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Lateness in Context

Shay Loya

Where does the idea of Liszt's visionary, future-gazing late style come from? The ostensibly obvious answer is the music itself: just listen to the final bars of *Nuages gris* (1881), many austere and borderline atonal passages in *Via crucis* (1879) or the concept and realisation of *sans tonalité* in Liszt's *Bagatelle* (1885). But listening is not a passive activity, and someone has always guided our hearing of these works in a selective way, directing the reader to filter out music that weakens the case.

The idea of a late style has a history before Liszt and during his time. It also has a reception history specific to Liszt's music, one whose definitive form can be pinpointed to events and publications in the 1950s. Like many other 'late' styles, Liszt's has been used by his champions to shore up his credibility as a composer. However, there was a certain edge to this advocacy precisely because Liszt was (and perhaps still is) a controversial composer, and because the people who made the case on his behalf were all committed modernists. As we track this story, I will reflect on its repercussions on past and present scholarship and ask whether there could be other ways in which Liszt's final works might be understood.

Liszt as the First Author of His Lateness Story

How conscious was Liszt of having created something that could be described as a late style? Joachim Aloys Schlosser was apparently the first to theorise the division of Beethoven's creativity into three periods in 1828 (shortly after Beethoven's death), and the idea was further disseminated by Fétis (1837) and Czerny (1840) before Liszt encountered it in Lenz's influential *Beethoven et ses trois styles* (1852) to which he responded in a letter to the author.¹ Despite expressing misgivings about style

¹ K. M. Knittel, 'Imitation, Individuality, and Illness: Behind Beethoven's "Three Styles"', *Beethoven Forum* 4 (1995): 17–36.

periodization, he recognised phases of creativity in his own life.² According to Vincent d'Indy, sometime in 1870 Liszt jokingly summarised the progression from first to third period as 'the child, the man, and the god'. Beethoven's centenary year, 1870, was also when Wagner's *Beethoven* monograph appeared, celebrating Beethoven's deafness, isolation and suffering as a catalyst to the composer's most elevated music.³ The same year Liszt composed and conducted his *Zur Säcularfeier Beethovens* in Weimar – a secular *imitatione Beethoveni*, melding Beethoven and Liszt, musically and conceptually, in the persona of a genius-prophet leading humanity to redemption.⁴ The year 1870 was a good moment for all major Beethoven appropriators to think of their own legacy, particularly upon approaching old age.

Intimations of mortality and an intellectual awareness of a late style is one thing. Creating a late style consciously for oneself is another. There are hints, however, of conscious markers of lateness in Liszt's music: titles such as *Valses oubliées*, or tonally incomplete endings that drift into the ether, dramatising abandoned, forgotten music or distant horizons beyond our senses. This is tricky territory. The extreme fragmentariness and sharp stylistic changes such as can be found in *R. W. Venezia* (1883) – or the emergence of the euphonious 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden' chorale out of the tonally vague and dissonant harmony of the *Via crucis* (1879) – may or may not signify a conscious creation of a fragmentary late style that looks back at oddly disruptive moments in late Beethoven.

Not surprisingly, Liszt does not help with this particular question, and it would be absurd to reduce the act of composition to reputation management. But, as Dolores Pesce showed, at least we know he was aware of an aesthetic of textural asceticism related to old age.⁵ Pesce further argued and demonstrated in detail how Liszt's declarations of isolation and alleged artistic failure should not be taken at face value, but rather be understood as rhetorical tropes of suffering borrowed from Romantic and Christian texts, all of which point once more to a constructed prophetic image. We should equally develop a critical awareness of whom Liszt is writing to and note the quite earthly pride he occasionally takes in the composition of

² Jonathan Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 189–92.

³ K. M. Knittel, 'Wagner, Deafness and the Reception of Beethoven's Late Style', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 1 (1998): 49–82.

⁴ Ryan Minor, *Choral Fantasies: Music, Festivity, and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 94–109.

⁵ Dolores Pesce, *Liszt's Final Decade* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 99–100.

new works and vindication of old ones.⁶ One might add that Liszt's worldly understanding of celebrity meant that he had a reasonable expectation of unpublished works and private letters becoming public after his death.

