

A Critical Inferno? Hoplit, Hanslick and Liszt's *Dante Symphony*

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'Wie ist in der Musik beseelte Form von leerer Form wissenschaftlich zu unterscheiden?'¹

Introduction

In 1881, Eduard Hanslick, one of the most influential music critics of the nineteenth century, published a review of a performance of Liszt's *Dante Symphony* (*Eine Symphonie zu Dantes Divina commedia*) played at Vienna's Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde on 14 April, the eve of Good Friday.² Although he professed to be an 'admirer of Liszt', Hanslick admitted at the outset that he was 'not a fan of his compositions, least of all his symphonic poems'. Having often given his opinion in detail on those works in the *Neue Freie Presse*, Hanslick promised brevity on this occasion, asserting that 'Liszt wishes to compose with poetic elements rather than musical ones'.

There is a deep genesis to Hanslick's criticism of Liszt's compositions, one that goes back some thirty years to the controversy surrounding progress in music and musical aesthetics that took place in the Austro-German musical press between the so-called 'New Germans' and the 'formalists' in the 1850s. This controversy was bound up not only with music, but with the philosophical positions the various parties held. The debate was concerned with issues addressed in Hanslick's monograph *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, first published in 1854,³ and with opinions expressed by Liszt in a series of three review articles on programme music published contemporaneously in the

¹ 'How is form imbued with meaning to be differentiated philosophically from empty form?' Eduard Hanslick, *Aus meinem Leben*, ed. Peter Wapnewski (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1987), 150. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Seminar in Musicology at Queen's University, Belfast, in March 2008. I am grateful to Aidan Thomson, Jan Smaczny and Piers Hellawell for their thoughtful feedback on that occasion, and to Peter Tuite who responded to a draft of this text.

² Eduard Hanslick, 'Concerte', *Neue Freie Presse*, 15 April 1881, 1–3.

³ Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen: Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Leipzig: Rudolph Weigel, 1854). Modern edition: ed. Dietmar Strauß, 2 vols (Mainz: Schott, 1990).

Neue Zeitschrift für Musik.⁴ The controversy also featured several other personalities. In 1858 Liszt employed the critic Richard Pohl to write an introductory essay for the *Dante Symphony* which was included in the earliest publication of Liszt's score. Pohl, who wrote under the pseudonym 'Hoplit', was one of Liszt's most controversial apologists and a protégé of Franz Brendel. Brendel, in turn, was Schumann's successor as the editor of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, a journalist and critic who was a staunch champion of Wagner, Berlioz and Liszt, the group of composers he inaugurated as the 'New German School' in 1859. Brendel viewed music as a product of historical and cultural developments and as a manifestation of the unfolding Hegelian *Weltgeist*.

Excerpts of Pohl's essay on the *Dante Symphony* were in the programme notes that Hanslick received that April evening in 1881 when he attended the Vienna performance. These passages brought together once again in Hanslick's mind the issues and personalities involved in the controversy of the 1850s, recalling for him a critical inferno at a juncture when those journalistic battles of the musical press were otherwise largely forgotten. The review that Hanslick penned that evening can therefore be understood as a critique not only of Liszt's composition but also of the aesthetics that Pohl and the Brendel School used to promote Liszt's work. Given the critical and chronological distance of Hanslick's 1881 review of the *Dante Symphony* to the controversy of the 1850s, his comments at this time attain a greater impartiality than his earlier writings on Liszt, and are particularly interesting for indicating what Hanslick considered to have been the salient and lasting issues in this debate.

Focussing on Hoplit's essay and Hanslick's review, this article will examine the issues and personalities involved in this episode that spans a thirty-year period. In order to appreciate Hanslick's position in the 1881 review, we will revisit his monograph on aesthetics and his earlier writings on programme music. In so doing, I argue that, despite the polemical battles, these groups shared much common ground in their view of music history and in their approach to programme music.

⁴ Franz Liszt, 'Robert Schumann I', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 42/13 (23 March 1855), 133–7; 'Robert Schumann II', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 42/14 (30 March 1855), 145–53, and 42/15 (6 April 1855), 157–65; 'Robert Schumann III', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 42/17 (20 April 1855), 177–82, and 42/18 (27 April), 189–96; 'Marx und die Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 42/20 (11 May 1855), 213–21, and 42/21 (18 May 1855), 225–30; 'Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 43/3 (13 July 1855) 25–32, 43/4 (20 July 1855), 37–46, 43/5 (27 July 1855), 49–55, 43/8 (17 August 1855), 77–84, and 43/9 (24 August 1855), 89–97.

The battle of musical poetics in the 1850s: Liszt and programme music

As they were originally conceived, the aesthetics of Hanslick and Liszt were entirely independent of one another. Liszt's philosophy supporting his programmatic symphonic output, which he began to sketch in a draft of the essay 'Berlioz and his Harold Symphony' in 1854, was in place before he was aware of Hanslick's monograph. Similarly, the first edition (1854) of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* contains no mention of Liszt. At this time Hanslick had not heard any of Liszt's orchestral works, and he was not yet familiar with Liszt's writings on programme music. Within months, however, Hanslick and Liszt, and their respective outputs, were irrevocably cast together.

As the debate unfolded, each side of the dispute tried to deny the other the organic qualities of its music and the right of their adversary to the spiritual in music. The chronology is as follows:

- 1854: Publication of Hanslick's monograph.
- 1855: Publication of Liszt's review articles.
- March 1857: Hanslick's review of Liszt's Symphonic Poems.⁵
- 10 April 1857: Publication of Wagner's 'Open Letter on Liszt's Symphonic Poems', written to Marie Pauline Sayn-Wittgenstein on 15 February 1857.⁶
- September 1857: Brendel's review of Liszt's Symphonic Poems.⁷
- Autumn 1857: Draeseke's review of Liszt's symphonic poems.⁸
- 1858: Publication of the second edition of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (Leipzig: Rudolph Weigel, 1858) in which Hanslick criticizes Liszt's conception of programme music and his *Faust Symphony*.

⁵ Eduard Hanslick, "'Les préludes.'" Symphonische Dichtungen für großes Orchester von Franz Liszt', in Eduard Hanslick, *Sämtliche Schriften: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Dietmar Strauß (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2002), vol. I/4, 47–53.

⁶ Richard Wagner, 'Über Franz Liszts Symphonische Dichtungen', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (10 April 1857), 157–63.

⁷ Franz Brendel, 'Franz Liszt's neueste Werke und die gegenwärtige Parteistellung', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (18 September 1857), 121–4; (25 September 1875), 129–33.

