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Medtner's Sonata-Ballade: Interpreting Its Dramatic Trajectory through Virtual Subjectivities

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**Medtner's Sonata-Ballade: Interpreting Its Dramatic Trajectory
through Virtual Subjectivities**

by

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As one of his more programmatic works, Nikolai Medtner's *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27 exemplifies the composer's structural mastery of form in framing an expressive narrative. In accounts given by Medtner's students, the sonata was partly conceived in connection to a religious poem by Fet detailing Christ's temptation in the desert. His pupils additionally recall an underpinning theme of inner conflict between light and darkness in the human soul. Medtner's program is indeed a sort of two-tiered narrative, incorporating Fet's biblical drama within a larger narrative of personal struggle and redemption. In the music, this manifests itself in the form of a variable subjectivity that alternates between a virtual, human protagonist and a scriptural drama.

My analysis of the *Sonata-Ballade* uncovers implicit meanings in Medtner's use of musical gestures, intertexts, topics, and his employment of genre. In addition, I survey the composer's symbolic conception of his 'muse' to better contextualize the use of an associated leitmotif in the sonata. In these discussions, I support the ongoing reassessment of Medtner as a composer—from once being dismissed as a mere structuralist, to attaining greater recognition for the symbolic and narrative elements incorporated within his formal designs.

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Chapter 1: Medtner's Muse

Nikolai Medtner's *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, is a work that is perhaps best understood in light of the composer's conception of a muse guiding his art. In his correspondence, Medtner frequently makes reference to his muse in speaking about his life's work as a musician.¹ Indeed, many of his compositions refer to the topic of a 'muse' in symbolism and in text.

The composer set Pushkin's poem "The Muse" in 1913, a year in which the *Sonata-Ballade* was a work in progress. Both contain a common motive, which some scholars refer to as Medtner's "Muse theme."

A)

[Opening Motto]

The hymns mag - ni - fi-cent in-spired by gods im - or - tal

B)

[Opening Motto]

Example 1.1: A) "The Muse," Op. 29, No. 1, mm. 10-12. B) The Muse theme in the *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 48-51.

This terminology is somewhat speculative, as Pushkin's poem was likely not the initial inspiration for this theme. The motive first appears in the composer's drafts for the Piano Quintet. Its first movement, which contains several presentations of the theme, was completed in 1905.² However, the Piano Quintet would not be finished until 1948, and it

¹ Barrie Martyn, *Nikolai Medtner: His Life and Music* (Scolar Press, 1995), 120, 149, 145.

² *Ibid.*, 248.

was published posthumously at the composer's request. Its prolonged period of composition is indicative of the theme's enduring appeal to Medtner, as are its appearances in other works composed in the decades between.

In 1912, the first movement of the *Sonata-Ballade*—not containing the Muse theme—was published independently of the eventual completed work. However, Medtner's creative vision for the sonata proved to be larger than its initial publication. The Muse theme appears in a later written *Introduction* and *Finale* added to the end of the *Sonata-Ballade*. One early sketch of the motive, uncovered by Christopher Flamm, is underscored with the opening line from a poem by Afanasy Fet detailing Christ's temptation.³ This poem's relation to the *Sonata-Ballade* will be discussed in later chapters. In Medtner's other works containing the theme, however, it finds use in much broader contexts than Christian symbolism.

This chapter will explore the Muse theme's relation to Medtner's artistic ideals, and then contextualize its expressive meaning within his compositional output. I will begin with a discussion of the muse's symbolic relevance to the composer's philosophical and religious beliefs on art. Next, I will postulate the relevance of three genres—Pastoral, Elegy, and Pastoral-Elegy—in Medtner's choice of musical topics employed with the theme. After detailing a few variants of the Muse theme's opening contour, I will conclude the chapter with a short survey of works which incorporate it. My intent is to expand the scholarly discussion of possible references to the Muse theme, as well as to create a richer semiotic foundation for interpreting its use in the *Sonata-Ballade*.