Liszt knew some of his old-age works were more challenging than others and famously pinned his hopes on future audiences, encapsulated by his famous motto 'I can wait'. Alan Walker, representing a broad scholarly consensus, declared Liszt's faith in posterity justified in light of the enthusiastic reception of his late works following the rise of twentieth-century modernism.⁷ It has long since become part of a story of triumph over adversity in which the late works hold a special place. The picture is complicated, however, when one considers the context in which the late works have been promoted and the split between the reception of those works and Liszt's earlier oeuvre. Overall, Liszt is best known as a composer for his Weimar-era works (1848–61), whose continued popularity, further promotion or revival always depended on a favourable appreciation of high-Romantic style and aesthetics. By contrast, the late works were often promoted in a frankly anti-Romantic spirit, and sometimes even favourably contrasted with the earlier repertoire, as we shall see. A further issue is that Liszt's late works do not fit the idea of late masterpieces in the mould of Bach and Beethoven. In fact, after the completion of *Christus* in 1866, Liszt never again produced a monumental *Meisterwerk* in the conventional sense. Ways were found to promote Liszt's late music irrespectively, but that problem never went away.

The Modernist Rehabilitation

In the first half of the twentieth century, various composers and musicologists committed to the modernist cause had attempted to recast Liszt as a proto-modernist in a bid to counter what they perceived to be his problematic or even tarnished reputation for Romantic bombast, virtuosity and sentimentality. Two different streams of Liszt's modernist rehabilitation parted ways. In performance, the public increasingly got the opportunity to listen to the musical quality of these works, since Busoni's pioneering all-Liszt recitals in Berlin in the winter of 1904–5 and 1911,⁸ through

⁶ *Ibid.*, esp. 111–68.

⁷ Alan Walker, *Liszt's Final Years 1861–1886* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 455–56.

⁸ Robert Rim, *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and the Eight* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2002), 55. According to Klára Hamburger, Busoni continued to perform throughout his career such late works as the *Concerto pathétique* (1877–85), the *Weihnachtsbaum* (1874–81) and *Années III* (1872–82)

Searle's equally pioneering chamber and orchestral concerts in the 1930s and 1940s.⁹

The dissemination of Liszt's late music gathered momentum with the Breitkopf & Härtel edition of Liszt's collected works, published in thirty-four volumes between 1907–36, which included editorial contributions from leading modernist composers such as Busoni and Bartók. As early as 1912, Bartók was editing the *Csárdás macabre* (1881–82) for the series, but the project was thwarted.¹⁰ The real revelation came in 1927, when José Vianna da Motta (one of Liszt's last pupils) edited and published the last volume of solo pieces, which included *Nuages gris* (1881), *Unstern* (1881) and *Schlaflos* (1883) – pieces that have become emblematic of Liszt's late style and which were never published before – as well as equally iconic modernist pieces that were published in Liszt's lifetime but remained largely unperformed (Busoni notwithstanding), such as the *Gondola* pieces.¹¹

Meanwhile, a parallel rehabilitation was taking place in popular writing and scholarship, where an emphasis on the modernist aspect of the late works superseded their artistic importance. Thus, an important part of what defines studies concerned with late art – *artistic* greatness – was largely missing. This is already noticeable in the centenary year of 1911, with two publications by leading modernist composers, Schoenberg and Bartók. Schoenberg was not interested in individual works by Liszt as much as techniques and harmonic inventions that served future composers like himself.¹² Bartók's promotion of Liszt was as much a polemic against his conservative critics as an appraisal of Liszt, an approach he elaborated and intensified in his 1936 'Liszt Problems'.¹³ For Bartók, the least important works were those that reflect popular and Romantic tastes

cycles, the *Valses oubliées* (1881–84), Hungarian Rhapsody No. 19 (1885, and one of the *lugubre gondola* pieces (1882–85): see *Liszt*, trans. Gyula Gulyás (Budapest: Corvina, 1980), 193.

⁹ Searle was part of a wider Liszt revival movement in England after 1945. See William Wright, *Liszt and England* (Hillsdale: Pendragon, 2016), 218–25.

¹⁰ Imre Sulyok, 'Béla Bartók's Handschrift im Liszt Material in Weimar', *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29, no. 1/4 (1987): 353–54.

¹¹ José Vianna da Motta, ed., *Franz Liszt's Musikalische Werke*, series II, vol. 9 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1927). See also James Deaville, 'Liszt and the Twentieth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 34.

¹² Arnold Schoenberg, 'Franz Liszt's Work and Being (1911)', in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Leo Black, ed. Leonard Stein (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 442–46.

