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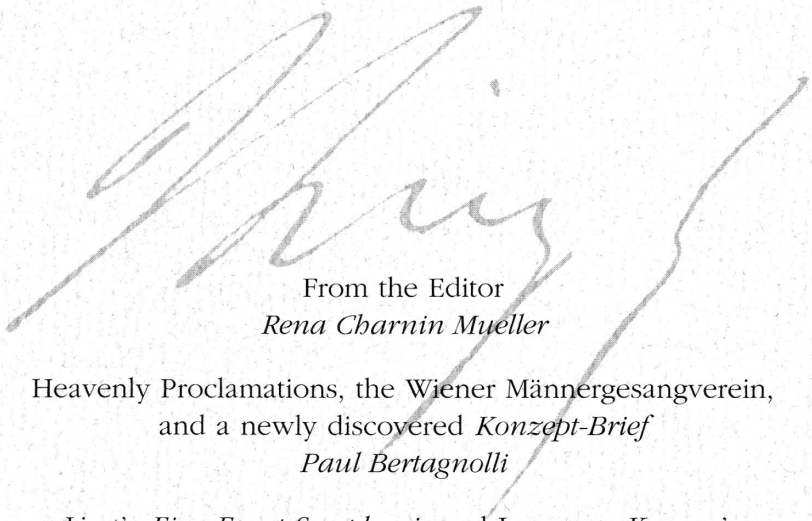

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Eine Faust-Symphonie and Lawrence Kramer's reading [appropriation?] of the "Gretchen" movement*

by Ilias Chrissochoidis

Few composers have suffered longer from scholarly neglect and misunderstanding as Franz Liszt. On the eve of his bicentennial, musicologists are as yet unable to adequately evaluate his place in music history.[1]

The case of Liszt as a composer is indeed a highly idiosyncratic one. Certainly, the amplification of his pianist genius placed heavy clouds over his creative achievements, as Saint-Saëns declared in Liszt's lifetime.[2] Another problem stems from his middleman position: no one has ever bridged two centuries so successfully as Liszt did.[3] The stylistic distance of his early, Viennese works from his late, experimental ones is unique among 19th-century composers. The boy who, as legend has it, received Beethoven's kiss became the grandfather of 20th-century avant-garde. There is yet another issue--the negative reception of Liszt's radicalism. Recent studies have shown that the revolutionary element had always been present in his music and in his life,[4] the two being so often merged.[5] His survival in the post-1848 Europe rested primarily on his virtuoso fame, but his music suffered from foes and friends alike: on the one side, from intermittent attacks by German conservative circles, mainly in Leipzig and Vienna;[6] on the other, from the betrayal of his own supporters. Even the most fervent proponents of his music, Wagner and Bülow among them, finally turned their backs to what they thought was becoming musical eccentricity. The artistic isolation of his last years led him to an even more radical route, on the heels of atonality and formal disintegration: in one word, to musical nihilism.[7] Already condemned in his lifetime, the composer Liszt has still to be fully appreciated, given the small fraction of his vast output (more than 1400 individual pieces of music) that is generally available.[8]

Considering the long spell cast over Liszt the composer, who was rejected by his own timeand neglected by posterity,[9] one feels compelled to approach him through his most representative symphonic work, *Eine Faust-Symphonie*.

As the quintessential Romantic, Liszt was fatefully open to the influence of Faust. Table I lists the main events in his contact with this theme. From a cursory view it is clear that he was preoccupied with the subject almost throughout his life--actually, as many years as Goethe himself.

