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The Mystery of the Seventeenth Hungarian Rhapsody

No. 17 of Liszt's much celebrated and denigrated *Rhapsodies hongroises* is one of those works that has the dubious distinction of being hidden in plain sight. It was composed in 1884 and Liszt lived to see it published both in Paris (*Le Figaro*, 1885) and Budapest (Táborszky & Parsch, 1886). It was republished in several editions, including two respected critical ones (FLMW III/12, 1926 and NLA I/4, 1973). But the work itself received scant scholarly attention. It did not feature much in the excited post-war discourse surrounding Liszt's late piano works, and is wholly absent (to the best of my knowledge) from more recent tonal-analytical studies of this repertoire. Liszt, too, remained silent about this Rhapsody, and left nothing for biographers and historians to ponder beyond the score. The received image of Liszt as a prophet of the twentieth century, a "late" composer, who was creating works outside the normal course of music history [e.g. DAHLHAUS, 1993, 219; WALKER, 1996, 452-54], all derive from a small but important body of harmonically radical works full of dissonance, ambiguous tonality and unfamiliar sonorities (e.g. *Via crucis*, *R. W-Venezia*, *En rêve*, *Shlaflos!*, *Unstern!*, *Nuages gris*). One suspects that despite the uncertain key of Hungarian Rhapsody No. 17, it has been largely excluded from these historical and musical-theoretical interests due to its mostly euphonious harmony and the too earthly genre of a "Hungarian Rhapsody".

As many Lisztians will know, however, this work is part of a group of four "late" Hungarian Rhapsodies that readily demonstrated the effects of Liszt's austere late style on a once folkloristic and highly popular fantasy-type genre, as Zoltán Gárdonyi and István Szelényi observed in the preface to the *NLA*:

Only the formal scheme of slow-fast [*lassú-friss*] is taken from [the previous fifteen Rhapsodies]. In place of the earlier richness in part-writing, near orchestral colourfulness and luxuriant ornamentation, there emerges a strange, new, concise piano style, the content of which is frequently contained within a single voice-part. The cadenza-like moment have also become rarer and now form, as it were, symbolic memories of the once overflowing richness of fantasy. The tonal world of these Hungarian Rhapsodies from Liszt's late years is close to the three Csárdás compositions and the Historische Ungarische Bildnisse which were composed at the same time.¹

The editors could have added, for good measure, that particular stylistic features of the *verbunkos* idiom (Hungarian-Gypsy style), undergo similar abstraction, as we shall soon see.² Secondly, it is important to note that of the last four Rhapsodies, some are less "generic" than others, in the important sense of the extent they deviate audience expectations, as established by the most popular of Liszt's *lassú-friss*-type Rhapsodies, namely Nos. 2, 6, 9, 12, 14 and 15.³ To give a simple example, in terms of length, No. 19 is still fairly expansive, whereas

¹ LISZT, 1972-73, xii-xiii.

² See also LOYA 2011, 233-246.

³ It is notable that these Rhapsodies were orchestrated in the late 1850s and published in 1874-75 (S359), confirming their popularity. In order of appearance, these were based on the popular Nos. 14, 12, 6, 2, 5 and 9. They were orchestrated in 1857-60 in collaboration with Franz Doppler. Although Liszt also orchestrated the small-scale, slow and elegiac Hungarian Rhapsody No. 5, this seems to have been dictated by personal choice rather than in response to public demand. The *Rákóczi-Marsch*, also known as Rhapsody No. 15, which was the most symbolic of Hungarian nationality in the nineteenth century, was arranged for orchestra in 1870 and published in 1871 (S608).

No. 18 takes a mere 3 minutes to perform: its fast section lasts about a minute, and the overall miniature proportions really chafe against generic expectations.⁴

But it is No. 17 of the *Rhapsodies hongroises* (henceforth Rh17) that is arguably the most emblematic of what is widely recognized as Liszt's late style: austere, short and condensed, fragmentary, abstract, puzzling. It is indeed even slightly shorter to perform than No. 18, with a *lassú* (slow) section of only 10 bars that presents a mere shadow of the florid improvisation expected in such sections. It is the most motivically condensed of all Rhapsodies, and the arrested melodic motion, the heaviness of the opening bars (see Fig. 1), the slowness of most of the *Allegretto* (Fig. 4) and the extremely slow harmonic pace overall, give rise to Joseph N. Straus's notion of the "disability" element in "late" styles [STRAUS, 2008].⁵ This immobility creates a real difficulty for generic perception, as the quick section and acceleration at the end seem to flare up too quickly, «against the grain», to borrow a "late-style" descriptor from Edward SAID (2006). Or—to borrow a less charitable phrase used by Wagner against Mayerbeer's operas—such a conclusion comes uncomfortably close to «an effect without a cause» [WAGNER, 1995, 95-99]. In technical terms, this could be the result of the motivic condensation itself, which undermines the kind of momentum and build-up one would expect in a Rhapsody. James BAKER (2005, 110) described the problem thus:

[Rhapsodies Nos. 16-18] lack the full, balanced melodies of the traditional rhapsodies and suffer from an almost mechanical sequencing of their limited subject matter. They do build to the frenzied conclusion typical of the genre, but these endings can nevertheless seem perfunctory and unconvincing (as especially the case of No. 17)—a flaw not uncommon in late-period works when he attempts a big finish.

The other "problem" for these Rhapsodies is that they fall into the no man's land of tonal theory, not really garnering interest either for their traditional or unconventional aspects.⁶ Nos. 16 and 18 are almost formulaic in their csárdás scheme of a slow section in a minor key leading to a fast one in the parallel major, with a resolute tonic conclusion. Although the way their tonality unfolds may be unusual and idiosyncratic, the harmony on the surface is notably more traditional than many other late piano works, and possibly for this reason quite an unattractive specimen for post-tonal theoretical pursuits.

This is not the place to argue why looking at Liszt's late works through a strictly post-tonal lens misses a great deal that is heterogeneous, transcultural and retrospective in his late harmony.⁷ Instead, I would simply point out that Rh17's elusive key, its puzzling cadences and note-spelling, are as interesting "post-tonally" as anything else Liszt wrote in this period. To get a better sense of this, we will approach the question of tonality through a more holistic exploration of the work's genre and affective content. I will therefore begin with a comparatively straightforward account of what generic materials and expectations become

⁴ It is worth mentioning that Rhapsody No. 3 (1853) is also rather short, but its ABA form, with a slow beginning and end, does not provide any early model for the later Rhapsodies (irrespective of being counter-generic in its own right). Liszt evidently needed bigger dimensions for a fast conclusion to work in the first fifteen Rhapsodies, and this is precisely what is being challenged—or what creates a challenge for listeners—in Nos. 16-18.

⁵ Straus also summarized wide-ranging literature on the subject, noting that "late" styles are frequently described as introspective, austere, difficult, compressed, fragmentary, and/or retrospective, and arguing that «it would be unlikely for any single work to exhibit all of these characteristics, but a late-style work would necessarily have most of them». [*Ibid.*, 11]. It seems to me that all six apply to Rh17.

⁶ They are conspicuously absent from the slew of articles that dealt with post-tonality in Liszt's late works, including MORGAN, 1976; LEMOINE, 1981; CINNAMON, 1986; FORTE, 1987; BAKER, 1990; SKOUMAL, 1994; TODD, 1996; SATYENDRA, 1997a and 1997b; BERRY, 2004.

⁷ See KREGOR, 2010, 190-98; LOYA, 2011, 225-51; PESCE, 2014, 171-245.

unfamiliar. This will lead to an exploration of how a patriotic and popular genre is used to express an interior, brief, even troubling psychological drama. Consequently, through two different readings of the tonal process, we shall see how the most basic thematic and tonal processes are fractured and distorted. It seems to me that this most anti-generic of all of Liszt's Rhapsodies deserves this much analytical attention, so that at least its uniqueness and peculiarity are more fully understood before further research addresses other questions surrounding its conception and reception. It is also my hope that it will lead to further study of the other three late Rhapsodies.