¹³ Béla Bartók, *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 451–54 and 501–10. See also Shay Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition* (Rochester: University Rochester Press, 2011), 124–28.

(reflecting the lamentable aesthetics of Bartók's conservative opponents), whereas Liszt's partially unrealised but pregnant modernist ideas proved to be his greatest gift to prominent composers in the twentieth century.¹⁴

By the time Bartók published his essay, the notion of Liszt's late works foreshadowing various twentieth-century modernist trends was emerging in musicology too.¹⁵ But not all Liszt scholars valued the late works, whether artistically or historically. In his magisterial 1931 monograph, Peter Raabe – arguably the most pre-eminent Liszt scholar before the Second World War – was perhaps the first to point to the absence of a masterpiece in the late repertoire and was generally dismissive of works composed after 1871. His opinion seemed to be shaped by a Wagnerian disdain for Hungarian and Catholic elements in Liszt's life and music, by a criticism of Liszt's alleged retreat from a clear artistic purpose, by the symphonic ideal and the ideal of intricate formal development, which Liszt mastered in the 1850s.¹⁶ By contrast, he thought that 'poor melodic inventiveness' in pieces such as *Nuages gris* and *Unstern* (both composed in 1881) testified to Liszt's isolation, hopelessness and deteriorating mind, clearly more fascinating for the biographic insights they provided than for their artistic worth.¹⁷ This gerontophobic view of the late works as mirroring a mental decline has remained with us to this day in biographical accounts that associate some of these works with mental depression.¹⁸ We shall also see that the issue of the putatively missing masterpiece has also lingered.

Nevertheless, Liszt's modernist rehabilitation intensified after the Second World War. Humphrey Searle, a committed serialist and a student of Webern, initiated a number of publications of late works that caused a sensation (see Table 29.1).¹⁹ Concomitantly, the 'late style' narrative narrowed to a more organised teleological historiography. René Leibowitz, a serialist composer like Searle, appropriated late Liszt for the artistic cause he believed in, but was less than complementary about the

¹⁴ Bartók, *Essays*, 505.

¹⁵ Werner Danckert, 'Liszt als Vorläufer des musikalischen Impressionismus', *Die Musik* 21, no. 5 (1929): 341–45. Zoltán Gárdonyi, *Die ungarischen Stileigentümlichkeiten in den musikalischen Werken Franz Liszts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1931).

¹⁶ Peter Raabe, *Franz Liszt I: Leben* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1931), 73–74; and Peter Raabe, *Franz Liszt II: Schaffen* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1931), 161–62. See also Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber*, 187–89. Raabe's sometime 'Wagnerian' attitudes towards Liszt were not unusual in the 1930s, not least when compared with Ernst Newmann's notorious *The Man Liszt* (New York: Cassell, 1934).

¹⁷ Raabe, *Franz Liszt II*, 62–63.

¹⁸ A widespread view that has not gone unchallenged, however: see Pesce, *Liszt's Final Decade*, 2014.

¹⁹ A few dating inaccuracies have been corrected in Table 29.1 in consultation with the catalogues in Grove (2001) and Pesce (2014).

Table 29.1 *Late works published by the Liszt Society through Schott & Co. in the 1950s*

Works	Year
Volume 1, Late Piano Works	1951
<i>Csárdás Macabre</i> , S224 (1881–82)	
<i>En rêve – Nocturne</i> , S207 (1885–86)	
<i>Nuages gris</i> , S199 (1881)	
<i>La lugubre gondola I</i> , S200i (c. 1884)	
<i>La lugubre gondola II</i> , S200ii (1882–83, rev. c. 1886)	
<i>R. W. – Venezia</i> , S201 (1883)	
<i>Vier kleine Klavierstücke</i> , S192/1–4: I (1865), II (1865), III (1873), IV (1876)	
<i>Trauer-Vorspiel und Marsch</i> , S206 (1885)	
<i>Unstern! – Sinistre – Disastro</i> , S208 (c. 1886)	
<i>Dritter Mephisto Walzer</i> , S216 (1883)	
Volume 2, Early and Late Piano Works [only late works listed here]	1952
<i>Réminiscences de Boccanegra</i> S438 (1882)	
<i>Am Grabe Richard Wagners</i> S202 (1883)	
<i>Vierter Mephisto Walzer</i> (1885)	
Volume 3, Hungarian and late piano works [late works only]	1954
<i>Mosonyi gyászmenete – Mosonyfi Grabgeleit</i> , S194 (1870);	
<i>Petőfi szellemének – Dem Andenken Petőfis</i> , S195 (1877);	
<i>Öt magyar népdal – Fünf ungarische Volkslieder</i> , S245 (1873);	
<i>Csárdás obstinée</i> , S225/2 (1885);	
<i>Première Élégie</i> , S196 (1874) and <i>Zweite Elegie</i> , S197 (1877)	
<i>Schlaflos! – Insomnie!</i> , S203 (1883)	
Vol 4, Dances for Piano [late works only]	1957
<i>Deuxième valse oubliée</i> , S215/2	
<i>Troisième valse oubliée</i> , S215/3	

