## Franz Liszt's *Petrarch Sonnets*:

# The Persistent Poetic Problem

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In this article the final versions of Liszt's settings of the Petrarch Sonnet No. 47, one for piano solo and the other for baritone voice and piano, are examined. Born out of the same compositional seed, these two final versions are strikingly dissimilar and yet closely related. While surface elements, tonal and formal designs, and structural voiceleading are radically altered in the 1861 baritone/piano version, subsurface motivic relationships reveal a bond between both versions. The purpose of this article is to show that these relationships, although sometimes obscure, bring these two versions closer together than has been previously believed.

Alan Walker, in Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years - 1811-1847, states that Liszt's comprehensive involvement with musical experiments of all kinds led him to revise a major portion of his work. The various settings of the Petrarch sonnets certainly belong in this "revisionist" category. Not satisfied with the early soprano and piano version of Sonnets 47, 104, and 123, Liszt continued to rework them for over two decades, resulting in the existence of four separate versions. In later years, Liszt wrote that his earlier attempts were too repetitious and ornate. The persistence shown by his two revisions indicates that Liszt was concerned with the proper musical treatment of

lalan Walker, Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years - 1811-1847, volume 1 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), p. 306.

Petrarch's poetry, a problem which led to the drastic alterations found in the 1861 version.

The first version came to fruition in 1838 and 1839, during Liszt's Italian sojourn with Marie d'Agoult. These early songs were quickly transcribed for piano solo. It was the piano transcription which was first published, in 1846. The publication of the song version soon followed in 1847. Liszt worked on the first revision of the sonnets during the 1850's, and this revision was published as the fourth through sixth numbers of the Annees de Pèlerinage: Deuxième Années, Italie in 1858. The Années de Pèlerinage version is most familiar to the music world. Liszt's final revision, for baritone and piano, was completed in 1861, though published much later in 1883. I shall refer to the four different versions in the following manner: first, by the sonnet's number, (i.e. Sonnet 47, 104, or 123) and then by its chronological order, using letters a,b,c, or d to designate the first through fourth versions.

Only minor alterations occur between the first three versions of 47 and 123. The first transcription faithfully adheres to the formal and melodic designs of the earlier songs, although pianistic figuration and minor alterations give the transcription a life of its own. With the first revision, that is, the Annèes de Pèlerinage version, many figurational passages are substantially simplified. David Neumeyer and Howard Cinnamon have written articles about the first three incarnations of Sonnet 104. 2 104/c is significantly altered from its predecessors in that it is transposed, an opening recitative removed and a new introduction inserted. 47/c is transposed as well. The early versions of 47/a and b in Ab major; 47/c and d in Db major.

The 1861 works are startling in their simplification of surface detail, condensation of thematic and harmonic ideas, and altered tonal schemes. However, much of the melodic, tonal, and formal design has been retained in each. The following analysis will examine the final versions (c and d) of Sonnet No. 47, comparing and contrasting these two creations inspired by Petrarch's poem. The text and its translation are given in appendix 1. The scores to both 47/c and 47/d are found in appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

The overall formal and tonal design of 47/c is shown in Example 1. 47/c follows a modified strophic procedure whereby the main aria theme is presented as the antecedent; each consequent is less tonally stable and melodically non-repetitious. The work opens with an out-of-key

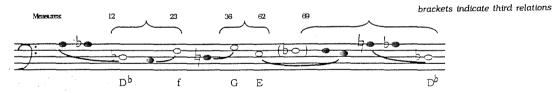
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>see David Neumeyer, "Liszt's Sonnetto 104 del Petrarca: The Romantic Spirit and Voiceleading," <u>Indiana Theory Review</u> v.2 no. 2 (Winter 1979): 2-22, and Howard Cinnamon, "Chromaticism and Tonal Coherence in Liszt's Sonetto 104 del Petrarca," <u>In Theory Only</u> v. 7 no. 3 (August 1983): 3-19.

introduction. The tonic (Db major) is established at m. 12. Each beginning of the aria theme coincides with a new tonal area: m. 14 in Db major, m. 38 in G major, and m. 62 in E major. The consequent phrase of each of these three sections receives increasing formal weight, so that the last consequent in effect marks the beginning of a new section (m. 69). The introduction (mm. 1-12) reveals prototypical material for the entire piece and previews general harmonic procedures which subsequently influence the overall tonal scheme. A harmonic sequence spans mm. 1-5, moving from the