Genre Problems and Distancing Effect

Jim Samson shrewdly observed that Rh17 is the «most remarkable» of the last four Rhapsodies in that it «welds together the seemingly incompatible worlds of Hungarian scales and modern symmetrical harmonies based on augmented triads and superimposed fourths» [SAMSON, 1991, 226-27]. «*Seemingly incompatible*» (italics mine) is a just qualification. On the one hand, Liszt generated non-functional tonal relationships from quasi-symmetrical *verbunkos* scales, so at least from a formalistic perspective there is no incompatibility. Moreover, since such scales also happen to have a deep symbolic meaning for Liszt, it is easy to argue why bringing together folklorism and modernism in this way would fit very well with an aesthetic, personal and cultural agenda.⁸

On the other hand, this work seems to give Liszt's modernist project a negative edge, as if he deliberately set out to deny Hungarian listeners the comforting, patriotic familiarity with *verbunkos*, and to confound subscribers of the Parisian *Le Figaro* (where the work was published) expecting to find the usual pleasures of exoticism and virtuosity in a Liszt Rhapsody. And so, stylistic elements appear individually without cohering into a convincing representation of the *verbunkos* genre. Melodic fragments replace proper national melodies. There is no attempt to imitate the sound and playing of Gypsy bands. The harmony—despite a few individual references to tradition (to be discussed)—is perhaps the most alien aspect of all. Likewise, the narrative of a slow part in D minor leading to an exuberant, virtuoso close in a parallel major key is distorted both tonally and rhetorically. The furious conclusion hardly sounds celebratory or related to the exotic image of free-spirited Gypsy musicians playing “vertiginously”. Instead, Liszt provides a psychological drama, a modern character piece in the guise of a Rhapsody. Even today this work will frustrate or confuse those who mistake its poetic content and edgy modernism for simple generic dysfunction.

I would go further and argue that there is a proto-Brechtian quality to Liszt's alienation techniques. In the old Rhapsodies one is of course well aware of the “art music” element, but it is still possible to suspend disbelief occasionally and become immersed in the imitation of *verbunkos* and Gypsy-band sound. Indeed, listeners were meant to do this, and Hungarian patriots in particular expected music they can listen to empathetically and identify with. Something akin to a modernist *Verfremdung-Effekt* (“alienation” or “distancing effect”), *avant le lettre*, takes hold in the case of Rh17, in the way idiomatic materials are deliberately

⁸ Liszt consistently used such scales to create modernist sonorities already in the 1850s, as demonstrated since GÁRDONYI (1931) in BÁRDOS (1978), HAMBURGER (1997) and LOYA (2011).

held at a distance from their normative contexts, denying audiences comfort and immersion, and thereby enhancing their disbelief and critical listening.⁹

A closer look at the opening bars can illustrate how Liszt achieves this distancing effect (Fig. 1). A simplistic analysis would merely point to what is idiomatic in this music: the quasi-duple (notationally 4/4) metre,¹⁰ syncopated (short-long-short) rhythm in the accompaniment, the pedal point, the single note decorated in a manner relating to the *bokázó* (“clicking of the heels”) dance figure, and the scale figures with augmented seconds. In terms of genre, the declarative, *pesante*-type opening of Rh17 (bb. 1-4) is comparable to those of Nos. 2, 3, 5, and 12.

Fig. 1: Rh17, mm. 1-10.

⁹ In Brecht’s formulation, the *Verfremdung-Effekt* is meant to make theatre audiences distance themselves from, rather than identify with, the stage personas and think critically about the artifice of theatre itself [BRECHT, 2015, 149-160]. The analogy here is the way Liszt unsettles generic expectations inherent in a Hungarian Rhapsody as if to force listeners out of their comfort zone and listen more attentively to how Hungarian Rhapsodies are made. I do not ascribe to Liszt any quasi-Marxist-historicist motivation here, but there does seem to be a cultural-political dimension to the fact he chose to publish such an anti-generic work in the two European capitals that were, respectively, centres for pre-established exoticist (Paris) and nationalist (Budapest) reception of his Rhapsodies. For further reading about the modernist immanent subversion of genres see PADDISON, 1993, esp. 152-56.

¹⁰ *Verbunkos* is generically in duple time. When Liszt sometimes sets slow movements in 4/4, these are experienced either as slow 2/2 (as the beginning of Rh3, Fig. 2) or as a compound 2/4 + 2/4, as is the case in the first ten bars of Rh17. From b. 11 onwards we hear a slow 2/2 within a single bar, despite the time signature.

From this group, it seems Liszt alludes more specifically to No. 3, which similarly opens in the low register of the piano, and displays the same type of syncopated accompaniment and scalar material (Fig. 2a). The reference to the cadential B \flat -A-B \flat figure is particularly noticeable (Fig. 2b).

The musical score for the opening bars is in bass clef, two flats, and common time. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The right hand begins with a 'pesante espressivo' section, featuring a syncopated accompaniment. The left hand has a 'pedal' point. The score includes a 'cresc.' section and a 'bokázó cadence'. The right hand has a 'dim.' section and an 'idiomatic cadential phrase' which is 'completed'. The left hand has a 'pedal' point and a 'bokázó cadence'.

Fig. 2a: Rh3, opening bars.

The musical score for the closing bars is in treble clef, two flats, and common time. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The score features a 'pedal' point and a 'bokázó cadence'.

Fig. 2b: Rh3, closing bars.

All such observations and comparisons point to the perception challenges Rh17 presents from the very start. Unlike its antecedents, the *pesante* opening lacks a melody. The idiomatic syncopated rhythm (marked as motif α) and pedal point are made alien by the sepulchral sonority of the accompaniment. A single repeated chord may be idiomatic, but not one that is an augmented chord that denies a tonal anchor, even if faintly suggesting the dominant of D minor. The pedal point may also be idiomatic in the abstract, but not its specific pitch (C \sharp), which further weakens this harmonic function. In contrast to what happens in Rh3 (cf. Fig. 2a, bb. 7-8), the quasi-*bokázó* figure of Rh17 is only ever given in the most minimalistic and truncated form, the main note either graced by an appoggiatura (motif β) or a turn (β'). Other than that, a fuller presentation of the *bokázó* figure is avoided throughout the piece, and its

strong association with a cadential function is undermined by the absence of a clear tonic resolution.

Luxuriant ornamentation and augmented seconds, two of the most “exotic” markers of the Hungarian-Gypsy style, are clearly present but are rarefied in a similar modernist fashion. A modernist harmonic context “de-exoticizes” the intervallic content of the scale that appears in b. 5 (motif γ). Traditionally it can be based on the tonic (D-E-F-G \sharp -A-B \flat -C \sharp) or the dominant (same pitches, starting with A), the latter modal inversion known in Hungarian musicology as “*kalindra*.”¹¹ Liszt conspicuously avoids a tonic function. Something that can be perceived as a *kalindra* scale (without the tonic D) seems to be derived from the augmented chord (bb. 5-8), and in that way implying, possibly, a dominant function in D minor. But in bb. 9-10 Liszt completely neutralizes this implication by employing a chord that enharmonically, more straightforwardly, sounds like an inverted B \flat m⁷, or even a restful C \sharp major with *sixte ajout e*. (For reasons that will become apparent, I hear these sonorities as if underpinned by a now absent yet implicitly retained C \sharp in the deep bass. I will therefore refer to them as B \flat m^{6/5} and C \sharp 6 respectively, the normal-case “6” in the latter chord refers to the *sixte ajout e*, not a sixth chord). Moreover the tempo and dynamics encourage listeners to hear a lessening of tension, or even harmonic resolution, if one hears the augmented chord resolving to a “tonic” C \sharp 6 chord.¹²

The “modernist” aspect that catches the eyes as well as the ear is the construction of a speculative chord of fourths (G \sharp -C \sharp -F-B \flat) from the same *kalindra* scalar material. Moreover, the chosen pitches for this quartal “*kalindra* chord” seem to be motivic: note how he carves this vertical sonority out of a horizontal, melodic γ -motif, where the same four pitches are constantly emphasized on the beat (Fig. 1: see **x**s in bb. 5-7). As my quotation of Samson suggest, this scale-derived chord is the one aspect of the work that did catch scholarly attention. It served as a useful sound bite during the same postwar period that saw a concerted effort to re-present Liszt as a prophet of twentieth-century musical modernism. Searle, for example, further noted the chord’s derivation from the defining augmented-second dyads F-G \sharp and B \flat -C \sharp [Searle 1985, 317].¹³ To relate this more clearly to Liszt’s distancing technique: the very intervals that define the *kalindra*’s modal character and strongly require consonant resolution are extracted here to create a *restful* chord in a tonal environment far removed from D minor.