⁸ Felix Draeseke, 'Franz Liszts neun symphonische Dichtungen. Zweiter Artikel', in *Anregungen für Kunst, Leben und Wissenschaft*, vol. 2/6 (Leipzig, 1857), reprinted in Felix Draeseke, *Schriften 1855–1861* (Bad Honnef: Gudrun Schroeder Verlag, 1987). This text is translated by Susan Hohl, with an introduction by James Deaville, as 'Defending Liszt: Felix Draeseke on the Symphonic Poems', in Christopher Gibbs and Dana Gooley (eds), *Franz Liszt and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 485–516.

In 1855, by which time he had read Hanslick's monograph, Liszt made a concerted effort to promote his conception of programme music in a series of three review articles published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*: 'Robert Schumann', 'Marx: Die Musik im neunzehnten Jahrhundert' and the final version of 'Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie'.⁹ These articles do not directly address Hanslick, yet a number of passages refer to points brought up in Hanslick's monograph. Liszt disputed the legitimacy of 'scientific aesthetics' and the formalist imitation of outdated forms by 'specifically musical' composers, arguing that:

Unusual treatment of form is not the supreme unpardonable error of which Berlioz is accused; his opponents will indeed concede, perhaps, that he has done art a service in discovering new inflections. What they will never forgive is that form has for him an importance subordinate to idea, that he does not, as they do, cultivate form for form's sake; they will never forgive him for being a thinker and a poet.¹⁰

Liszt's departure from his usual narrative style and his more scholarly approach to writing this article—with extended quotations from aestheticians such as Hegel—support the position that he was responding to Hanslick.¹¹

Liszt's advocacy of programme music expounded in these three articles had two main aims: to highlight the indebtedness of programme music to musical styles of the past, and to extol the organic qualities of the music.¹² Following the emancipation of pure instrumental music in the early nineteenth century, audiences learnt to appreciate symphonic music as the embodiment of the modern ideal. It was now Liszt's task to convince these same audiences that they needed programmes to guide their musical understanding. Liszt, in keeping with Brendel's notion of music history, capitalized on the metaphysical concept of musical poetics that pervaded discussion of music in the first half of the nineteenth century. Consistent with Hermann Christian Weisse's and Brendel's view of music history, he considered instrumental music to be 'purely poetic precisely because it lacked a definite subject, object, and purpose, an absence that let

⁹ As cited in note 4.

¹⁰ Liszt, 'Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie', as translated in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History*, revised edition, ed. Leo Treitler and Ruth Solie (New York: Norton, 1998), 1158–74: 1172.

¹¹ James Deaville, 'The Controversy Surrounding Liszt's Conception of Programme Music', in Jim Samson and Bennett Zon (eds), *Nineteenth-Century Music: Selected Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 98–124: 109.

¹² For further discussion see Deaville, 'The Controversy Surrounding Liszt's Conception of Programme Music'.

the music speak out by itself'.¹³ As Vera Micznik aptly notes, 'by exploiting the ambiguities inherent in the multiple meanings of the word "poetic", Liszt fused the old meaning (instrumental music that expresses ideas on its own) with the new meaning he was about to promote: music that needs a "poetic" in order to communicate the composer's thoughts more precisely'.¹⁴ To this effect, Liszt wrote:

The program asks only acknowledgement for the possibility of precise definition of the psychological moment which prompts the composer to create his work and of the thought to which he gives outward form ... The specifically musical symphonist carries his listeners with him into ideal regions, whose shaping and ornamenting he relinquishes to their individual imaginations; in such cases it is extremely dangerous to wish to impose on one's neighbour the same scenes or successions of ideas into which our imagination feels itself transported. The painter-symphonist, however, setting himself the task of reproducing with equal clarity a picture clearly present in his mind, or developing a series of emotional states which are unequivocally and definitely latent in his consciousness—why may he not, through a program, strive to make himself fully intelligible?¹⁵

Hanslick and programme music in the context of his contemporaries

It is instructive to think of Hanslick's judgement of programme music in three main categories.¹⁶ The first concerns the suitability of a particular text for musical setting. The second concerns the degree to which a work seeks to be musically comprehensible, as opposed to seeking to be understood in terms of its poetic counterpart. The third concerns the quality of the music itself. In most instances, Hanslick's main objection to programme music is in relation to category two, that it has a tendency to subordinate the musical construction to a poetic counterpart. He makes a distinction between works that seek to be understood in terms of their poetic programmes, and

¹³ Vera Micznik, 'The Absolute Limitations of Programme Music: The Case of Liszt's "Die Ideale"', *Music and Letters*, 80/2 (May 1999), 207–40: 210. On the relationship between the musical aesthetics of Hermann Christian Weisse, Franz Brendel, and Richard Pohl, see Nicole Grimes, 'In Search of Absolute Inwardness and Spiritual Subjectivity? The Historical and Ideological Context of Schumann's "Neue Bahnen"', *International Review for the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 39/2 (2008), 139–63.

¹⁴ Micznik, 210.

¹⁵ Liszt, 'Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie', as translated in Strunk, 1168–9.

¹⁶ This categorization is based on a survey of a broad range of Hanslick's writings on programme music by composers including Beethoven, Dvořák, Liszt, Rimsky-Korsakov and Richard Strauss, amongst others. See, for instance, Hanslick, 'Brahms B-dur-Concert.—Scheherezade von Rimski-Korsakow.—Broschüre von F. Weingartner', in *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts, 1895-1899: Musikalische Kritiken und Schilderungen* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1899), 286–95; and Hanslick, 'Brahms und Dvořák', in *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts*, 308–13.

works that, while they may have a suggestive title or descriptive heading, carry their meaning within the music itself.

In his 1857 review of Liszt's symphonic poems, Hanslick considers Liszt's work to be flawed in all three of the above categories. He differentiates between texts that he considers to be suitable or not suitable for musical setting:

Assuming descriptive music to be justifiable at all, there is still a great difference between the subjects chosen for it. In *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*, in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the programme of the 'Pastoral' Symphony and similar pieces, no one will misunderstand the spontaneity of the musical allusion. But a *Mazeppa* is absolutely anti-musical; a *Prometheus* is so far removed from every musical reference that just to associate such titles with symphonies can only create the impression of a braggadocio.¹⁷

The opposition to what Hanslick refers to as an 'abuse of programme music',¹⁸ that is, the objection to compositions that seek to be understood in terms of their extra-musical, rather than their musical, content, is not particular to Hanslick. It is a view that held great currency in mid- to late-nineteenth-century musical discourse, with traces of it showing up in the writings of the advocates of the *Neudeutsche Schule*. A case in point is August Wilhelm Ambros's 1856 text, *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie: Eine Studie zur Aesthetik der Tonkunst*.¹⁹ This text was originally conceived as a rebuke of Hanslick's 1854 monograph, the irony being, however, that for the most part it echoes Hanslick's claims. As Thomas Grey has argued, 'although [Ambros] attempts to address Hanslick's ideas about the relation of musical form and content, it is clear that Ambros's own thought is itself too deeply rooted in an aesthetic of "feelings" to