Bars	1-11	12-23	24-35	36-47	48-61	62-68	69-77	78-84	85-95
Division/ Procedure	introduction	antecedent theme 1 (aria theme)	consequent	antecedent theme 1	consequent (begins with theme 1)	antece- dent	consequent	repetition of 69-77	codetta
Design	independent phrase motives a & b	A	В	Α'	В'	Α'	Ċ,	, c	motive b and fragement of theme 1
Tonal Structure	IVI V <sub>7</sub>	I V7 i	vii° V:V	I with pring A	iv i VI V	ьш	C *9 V 7 b VI	≫ V <sub>7</sub>	ЬVI V7 н <sup>6</sup> ш V <sub>7</sub> I
Form		part I		part II			part III		

Example 1: Formal and Tonal Design of 47/c

#### Harmonic Outline



A major triad to the C# major triad, followed by an F major triad, and, finally, back to the A major triad. Immediately following this sequence, in m. 6, A major is converted into a German sixth in the tonic key, Db major. These two events, one a symmetrical division of the octave via the major third, the other a  $b\hat{6}-\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  linear motion, recur at several levels throughout the work. The major third sequence foreshadows successive third relations throughout the work. Example 1b illustrates these tonicized third relations throughout the work. Various tonal regions correspond to formal divisions in the text. The first quatrain begins in Db major, the second quatrain in F minor. The tonicization of G major coincides with the beginning of the sestet, and the second part of the sestet begins with a new tonal area, E major. E major is followed by the tonic. Third relations are, of course, typical of Liszt's harmonic language. In 47/c large scale tonal relationships are related to the sequential prototype, and this relationship creates a harmonic consistency throughout several structural

levels. For example, the harmonic prototype is expanded, or projected, over mm.  $1-23^3$ . Example 2 illustrates that this expansion is effected through the use of the other prototype, the b6-5-1 motion. The opening pitch class A becomes Bbb, which descends to Ab, dominant of Db major. Db major is established in m. 12. The same voiceleading

Example 2: Prototypical Expansion



procedure is used to arrive at the tonal area of F minor, in m. 23. These two prototypes continue their integration at a subsurface level. Another example of this cooperative event begins in m. 69, which coincides with the beginning of a new thematic idea. In this measure the diminished seventh chord is supported by the pitch F in the bass; which is prolonged until m. 73. At m. 73, F descends to E, the applied dominant of the A major triad in m. 74. The A major triad is the flatted submediant, which becomes a German sixth, resolving to the dominant of Db major. In this section, Liszt stresses the b6 of both m. 73 (pitch class F) and m. 74 (pitch class A) through repetition and strong metrical placement. These stressed pitches are the same pitches which comprise the sequential prototype: F,A, and Db. Though F and A are not tonicized, their prominence qualifies the comparison to the prototype.

66-5

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Other examples of prototypical expansion in Liszt's work are discussed in my article "Multi-level Motivic Projection in Selected Piano Works of Liszt," <u>Journal Of The American Liszt Society</u>, volume XVI (December 1984): 20-34.

The codetta, beginning in m. 85, subtly reiterates both the b6-5 motive and the sequential thirds motive. or enharmonic A, is given a last inflection in m. 89. Finally the prepenultimate F major triad referentially brings back the harmonic sequence of the opening measures.

Turning now to 47/d, it has been stated by other writers that this revision creates an essentially new work, sylistically akin to other late period Liszt works. important stylistic features evident in 47/d and not present in 47/c are monothematicism and tonal ambiguity arising from enharmonic equivalence. I will now briefly discuss largescale formal and tonal contrasts between 47/c and 47/d, showing that these later stylistic changes of monothematicism and tonal ambiguity create a new work out of the earlier model. I will then discuss how these two works are similar, and conclude with a summary of the analytic findings.

Considerable differences between the two are evident when formal and tonal outlines of both are presented side by side as in Example 3. In 47/d, Liszt retains the main aria theme, though it appears only twice, rather than three times (see mm. 10 and 33). The tonal center of the second appearance of the theme is E major, not G major, as in 47/c. Also, the C section of 47/d, beginning in m. 41, contains in the voice part a melodic line not found in 47/c. At a more surface level, there is obvious disparity between the two introductions. The unstable opening of 47/c introduces prototypical material for the entire work. 47/d presents prototypical material as well. However, Liszt dispenses with the two prototypes of 47/c (the symmetrical division of the octave by major thirds and b6-5-1) and chooses in their place an unobtrusive stepwise descent of a fourth, stated in the outer voices, over a dominant prolongation. From this simple stepwise motion grow all of the significant melodic patterns -- for example, the relationship of the main aria theme to the prototype (shown in Example 4). The small