Even what is supposed to sound like a little flourish is strangely rarefied. The ornamentation in triplets is slow, schematic and almost mechanical rather than improvisatory. It hardly sounds like a cadenza, let alone evokes the playing style of the Gypsy-band *prim as* (leader). In contrast to the triplets in Rh3 (Fig. 2a), here the purpose of the scale is to generate motivic material. As represented in Fig. 1, the first three elements we hear in bb. 1-5—the syncopated accompaniment (α), quasi-*bok az o* figure (β) and first group of scalar notes (γ)—are the three basic and interrelated motifs from which the rest of the piece is constructed. Unlike the earlier rhapsodies that were based on variation technique, and occasionally thematic transformations, the concision of materials and their development in this piece creates a single, rapid process of motivic transformations. The poetic dimension that such commonplace motifs suddenly

¹¹ This term was invented by Lajos B ardos [B ARDOS, 1978].

¹² The tonal ambiguity of the passage will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

¹³ Humphrey Searle (1915-82), it should be remembered, was a student of Anton Webern and a committed modernist composer himself. In Hungary, disciples of Bart ok and Kod aly made a comparable effort to recast Liszt as a precursor of modern Hungarian or East European composition. Rh17 receives the briefest of mentions in that context in SZABOLCSI, 1959, 53-54.

assume is not only a “distancing” effect, but also a sublime one, in the original meaning of the word. It is meant to strike wonder and terror.

Dreams and Nightmares

The distancing techniques are merely the means by which Liszt constructed a continuously transforming narrative (or a shifting dreamscape, or affective journey, if you like), whose increasingly negative affect militated against (and was truly new to) the Hungarian Rhapsody genre. This deviance becomes clear when Rh17 is compared with other *lassú-friss*-based minor-key Rhapsodies. For the purpose of demonstration I shall borrow a two-dimensional circumplex model of affects first developed by James RUSSELL (1980), adapted to musical performance in JUSLIN (2001), and further adapted to an analysis of compositional process by Michael SPITZER (2010).¹⁴ I do not mean to defend or critique an emerging theory, only to appropriate a few of its basic ideas as a preliminary to the analysis of the work that will follow. The analysis, in turn, will show how a salient process of motivic transformations relates to the work’s affective journey, and in that way also clarify its most blatant anti-generic aspects. As part of this analysis I shall occasionally refer to the work that, in my opinion, set the precedence for this generic deviation: Liszt’s *Csárdás macabre* (1881-82).¹⁵ As Fig. 3a shows, the basic idea of the circumplex model is to arrange five “primary” emotional categories—anger, fear, sadness, tenderness and happiness (and more nuanced categories in between)—along a horizontal axis of positive/negative emotions or responses to an event (known as “valence,” represented by the letter “V”, with +/- signs attached accordingly); and a vertical axis of energy or “activation,” symbolized by the letter “A”.¹⁶ I have summarized the most basic performance-based “acoustic cues” from Juslin that can also be taken to be cues encoded in the composition itself, and to these I added the additional, salient parameter of major and minor, largely corresponding to positive and negative valence, respectively. Needless to say, all such categories are schematic, and in the actual analysis more categories of emotion will be invoked.

My contention is that the affective course of almost all the Rhapsodies is generically predetermined. Rh17 itself seems to be based (at least in the abstract) on the idea of a minor-key *lassú* section followed by a moderate, and then accelerating *friss* in the major mode. This follows a paradigm that governs the majority of Rhapsodies both before and after No. 17 (see Nos. 1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18 and 19; in all but No. 1 the progression is to the parallel major key). In all of these cases, the initial expression of lament or defiance progresses into a more positive, celebratory, even ecstatic mood.¹⁷

The most basic variants of this affective course are represented in the arrows in Fig. 3b. All of these Rhapsodies proceed in two or three main sections or “stages”. Despite expressive variance within sections (not represented here for the sake of simplicity), the connection to

¹⁴ Spitzer also provides a useful introduction to this model in *ibid.*, 149-54.

¹⁵ It should be mentioned that the *Csárdás no. 1* (1884) could have also inspired this work in a different way, as it shares common motifs and even similar formal proportions with Rh17 (LEGÁNY, 1992, 263-64). However, it is the *Csárdás macabre*, in my view, that has given Liszt the template for key expressive moments in Rh17, as we shall see.

¹⁶ The axes are also flipped sometimes. I am keeping to Russell’s original representation, after Spitzer.

¹⁷ This excludes Nos. 3 and 5, which do not include a fast finale. No. 15 is a fast march throughout, and Nos. 4, 6, 9 are in a major key. However, the four sections of No. 6 can also be understood to be comprised of two pairs of *lassú-friss*, of which the final one, a B \flat minor *Andante* followed by an accelerating *Allegro* in B \flat major, follows the abovementioned paradigm.

more traditional *verbunkos* is evident in the way each section is governed by a single, overriding affect.¹⁸ Rhapsodies can begin softly, as in Rh11, or, more commonly, express mournfulness and defiance more energetically, with comparatively loud dynamics and sharp articulation (the dotted lines give this option). They can proceed more or less in two stages from a slow section (represented by ❶) straight into a “Friska” finale (*friss*, ❸) that becomes increasingly animated, as in Rh2. Or, they can pass through a mid-tempo section or subsection (❷) before the fast *finale*, as in Rh12, bb. 127-83. Some middle sections are lyrical (“tender”), as in No. 13, bb. 25-99;¹⁹ whilst others are more energetic, closer to the character of a *friss*, as in No. 8, 41-138. Depending which Rhapsody we are thinking of, it is possible to imagine a different placement for ❶, ❷ and ❸ on the graph. That said, the arrows themselves, representing the *lassú-friss* archetypal progress towards higher activation and greater positive valence, remains the common denominator.

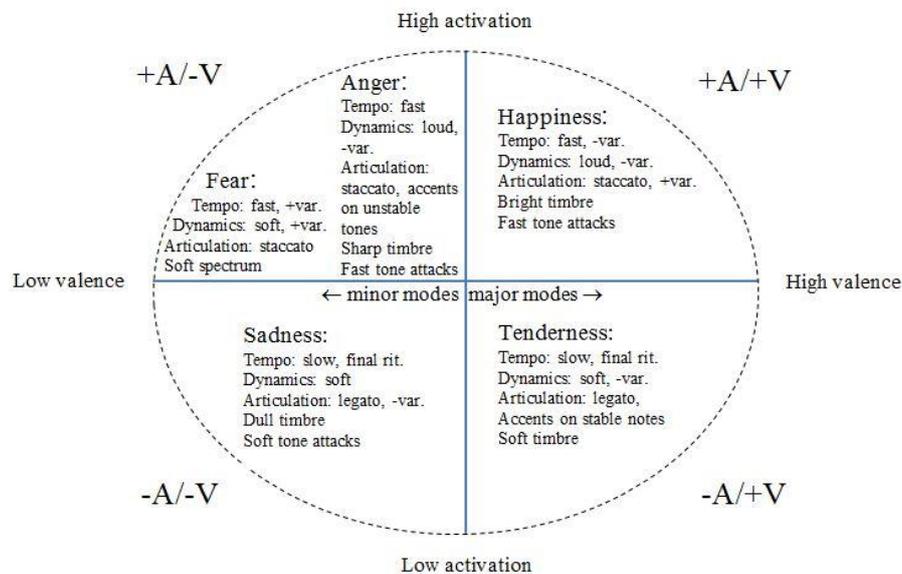


Fig. 3a: The circumplex model of affects after JUSLIN, 2001 (major and minor modes added).