The Faust stimulus must have been intensified after his settlement in Weimar, in 1848, the very city associated with Goethe. However, the lat-

*I wish to thank Dr Michael Fend, whose graduate seminar on "Faust in Music" at King's College, London provided both the occasion and the stimulus for this review.

ter's *Faust* was not the only source of inspiration for Liszt. His correspondence indicates a strong dissatisfaction with the great poet's version, which Liszt regarded as bourgeois rather than romantic in character.[10] On the contrary, Nikolaus Lenau's Faust,[11] written in 1836 as a reaction to Goethe's, was much closer to Liszt's own psychological condition: the hero indulges in nihilism.[12] Furthermore, the composer found many common points with Lenau himself, the latter being Hungarian by birth but wandering throughout and outside Europe and exhibiting in his poetry the sense of world-weariness.[13] In this symphony, however, Liszt makes it clear in the title that the work is based on Goethe's version, although the indefinite article "Eine" might raise other questions.[14]

Whatever the external stimulation, Liszt's correspondence reveals a primarily internal relationship with Faust. No other 19th-century artist enjoyed the fame and popularity of Liszt. Even at the peak of his virtuoso career, however, he was depressingly unsatisfied,[15] which explains his early retirement at the age of thirty-eight. His mystical crisis was not an isolated phenomenon of his adolescence, and his religious aspirations, present throughout his life, finally led to his taking Minor Orders.[16] Considering the chasm between his hectic public life as a celebrity and his introverted, contemplative nature,[17] one may better understand the psychological pressure to which he was conditioned, and comprehend why the most celebrated artist of his time was continuously preoccupied with death in his work.[18] Character and personal inclinations aside, Liszt experienced many personal tragedies and had many disappointments from his personal relationships.[19] If we add to the above the artistic isolation of the last period of his life, then it becomes apparent that behind the lustre of celebrity there was the darkness of solitude. Liszt saw in Faust a reflection of his own image.[20]

* * *

A Faust Symphony was orchestrated in 1854 and took its final form in 1857 with the addition of a choral finale.[21] Although an analysis of the work appeared just a few years after its première, serious scholarly interest in the symphony originated only in the 1960s. Ironically, this interest focused on the work's formal irregularities,[22] and the allegedly first twelve-tone theme of its beginning.[23] Hermeneutic approaches, though small in number, demonstrate an impressive variety. Three of them stand out. The first, by Vernon Harrison, advances a psychoanalytical reading of the work: Jungian depth psychology provides the key for understanding both Faust's and Liszt's personalities; the *Faust Symphony* can thus be interpreted by the Jungian archetypes of "Anima" and "Shadow."[24] In a more traditional vein, Paul Merrick highlights the Christian view of love as a force of redemption: "in Liszt's interpretation, [the story] concerns the nature of Faust's love for Gretchen, and how this serves to redeem him."[25] It is the third and most provocative reading, however, that I shall take issue with here. Lawrence

Kramer's feminist approach proposes that the idealization of Woman in the 19th century legitimized women's social marginalization;[26] this cultural image Liszt reproduces in *A Faust Symphony*.

With his *Music as Cultural Practice*, 1800-1900, Kramer proposes a liberal, though not necessarily liberating, approach to music. Music works for him are just another matrix for the inscription of cultural practices, privileged reservoirs of meaning waiting for the imported sophistication of a new, it appears, breed of musicologists. In the act of re-confining extraordinary artistic achievements into the camp of a culture indulging in rather depressing practices, Kramer depreciates music as an art form. If a symphonic work or a piano sonata can so easily encode cultural practices, one wonders why so many in the 19th century saw music as the manifestation of the ineffable and the sublime.

Liszt's *A Faust Symphony* is one of the works Kramer targets for his "new" musical hermeneutics. Apart from new, his hermeneutics is also erratic. Instead of engaging in dialogue with the work, Kramer arrives with a heavy saddle of preconceived notions. His hermeneutic ride is impossible without understanding "cultural discourse as inevitably gender-marked" (120), and representation of the female as an unavoidable "gaze."

