensity closer to the end than the beginning. The symmetrical thirds-related tonal scheme then falls neatly into place around the fulcum.

We should note, however, that the deletion of the *presto agitato assai* material from the 1837 version of *Paysage* also had a programmatic resonance, in that it focuses our attention on theme (subject to variation) rather than development, and thus promotes a unity of mood entirely appropriate to the programmatic image; even the questioning motive of bar 11, which is briefly worked and expanded at bar 47, does little to dispel this. Moreover, the deletion of the *presto* served to foreground and “place” the human presence in this landscape, that impassioned A-major section whose declamatory rests speak to us with an expressive urgency that is by no means typical of the general character of the piece. The pacification of this material, and its absorption by the *dolce pastorale* of the coda, is neatly symbolised by the unmistakable bells signified by Liszt's dominant pedals in the closing stages of the piece (cf. *Harmonies du soir*). In this sense, formal and poetic imperatives may have worked together to motivate and dictate the revision, and this is characteristic of the cycle as a whole.

By way of conclusion, it may be noted that although the musical differences between the *Grandes Études* and the *Transcendentals* are often slight in themselves and motivated largely by pragmatism they take on new significance in light not just of the poetic titles added to the etudes (we have seen that there was an arbitrary quality to that), but of the manifesto implicit in those titles: a music that not only transcends virtuosity, but also subsumes poetry. In this sense I think we could say that the rhetoric invades the music. My own view is that in the third version of Liszt's etudes he arrived at a reconstituted work concept by way of a newly defined poetics of instrumental music allied to sanctioned archetypes of form. The key point here is that these two work together. Formal revision supports programmatic image. The idiomatic figures of the early exercises are transformed first into a performance-orientated surplus (the *Grandes Études*) and then into a work-orientated essence

(the *Transcendentals*) in what amounts to a conquest of virtuosity by the musical work. We have then three virtuosities in the three versions of the études. The post-Classical virtuosity of the *Études en exercices* yields to the Romantic virtuosity of the *Grandes Études*, and that in turn yields to the work-orientated virtuosity of the *Transcendentals*. It is this latter category – virtuosity understood as the technical mastery necessary to support an interpretation – that is clearly on the ascendant in the mid nineteenth century. It marks the point where the “perfect musical performance” makes room for the “perfect performance of music”.

L'élaboration des Transcendantes

L'histoire des Études transcendantes débute par un groupe d'exercices composé en 1826, repris en 1839 sous le titre Douze grandes études, revu enfin en 1851 pour produire les Transcendantes. Ces dates sont significatives compte tenu du développement de la technique et de l'esthétique lisztiennes.

Chacun de ces recueils d'études appelle un mode de recherche différent et le présent exposé tentera de développer les approches appropriées aux uns et aux autres. Les premiers essais peuvent utilement être étudiés comme des modèles idéaux de matériau musical. Les Grandes études appellent l'analyse des méthodes de composition et de re-composition d'oeuvres orientées vers la performance de virtuose. Les Transcendantes sont à placer sous l'éclairage d'un nouveau concept qui fait des figures conventionnelles l'essence même de l'oeuvre plutôt que des compléments.

Nous examinerons ainsi manuscrits et premières éditions des études, allant des autographes de deux des Grandes études aux Stichvorlage des Transcendantes. Ces derniers susciteront quelque discussion sur les collages et corrections gravés, comme sur le contenu des amendements au crayon de couleur. Ceci nous conduira à quelques réflexions sur la chronologie de Mazeppa et sur les titres des Transcendantes, en nous basant sur les éléments figurant dans les esquisses de Liszt.