¹⁸ Some Rhapsodies are more obviously like that (No. 6 is a prime example), whereas most stress the dramatic and narrativic (“rhapsodic”) element. The lengthy slow section of Rh1, for example, develops one phrase in a fantastic succession of developing variations that gently move between characteristically “sad” and “tender” sections, overall progressing toward a more positive valence. Some large-scale Rhapsodies (e.g. Nos. 2, 12 and 14) further complicate the model by inserting contrasting subsections, but these do not fundamentally contradict the schematic pathways offered in Fig. 3b, because overall the “right” sequence of affects is followed.

¹⁹ It is possible to argue that the *Andante sostenuto* section or Rh13 stretches all the way to b. 99 as a single slow section. But just as clearly a different affective stage starts at b. 25 as well as the development of a new theme that dominates this part of the section until b. 99.

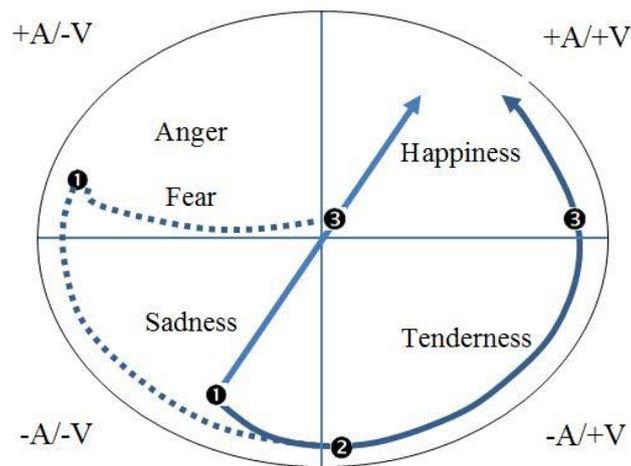
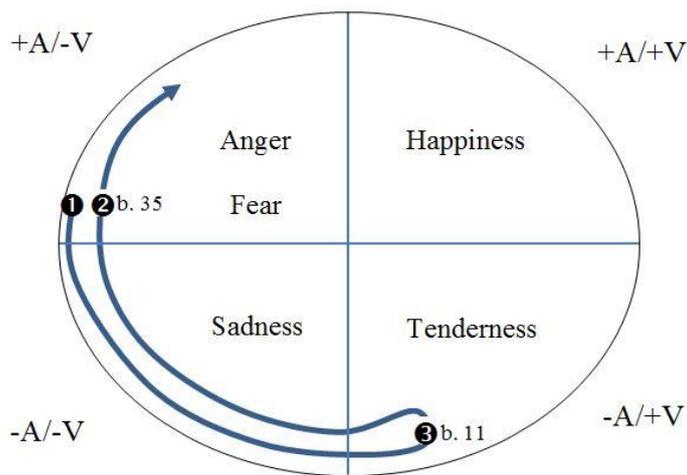


Fig. 3b: Fig. 3a applied to basic affective routes in minor-key, *lassú-friss*-based Rhapsodies.



A = Activation V = Valence

+var. = large variability -var. = small variability

Sections: ❶ slow beginning ❷ middle section(s) in moderate tempo
 ❸ fast finale (Rh17: faster phrase repeat, b. 35ff)

Fig. 3c: Basic affective route of Rh17.

The affective journey of Rh17 departs from the above basic paradigm in several important ways, as Fig. 3c suggests. First, the direction towards a positive valence swiftly turns back, irrevocably, and at quite an early stage too (from b. 15 onwards). More astonishingly (because there is no generic precedence for this), Liszt is then able to harness the expected higher activation towards the end of the work to create an ever more excitable *negative*

emotion. We shall soon see how. Finally, the brevity of the work means that there are no affective boundaries between sections. There is a major affective transition in the first ten bars, and two affective stages (❷ and ❸, corresponding to bb. 11-34 and 35-76) within the span of a single repeated phrase. Overall we perceive a single, continuous affective arch throughout the piece, expressed through the same motivic materials, which creates an acute focus on the changing character, or indeed “mood” of these motifs.

A few key moments in the work will suffice to demonstrate how this works. The sublime effect of the introduction, turning ordinary *style hongrois* gestures into objects of terror, has already been discussed. There is something monstrous and decidedly “Gothic” about transforming the sound and melodic-harmonic content of innocent folkloristic signifiers in this way. The hammering sound of the first four bars, especially in association with the *kalindra* scale, alludes most directly to a similar ostinato chord in the *Csárdás macabre* (1881-82), where the Gothic association is more explicit (Fig. 4; cf. Fig. 1).

The specific emotion expressed—whether anger, fear, frustration, anxiety, etc.—is moot. What is more certain is that the combination of loud dynamics, murky sonorities, indeterminate tonality, ostinato repeats and sharp articulation, point to a negative emotion, located somewhere in the northeastern quadrant (+A/-V). If one wants to perceive this as closer to “sadness” rather than fear, the high activation element in this opening passage still means this is a highly-strung kind of sadness, one that involves gestures of moaning or even howling.



Fig. 4: *Csárdás macabre*, bb. 25-32.

Apart from these distancing effects, beginning a Rhapsody with such negative valence and high(er) activation is not that unusual in itself (see the openings of Rhapsodies Nos. 2, 3, 7 and 12, for example). But then the affect changes rather quickly. From b. 5 we are left with a naked, slow-moving *kalindra* scale played legato, the kind of recitativo figure often associated with lament in this genre: the activation drops. Then, the uncertain (anxious?) augmented chord gives way to a “*kalindra* chord” that enharmonically sounds like a restive $B_{\flat}m^{6/5}$ or $C\#6$. Likewise, the texture becomes lighter, the articulation becomes softer, the dynamics drop, and the tempo slows down, so that overall bb. 5-10 increases in positive valence while decreasing in activation.

The transformation of motif β , the most basic one in the piece, provides a tangible way of experiencing this affective path. Note how this motif seems to struggle to loosen itself from its own constraints. It first appears buried in a middle voice in the deep bass, then a more animated and florid variant (the turn figure) appears in the tenor. In b. 5 motif β' morphs into

motif γ . Next, motif γ ascends an octave (b. 6) and finally a further octave (bb. 9-10), at which point it transforms back into motif β , now a dreamy reminiscence of its original form. The overall effect is that of a great weight being lifted, a sense of release and relief.²⁰

Fig. 5: Rh17, beginning of the Allegretto section; subphrase repeat at b. 15 turns to E minor.

These successive transformations happen at such a short duration, that they seem to communicate a dream state rather than a staged drama. As b. 10 melts into the first part of the *Allegretto* (Fig. 5), the gestures of “lifting” the sad (or angry, or anxious) mood of the opening is signalled by the further semitonal rise of the β -motif, the sweet triadic harmony, lilting melodic line (both motifs β and γ), airy textures, and the mode switch to the major. Furthermore, for the first time we hear a clear tonal direction, V of D major. Technically, this is the point the Rhapsody crosses over (so soon!) into its moderate or fast tempo section. But strangely enough, the tempo marking we see on the page is contradicted by what we perceive. What we *hear* is that section ② directly continues the tempo of section ①, since the short-long-short accompaniment motif (α) takes almost same duration whether written as $\uparrow \uparrow \uparrow$ in MM 48 (*Lento*) or $\uparrow \uparrow \uparrow$ in MM. 92 (*Allegretto*). Likewise, section ② continues the dynamics and the “major mode,” resigned mood of section ①, with only a slight shift of articulation (more legato at b. 11). Had Liszt changed the tempo perceptibly as well as symbolically, the β -motif, in its dotted-rhythm guise, could have been easily recast as a faster and more affirmative *giusto*-type *verbunkos* melody with a march character.²¹ Instead, Liszt’s transformative and distancing techniques create a dreamy spectre, a “*Rhapsodie oubliée*” of sorts.²²

²⁰ It is possible to hear the rising *kalindra* scale in b. 8 as alluding to a similar moment in Station XI of *Via Crucis* (bb. 11-15), described by Dolores Pesce as giving «a sense of a nebulous space between life and death» [PESCE, 2014, 225-27]. Or it could signify a withdrawal from the physical world, a transition from the dramatic scene in Station XI to the more solitary thoughts of Christ on the cross in Station XII.