Not surprisingly, Gretchen among the three characters in the symphony becomes the object of Kramer's own scholarly gaze. In her movement he sees the representation of the female as understood in the 19th century: restrained and immobile. Kramer deploys every means to support this claim, as if none of his readers knew that second movements are traditionally subdued, less developed, homophonic rather than contrapuntal, and with fewer themes than first. His comments, however, are valid only for Gretchen's two themes, not at all for the whole movement. Indeed, most of the first part seems to be immobile on account of its chamber music texture and static musical material (limited contour and stepwise movement).[27] Yet the so-called "flower" episode, the strong modulations and swift key changes, the agitato C-minor section, the truncated and varied repetition of part one at the end—in short, the disjunctions that Faust's thematic presence brings about turn the "Gretchen" movement into a rather dynamic piece, full of expressive contrasts. One also recalls that even Gretchen's first theme has elements of instability, such as the *faux-bourdon*-like accompaniment. It is hard to reconcile these facts with Kramer's charge that Liszt impoverishes the psychological depth of Goethe's Gretchen thus immobilizing her to an absolute degree (107-8).

If the contrasts in the "Gretchen" movement render the immobility claim problematic, Kramer resorts to another strategy. The second tool in his hermeneutics kit is gendering, a reductive habit that turns all opposition and contrast into the male-female polarity. Favorite candidates here are the themes of the two characters. Once again, Kramer tries to convince us of the evident, namely that Faust's and Gretchen's themes are musically opposed, rendered as "male" and "female" (104-6). By genderiz-

ing musical parameters, however, he opens the door to essentialism. Blowing out of proportion the heuristic description of accented-unaccented themes as male-female, he identifies Faust's thematic material as running "the gamut of masculine possibilities" (105). One recalls how "non-heroic" sounds *Eroica*'s main theme, though beginning on a strong beat; and how easily escapes "male" accentuation norms the famous motive in Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. But accentuation and metric placement never create thematic character by themselves. So Kramer tries to extend this gendering to other musical parameters. His list of stylistic oppositions does little to prove his claim, as counter-examples can easily dissolve gender contrast. If the diatonic articulation of Gretchen's themes is a token of her femininity, then does the seductive chromaticism in Carmen's "Habanera" make the latter masculine?[28] Or does textural simplicity, inertia *pace* Kramer, make Beethoven's *Dankgesang* effeminate? In what way does a descending sequence of four augmented chords (Faust's main theme), an absolute of indeterminacy, encode masculine traits? And how manly can Faust's "love" theme be in its unmistakable gesture of longing? Is there really a gender inscribed in melodic texture? Can there be one-to-one correspondences of music and gender, as Kramer proposes? I think not, otherwise music would long have been a depressingly narrow field of artistic expression.

Just as thematic gendering begins to turn problematic, Kramer jumps onto another rope, the cultural practice of the gaze (109). His analysis attempts to establish that "Liszt's Gretchen is represented in terms that faithfully reproduce the structure of the gaze[...]The movement named for Gretchen is the implicit incidental music for a scene of gazing" (114). As if this claim is not ambitious enough, Kramer asserts that "What we have been calling Gretchen's music is really Faust's" (115). One wonders then if the preceding gendering of their themes was unnecessary. Perhaps it is only a consequence of Kramer's changing lenses in his reading, from feminism to Lacanian psychology. In any case, the idea of Gretchen being a projection of Faust had already been proposed in the psychoanalytical interpretation of Harrison.[29] What Kramer brings in is the image of a narcissistic Faust: in short, the woman Gretchen becomes an image which the man Faust appropriates leaving aside, or rather displacing, the woman herself. This displacement is evident in the second part of the movement, exclusively based on Faust's thematic material. But now the image of Faust is much more polite and human. This whole setting reveals Faust the bearer of patriarchal power, who indulges in the gazing of Gretchen's image. Here Kramer enters the realm of cultural distortion. Reducing one of the most complex figures in modern literature to a bearer of patriarchal power is certainly disheartening. But Faust as an agent of power is a caricature. How can a suicidal person weary of life be or act as the 19th-century bourgeois male of Kramer? The essentialism Kramer brings to the "Gretchen" movement becomes almost unbearable in this point.