music itself.²⁰ Searle took a more even-handed approach. Sidestepping the question of artistry, he collected some of the most remarkable passages that pointed to several twentieth-century ‘modernisms’.²¹ It was this curatorial manner of presenting select passages as exemplars of the late style that has defined the modernist rehabilitative literature since, and it allowed for different, competing narratives. For example, when Hungarian musicologists soon joined in in similar fashion, notable contributions from

²⁰ René Leibowitz, ‘Les Prophéties de Franz Liszt’ in *L’évolution de la musique: De Bach à Schoenberg* (Paris: Corrèa, 1951), 141–53.

²¹ Humphrey Searle, ‘Liszt’s Final Period (1860–1886)’, in *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 78 (1951): 67–81. He later expanded this in his Grove 5 ‘Liszt’ article and *The Music of Liszt* (both 1954; the latter republished in New York: Dover, 1966). Alan Walker’s current (2001) Grove article on Liszt follows Searle’s essential arguments and manner of presentation in his discussion of the late works.

Szabolcsi (1956/58), Szélényi (1963) and Bárdos (1969/78 and 1975) were underpinned by a desire to relate Liszt to the new, post-Bartókian Hungarian school.²²

Putting ideology aside, there was a persistent problem with the anachronistic way Liszt's modernist champions tended to compare small fragments of his music to that of later generations. The historical and tonal de-contextualisation of musical material was a particular problem. By way of example, consider how Bence Szabolcsi identified 'Arabian' or 'Javanese tetrachords' in Liszt's late music that were to recur in 'On the Island of Bali' (No. 109 in the *Mikrokosmos*) and other short examples from Bartók's works – without his acknowledging the extremely different perception of these intervals in different tonal environments.²³

These technical weaknesses have been partly redressed since the 1970s, most prominently by Schenkerian approaches to the analysis of perceived post-tonality in Liszt's late works.²⁴ A musical-theoretical orientation meant that demonstrating the usefulness of an analytical system in explicating this harmony became the main issue, whereas Liszt advocacy, and even stylistic considerations, became a secondary or irrelevant concern. Nevertheless, the selection of particular late works that fit the image of 'late Liszt' defined by the earlier rehabilitators continued, sometimes encoded in the type of tonal theories that were being used.

Aesthetic Worth

It may be a very old-fashioned question now, but the 'greatness' of a work is an important aspect of lateness that had been left behind. Perhaps the last musicologist to deal with this comprehensively was Szabolcsi, who rebutted several of Raabe's assertions about Liszt's life and music and valorised some aesthetic aspects the late works.²⁵ Yet he avoided addressing Raabe's straightforward allegation of poor melodic invention, instead

²² For a detailed survey of the Liszt scholarship in this era, see James Deaville, 'Liszt and the Twentieth-Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt* ed. Kenneth Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45–55. For a critical review of the Hungarian scholarship, see Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition*, 114–37.

²³ Bence Szabolcsi, *The Twilight of Ferenc Liszt*, trans. András Deák (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1959), 53–54; Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition*, 243–44.

²⁴ Two foundational articles in this vein are Robert P. Morgan, 'Dissonant Prolongations: Theoretical and Compositional Precedents', *Journal of Music Theory* 20, no. 1 (1976): 49–91; Allen Forte, 'Liszt's Experimental Idiom and Music of the Early Twentieth Century', *Nineteenth-Century Music* 10, no. 3 (1987): 209–28.