¹⁷ 'Die Berechtigung der descriptiven Musik überhaupt angenommen, ist doch wieder ein großer Unterschied zwischen den Stoffen, welche man ihr zumuthet. In der "Meeresstille und glücklichen Fahrt," im "Sommernachtstraum," im Programm der Pastoralsymphonie u. dgl. wird niemand die Ungezwungenheit der musikalischen Anspielung verkennen, ein Mazeppa aber ist geradezu wider-musikalisch; Charaktere, wie Prometheus, sind jeder musikalischen Beziehung so fern, daß solche Ueberschriften von Symphonien nur den Eindruck einer prahlhaften Spielerei machen können.' Eduard Hanslick, *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. I/3, 49; translated in Eduard Hanslick, *Vienna's Golden Years of Music*, ed. Henry Pleasants (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), 46–7. Hanslick is equally critical of Beethoven's setting of the Prometheus legend: see his *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuosen der letzten fünfzehn Jahre, 1870–1885: Kritiken* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1886), 220–21.

¹⁸ 'Mißbrauch der Programm-Musik'. Hanslick uses this turn of phrase in the review 'Brahms B-dur Concert. — Scheherezade von Rimski-Korsakow. — Broschüre von F. Weingartner', as note 16, 286–95.

¹⁹ Ambros, *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie: Eine Studie zur Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Prague: Mercy, 1856).

provide an adequate challenge'.²⁰ Here, in words that could quite easily be mistaken for those of Hanslick, and drawing on the ubiquitous alternative of Mendelssohn in these discussions, Ambros claims that:

If *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt* must be recognized in a similar manner as an exact translation of the poem, there is a great difference nonetheless, in that this composition, completely apart from Goethe's poem, is explainable and intelligible in and of itself, and carries within itself its aesthetic centre of gravity, the conditions of its existence. [Emphasis in original.] While with [Berlioz's] *Romeo and Juliet* this centre of gravity lies outside the composition—namely in Shakespeare's dramas.²¹

Wagner's opinion of Berlioz as expressed in his 'pseudo-apologia'²² for Liszt's symphonic poems is in keeping with the views of Hanslick and Ambros.²³ He, too, contrasts the poetic music of Berlioz and Liszt. This essay constituted a thank-you note from Wagner to Liszt for the considerable aid Liszt had given him both in support of his own compositions and because Liszt had helped him clarify his own ideas about programme music.²⁴ This perhaps goes some way toward explaining why Berlioz is given such a bad press by comparison with the more tolerant discussion of Liszt.²⁵

²⁰ Thomas Grey, *Richard Wagner and the Aesthetics of Musical Form in the Mid-19th Century* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1988), 189.

²¹ 'Wenn *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt* als eine ähnliche genaue Uebersetzung des Dichterwortes erkannt werden muß, so ist der große Unterschied dabei, daß dieses Tonwerk, auch völlig abgesehen vom Göth'schen Gedichte, aus und durch sich selbst erklärbar und verständlich ist, und seinen ästhetischen Schwerpunkt, die Bedingungen seiner Existenz in sich selbst trägt, während bei *Romeo und Juliette* dieser Schwerpunkt außerhalb des Tonwerkes—nämlich im Shakespearischen Drama liegt.' Ambros, *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie*, second edition (Leipzig: Heinrich Matthes, 1872), 171.

²² Thomas Grey's description of Wagner's open letter of 1857. See Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 311.

²³ Wagner's 1857 essay on Liszt's symphonic poems followed his discovery of Schopenhauer in 1854. As Bryan Magee observes, after Wagner's discovery of Schopenhauer the notion that the arts themselves had equal potential was no more than an ideology. His 1857 essay on Liszt was a public repudiation of his former conception of what constituted a synthesis of the arts. See Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2001), especially Chapter Ten, section IV.

²⁴ Keith T. Johns and Michael Saffle, *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt* (Stuyvesant NY: Pendragon Press, 1997), 106.

²⁵ A number of scholars take a more guarded view of Wagner's motivation in writing this open letter. Thomas Grey makes the case that due to Wagner's belief that the future of music did not reside in the instrumental realm, his position on the symphonic poems is equivocally supportive. He suggests that this review can be read as a veiled critique of Liszt, arguing that Wagner admits that Liszt's symphonic poems 'stimulated his consciousness of the "problem" of forms and the motives [justifications] behind them ... yet says nothing about their having solved it'. See Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose*, 1–4 and 306–14, particularly 310.

Defending the latter against accusations of belittling music by bringing it into association with other arts, Wagner writes:

Music can never, and in no possible alliance, cease to be the redeeming art. It is of her nature, that what all the other arts but hint at, through her and in her becomes the most undoubtable of certainties, the most direct and definite of truths.²⁶

Wagner considers Berlioz's compositions to 'reduce "pure, absolute music" to the material aims of description or narration'.²⁷ Unlike Hanslick, Wagner does not object to the subjects Liszt chose for his symphonic poems. He does object, however, to the manner in which Berlioz's compositions seek to be understood in terms of their extra-musical rather than their musical content. In this sense Wagner can be understood to express the same reservations as Hanslick and a host of other mid-century critics: that such works sacrifice their autonomous musical intelligibility. The disparity of views between Hanslick and Wagner on programme music (or to put it another way, on how far a composition can turn away from 'pure instrumental music') when considered in this light, is one of degree, rather than the two holding opposing positions. Standing on this same common ground is Franz Brendel, who asserted in his 1856 article 'Programm Musik':

The composition must always leave a satisfactory impression, apart from its programme ... However, the composition suddenly throws the listener into a completely heterogeneous condition if it is only intelligible through its *Phantasiebild* ... in such cases it goes beyond the boundaries of instrumental music ...²⁸

Where Hanslick diverges from his contemporary critical counterparts, then, is in the third category of his judgement of programme music: in considering Liszt's programmatic texts to compensate for a lack of quality in the music. He clarifies that the 'objection to be raised against Liszt is that he imposes a much bigger—and abusive—mission on the subjects of his symphonies; that is, either to fill the gap left by

²⁶ Wagner, 'Über Liszts Symphonische Dichtungen', this excerpt translated in Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848–1861* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 359.

²⁷ Grey, *Richard Wagner and the Aesthetics of Musical Form*, 138.