A specific case of the gaze Kramer recognizes in the six-bar interpolation of Faustian material at the end of Gretchen's first theme (mm. 45-51). It is curious, however, that he omits to link this section to the ensuing "flower" interlude, the most programmatic section in the symphony,[30] with Gretchen plucking off the petals of a flower to divine Faust's feelings. Far too explicit for a gaze, the swift alternation between A major and F minor chords, as well as the metrical change from 3/4 to C, relate better to the emotional agitation of Gretchen in the thought of Faust. These modulations might well represent her ambivalent reactions prompting the plucking off of the flower. What is interesting in this interlude (mm. 51-56) is the interplay between the notes A and B, representing the affirmative and negative answers to her question, respectively. Their accelerated alternation stops abruptly after two negative answers on a questioning A sharp (that is, between A and B or "yes" and "no"). The return to her first theme is effected with one of the most expressive, I vow, modulations in the whole of music literature.

In this light I find Kramer's "gazing" a very limited and perhaps misleading a reading. It is interesting to note that the above extension-interpolation is repeated verbatim in the third part of the movement, leading this time to Faust's *love* theme (mm. 245-60). This symmetry makes even starker the different outcomes, Gretchen's dreaming of Faust and the explicit statement of the love theme. Does this mean that Gretchen's doubts in the first interlude have now given place to her certainty about his feelings? If so, then the immobility argument of Kramer suffers a blow: Gretchen's psychological portrait acquires depth. One should also point out that Gretchen's thematic material returns in part three with considerable changes: the scoring for string quartet may well suggest psychological integration; and the continuous motion in the first violin adds complexity, as it alternates between figurative accompaniment and melodic substitute. This is not the same Gretchen we encountered in the beginning of the movement; hence she cannot be the shallow creature proposed by Kramer.

The "gaze" argument also weakens considering the coda of the movement. Here appears the only Faust theme not quoted in the middle part, the *grandioso* one. Its articulation in triplets and in triple meter might suggest Faust's absorbing the soothing power of Gretchen (3/4 is the meter of both her themes). Most importantly, however, the grandioso theme, Faust's emblem of determination, comes in A-flat major, Gretchen's tonality and a symbol of love in Liszt's music.[31] In addition, we find a rhythmical fragment of his main theme in the bass line. Is it that Faust's doubt, which this theme represents, is now outweighed by the triumph (*grandioso* theme) of love (A-flat major, from 3/4)? And if so, is it then surprising that the "eternal feminine" lines in the finale are sung by a male voice, Faust himself? If we accept Paul Merrick's position that Liszt's version of Faust is that of redemption through love,[32] it becomes clear that only the latter could sing these lines and transform his power (*grandioso*) theme into virtually the

basis (bass-line) of this redemption. So, it is hard to accept, once again, Kramer's reading of this choice as negation of woman and celebration of male domination (130).

* * *

Kramer's reading of *A Faust Symphony* is certainly intriguing. Its persuasiveness, though, relies on adopting a prefabricated ideological framework. Kramer does not offer to deepen our understanding of the work but rather uses it to illustrate a general argument, that the musical language of the 19th century was reflecting and reproducing contemporary cultural codes on sexual differentiation (102). His reading is not a musical but a cultural one; far from treating the work as a whole, he seeks its fragmentation, chipping away isolated gestures and musical building blocks. In the end, music is only an instrument, "a lens" to help him focus on "representational practices" (102-3). It is in this respect that his discussion actually restricts rather than expands the hermeneutic aspects of the symphony. For example, Kramer's insistence on gender opposition limits his reading to a comparison between Faust and Gretchen, leaving aside perhaps the most important opposition between Faust and Mephistopheles. Furthermore, his culturally oriented interpretation seems to demote the whole Faust plot into a bourgeois love story, if not a case of sexual pathology. Given Liszt's strong identification with Faust,[33] it is clear that Kramer subjugates authorial intention to exegetical autocracy.