²⁵ Szabolcsi, *The Twilight of Ferenc Liszt*, 12–18 and 37–49.

choosing to take on the lateness-inspired idea that Liszt communicated to no one but himself.²⁶

The question has remained hanging uneasily in the air ever since. As recently as 2008, Serge Gut affirmed Raabe's assessment of these works as 'weak' and identified the way in which the lateness discourse had splintered in Liszt's case:

It is true that . . . progressivism and [musical] profundity [*qualité profonde*] can go together. That combination has been the distinctive mark of the greatest geniuses But it is precisely with [Liszt] that the disassociation between [musical] quality and revolutionary boldness can be seen for the first time in a great composer, and it lies in the last phase of his life.²⁷

Gut finds Liszt at fault for this, without querying how an intensive focus on 'progressivism' and an assumed aesthetic hierarchy of genres (with the symphony at its pinnacle) might have also created this reception mode. On the other hand, the modernist rehabilitation provided ammunition for a counter-rehabilitation of Liszt's earlier virtuoso works, precisely on this point of artistic value. Enter Charles Rosen:

Most of the piano works by Liszt that have remained in the repertory today were written, at least in their initial form, before 1850 Many of [the] late piano works are experimental, foreshadowing the music of Debussy and the atonal composers of the early twentieth century. They cannot have had much influence on these developments, however . . . and the importance of Liszt to history cannot be explained by an appeal to his late style. In any case, even the best of the late works are less impressive than the music of Debussy and Schoenberg to which they appear to point. It is essentially the inspirations of the young Liszt of the 1830s and 1840s . . . [that] gave Liszt his stature. The early works are vulgar and great; the late works are admirable and minor.²⁸

Rosen's 'admirable and minor' jibe exposes the chink in the modernists' rehabilitative armour, for it is the latter who have made the late style dependent on the credibility of other, presumably greater composers. A naïve modernist perspective on these works will only result in disappointment when they turn out to be unreliable as pre-twentieth-century prophecies. Conversely, when they are taken seriously as works of art, they may disappoint when they do not fulfil the conventional *Meisterwerk*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 43–44.

²⁷ Serge Gut, *Franz Liszt: Les éléments du langage musical* (Bourg-la-Reine: Editions Aug. Zurfluh, 2008), 276.

²⁸ Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 473–74.

model or when generic expectations that Liszt purposefully explodes are misconstrued as a failure of genre.²⁹ The middle ground between these extremes has never been well established. But maybe this is about to change. It is time to untether a unique nineteenth-century repertoire from the twentieth-century historical imagination.

A Possible Future for Liszt's Lateness

In truth, musicologists have already provided some counterweight to the rehabilitative discourse, first and foremost through more balanced surveys that reveal the diversity of Liszt's late styles.³⁰ Baker's survey highlights interesting continuities with Liszt's older harmonic practices, while considering in some detail large-scale cycles as complex and (importantly) coherent works – a partial solution to the problem of the absent *Meisterwerk*. Further historical counterweights to the modernist rehabilitation included studies that located Liszt's harmonic practice in the context of the music theory of its time,³¹ demonstrated contemporaneous allusions and intertextuality³² or dramaturgical or affective aspects of these works.³³

Mostly comparisons with other composers focus either on works before 1870, or – as we have seen – comparisons of late works with Liszt's successors. Only vague ideas, rather than analytical demonstration, link his works to, say, that of Russian contemporaries in the 1870s and

²⁹ See Shay Loya, 'The Mystery of the Seventeenth Hungarian Rhapsody', *Quaderni dell'istituto Liszt* 15 (2015): 107–46; Shay Loya, 'Virtuosity in Liszt's Late Works', in *Liszt and Virtuosity*, ed. Robert Doran (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2020), 387–418.

³⁰ Dorothea Redepenning, *Das Spätwerk Franz Liszts: Bearbeitungen eigener Kompositionen* (Hamburg: K. D. Wagner, 1984); Ben Arnold, 'Piano Music: 1861–1886', in *The Liszt Companion*, ed. Ben Arnold (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 139–77; James M. Baker, 'Liszt's Late Piano Works: A Survey' and 'Liszt's Late Piano Works: Larger Forms', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 86–151; Pesce, *Liszt's Final Decade*, 171–257.

³¹ Larry Todd, 'The "Unwelcome Guest" Regaled: Franz Liszt and the Augmented Triad', *19th-Century Music* 12, no. 2 (1988): 93–115; David Carson Berry, 'The Meaning(s) of "Without": An Exploration of Liszt's "Bagatelle ohne Tonart"', *19th Century Music* 27, no. 3 (2004): 230–62.