²⁸ 'Das Tonstück muß stets als solches, auch abgesehen von seinem Programm, einen befriedigenden Eindruck hinterlassen ... Wirft aber eine Composition unvermittelt den Hörer in ganz heterogenen Zuständen umher, die sich nur durch das zu Grunde liegende Phantasiebild erklären ... so ist die der Instrumentalmusik gesteckte Grenze überschritten ...'. Franz Brendel, 'Programm Musik', in *Anregungen für Kunst, Leben und Wissenschaft: unter Mitwirkung von Schriftstellern und Künstlern* (Leipzig: C. Merseburger, 1856), vol. 1, 82–104. The German is quoted in Deaville, 111–12. The translation is my own.

the absence of musical content ('Inhalt') or to justify the atrocities of such content as there is.'²⁹ It is worth noting that Hanslick uses the term *Inhalt* for the content of Liszt's music, and not *Gehalt*. This passage when read in German, therefore, in light of the different categories of content that Hanslick discusses in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, is even more caustic than when rendered in English. It is as though Hanslick does not even consider the possibility that Liszt's music has a spiritual content.³⁰

Liszt's *Dante* and Pohl's review

Having previously written nine symphonic poems and the first version of the *Faust Symphony*, Liszt embarked on the composition of the *Dante Symphony* in 1855. He had long nurtured ideas of setting Dante's *Divine Comedy* to music. The 'Dante Sonata' (*Après une lecture de Dante, Fantasia quasi Sonata*), for instance, was composed in 1837 and revised in 1849.³¹ In June 1855, he explained, when writing to Wagner (to whom the symphony is dedicated), that he planned to 'furnish a kind of commentary to [Dante's] work'. His intention was to compose three movements, each one corresponding to a section of Dante's text—'Inferno', 'Purgatorio', and 'Paradiso'—with 'the first [being] purely instrumental, the last with chorus'.³² Wagner's misgivings over 'whether anyone could ever adequately depict paradise in music'³³ seem to have

²⁹ 'Die Hauptbedingung wird immer bleiben, daß die Musik, allem Titel und Programm zutrotz, denen sie ihre Färbung leiht, doch immer auf ihren eigenen Gesetzen ruhe, spezifisch musikalisch bleibe, so daß sie auch ohne Programm einen in sich klaren selbständigen Eindruck mache. Dies nun ist die erste wichtige Einwendung, die man gegen Liszt erheben muß, daß er dem Sujet seiner Symphonien eine weit größere mißbräuchliche Mission auferlegt: nämlich den fehlenden musikalischen Inhalt entweder geradezu zu ersetzen oder dessen Atrocitäten zu rechtfertigen.' Hanslick, 'Les préludes', 49. I have slightly altered this translation from that given in Hanslick, ed. Henry Pleasants, *Vienna's Golden Years of Music*, 47.

³⁰ For a discussion of the terminology that Hanslick uses in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* and a consideration of how this can best be translated into English, see Geoffrey Payzant, *Hanslick on the Musically Beautiful: Sixteen Lectures on the Musical Aesthetics of Eduard Hanslick* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Cybereditions, 2002); Payzant's preface in Eduard Hanslick, ed. Geoffrey Payzant, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986); and Nicole Grimes, *Brahms's Critics: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Critical Reception of Johannes Brahms* (PhD diss., University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, 2008), Chapter 3.

³¹ For a discussion of Liszt's early interest in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, see Anna Harwell Celenza, 'Liszt, Italy, and the Republic of the Imagination', in Gibbs and Gooley, *Franz Liszt and His World*, 3–38: 28.

³² Liszt to Wagner, Weimar, 2 June 1855. *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, ed. W. Ashton Ellis (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 89.

³³ Reeves Shulstad, 'Liszt's Symphonic Poems and Symphonies', in Kenneth Hamilton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 206–22: 220.

influenced Liszt's decision instead to compose two main movements, *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, followed by a choral *Magnificat* at the end of the second movement.

The *Dante Symphony* bears witness to Liszt's considerable powers of tone-painting, depicting specific scenes from a literary work. At one time the composer cherished the idea of adding a visual dimension by linking his music to a diorama of scenes from Dante's *Divine Comedy* by the artist Giovanni Buonaventura Genelli, to be projected before the audience during performances.³⁴ This work explicitly conveys Liszt's ideas about the correspondence between music and programme. After selecting excerpts from Dante's poem, Liszt inserted them in various places in the score. The prescribed programmatic elements are as follows:

Location in the score	Original text given in the score	Translation
Introduction, bars 1–17	Per me si va ne la città dolente per me si va ne l'eterno dolore per me si va tra la perduta gente Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'entrate!	<i>Through me you enter the city of sorrow Through me you pass to eternal pain Through me you reach the people who are lost All hope abandon, ye who enter here!</i>
Bar 294, Francesca's words	Nessum maggior dolore Che ricordarsi del tempo felice Nella miseria.	<i>There is no greater grief than to recall a time of happiness when in misery.</i>
Magnificat	Magnificat anima mea Dominum et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salvatore meo. Hosanna, Halleluja.	<i>My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Hosanna, Hallelujah.</i>

With this prescriptive method, Liszt explicitly indicates the correspondence between programmatic ideas and the respective sections of the music.

Liszt went to great lengths in this instance to ensure that the connection between programme and music was overtly made by employing the services of Pohl to write an explanatory essay to be included in the publication of the score. Residing in Weimar as the 'critic in residence',³⁵ Pohl was intimately familiar with Liszt's compositions and from 1854 he sent detailed reports about Liszt's activities in Weimar to Brendel who

³⁴ Kenneth Hamilton, 'Liszt', in D. Kern Holoman (ed.), *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony* (London and New York: Schirmer, 1999), 142–62.

³⁵ The term is borrowed from Walker, 364.

published them in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* under Pohl's pseudonym 'Hoplit'.³⁶ These articles and reports were written with Liszt's full knowledge and approval, as was his essay on the *Dante Symphony*.³⁷

Pohl's essay makes explicit Liszt's intention to have the symphony perceived in connection with specific scenes from Dante's epic. Pohl elucidates these scenes, provides further quotations from Dante and a prescriptive discussion of the music. On a number of occasions he goes beyond Liszt's programme and elaborates on the philosophical and religious aspects of the correspondence between programme and music. The essay can be understood as an analogous musical narration for Liszt's work. The composer wanted these ideas to be communicated to the listener, to guide their response to the music to a greater extent than was possible in his own programme.