Which raises a point of caution with regard to interdisciplinary engagement. While Kramer poses as contextual liberator of Liszt's symphony, escorting it back to the "real" world of 19th-century cultural practices, he cuts it off from another context, that of a distinguished symphonic tradition,[34] cyclical forms and variation techniques. To Kramer's claim that music reflects contemporary cultural images, one may counter that art music is primarily engaged in a dialogue with the past and with other major artworks. And because artworks are not created or meant simply for immediate consumption,[35] to remove them from this historical context and diachronic dialogue is to strip them off their most precious social value: a-historicity, the power to move and fascinate audiences across cultures and eras. Finally, artworks differ from industrial music in their striving to be inventive, hence unconventional, and to surpass the conditions of their origin. Kramer's contextualization forces Liszt's symphony into an alignment with a set of ideas that are foreign to its claims: it is about Faust, not Gretchen; it is about character transmutation, not militant gendering. Interdisciplinary study presupposes a dialogue between disciplines, not domination of one over the others. And this dialogue I fail to register in Kramer's reading of *A Faust Symphony*.

Table I

	Liszt's intersection with the Faust theme
1830	Berlioz introduces him to Goethe's *Faust*
1830s	becomes friend with Gérard de Nerval, French translator of Goethe's Faust
1840s	early sketches on a Faust project
1848	settles in Weimar as *Kapellemeister* extraordinary
1849	conducts excerpts from Schumann's *Szenen aus Faust*
1850	Gérard de Nerval proposes to Liszt a Faust opera
1852	invites Berlioz to conduct his *La Damnation de Faust* in Weimar; conducts Wagner's *Faust-Ouvertüre* and Spohr's *Faust*
1854	August-October, George Henry Lewes sojourn to Weimar for writing Goethe's biography; first version of the *Faust Symphony*
1856-61	[*Two Episodes from Lenau's Faust*] first *Mephisto Waltz*
1857	first (semi-formal) performance; adds "Chorus Mysticus"
1861	second performance of *Faust Symphony* (final version); piano arrangement of Gounod's "Valse de l'opéra *Faust*"
1878-79	second *Mephisto Waltz*
1880	adds a coda to "Gretchen" movement
1883	third *Mephisto Waltz*; *Mephisto Polka*
1885	fourth *Mephisto Waltz*

Notes

1 Richard Kaplan, "Sonata Form in the Orchestral Works of Liszt: The Revolutionary Reconsidered," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 8 (1984-85), 142. This, in spite the fact that the Liszt bibliography exceeds 10,000 titles: Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 127.

2 Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848-1861* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 300.

3 About Liszt's anticipation of many 20th-century musical developments see Nicholas Cook, "Liszt-100 Years on," *The Musical Times* 127 (1986), 372.

4 See Paul Merrick, *Revolution and Religion in the Music of Liszt* (Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); also, Larry R. Todd, "The 'Unwelcome Guest' Regaled: Franz Liszt and the Augmented Triad," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 12 (1988), 94.

5 Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 217; and Walker, *The Weimar Years*, 22.

6 Walker, *The Weimar Years*, 337.

7 Cook, "Liszt;" Walker, *The Weimar Years*, 15.

8 For example, a substantial portion of his keyboard oeuvre-the repertory of paraphrases-has been poorly examined because of the introduction of the authenticity criterion: Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 315. Again, his rhapsodies were in disrepute with musicologists for a long time: Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 341.

9 Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 189, and *The Weimar Years*, 12-14.

10 Humphrey Searle, "The Orchestral Works," in *Franz Liszt: The Man and His Music*, ed. by Alan Walker (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1970), 304; Humphrey Searle, *The Music of Liszt* (New York: Dover, 1966; 2nd rev.), 77-78; Constantin Floros, "Die Faust-Symphonie von Franz Liszt: Eine semantische Analyse," Musik-Konzepte 12 (März 1980), 47.