²¹ The term “*giusto*-type *verbunkos*” is borrowed from PETHŐ, 2000, 215-16. In three of Liszt’s minor-key Rhapsodies, the *giusto*-type *verbunkos* section begins with a switch to the parallel major mode, as it does in a more abstract fashion in Rh17. See No. 8, bb. 41-138, No. 11, bb. 17-40, and No. 13, bb. 25-99. The latter example also exhibits a remarkable transformation of affects, and shows the greatest extent to which Liszt expanded the expressive range of this type of subgenre in the 1850s.

²² I am referring to Liszt’s idea of dramatizing the memory of passing years through the “forgotten” waltzes and *Romance oubliée* of the 1880s. See REDEPENNING, 1984, 197-212 and PESCE, 2014, 217-18.

There is still a questioning tone in bb. 11-14, as the dominant function continues aimlessly. Soon we will learn that the promise of greater tonal clarification and light-hearted music in D major was false. In bb. 15- 18, the C# bass temporarily disappears (as it did before, at the end of the *Lento* section), which means that on the surface one hears an E-minor reharmonization of the phrase. Although a structural hearing (which I will present later) encourages listeners to continue hearing an A-major ninth-chord in the first inversion, the minor-chord surface sonority is affectively meaningful, because after this moment not a single major chord will ever be heard again in the piece.²³ From this point too, the sense of tonal direction begins to slip. After a simple sequence where E minor, followed by F# minor can still easily lead to a D major resolution (bb. 19-26 not shown; the progression will be discussed a little later), the first sentence ends on even greater tonal uncertainty through a disorientating, non-functional harmonization of the cadence-motif β (Fig. 6). Rather than tonal clarity and the desired move away from minor we should expect, we return inexplicably to the B \flat minor sonority (now spelled as A# minor) of the beginning. This creates a nightmarish circularity, the uncanny encounter with the very thing left behind. The distinction between introduction and “march” dissolves. Where are we?

It is interesting to observe that this “wrong” turn that faces back rather than forward changes also the character of the melodic line. Once again, soft intervals (thirds and sixths) turn into bare octaves. The great exhale of relief expressed through motif γ at the beginning of the *Allegretto* (Fig. 5, bb. 13-14), turns back to the anxious, searching circular motion of the original γ (compare Fig. 6, b. 28 and its repeats to Fig. 1, bb. 5-7). Indeed, this motif is supported by an F# minor chord, as if taking a step back to the previous sonority in repeated, unsuccessful attempts to find a way “back” after having become lost.

In a final attempt to escape the circular dead-end of the A#m-F#m exchange and find its way back, motif γ shakes away the trappings of harmony and become a unison scale again. It almost works: bb. 33-34 provide another chance to advance towards D major. This *could* have been the moment to cross over into more affirmative music in that key, and the crescendo (an increase in activation) signals that something is about to happen, and there is promise in the rhythmically augmented B-A-B-C# motif in b. 34, as if finally we will hear the tonic. But, in a great gesture of pulling back, this destination collapses into B and the repeat of the whole irresolute phrase.

Having failed to resolve, we hear that very same motif in angry or frustrated utterances in the bass, against sharp arpeggio chords in the treble (motif α , transformed), thanks to Liszt’s inversion of texture (compare Fig. 6, bb. 35-36, to Fig. 5, bb. 11-12). But the higher activation of this phrase repeat—faster tempo, loud dynamics, full texture, sharp attack, and then rhythmic diminution from b. 37—also signals a determination, possibly a desperate one, to try the same route again and this time find the way home, as it were. It is interesting to note that the sweet ninth chord of bb. 11-14 has now become an impassioned, perhaps bitter or defiant half-diminished chord (a 4/2 inversion of C#^{o7}, due to the projection of the melody into the bass part). Once again, it is the *Csárdás macabre* that provides us with an equivalent moment, where a similar motif, with similar dynamics and articulation (in both cases supported also by a “modernist” type of seventh chord, previously unheard in the piece),²⁴ signals a moment of reckoning, the point at which transient optimism is transformed, motivically, to despair (Fig. 7).

²³ Unless one also hears a glimmer of the A-dominant-ninth chord in bb. 39-41.

²⁴ I do not mean to imply the chords are the same: in the *Csárdás macabre* this moment opens with a B \flat minor-major seventh chord in the first inversion (bb. 179-80), rather than a C# half-diminished chord. But note also how this chord then unfolds, “becoming” a half-diminished sonority (G^{o6/5}).

8va

27 β α $\beta = \gamma$ γ

espressivo

C# pedal point

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

31 *cresc.*

Inflected repetition of γ (implied D major)

Ped. *

35 Un poco più animato M.M. ♩ = 104

ff

ff

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

Fig. 6: Rh17, bb. 27-36: End of first allegretto phrase (stage 2) and the beginning of its repeat (stage 3).



Fig. 7: *Csárdás macabre*, bb. 179-86.

The increased scalar activity from b. 39 onwards, which heightens the activation level, does not stop until the end of the piece, except for a short pause in bb. 47-48 (not shown). This is helped by what we expect from a Rhapsody, but at this stage, after the direction of valence has already travelled in a negative direction for some time, the unrelenting scalar activity only turns anxiety into alarm and even gives a gesture of flight, as in a chase dream. It is significant, then, that on the repeat of the cadence figure in bb. 59-64 that vacillates between A# minor and F# minor (see motif β , bb. 63-64 of Fig. 8), the scalar activity (now a more recognizable motif γ) does not stop as in bb. 47-48. It continues frantically, in smaller circles, as if to signal no hope of escape.

When the chords are once again shaken off at b. 65, the naked unison shapeshifts modally, and the nightmare is complete when in b. 66 motif γ reverts back to the *verbunkos* modality of the opening, now monstrously transformed (compare Fig. 8, bb. 66-76 to Fig. 1, bb. 5-10).²⁵ The uncanny and fateful re-emergence of this memory from the beginning is complete when the vacillating cadence returns in naked unison (motif β , bb. 69-72), as if seized by an awful paralysis, or as if mocking the possibility of ever escaping this inexplicable, wrong turn of events. The opening and loosening up of motifs in the introduction is reversed, as motif γ collapses into β' , the turn variant of motif β (note how β' is already embedded in motif γ , when the latter becomes locked in a circular motion around B \flat : see b. 67 in Fig. 8). Then motif β' further condenses into the familiar B \flat -A dyad (β) in bb. 71-72, leading to the fateful hammer blows on B \flat that conclude the piece. A final comparison with the *Csárdás macabre* leaves little doubt about the intended affective content of such an ending (Fig. 9).

²⁵ One small difference is the use of G instead of G#, which avoids tonicizing the A, but the association between this scale and the *kalindra* used at the beginning is intentional and unmistakable. The modality and tonal ambiguity of this passage will be discussed later.

Fig. 8: Rh17, bb. 63-76.

Fig. 9: *Csárdás macabre*, bb. 693-704.