The essay is written in the philosophical and scholarly style that was characteristic of the *Neue Zeitschrift* by the 1850s. Pohl's concentration on style and on 'objective expression' reveals a great deal about the thinking that he represents; his discourse is informed by Brendel's dialectical notion of the subjective and objective elements in art and music. He first addresses the suitability of Dante's text, which he considers to belong among 'the most exalted creations of the human spirit', as a source of inspiration for artists of all kinds.³⁸ When he wrote this poem, Pohl argues, Dante 'anticipated that his work would be a source of enthusiasm for the coming centuries, and called it a plenum of meanings (polysensum)'. For this reason, every composer is fully entitled to understand this 'all-embracing poetry of multifaceted extremes from their

³⁶ Richard Pohl's pseudonym 'Hoplit' (a heavily armed foot soldier in ancient Greece) gives some indication of the confrontational nature of much of his output. Such confrontational writings were not unusual in the musical press of the day. Pohl's pseudonym was conceived in contrast to Hans von Bülow's pseudonym, 'Peltast' (a species of troops between heavy-armed and light-armed, furnished with a pelta (or light shield) and short spear or javelin, who engaged first from longer ranges). See, for instance, 'Die Opposition in Süddeutschland', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 39/22 (25 November 1853), 229–30; 23 (2 December), 240–3; 24 (9 December), 252–5; 25 (16 December), 265–6; and 26 (23 December), 276–9. Hoplit, however, did not engage from long ranges, but rather launched a number of direct attacks on Hanslick in the 1850s, an example of which is his essay 'Modern Programme Music', which ridiculed what he perceived to be Hanslick's theoretical picture of music as a thing in itself.

³⁷ Walker, 365.

³⁸ 'Die Divina Comedia gehört zu den erhabensten Schöpfungen des menschlichen Geistes, und eine wechselnden Lauf der Zeiten sich immer erneuernde Bewunderung stellt dieses in seiner Art einzige Dichterwerk den größten aller Zeiten und Völker unbestritten zur Seite.' Richard Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia" Prag 1858', in *Gesammelte Schriften von Musik und Musiker* (Leipzig: B. Schlicke, 1883), 238–46: 238.

own particular point of view'. He notes that its 'wonderful, malleable descriptions have inspired great artists of all inclinations', mentioning, among others, Genelli, Delacroix and Flaxmann.³⁹

Yet, Pohl did not believe that composers ought to be restricted to mere tone painting, restricted to bringing the form and colour to objective expression as these artists have done. Rather, the composer absorbs into his art 'that world of the most secret and deepest feelings that only reveals the spirit of the people in tones'.⁴⁰ Defending Liszt's decision to depict only specific scenes from the poem, he ventures that instead of drawing on 'the material moment of Dante's epic', the composer ought, at most, to hint at only a few of these, 'in order not to reproduce an arbitrary painting of hell, purgatory, or heaven, but rather to reproduce Dante's perception (*Dantesche Auffassung*)'.⁴¹ In undertaking to reflect such a monumental subject, he explains that Liszt had to 'distil from the dramatic and philosophical parts that serve the structure of Dante's epic', and to 'seize in his view only the ethical, aesthetic thoughts or ideas that form the individual scaffolding' of the work.⁴² Conscious of the charges of ahistoricism and superficiality that Liszt faced from the opposition, Pohl hastened to emphasize the relationship of the *Dante Symphony* to the work of past masters. He therefore places Liszt among the ranks of Mozart and Gluck, composers who had 'painted the horrors of hell for us ... in dramatic music', and, possibly responding to

³⁹ 'Der florentinische Meister, vorausahnend, daß sein Werk eine Quelle der Begeisterung für kommende Jahrhunderte sein würde, nannte es selbst ein vielsinniges (polysensum). In diesem mannigfaltigen Reichtum seiner Schöpfung ruht die volle Berechtigung für jeden Künstler, diese in sich so verschiedenartige Gegensätze einschließende Dichtung aus seinem eigentümlichen Standpunkt aufzufassen. Deshalb haben seine so wunderbar plastischen Schilderungen die größten Maler aller Richtungen wie Carstens, Koch, Genelli, Cornelius, Ary, Scheffer, Eugene Delacroix, Flaxmann u.a. zu Meisterwerken inspiriert.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 238.

⁴⁰ 'Es konnte in seine Kunst nur das aufnehmen, was weder das Wort mit seiner konkreten Bestimmtheit zu erreichen, noch Form und Farbe zur gegenständlichen Versinnlichung zu springen vermochten: jene Welt der geheimnisvollsten und tiefsten Gefühle, die nur in Tönen dem Menschengeste sich entschleiern.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 239.

⁴¹ 'Um dieselben aber in ihrer Tonalität zu erfassen, durfte er sich nicht an die materiellen Momente des Danteschen Epos anlehnen: höchstens konnte er einige wenige von ihnen andeuten, um kein beliebiges willkürliches Gemälde von Hölle, Fegefeuer und Himmel, sondern die Dantesche Auffassung derselben zu reproduzieren.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 239.

⁴² 'Als Liszt einen so gigantischen Vorwurf in dem Bereich der Musik widerzuspiegeln unternahm, mußte er von den dramatischen und philosophischen Teilen abstrahieren, die dem Gebäude des Dante-Epos selbst, wie Skulptur der Architektur, dienen, und nur den ethisch-ästhetischen Gedanken, der das eigentliche Gerüste bildet, ins Auge fassen.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 239.

Hanslick's 1854 text, he argues that 'pain, longing and hope were always the main motives of lyrical music; descriptions of heavenly choirs always form one of the main tasks of religious music'.⁴³

Pohl conveys the changes Liszt made to the organization of Dante's epic as being necessary for the musical logic of his work, but also sees them acting in the interest of the religious interpretation of the work: he regards Liszt's combination of purgatory and heaven in the second movement to be an allegory for the 'process of purification and transfiguration that every soul undergoes' for its own sake in purgatory, a process whereby 'the divine presence is brought nearer gradually and continuously until it is freed of every troubling tarnish and arrives at its contemplation.'⁴⁴ Liszt does not attempt an actual depiction of heaven, and does not in any way describe God or paradise. Following Wagner's advice, he chose to end the work in a mood of pensive anticipation and avoided portraying the bliss of heaven. Instead, he merely contemplates it. The words of the *Magnificat*, a canticle sung at Vespers, were supposedly originally sung by Mary the Mother of Christ to her Lord and Creator as a sign of eternal praise and thanks. Pohl considers those who are inclined to follow the feelings of the Blessed Virgin—the souls who have been transfigured in purgatory—to be to some extent complicit in her innocence.⁴⁵

Throughout the essay, Pohl vividly describes what he understands Liszt is representing in the music. His depiction of the first movement outlines the programmatic elements and attempts to communicate to the audience how these ideas are manifest in the music. The resulting discussion of purgatory and heaven is far richer than one would expect from the literary excerpts Liszt included in the score. Of the fugue in the second movement, Pohl writes:

⁴³ 'In der dramatischen Musik malten uns Gluck, Mozart u. a. die Schrecken der Hölle; Schmerz, Sehnsucht und Hoffnung waren von jeher Hauptmotiv der lyrischen Musik; Schilderungen himmlischer Chöre bildeten immer eine der Hauptaufgaben der religiösen Musik.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 239.

⁴⁴ 'Durch den Läuterungs- und Verklärungsprozeß, den jede Seele an und für sich im Fegefeuer durchmacht, wird sie der göttlichen Gegenwart allmählich, ununterbrochen näher gebracht, bis sie vollständig von jedem sie trübenden Makel befreit, zu deren Anschauung gelangt.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 240.