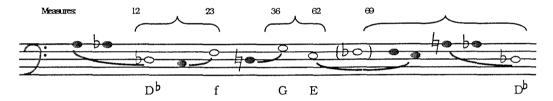


Example 4

Example 3:	Structural	Comparison;	47/c	and 47/	d
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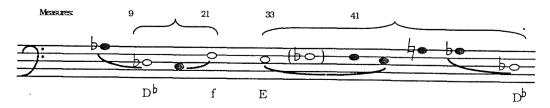
Bars	1-11	12-23	24-35	36-47	48-61	62-68	69-77	78-84	85-95
Division/ Procedure	introduction	antecedent theme 1 (aria theme)	consequent	antecedent theme 1	consequent (begins with theme 1)	antece- dent	consequent	repetition of 69-77	codetta
Design	independent phrase motives a & b	A	В	A'	B'	A'	С	С	motive b and fragement of theme l
Tonal Structure	IVI V7	I V <sub>7</sub> 1	Vii° V:V   1 6 V  9 #IV	I with hi hair a	iv i VI V	ьш	C <sup>#9</sup> V <sub>7</sub>	<b>&gt;</b> <sup>∨</sup> <sub>7</sub>	ЬИ V7 п <sup>6</sup> п V71
Form	,	part I		part II			part III		

### Harmonic Outline



Bars	1-8	9-20	21-32	33-40	41-61	62-79	80-92
Division/ Procedure	introduction	antecedent theme 1 (aria theme)	consequent	antecedent theme 1	consequent melody derived from motive X	repetition of 41-61	codetta
Design	independent phrase motiveX	A	В	A'	С	С	introductory material reworked
Tonal Structure	V <sub>7</sub>	I V <sub>7</sub> i	V <sub>7</sub> i Vii° 7 i III 6 V 4 i VI	I i biii	Cr°7 V <sub>7</sub> V <sub>2</sub>	Cr°7 V7	IV I IVI I
Form		part I		part II	part III		

### Harmonic Outline



brackets indicate third relations

contour alteration made to the aria theme of 47/d closely binds this melody to its introduction. Liszt achieves musical cohesion through linkage technique, described by Oswald Jonas as a new phrase which takes "as its initial idea the end of the immediately preceding one and then continues independently, either with the same formal unit or to initiate a new section."

For example, mm. 39-40 serve as a link between sections, and are a continuation of the end of the phrase ending in m. 38. This link anticipates the melodic ideas of the following phrase. The primary melodic material for the second half of the song, beginning in m. 41, is but a slight reworking of the stepwise prototype. The relationship between the prototype and the descent from Ab4 (in m. 41) to Eb4 (in m. 43) is obvious. The fourth descent recurs in mm. 55-57, from C#5 to G#4. A related form of the prototype is found in mm. 47-53, and again in mm. 69-74, with the descending figure in the bass, which moves chromatically down from Gb to C#. Here, the chromatic descent cloaks the fundamental descent of the fourth, from Gb to Db, or the enharmonic C#.

The ubiquitous quality of the descending fourth prototype casts a monothematic light over the 47/d version, in contrast to 47/c, which throws several distinct ideas into relief.

#### TONAL AMBIGUITY

In 47/c tonal regions were consistently set up via the German sixth/dominant progression, and though occasionally deceptively resolving this progression, Liszt fully prepared the listener for a new tonality. 47/d, however, eschews the German sixth/dominant prototype, and instead weakens tonal clarity in several ways at several structural levels. At a surface level Liszt weakens tonal direction by 1) the use of inversions at critical key-defining junctures, and 2) the suppression of the dominant function throughout the work. These two procedures are illustrated in mm. 29-34.

In mm. 27-28, the listener assumes an e minor tonality. At m. 29, the mediant G major six-four triad still implies e minor. However, m. 30, with its c minor sixth triad, efficiently erases e minor. Mm. 31 and 32, with respective Ab major and C# minor triads, further destabilize tonal centricity. The entrance of the aria theme in m. 33, following on the heels of the C# minor triad, is therefore prepared not with a dominant, as in 47/c, but rather with a common tone-modulation. The tonic (E major) is finally confirmed in m. 34.

The codetta also exemplifies the ambiguous tonal language brought about by these procedures. In mm. 78-79 the tonic six-four chord is non-functional. No dominant resolution

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Oswald Jonas, <u>Introduction</u> <u>To</u> <u>The Theory of Heinrich Schenker</u>, translated and edited by John Rothgeb (New York: Longman, 1982): 7-8.

follows. Instead, a sense of closure is achieved by means of a bass arpeggiation of the subdominant (mm. 83-85), which moves to the tonic. From m. 86 to the final measure, a tonic pedal, over primarily tonic and flatted submediant triads, provide a tranquil ending. Conspicuously absent from this entire final section is any form of the dominant.