³ Christoph Flamm, *Der russische Komponist Nikolaj Metner: Studien und Materialien : mit einem ausführlichen Werkverzeichnis, einem vollständigen Verzeichnis der von . . . Slavica musicologica*, (Berlin: E. Kuhn, 1995), 193.

The literary topic of the muse was a lifelong fascination to Medtner. He refers to it many times in letters as the voice of his creative inspiration and artistic impulse.⁴ Within his similarly-titled book, *The Muse and the Fashion*, Medtner speaks of truly inspired (“muse”) themes as the result of intuition rather than (“fashionable”) invention. In Medtner’s view, themes received from a composer’s “muse” also issue a command to the artist.⁵ This closely correlates with the depiction of the muse as both teacher and inspiration for the musician in Pushkin’s poem “The Muse.” Within the poem, the muse is personified as a Greek goddess encouraging the musician in his work, who then instills “holy rapture” by taking the “reed” [instrument] and demonstrating it to the musician. Aptly, the composer quotes Pushkin’s “The Muse” in its entirety within *The Muse and the Fashion*, as a precursor to his thoughts on musical language and form.

Medtner further elaborates on a philosophical, and theological, discussion of what constitutes an inspired musical theme. He states: “By speaking about the theme in general, or in contemplating our own themes, we should not interrupt our contemplation likewise of that initial [mythical] theme-song that inspired all musical art.”⁶ The composer’s thoughts on an initial song, expressed in *The Muse and the Fashion*, can be compared to Rousseau’s writings on the origins of music. Medtner considers original song to be an axis on which all musical language is coordinated:

The first song that once upon a time resounded in the world, left the human soul one single “living strain” and the strain of this song became the starting point for the coordination between each other of all other strains. This strain has become for us the living symbol of unity and simplicity. In it is contained the whole complexity, the whole diversity of human songs . . . The man who first intoned it, did not in his simplicity, ponder over the choice of elements, he did not invent

⁴ Martyn (1995), 120, 149, 145.

⁵ Nikolai Medtner, *The Muse and the Fashion, Being a Defence of the Foundations of the Art of Music*, translated by Alfred Swan (Haverford, Pa.: Haverford College Bookstore, 1951), 43.

⁶ Medtner, 43.

them. The inexpressible was expressed of itself. Nevertheless, the song was composed, i.e. coordinated from separate sounds that had already become its elements.⁷

Rousseau suggests there is a ‘moral power’ to the songs intoned by man in his aboriginal state. Like Medtner in *The Muse and the Fashion*, he questioned if the music of his time strayed too far from this ideal:

Thus we see how singing gradually became an art entirely separate from speech, from which it takes its origin; how the harmonics of sounds resulting in forgetting vocal inflections; and finally, how music, restricted to purely physical concurrences of vibrations, found itself deprived of the moral power it had yielded when it was the twofold voice of nature.⁸

For Medtner, the moral dimension of the theme-song constituted an individual unfolding of the “themes of eternity, existing in themselves” and “certainly not an invention of a non-existent art.”⁹

Further sources suggest that Medtner associated Christian theology with this concept of an initial song. His religious affiliation at the time was Russian Orthodox, a belief he held to his death after converting from Lutheranism in 1935.¹⁰ In *The Muse and the Fashion*, he refers to the initial (mythic) song as the substantive “LOGOS itself of music.”¹¹ More than a metaphor, Medtner’s musical conceptualization of *logos* is connected to man’s initial religious experience at creation, as he relates in letters concerning his religious views on art. In Medtner’s words, “the closer the balance between thought and feeling, the closer [one is] to the Spirit.”¹² The pursuit of his artistic ideal—a

⁷ Ibid., 7, 21.

⁸ Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 102.

⁹ Medtner, 3.

¹⁰ Rebecca Anne Mitchell, “Nietzsche’s Orphans: Music and the Search for Unity in Revolutionary Russia, 1905–1921” (Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011), 272.