The difference is that the *Csárdás macabre* ends more resolutely in the tonic, as a kind of damnation music in D minor. In Rh17 the artful manner of purposefully suppressing the tonic helps to create an ending on (supposedly) the major submediant that sounds fateful and “wrong” at the same time. There is a temptation to reach out and grab any short explanation

for this. Perhaps the whole capricious harmonic progression is just part of a stereotypical portrayal of “Gypsies,” the old “wrong-note” exoticist trick with a modernist twist.²⁶ Or perhaps, the whole harmony is somehow related, at an angle, to a practice found in the *verbunkos* tradition of sometimes treating the submediant (other degrees as well) as the *finalis*. It is also possible to point to immediate precedents in Liszt’s oeuvre, namely the F-minor *Ungarische* movement in *Weihnachtsbaum*, S. 186 (1874-76; published 1882), which ends in D \flat major, or the D-minor *Deák Ferenc* movement from *Historische ungarische Bildnisse*, S. 205 (1885), which ends in B \flat major.

All such short rationalizations do not yet amount to a satisfactory explanation, in the same way that dismissing a bad dream with a curt explanation does not take away the experience of being in the midst of one. Even after we “wake up”, the memory of the thundering last notes continues to trouble. Why did it end there? What was it all about?

Cadential riddles and shadowy structures

Perhaps a way out of this confusion is to acknowledge that symbolic and formal levels of explication are often incommensurable, as had previously been noted in relation to the deceptive tempo change from *Lento* to *Allegretto* (p. 11). We see in the score a strangely spelled sonority in bb. 8-10 (Fig. 1), whose intervallic meaning stretches intuitive perception. Similarly, we see on paper the A \flat -A \sharp exchange in bb. 27-28 (Fig. 6), but musical training and/or experience directs us to hear this exchange as a $\wedge 7\sharp \rightarrow \wedge 1$ motion (leading tone to tonic) within the A \sharp minor chord. Liszt’s implication of an F \sharp chord with a modally fluctuating $\wedge 3\sharp/\flat$ is difficult, if not impossible, to perceive. It may well reflect the interest he took in his late years in such modal fluctuations, particularly in relation to the *verbunkos idiom*.²⁷ But this seems yet another symbolic notational gesture rather than something that is offered directly to the senses. It is as if Liszt set out to write *musica reservata*, esoteric music for the eye rather than the ear, as if expecting only a few, if anyone, to understand it.

If we follow that logic, then tonality can also be explained separately in formal-perceptual and symbolic terms. Perceptually, there is just enough of a hint of D minor at the beginning to take the key signature seriously (note especially the β motif within the augmented chord that suggests A as the dominant degree). Likewise, we hear the dominant of D major in bb. 11-14 (Fig. 5), as indicated by the key-signature change. But overall these keys are more notable by their absence. Nowhere is the tonic D established, and it is entirely reasonable to argue that any loose sense of D as the tonic is lost after the quasi-dominant implication at bb. 11-14.²⁸ The extremely fugitive implications of D major in scalar form in bb. 33-34 (Fig. 6), and b. 66 (Fig. 8), remain unfulfilled. Instead, it is B \flat that is tonicized in the end. Moreover, the colouristic variations on the cadential β motif, which everywhere lead to the same pitch B \flat or A \sharp (however it is spelled), contradict any sense of closure in either D minor or major.

²⁶ As Jonathan Bellman defined it, the principle is simply that of deliberately contravening “good” (Western) art-music practice in order to represent barbaric otherness: “what our *good* music does not favour or encourage, their (whoever “they” might be, depending on epoch, context, or opera plot) *crude* music probably does, or may as well do.” BELLMAN, 1993, 41-42. Elsewhere Bellman also discusses the principle of sudden, unprepared shift to a tonally distant key area or chord in relation to “Gypsy” stereotypes: see *ibid.* 125-27.

²⁷ LOYA, 2011, 241-43.

²⁸ A structural hearing would correct this statement to include bb. 15-18 as prolonging the «quasi-dominant implication», as my next two graphs will show. However, E minor is very clearly tonicized on the surface, both melodically and harmonically, while the dominant implication is not realized in any functional way.

The key signatures may therefore be yet another part of Liszt's *musica reservata*, notationally gesturing typical "Hungarian" keys and minor/major mode switch, but serving only a limited technical function in reality.²⁹ If we take Liszt's symbolism with a formalistic grain of salt and do not allow cryptic spellings and key signatures to get too much in the way of perception, an interesting possibility arises: could B \flat be the "right" rather than "wrong" tonic? If so, then it is not conventional functional tonality that makes it so, as suggested by the F \sharp m-A \sharp m exchange in Fig. 6. The above possibility leads to my first reading of the tonal structure, which assumes that all vestiges of major-minor tonality appear as mere surface gestures, whereas the work as a whole is structured by non-functional chromatic relationships and voice-leading.

After the initial dominant implications for both D minor and major are never realized, there is some uncertainty as to whether the main phrase and its expanded repeat prolong a conclusion on A \sharp m or F \sharp m (bb. 11-32 and 35-64: see Fig. 6). For a while it is also possible to hear the F \sharp m as the quasi-"tonic" chord on the weak hyperbeat of the cadence (b. 28), as if a prolongation of this chord over a C \sharp bass in the previous bars (19-26) continues in bb. 27-32. However, A \sharp m is arguably a much more perceptible centric tone (if "tonic" is too loaded a term), not least as the piece as a whole ends in B \flat . As part of motif β , it sounds like the tonic solution of a $\wedge^7\text{-}\wedge^1$ cadential dyad. Its placement on the strong beat and hyperbeat (i.e. at the beginning of every two bars), is likewise analogous to the original cadential use of this motif in bb. 9-10, and its final appearance in bb. 71-72 before resolving (again on the strong hyperbeat) to B \flat (see Fig. 8).

Liszt's choice of D minor/major, B \flat minor/major and F \sharp minor/major as his main points of tonal reference will further suggest that the whole harmony may be structured around closely knit "hexatonic" (six-tone) relationships; i.e. all of the above keys or chords can be constructed from C \sharp , D, F, F \sharp , A, B \flat and their enharmonic equivalents. As Richard Cohn demonstrated in his theory of hexatonic cycles, Romantic composers could increasingly rely on suspending tonality by progressing through such chords through smooth semitonal voice-leading, irrespective of functional tonality [COHN, 1996; 1998; 2014]. So, for example, the alternating "hexatonic" pair A \sharp m to F \sharp m that we actually hear on the surface consists of chords that share one tone (the same C \sharp in the bass), whilst requiring only the inflection of two semitones to transform into one another.³⁰ The "inflected repetition" of scales, as seen in

²⁹ To provide some statistical evidence, it is notable that A- and D-based keys are the initial tonic of 64 out of 136 pieces (47%) that make up the important *verbunkos* collection *Magyar nóták Veszprém vármegyéből, 1823–32* (RUZITSKA, 1994). They appear even more frequently in the oral tradition. In Liszt's Rhapsodies A- and D-based keys amount to about 25%. In his *Ungarische Romanzero* (1853), shorter works that are closer to the tradition of more straightforward *verbunkos* transcriptions, the figure is tellingly high, at 67%. (These select statistics are based on a research project in progress.) As for parallel major-key endings in the form of a coda section (known as "*figura*"), these can be seen in RUZITSKA (1994) in dances Nos. 1, 16, 18, 25, 50, 53. In the later volumes of the above collection, some pieces cluster in a way that suggests a suite beginning in the minor and ending in the parallel major: see nos. 83-84, 92-93, 116-17, 121-22, 129-30, 134-35. The way Liszt's Rh17 gestures towards all of this longstanding tonal and harmonic tradition, whilst denying a straightforward perception of it, is yet another *Verfremdung-Effekt*.