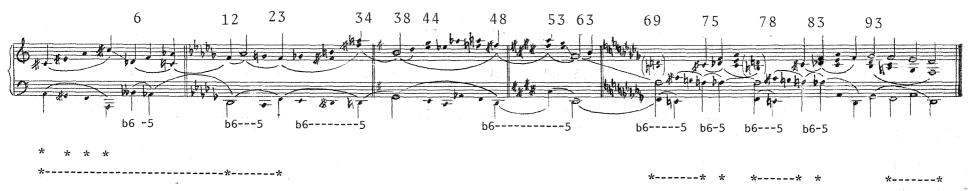
Another procedure employed in this work which significantly effects tonal clarity, yet, paradoxically, provides a sense of tonal coherence, is the exploitation of enharmonically equivalent pitch classes. The codetta, with the tonic pedal functioning alternately as the root of the tonic and the third of the flatted submediant, explicitly illustrates the dual aspects of the Db/C#. Another instance of this Db/C# duality occurs in mm. 74-78. In m. 74, the C# in the bass is converted to Db in m. 78, transferred to an Measure 78 also shows another enharmonic inner voice. relationship between the G#4 found in the vocal line and the Ab4 in the accompaniment. At a deeper structural level, the enharmonic duality of Ab, 5 of Db major, and G#, 3 of E major, creates a long-range connection between these two tonal centers, and helps bring about tonal coherence. Examples 6a and 6b show middleground and background sketches of 47/d. The importance of the Ab/G# pitch class is evident in the fundamental line. Throughout the various structural levels of 47/d, enharmonic equivalence functions as a major compositional process.

Having discussed contrasts between 47/c and d, now examine their similarities. After the introductory material of both works, with the arrival of the tonic, the fundamental voiceleading and melodic material is similar up to m. 27 in 47/c and m. 25 in 47/d. At this point, the works dramatically diverge, with their next tonal goals far removed from one another. The voiceleading similarities abruptly end. Yet, if the G major episode (ms. 28-61) is excised from 47/c, a striking correspondence to the middleground of 47/d surfaces. Comparison of examples 5a and 6a show that, beginning in m. 69 of 47/c, and m. 41 of 47/d, the middleground structures are essentially the same, despite differences in registral placement of important structural tones and different melodic lines. Also, changes to the foreground, specifically the substitution of the b6-5-1 prototype for the linear descending prototype, only slightly differentiate the middleground of each work.

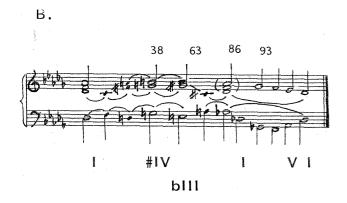
In 47/c, the tonal movement to G major, #4, is surprising, for there are no precedents which hint at that choice for a secondary, yet significant, tonal goal. Further, Liszt does not exploit this #4 relationship in any other way during the piece. However, the G major goal is in keeping with the improvisatory aspect of the introduction, and heightens tonal tension. It is as if Liszt's creative fancy inexorably led him to this destination, and, having reached a point farthest removed from tonic, this same creativity journeys slowly back home.

In contrast, 47/d seems more concerned with long range tonal unity. By choosing E major rather than G major, a stronger tonal connection with the tonic is made by way of

Α.

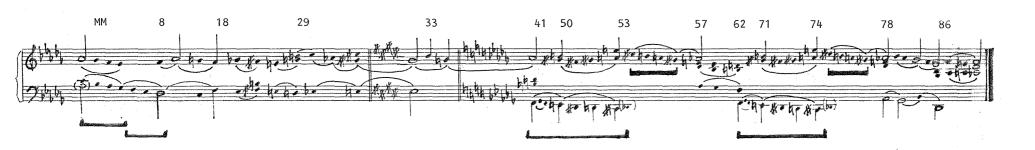


ASTERISKS INDICATE SYMMETRICAL DIVISION VIA MAJOR THIRDS



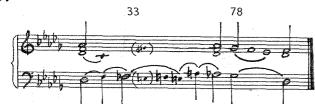
Example 5: Harmonic Reduction, 47c

### Α.



BRACKETS INDICATE DESCENDING FOURTH LINES





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Example 6: Harmonic Reduction, 47/d

the common tone Ab/G#. As has been shown, enharmonicism creates tonal ambiguity, and it is integrated into the work's structure at other structural levels. Perhaps this concern for tonal coherence through enharmonic means was a factor in Liszt's decision to delete the G major episode from 47/d.