³² Gerhard J Winkler, 'Liszt contra Wagner: Wagnerkritik in den späten Klavierstücken Franz Liszts', in *Liszt Studien*, vol. 3, ed. Serge Gut (München: Katzbichler, 1986), 189–213; David Butler Cannata, 'Perception and Appreciation in Liszt's Late Piano Music', *Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 2 (1997): 178–207.

³³ Siegfried Mauser, 'Demontage und Verklärung: Zur Form und Dramaturgie in den späten Klavierstücken Franz Liszts', in *Virtuosität und Avantgarde: Untersuchungen zum Klavierwerk Franz Liszts*, ed. Zsolt Gárdonyi and Siegfried Mauser (Mainz: Schott, 1988), 60–70; Pesce, *Liszt's Final Decade*; Michael Saffle, 'Program Music and Liszt's *Unstern!* in *Nineteenth-Century Programme Music: Creation, Negotiations, Reception*, ed. Jonathan Kregor (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 107–21.

1880s – despite his reported knowledge of and enthusiasm for such works.³⁴ The unstated notion that Liszt's late works stand in glorious isolation, stylistically dislocated from their historical time, is testament to the continuing hold of the lateness discourse.³⁵

A radical approach to this problem would be to try and dispense with the lateness discourse altogether. For example, we could sharpen a historical-generic reading of Liszt's harmony without reference to lateness tropes, focus on virtuosity in the late works (against the anti-virtuoso dichotomy implied by old age, metaphysical seriousness and aesthetic austerity) or investigate the compactness of these works in relation to minimalist experiments in the nineteenth century from Reicha to Marie Jaëll.³⁶

But I suspect that the lateness discourse will pull such investigations back. Liszt's lateness discourse will endure, both due to its attractive mystique and compelling logic. Compare it with more recent constructions of late styles for Schubert, Chopin and Schumann, all of whom died prematurely, and whose 'late style' requires some sort of intellectual pleading.³⁷ In Liszt's case, the old-age factor matters – as well as illness, ailment and a sense of the coming end. The stylistic contrast between the music of his youth and old age is considerably more extreme than that of any of his contemporaries and arguably even that of Beethoven. The tonal experiments of the 1880s light up the historical imagination for a good reason: How *could* such music exist at that time?

Paradoxically, the 'naturalness' of Liszt's lateness discourse has made it marginal to the wider discourse on lateness. It is telling that Liszt is absent from the recent *Late Style and Its Discontents*, or even from a more music-orientated discussion of lateness, such as Burnham's in relation to Schumann.³⁸ The problem is a lack of intellectual context for the Liszt

³⁴ Szabolcsi, *The Twilight of Ferenc Liszt*, 25–35; Gut, *Franz Liszt*, 292–96. I may be unaware of (possibly Russian) scholarship in this area that has advanced this question further.

³⁵ As an exception to this rule, see Renate Grasberger, ed., *Bruckner Symposium: Bruckner, Liszt, Mahler und die Moderne* (Linz: A. Bruckner Institut Linz, 1989).

³⁶ Ralph P. Locke, 'Anti-Virtuosity and Musical Experimentalism: Liszt, Marie Jaëll, Debussy, and Others', in *Liszt and Virtuosity*, ed. Robert Doran (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2020), 346–86.

³⁷ Lorraine Byrne Bodeley and Julian Horton, eds., *Schubert's Late Music: History, Theory, Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Jeffrey Kallberg, 'Chopin's Last Style', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38, no. 2 (1985): 264–315; Laura Tunbridge, *Schumann's Late Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁸ Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles, eds., *Late Style and Its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Scott Burnham, 'Late Styles', in *Rethinking Schumann*, ed. Roe-Min Kok and Laura Tunbridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 411–30.

phenomenon. No aesthetic theory exists for Liszt's late style to compare with Theodor Adorno's writings on late Beethoven and the host of scholarly reactions to it.³⁹ It is possible that, with the recent criticism of late style theory in the arts, the moment for developing such a theory has passed, along with a naïve belief in the march of progress. And yet we also need more musicological and analytical scholarship to resituate the late works in their own time. An imaginative theory that overcomes the old, tyrannical hold of the summative *Meisterwerk* will undoubtedly provoke and stimulate such scholarship, moving the discourse to a broader and deeper consideration of these compositions as works of art. Liszt deserves no less.

³⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 123–77. See, however, Grégoire Caux for a more narrow focus on endings in 'Les dernières pièces pour piano de Franz Liszt: Pour une étude de la notion de fin d'œuvre', PhD Dissertation, Paris, 2011.