³⁰ This is known as a PL or P+L operation. P indicates the single-semitone motion between parallel-mode chords such as F \sharp minor and F \sharp major. L stands for *Leitonwechsel* ("leading-tone exchange) and means the single-semitonal motion between two consonant triads that share a minor-third dyad, e.g. F \sharp major and A \sharp minor (A \sharp -C \sharp is the common dyad). Therefore the simultaneous operation that transforms F \sharp m into A \sharp m is PL. A precedence for this progression can be found in Liszt's *Il Penseroso* as discussed in TSOUGRAS, 2012, but there is also a striking resemblance of this particular hexatonic cycle to the one used in the opening of Rimsky-Korsakov's Second Symphony («*Antar*», first version 1868). That opening undoubtedly exhibits Liszt's harmonic influence on his younger Russian colleague, but it is possible that, if Liszt knew the work, he returned

Fig. 8 (bb. 65-66), shows a similar principle,³¹ as does the progression between the two chords in Fig. 1 and the modal scale that connects them, which includes all pitches from both chords.

If we hear B \flat as the “tonic” (the inverted commas are advisable) despite the “anti-gravitational” effect of these hexatonic relationships, then probably some harmonic logic is still at play. My interpretation of harmonic prolongations in Fig. 10 therefore shows middleground Neo-Riemannian relations, in which “tonic” B \flat chords or notes are reached first through the transformation of the augmented chord F-A-C \sharp and then, in the *Allegretto*, the that chord’s (transformational) variant F \sharp -A-C \sharp . Such a prolongational perspective precludes structural dominant-tonic functions, though these may be suggested at more local levels of the work.

“B \flat minor” → “B \flat major”

1 bb. 1-10
2 bb. 11-31, 32-34
3 bb. 35-63, 64-76

1 bb. 1-10
2 bb. 11-31, 32-34
3 bb. 35-63, 64-76

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1 bb. 1-10

between them. Despite the continued emergence of B \flat as the *finalis* through repetition, placement and emphasis, there is no diatonic structure that makes it a tonic. Rather, surface diatonic progressions prolong a “hexatonic background”, in a reversal of Liszt’s older practice (the normative Romantic practice) of containing local chromatic space within a larger diatonic background.³³

For most of the piece there are problems perceiving B \flat m’s centrality even as a putative *finalis*. The harmonic endpoint of stage ② in Fig. 10 does *not* represent a full stop of the phrase, as in b. 10, but rather an indecisive hexatonic exchange. This cadential vacillation ends when a final F \sharp m chord (on the weak hyperbeat, b. 32) transforms into scales (bb. 33-34) that momentarily suggest a return of the D major area, before turning back to a repeat of the same phrase. Nevertheless, that repeat (③) reaffirms B \flat m as the endpoint, and this time the scalar transformations at its end play a much more structural role: the C \sharp pedal point that had been prolonged for 66 bars finally descends through this scale to B \flat , allowing the ten final closing bars to prolong B \flat unambiguously.³⁴

The appearance of a monodic D-harmonic-minor scale in b. 66 reinstates both the modality and melodic contour originally associated with motif γ in the *Lento* section, as has already been mentioned on p. [6]. D harmonic minor is nominally familiar, but when it revolves melodically around its augmented second (B \flat -C \sharp), the association with A *kalindra* is clear enough. The difference between the two scales is one note: D harmonic minor has G \natural instead of a G \sharp . But this modal inflection has structural implications, as it helps Liszt to avoid tonicizing A. Now B \flat emerges as the centric tone, embellished by upper and lower neighbours, C \sharp and A respectively. And it is the C \sharp -B \flat motion in particular, in the lower register of the piano, that creates a palpable sense of a $\wedge^2\sharp\text{-}\wedge^1$ resolution for the C \sharp pedal point.

A chromatic yet B \flat -centred reading of the background overturn all previous assumptions about key, yet recalibrating our perception in this way has one more important implication. Hearing the abovementioned D-harmonic-minor scale as B \flat *verbunkos* lydian (B \flat -C \sharp -D-E-F-G-A), a mode Liszt like to intone in the key of B \flat in particular,³⁵ suggests a background B \flat *major* triad at the end of the piece. And if it is possible to hear a minor-to-major progression on this scale—from the centric B \flat m^{6/5} and A \sharp m chords to a B \flat major conclusion of sorts—then this means Rh17 follows the basic generic rule about parallel-mode switch at the point of higher activation. So is this a belated, happy ending after all?

* * *

³³ Costas TSOUGRAS (2012) has recently provided an excellent analysis in this journal of how Liszt contained such chromatic procedures within the diatonic background of *Il Penseroso*. See also CINNAMON, 1986.

³⁴ Although the bass part is heard to descend emphatically to B \natural in b. 35 this is not a “structural” descent that resolves the prolonged C \sharp pedal point, but rather the result of a temporary textural inversion (the C \sharp pedal point can be heard in the middle voices of the chords above). In b. 39 the voices are properly realigned once more so that the C \sharp pedal point is also reinstated in the bass.

³⁵ Lyrical expressions of B \flat *verbunkos* lydian can be heard in Rh3, bb. 62-64 and Rh13, 37-38 (and repeats thereof); more ecstatic or even savage expressions can be heard in the *Csárdás macabre* bb. 577-88 and (in B \flat and related keys) in the *Magyar gyors induló*, S. 233 (1870), bb. 50-64 and 114-22. A note on nomenclature: the scale names and lower case for ‘lydian’ are derived from LOYA (2011) as represented on pp. 54-55 and explained on pp. xvii-xviii.

So far I presented a reading of a closed and coherent structure, which corrects somewhat the impression of a radical departure from genre. If the harmonic route is simply a repeated affirmation of B \flat , ending in B \flat major, then it is possible this work is more optimistic than I have previously described, and the repeated returns to B \flat are certainly not the cause of mounting frustration or fear.³⁶ This is where tonal perception and analysis clearly do matter. To put it bluntly, the perception of affect is largely dependent on whether the B \flat sonorities sound “right” or “wrong” as the emerging *finalis*. I offer the previous analysis as one possibility. Now we should explore the alternative that is much more in line with the previous affective reading. It rests on an equally intuitive perception: namely, that the A-B \flat vacillating cadence is simply repeated in the end without reaching a satisfying tonal resolution, creating an odd cognitive clash between tonal wrongness and rhetorical, surface rightness (the B \flat hammer blows). Such harmonic uncertainty and cognitive dissonance, in turn, reinforce the overall negative affective trajectory of the work.

In terms of formal harmony, if the B \flat *finalis* cannot be perceived to function as the tonic, then this leaves us with two options. Either the work is somehow “keyless” or B \flat has a subordinate tonal role within another key. The first description may have some aesthetic value, but it is analytically meaningless unless a lack of controlling tonic key means that the work is truly based on non-functional chordal relationships. But even if we note the importance of the hexatonic cycle C \sharp -D-F-F \sharp -A-B \flat in weakening traditional tonality, it is easy enough to perceive a D-major key area when the *allegretto* begins, and arguably until the introduction of the vacillating F \sharp m-A \sharp m phrase, which confounds a sense of tonal direction. Put differently, if it were possible to show more clearly how D minor and major operate despite the absence of traditional tonal articulation, that may tell us more about the sense of mystery this work conveys. Such a reading would suggest a continued, unfulfilled desire for tonal completion that rather reinforces my previous interpretation of affects, and this is the main reason that I offer it as my final interpretation of the work. The second reason is that, most intriguingly, reading the work “in” D minor and major means we can—and actually should—take Liszt’s *musica reservata* spellings and key signatures seriously in formal analysis. To my mind this is a more fulfilling methodological premise than the previous one, which required us to ignore (insensitively, perhaps even arrogantly) Liszt’s musical encoding and separate too rigidly the symbolic and perceptual levels of interpretation.