⁴⁵ 'Als geweihtesten Ausdruck dieses höchsten Gefühls hat Liszt die Worte gewählt, mit welchen das reinste, einzig sündenlose menschliche Wesen, die in aller Ewigkeit zur Mutter Gottes erwählte zarte Jungfrau, ihrem Herrn und Schöpfer ein ewiges Lob- und Danklied sang. Indem es den Menschen verliehen ist, ihren gebenedeiten Empfindungen zu folgen, werden sie dadurch einigermaßen ihrer Unschuld teilhaftig.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 245.

The form of the fugue used here offers the most suitable framework for the incessant wanting and weighing of the continuous backward views, as for the forward feeling of hope. For the climax of the fugue section, the choral-voiced main motive directs itself powerfully forward, and soon thereafter is completely dissolved in unbroken, recurring lamentation of humility and contrition. Gradually, the heavy clouds of inexpressible suffering are lifted. The Catholic intonation of the Magnificat rings out quietly, redemption through prayer, announcing the 'release of the soul'. One feels that a fleeting repentance soars to eternal blessedness, and through the circles of purification is raised up to the peak of the mystical mountain, until we are raised to paradise.⁴⁶

For those attending one of Liszt's performances, most would not have had access to both the score and the programme at the same time. Therefore amateur members of the audience (who may not have had the opportunity to study the score with its accompanying guide beforehand) would most likely not have been able to locate exact coincidences between the programmatic and musical events. Pohl does very little to ensure an appreciation of the tension resulting from the interaction of the programme and the music. This lack of guidance in relation to the music is not in keeping with Liszt's aesthetic of programme music. We might argue with Vera Micznik that, for him, 'the poetical idea of the whole', which resulted from the music and the programme, is present *in the music*. The programme, as Liszt expressed it in his Berlioz essay, is simply 'guarding the listener from an arbitrary poetic interpretation of the work'.⁴⁷

If, as Liszt holds, the programme 'asks only acknowledgement for the possibility of precise definition of the psychological moment which prompts the composer to create his work and of the thought to which it gives outward form',⁴⁸ Liszt's inscriptions in the score are too specific and narrow on the one hand, and Dante's text too epic on the other, to indicate any precise definition to the listener. Hence the need for what

⁴⁶ 'Die hier angewandte Form der Fuge bietet den geeignetsten Rahmen für das unablässige Wollen und Wogen des fortwährend rückwärts schauenden, wie vorwärts hoffenden Gefühls. Zur Gipfelung des Fugensatzes richtet sich das zuvor choralartig angestimmte Hauptmotiv kräftig empor, um bald danach in Demut und Zerknirschung wiederkehrend von recitativischen Klagen unterbrochen, sich gänzlich aufzulösen. Allmählich lichten sich die schweren Wolken eines unsäglichen Leidens. Die katholische Intonation des Magnificat erklingt leise, die Erlösung durch das Gebet, das "Aufatmen der Seele" verkündend. Man fühlt, daß sich eine fliegende Buße zu ewiger Seligkeit hinaufschwingt und durch die Kreise der Reinigung aufwärts dem Gipfel des mystischen Berges, entgegenführt, der uns bis zum Paradiese emporhebt.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 245.

⁴⁷ Micznik, 215.

⁴⁸ Liszt, 'Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie', as translated in Strunk, 1168.

Hanslick refers to pejoratively in 1881 as 'the descriptive "guide"'.⁴⁹ Although Pohl goes to great lengths to describe the work, he never articulates where the listener is to identify the meaning of the work—the 'poetic idea'—in the absence of such a guide. In other words, he does not locate the meaning of the work in the music itself.

On a number of occasions, however, as with the explication of the fugue, given above, Pohl suggests that the 'poetic idea' results from the interaction and interchange between the sounding phenomenon and the programme.⁵⁰ He observes, for instance, that because Dante only suggests the moment of redemption in one episode of Purgatory, verses 21 and 22, it 'lay in the power of music to extend the description of these psychological processes to a universal view of purgatory'.⁵¹ This idea that the ultimate meaning of a programmatic work—the 'poetic idea'—lies neither in the music alone nor in the programme but constitutes a third element situated at their intersection was one that Pohl shared with Liszt and Brendel, and is one that has been expressed more recently by writers such as Carl Dahlhaus and Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht.⁵²

⁴⁹ 'Dieser beschreibende "Führer" ist durchaus keine überflüssige Zugabe, sondern leider eine sehr nothwendige, ohne deren vorhergehendes Studium der Hörer gar keine Idee hat, was er aus Liszts Symphonie heraushören soll.' Hanslick, 'Concerte', *Neue Freie Presse*, 15 April 1881, 2.

⁵⁰ Terminology borrowed from Carl Dahlhaus, 'Thesen über Programmmusik', first published in Carl Dahlhaus (ed.), *Beiträge zur musikalischen Hermeneutik* (Regensburg: G. Bosse, 1975), 187–204: 193. As cited in Micznik, 214.

⁵¹ 'Es lag in der Macht der Musik, die Schilderung dieses psychologischen Prozesses zu einer allgemeinen Auffassung des Purgatoriums zu erweitern, wenn auch Dante diesen Erlösungsmoment nur in einer Episode (21. und 22. Gesang) andeutete, ihm nicht erlaubten, bei dieser rein lyrischen Seite zu verbleiben.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 240.

⁵² See Dahlhaus, 'Thesen über Programmmusik', and Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, 'Symphonische Dichtung', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 39 (1982), 223–33. Dahlhaus, for instance, considers the 'content of the work' to form 'a third [poetic idea] which springs from the relation between the music and the programme ... The programme should not be misunderstood as deciphering the music, but, rather, together with the sounding process, is itself a cipher' (Dahlhaus, 'Thesen über Programmmusik', 189). Liszt's position is complicated by the fact that he was motivated by a desire to appeal to the widest possible audience, both in his orchestral output and his review articles. He invites the listener to share the inner making of his works. As a result his theory is replete with ambiguous and contradictory definitions. On the one hand he minimizes the importance of the programme as merely an acknowledgement of the composer's intention to share the precise definition with his listeners, thereby implying that the programme is secondary to pure music. On the other hand, by attempting to 'protect the listener from arbitrariness of poetic interpretation of his work' through the attachment of a programme which creates definite impressions, he demands a 'simultaneous bringing into play of feeling and thought'. See Micznik, 211–12.