11 Pseudonym of Nikolaus Franz Niembsch von Strehlenau (1802-1850). William E. Grim, "Mephisto Waltz: Franz Liszt and Nikolaus Lenau," in *idem, The Faust Legend in Music and Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 1.

12 Grim, *Faust*, 1, 5-6.

13 Grim, *Faust*, 1, 2-3.

14 Perhaps Liszt took it from Wagner, who, in elaborating his homonymous overture in 1853 entitled it *Eine Faust Ouvertüre*; Dorothea Redepenning, *Franz Liszt: Faust-Symphonie* (München: Fink, 1988), 9-10.

15 Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 380, 427, 440, 442.

16 Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 61, 62, 117.

17 Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 269. About dualities in his life and work, see Bela Bartók, "Liszt's Music and Today's Public," in *Bela Bartók Essays*, ed. by Benjamin Suchoff (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 451-52.

18 Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 151.

19 Such as the early death of his father to whom he was very much attached: Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 40.

20 Ironically, many of his contemporaries saw him as a Mephistopheles. Painter Ary Scheffer (1795-1858) modelled after him the Devil in his *La Tentation du Christ* : Pauline Pocknell, "Clandestine Portraits: Liszt in the Art of His Age," in *New Light on Liszt and His Music: Essays in Honor of Alan Walker's 65th Birthday*, ed. Michael Saffle and James Deaville (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1997), 129-30.

21 See his letter of 10 July 1857 to Richard Wagner: *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters*, trans. and ed. by Adrian Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 438.

22 See Rey M. Longyear and Kate R. Covington, "Tonal and Harmonic Structures in Liszt's Faust Symphony," *Studia Musicologica* 28 (1986): 153-71; and Kaplan, "Sonata Form," 142-52.

23 See Fred Ritzel, "Materialdenken bei Liszt: Eine Untersuchung des 'Zwölfonthemas' der Faust-Symphonie," *Die Musikforschung* 20 (1967), 289-94; Klaus Wolfgang Niemöller, "Zur nicht-tonalen Thema-Struktur von Liszts Faust-Symphonie," *Die Musikforschung* 22 (1969), 69-72; and David Brown, "The Introduction to Liszt's *Faust Symphony* with a Postscript on the B minor Sonata," *The Music Review* 49 (1988), 267-71.

24 Vernon Harrison, "Liszt's Faust Symphony: A Psychological Interpretation," *The Liszt Society Journal* 4 (1979), 2-5. The proverbial duality in Liszt's life and work may well warrant a Jungian approach: for a similar reading of his piano sonata, see David Wilde, "Liszt's Sonata: Some Jungian Reflections," in *New Light on Liszt*, 197-224. The first part of Wilde's article (198-205) offers a summary of the main Jungian concepts.

25 Merrick, *Revolution and Religion*, 273.

26 Lawrence Kramer, "Liszt, Goethe, and the Discourse of Gender," in *idem, Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 102-34.

27 It is interesting to note that, writing in 1848, Liszt was perceiving Gretchen as foreign to any complexity: Floros, "Faust-Symphonie," 74-75.

28 See Susan McClary, *George Bizet: Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 54, 56, 57, 75-76.

29 Harrison, "Faust Symphony," 4.

30 Searle, *The Music of Liszt*, 79.

31 Merrick, *Revolution and Religion*, 297.

32 Merrick, *Revolution and Religion*, 297.

33 Merrick accepts the work as "a self-portrait in music carried out in a most complete and unrestrained manner," *Revolution and Religion*, 148.

34 Certain comments on Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* excepted.

35 This was also Liszt's view in 1856, as he confessed to Wagner: "Since, several years ago, I took the serious decision to devote myself to my artistic career, I have no longer been able to count on additional money from the music publishers. My symphonic poems...bring me in not a ha'penny...My Mass and my Faust Symphony are likewise quite *unprofitable* works...," Williams, *Letters*, 402.

Contributors to this Issue

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