#### SUMMARY

The preceding analysis has compared and contrasted the melodic, harmonic, and formal aspects of Liszt's final settings of Sonnet 47. The two versions are much like a character in an opera who, though in disguise, is obviously the same. While 47/c remains the most popular version, 47/d possesses a more streamlined and focused tonal structure. At the same time, the harmonic language of 47/d is more ambiguous. Another feature which distinguishes 47/d is its monothematicism and the use of linkage technique. A similar analytic comparison of tonal relationships and motivic interplay between Sonnets 104/c and d and 123/c and d reveal dramatic compositional links and, conversely, marked contrasts.

Liszt's compositional growth compelled him to review and rework his youthful settings, and subsequently, his mature settings. For Liszt, whose revisions were logical sequels to his unfailing search for the perfect union of literary and musical art, the Petrarch sonnets posed a persistent problem. Consequently, we may enjoy the romantic spirit exemplified in them.

Appendix A: Petrarch, Sonnetto 47

#### SONETTO XLVII

Benedetto sia 'l giorno, e 'l mese, e l'anno,

E la stagione, e 'l tempo, e l'ora, e 'l pun

E 'l bel paese, e 'l loco, ov'io fu giunto

Da duo begli occhi, che legato m'hanno.

E benedetto il primo dolce affanno,

Ch'i' ebbi ad esser con amor congiunto;

E l'arco e le saette ond'io fu punto;

E le piaghe, ch'infin al cor mi vanno.

Benedette le voci tante, ch'io,

Chiamando il nome di mia Donna, ho sparte;

E i sospiri, e le lagrime, e 'l desio;

E benedette sien tutte le carte

Ov'io fama le acquistò; e 'l pensier mio,

Ch'è sol di lei, sì, ch'altra non v'ha parte.

#### SONNET XLVII

BLEST be the year, the month, the hour, the day,
The season and the time, the point of space,
And blest the beauteous country and the place
Where first of two bright eyes I felt the sway:
Blest the sweet pain of which I was the prey,
When newly doomed Love's sovereign law to embrace,
And blest the bow and shaft to which I trace
The wound that to my inmost breast found way:
Blest be the ceaseless accents of my tongue,
Unwearied breathing my loved lady's name:
Blest my fond wishes, sighs, and tears, and pains:
Blest be the lays in which her praise I sung,
That on all sides acquired to her fair fame;
And blest my thoughts! for o'er them all she reigns.

DACRE

Appendix B: Score, 47/c



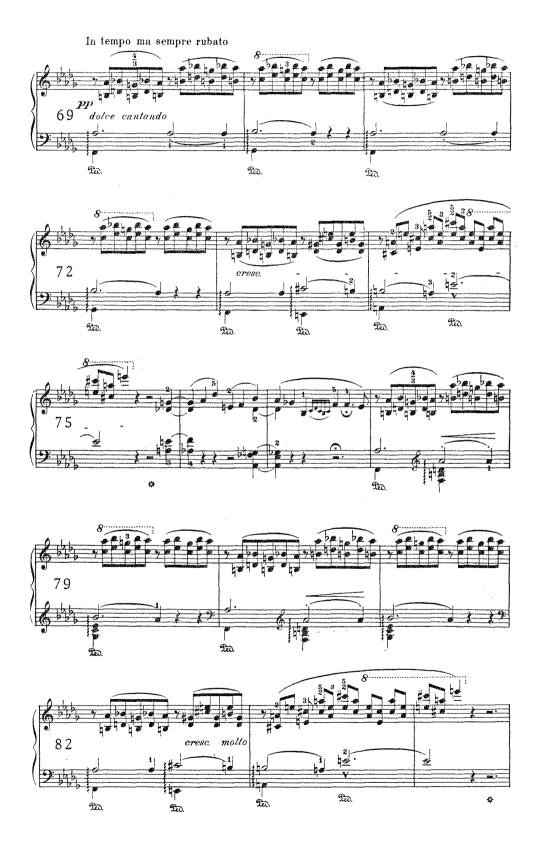
Appendix B: Score, 47/c (cont.)



Appendix B: Score, 47/c (cont.)



Appendix B: Score, 47/c (cont.)



Appendix B: Score, 47/c (cont.)



Appendix C: Score, 47/d



Appendix C: Score, 47/d (cont.)



Appendix C: Score, 47/d (cont.)