If Pohl's account of Liszt's music at this point as a 'universal view of purgatory' lacks specificity, his description of what the composer was trying to express is more precise. Whereas he considers the absolute extremes of hell ('eternal and absolute agony') and heaven ('eternal and absolute bliss') to be apparent opposites, he argues that in the human soul they are visualized through 'infinite gradations and nuances'. 'All of the feelings of pain and fear that lie between the two extremes can be seen as the psychological movements belonging to human life with its well-known subjective conditions and impressions.'⁵³ Where poetry and art can only describe these extremes 'through analogous or similar sensuous pictures which appeal to our imagination', music stands alone in its capacity 'to depict the unique feelings dominant in purgatory as we are already sensitive to their sorrows and hopes'.⁵⁴ Here Pohl appeals to religious sensibility (perhaps Liszt's own religious sensibility) to clarify the meaning of Liszt's 'purgatory'. It is worth quoting Pohl at length:

The music needed only to lend a voice to the deep inextinguishable feeling of nostalgia that flows from the consciousness of our frailty, our powerlessness, our ardent, worshipping longing for the infinite. This feeling of nostalgia, which consists of regret and hope and which forms the basis of our religious disposition ... has embraced humanity since the beginning of time. In this respect one can say that symphonic music in its universal structure supplements religion, which serves worship, in that it gives content to abstract religious feeling. That is, the need which is announced in human hearts through all times and people, a purification in pleading to a good, heavenly power, to search in prayer to the highest nature: the eternal longing that turns away from the earthly, temporal, ephemeral, and envisages the good, beautiful and true in order to hope for its attainment. When, in earthly life, this eternal striving for the highest and purest is always disturbed and intersected by temptation and passion, it nevertheless remains the

⁵³ 'Die ewige und absolute Qual, die ewige und absolute Seligkeit sind zwei schroffe Gegensätze, die als objektive Begriffe uns gegenüber stehen, aber durch unendliche Abstufungen und Nuancen sich der menschlichen Seele vergegenwärtigen. Während diese beiden absoluten Extreme von Hölle und Himmel als übermenschliche Momente anzusehen sind, können hingehen alle die Gefühle des Schmerzes und der Freude, die dazwischen liegen, als dem menschlichen Leben angehörende psychologische Vorgänge, mit uns bekannten subjektiven Zuständen und Eindrücken identifiziert werden. Poesie und Kunst vermöchten Hölle und Himmel nur durch analoge oder ähnelnde sinnliche Bilder zu beschreiben, welche an unsere Einbildungskraft appellieren; um aber die im Purgatorium herrschenden gemischten Empfindungen wiederzugeben, bedarf man deren Hilfe viel weniger, da wir für ihre Leiden und Hoffnungen schon hier empfänglich sind.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 242–3.

⁵⁴ The original German is contained in the passage in the previous footnote.

continuous struggle of each noble soul. It is this impulse that in purgatory is no longer inhibited from thriving by restraining factors.⁵⁵

Beseelte Form oder leere Form? Hanslick on Liszt in 1881

The quotation given at the head of this article encapsulates an issue that preoccupied Hanslick throughout his lifetime, in his capacity as a writer on music aesthetics and as a music critic. This was the question of how to distinguish between form with a spiritual dimension and form that he perceived as lacking such a dimension. In his reviews of Liszt, Hanslick repeatedly addressed this issue and invariably consigned Liszt's works to the latter category. In his recent book, Markus Gärtner has inestimably enhanced our understanding of the nature of the controversy between Hanslick and Liszt: he clarifies exactly what it is that Hanslick found so atrocious in Liszt's music.⁵⁶ Whereas Hanslick extolled the 'universal' language of the instrumental music composed in the Viennese Classical idiom, he considered Liszt's music to amount to 'superfluous fillers'. Gärtner argues that the demand for originality was more important to Hanslick than the demand for symmetry. Hanslick took issue with the lack of development of Liszt's themes. He considered Liszt's thematic material to be deficient; accordingly, a developmental technique without material to develop remained nonsensical. With regard to harmony he considered Liszt to contribute only 'dissonant howling' whereas his use of form amounted to nothing but chaos. He

⁵⁵ 'Die Musik brauchte nur dem uns angeborenen, tiefen unauslöschlichen Wehmutsgefühl, das aus dem Bewußtsein unserer Gebrechlichkeit, unserer Ohnmacht, unserer glühenden andachtsvollen Sehnsucht nach dem Unendlichen quillt, eine Stimme zu verleihen. Dieses Wehmutsgefühl, das aus Reue und Hoffnung besteht und den Grundzug der religiösen Stimmung bildet ... hat dennoch von jeher die Menschen mit dem gemeinschaftlichen Bande der Religion umschlungen. In dieser Hinsicht kann man sagen, daß hierin die symphonische Musik in ihrer allgemeineren Fassung die religiöse, dem Kultus dienende, ergänzt, indem sie das abstrakt genommene Religionsgefühl zum Inhalt hat, d. h. das Bedürfnis, welches durch alle Zeiten und Völker sich im menschlichen Herzen kundgegeben, eine Läuterung im Flehen zu einer gütigen himmlischen Macht, im Gebet an ein höchstes Wesen zu suchen: das ewige Sehnen, welches sich von dem Irdischen, Zeitlichen, Vergänglichen abwendet und sich das ewig und absolut Gute, Schöne und Wahre vorstellt, um auf dessen Erlangen zu hoffen. Wenn im irdischen Leben dieses ewige Streben nach dem Höchsten und Reinsten durch Versuchungen und Leidenschaften stets gestört und gekreuzt ist, so bleibt es doch das permanente Ringen jeder edlen Seele. – Dieser Trieb ist es, welcher im Purgatorio, durch keine hemmenden Faktoren mehr unterdrückt, zu seiner vollsten Entfaltung gelangt.' Pohl, 'Liszts Symphonie zu Dantes "Divina Comedia"', 243.

⁵⁶ Markus Gärtner, *Eduard Hanslick Versus Franz Liszt: Aspekte einer grundlegenden Kontroverse* (Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Olms Verlag, 2005). For Gärtner's description of what Hanslick found so problematic in Liszt's music, see pp. 57–95 in particular.

objected to Liszt's overuse of brass and percussion, features of his orchestration that he associated with 'janissary' music.⁵⁷

That Hanslick was to remain intolerant of Liszt's music throughout his critical career, particularly of his symphonic poems, is substantiated in his review of the *Dante Symphony* published in April 1881. He considers this work to share the same mistaken aesthetic principle with Liszt's other *Symphonische Dichtungen*, namely that 'Liszt wishes to compose with poetic elements rather than musical ones; and that he offers us the interpretation of any one famous poem instead of a unified musical organism'.⁵⁸ Of all the poetic texts that Liszt set, Hanslick considers 'Hell and Purgatory to be the least musical' and the most unfavourable for music, and for this reason the *Dante Symphony* to be one of Liszt's most appalling contributions.⁵⁹ Hanslick deplores the 'two potent means' Liszt employs in his misguided endeavour 'to compel us to understand the poetic subject of his symphony'. The first of these is the explanatory introduction by Pohl which is written in the 'partly effusive, partly dry philosophical tone of the Brendel school' with 'its interpretation of dogma and opinions on the nature of purgatory or penalty'.⁶⁰ Unlike Pohl and Draeseke, Hanslick was impervious to Liszt's efforts to communicate moral and religious ideas to his audience through his music by various means. Moreover, it is likely that Pohl's overtly religious reading of Liszt's *Dante Symphony* would have been at odds with Hanslick's liberal *Weltanschauung* that he