A good point of departure for reinstating the symbolic is to examine again the *kalindra* chord. Liszt’s spelling presents this unlikely scale-derived sonority as unstable and dissonant, against intuitive perceptions. It is certainly a “distancing effect” that requires a somewhat tricky, though not impossible, perceptual recalibration. Heard as spelled, this chord assumes the quality of a tense augmented sixth chord (a distorted German sixth) or, contrapuntally, a dissonant aggregate of appoggiaturas to the dominant of D minor or to the tonic itself (Fig. 11a). It is possible to imagine now all kind of pastiche continuations in D minor. Fig. 11b offers the beginning of one, and it could be continued with a more concrete melody than Liszt had offered in bb. 11-15, just to clarify what is being denied: a clear melody in the tonic key. And if one decides to hear the *kalindra* chord as the unfulfilled dissonance, rather than fall back on a more comfortable (“intuitive”) enharmonic perception, then the affect changes

³⁶ There is always the danger of being somehow unwittingly influenced by the mythic image of the old, frustrated, depressive Liszt, and my previous analysis of affects has possibly fallen into this trap. Dolores Pesce, who hypothesized extensively on the subject of Liszt’s mental state in his late years, warns us against thinking of this period in Liszt’s life as unremittingly bleak, and suggests instead Liszt suffered from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) that involved «depressive symptoms... agitation and anxiety». At the same time, she shows some evidence that, despite falling productivity due to failing eyesight, Liszt was not visited much by this condition in the year 1884 [PESCE, 2014, 160-62].

correspondingly. Either this sonority is complete and restful, or it strikes a little questioning, and possibly uneasy, note.

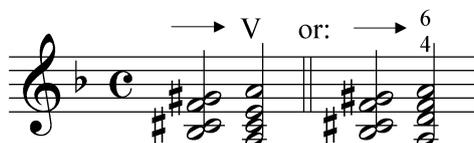


Fig. 11a: The implied (unrealized) predominant function of the *kalindra* chord.

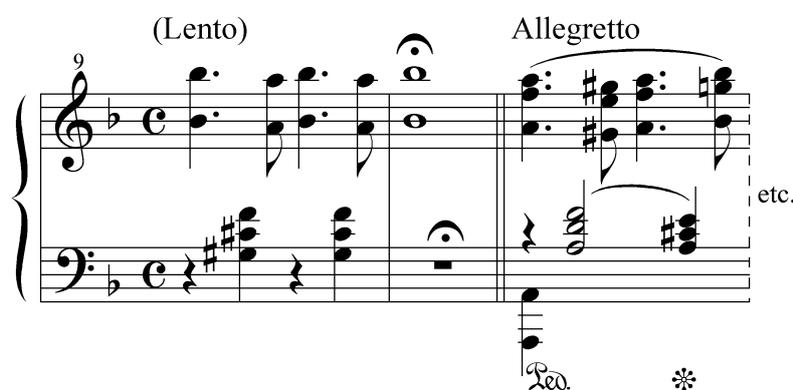


Fig. 11b: A pastiche continuation of b. 10.

Fig. 12 extends the latter hearing to the entire piece, deeming both D minor and D major to be implied, unfulfilled tonics. I have therefore inserted their shadowy presence into a representation of an essentially open structure, where what lies before and after the actual music is shown in dotted barlines and beams. Otherwise, similar reduction principles from the previous graph apply here, but with one important difference. It is now F#m that is the more structural sonority. It is possible to see that F#m is to D major what the augmented F-A-C# was to D minor: both chords contain tonic and dominant dyads, which suggest to me two interpretations. Zdenek Skoumal has demonstrated a weakening of the tonic-dominant polarity in late works by Liszt through harmony that synthesizes their functions [SKOUMAL, 1994], and the above-mentioned chords could be heard as yet another instance of the same phenomenon. On the other hand, there are various strong suggestions of C# as an unresolved leading tone. In that way the F#m chord extends the various dominant substitutes already heard, namely the opening augmented chord, the “dominant ninth chord” in bb. 11-15, and the brief suggestion of that function in the scales at bb. 33-34 and 65.

The phrase endings on Bb can now be heard as harmonically unstable and frustrating, each time derailing the fulfilment of the dominant function, especially in the closing bars. The structural melodic tone A never begins to descend to D. One may hear the A as perennially “stuck” or hear it as the beginning of a structural melodic ascent to D (A-B-C#→?) in bb. 11-

26 and 35-58 that never reaches its tonic destination.³⁷ So in the end the clue was in the surface motif β : A only ever progresses, irresolutely, to B_{\flat} .

Fig. 12: A D minor/major reading of Rh17.

This final reading is in some way sympathetic with research on Liszt's late works that has examined open structures and implicit tonality, especially BAKER (1990), SATYENDRA (1997b) and BERRY (2004). Like Baker, my purpose of proposing implicit tonal functions within a prolongational graph was to allow individual listeners to judge for themselves the extent to which they can still perceive such functions to be blurred or withheld, as opposed to being merely absent. Similar to Berry's reading of the *Bagatelle sans tonalité* (1885), Rh17 could also be described as a work where implicit resolutions to melodic and harmonic tendencies are suggested at surface level too. The difference is that the harmony in this work is more ambivalent than ambiguous, more about binary than multiple choices. It challenges listeners to decide between B_{\flat} and D as tonics, between hearing the same sonority as either consonant or dissonant, and between diatonic and chromatic space. Satyendra's study helps us understand this ambivalence by illustrating the paradox of open structures: what appears to be most stable within the boundaries of the piece is in effect the sign of *instability* in relation to what lies outside of the piece [Satyendra, 1997b, 193].³⁸ This is where affect is inextricable from tonal perception: once we perceive that the thundering B_{\flat} octaves that end Rh17 are uneasy, or perhaps even tragic, rather than celebratory, it becomes easier to hear them as tonally unstable; and vice versa.

My multiple readings of the work do not in any way solve its mystery: they simply highlight it in more analytical detail. The analyses also show the extent to which Liszt went against the

³⁷ This goes against Schenkerian theory which only admits descending *Urlinie*, but that is a separate theoretical matter that need not concern us here.

³⁸ My paraphrasing of Satyendra is a simplification, as in his example the audible structural sonorities are inherently dissonant.

genre, deliberately, rather than “fail” in his task. Just as motivic shreds replace proper melodies, and phrases remain unresolved, so too, I would suggest, the tonal process itself remains a fragment of an incomplete process. Satyendra argument that Liszt’s dominant-based “open” structures are extreme exemplars of the Romantic aesthetic of the fragment [*ibid.*] is a fine observation that is patently applicable to this work too. Only that, in this case, such a structure seems to militate against the aesthetic purpose of the genre itself, at least as Liszt originally conceived of it. Think of it this way: when Liszt set out to write Hungarian Rhapsodies, he imagined Hungarian-Gypsy melodies to be scattered fragments, and himself as the latter-day bard (*Rhapsode*) who would reassemble them expertly into a rich and coherent musical epos [LISZT, 1859, 343-48 (344)]. In this “Rhapsody”, he seems to tear out a piece from a greater whole that remains unknowable and beyond reach.

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ABSTRACT

Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 17 is a puzzling miniature written towards the end of the composer's life: much of its idiomatic material, as well as the traditional slow-fast pairing, is represented in a highly abstract way that defies generic listening. The largely euphonious harmony or genre of the work are perhaps the reasons it has not fitted well received narratives and discourses on Liszt's late music: but it is precisely its harmonic and anti-generic aspects that deserve close attention.

This article therefore begins by contextualizing the work as a Rhapsody and then proceeds to examine salient ways in which Liszt creates a quasi-"distancing effect" that denies listeners the pleasure of immersing themselves in exoticism, nationalism and virtuosity. The Second part looks more closely at how this work avoids the affirmative affective route expected in a Rhapsody, and instead continuously transforms three idiomatic (and extremely simple) motifs in order to create something closer to a dreamlike psychological drama or even a nightmare—unlike any other Rhapsody ending in a fast tempo.

The final part examines the role tonality plays in creating this dream world; more specifically, Liszt's cryptic key signatures and note spellings, some of which seem to go against a more intuitive perception of harmony. Two contradictory readings, employing both Neo-Riemannian and prolongational perspectives, highlight this riddle. The first demonstrates that, notwithstanding Liszt's D minor-to-major key signatures, the work can be heard as tonally coherent when B-flat is considered to be the centric sonority in a largely chromatic background. The second reading takes Liszt's key signatures and spellings seriously and presents a tonal process that is only a fragment of a greater, imperceptible whole, much like other elements in this fascinating work.