⁵⁷ The word 'janissary' is derived from the Turkish *yeni* (new) and *çeri* (soldier or military force). Janissary music featured shawms, trumpets, fifes and a number of rhythmic instruments including cymbals, triangles, kettledrums, bass drums and the cagana. This exotic combination of percussion instruments was included in Western European military bands from the early nineteenth century, and was to become known as 'Turkish Music'. For further information on 'janissary' music, see Richard Burnett, *Company of Pianos* (Goudhurst, Kent: Finchcocks Press, 2004), 131.

⁵⁸ 'Dieses grundfalsche Princip besteht darin, daß Liszt mit poetischen Elementen componiren will, anstatt mit musikalischen; daß er statt eines einheitlichen musikalischen Organismus uns die Nachdichtung irgend eines berühmten Poems bietet, die um so bedenklicher wird, je getreuer sie sein will.' Hanslick, 'Concerte', *Neue Freie Presse*, 15 April 1881, 2.

⁵⁹ 'Von all den poetischen Stoffen, in deren Nachmusicirung Liszt's Symphonien bestehen ("Tasso", "Die Ideale", "Prometheus" u.) sind offenbar "die Hölle" und das "Fegefeuer" die am wenigsten musikalischen, ja die musikwidrigsten, und schon aus diesem Grunde mußte die Dante Symphonie unter diesen geeigneten und geblasenen Bilderbüchern Liszt's eines der bedenklichsten werden.' Hanslick, 'Concerte', *Neue Freie Presse*, 15 April 1881, 2.

⁶⁰ 'Die Schwierigkeit hat sich Liszt nicht versteht, wenn auch leider die Unmöglichkeit; er greift zu zwei gewaltsamen Mitteln, uns zum Verstehen des poetischen Sujets seiner Symphonie zu zwingen. Das erste Mittel besteht in einer langen erklärenden Einleitung (von R. Pohl), welche der Partitur vorgedruckt und in dem bekannten, teils überschwenglichen, teils trocken philosophirenden Tone der Brendel'schen Schule geschrieben ist.' Hanslick, 'Concerte', *Neue Freie Presse*, 15 April 1881, 2.

shared with the readership of the *Neue Freie Presse* and with his agnosticism.⁶¹ Furthermore, Hanslick was, as Leon Botstein reminds us, part of the 'musical cognoscenti of his and [Brahms's] generation who understood the communicatory power and logic of music alone, and could hear a dense, purely musical discourse'.⁶² As such, he would have found this interpretive linguistic aid problematic on point of principle, as it guided the listener in such a rudimentary fashion, incapacitating their direct confrontation of the music through their ear, heart and mind. However, in this instance, rather than seeing this as a 'redundant addition' to Liszt's work, he finds it 'extremely necessary' simply because without having studied the guide beforehand the listener would have absolutely no idea what they should hear.

The second means Liszt employed, as Hanslick sees it, to help an audience understand the meaning of the symphony is the citation of 'particular parts of Dante's verse', extracts that 'would have meaning in sung music, but not in instrumental music'.⁶³ Whether the listener has any knowledge of Pohl's descriptive guide or the extracts from Dante's poem in the score is immaterial to Hanslick; he considers the musical component to be 'muddled, unnatural, disjointed, in parts empty, in parts ugly'.⁶⁴ In short, Hanslick found Liszt's music in its own right to be intolerable. He refused to join the ranks of those who considered this music to be 'beautiful and significant so long as they are told it is an exact after-impression (*Nachschilderung*) of Dante's *Divine Comedy*'. He bemoaned the fact 'that such an illusory intention is

⁶¹ On Hanslick's liberal *Weltanschauung* and his view on religion, see Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Epilogue, 'The Twilight of Liberalism', 204–20 (particularly 209), and Grimes, *Brahms's Critics*, 196–9.

⁶² Leon Botstein, 'Time and Memory: Concert Life, Science, and Music in Brahms's Vienna', in Walter Frisch and Kevin C. Karnes (eds), *Brahms and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3–26: 8.

⁶³ 'Neben diesem ersten, bei allen Liszt'schen Symphonien angewendeten Verständigungsmittel einer vorgedruckten "Erklärung" wendet Liszt diesmal auch ein zweites ganz merkwürdiges an. Er setzt unter gewisse Tacte Verse aus Dantes Gedicht, was doch nur einen Sinn hat bei gesungener, nicht auch bei instrumentaler Musik.' Hanslick, 'Concerte', *Neue Freie Presse*, 15 April 1881, 2.

⁶⁴ 'Angenommen, wir hören ein Tonstück, das uns verworren, unnatürlich, zusammenhanglos, teilweise leer, teilweise häßlich erscheint—müssen wir es schön und bedeutend finden, sobald uns Jemand sagt, es stecke darin eine genaue Nachschilderung der "Göttlichen Comödie" von Dante?' Hanslick, 'Concerte', *Neue Freie Presse*, 15 April 1881, 2.

brought to mind for the sake of the music' and regretted 'that the composer who is so poetically and pictorially gifted did not become a poet or a painter'.⁶⁵

Hanslick's Liszt reviews and Gärtner's analysis of the nature of the controversy between the composer and the critic give us a greater understanding of what Hanslick found deplorable in Liszt's music. I would add that whereas two of Hanslick's three categories of objection to programme music are widely applicable to nineteenth-century repertoire (the first concerning the suitability of a particular text for musical setting, and the second concerning the degree to which a work seeks to be musically comprehensible, as opposed to seeking to be understood in terms of its poetic counterpart), Liszt stands out as the composer unremittingly charged with contravening all three categories (the third concerning the quality of the music itself). It is precisely here that Hanslick represents the true dilemma of the critic—the critical inferno, as it were—in that he interprets a lack of spiritual dimension but cannot quantify it. This leaves Hanslick open to charges of waging a partisan battle with Liszt that spanned decades. One wonders whether Hanslick might not have been better to observe Wittgenstein's formulation: *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen*—'whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'.

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⁶⁵ 'Wir werden im Gegenteile bedauern, daß so illusorischer Absicht zuliebe die Musik auf den Kopf gestellt und das der poetisch und malerisch so begabte Componist nicht lieber Dichter oder Maler geworden ist.' Hanslick, 'Concerte', *Neue Freie Presse*, 15 April 1881, 2.