¹¹ Medtner, 10. In the Bible, Logos is the initial Word of God, itself an infusing spirit, as in “the Word was made flesh.”

¹² Quoted in Mitchell, 275.

unification of thought and feeling coordinated through a balance of complexity and simplicity—was for him an expression of piety. Medtner believed that this ideal unity with the Spirit “live[s] within us in the very depths of our soul . . . it is the root, uniting us with the first days of God’s creation. This is ‘reminiscence’ in Plato’s terms.”¹³ The Platonic theory of reminiscence, of inherent truths known to the soul awaiting conscious rediscovery, also has strong correlation to the composer’s allegorical conception of an initial song. Medtner’s interest in this philosopher is visible in his choice of just three literary sources to take with him when he emigrated to Germany in 1911: Plato, Pushkin, and the New Testament.¹⁴

On the diversity of these interests, his brother Emil once remarked that Nikolai was an “entirely ancient person and at the same time, a Christian.”¹⁵ This does not imply that Nikolai must have also believed in ancient Greek deities, or a literal goddess muse endowing him wisdom, as some scholarship has boldly claimed.¹⁶ The composer used metaphors drawing from ancient religion and philosophy (and references to them in poetry) to depict his artistic beliefs. Christian metaphors were similarly employed by Nikolai in reference to art, such as his perspective on *logos*. He speaks of his religious view of art as follows:

¹³Quoted in Mitchell, 257.

¹⁴ Martyn (1995), 145.

¹⁵ Quoted in Mitchell, 277.

¹⁶ Sergei Bulgakov’s pseudo-Christian theology of a Divine Sophia co-existing with the Trinity, which Rowen (2015) postulates as the implied meaning of Medtner’s muse, was formally condemned as heretical by the Russian Orthodox Patriarch and Bishops in 1935.

“ . . . faith in art . . . the kind of faith I, for example, only understand a man having in God when he feels Him absolutely distinctly in his heart and does not recognize Him as just some image beyond the clouds. This is how an artist must believe in art.”¹⁷

For Medtner, analogies like these were more than a symbolic utterance; they were also a reflection of his religious convictions. This is best illustrated in his remarks on a draft of *The Muse and the Fashion*. Rebecca Mitchell (2016), quoting the composer, explains: “Nikolai explicitly stated that the goal of his book, while ostensibly about music, was to write about ‘God and religion’ and against Apollonism¹⁸ and modernism—the empty celebration of mere form.”¹⁹ His music, on the other hand, was an attempt to put into practice his beliefs as (later) articulated within his book. Martyn explains that Medtner’s “muse and his God were indivisible, his art a profession of faith.”²⁰

While it is evident that the muse had broader meaning for Medtner than could be summarized by any single piece of music, the Op. 29, No. 1 setting of Pushkin’s poem is his only composition bearing its title. This may be regarded as justification to continue referring to the theme as “The Muse” motive. Wendelin Bitzan, at the 2016 International Medtner Study Day in London, proposed an alternate classification in which the title is relegated to works pertaining to Pushkin, or to secularized usages such as found in *The Muse and the Fashion*. More overtly religious [Christian] contexts, in his view, presuppose a new classification of the theme as a “temptation” or “consolation” motive.²¹ Considering

¹⁷ Quoted in Martyn (1995), 21.

¹⁸ This is in reference to Nietzsche’s philosophical dichotomy of Apollonism and Dionysianism. Medtner’s artistic beliefs were not necessarily opposed to Apollonian elements, but he bemoaned the formalistic tendencies he saw in modern music.

¹⁹ Mitchell, 265.

²⁰ Martyn (1995), xii.

²¹ Wendelin Biztan, forthcoming publication in *Problemy Muzykalnoy Nauki* No. 3, 2016.

the composer's integrated perspective on faith and his muse, parsing the motive's meaning into distinct categories is a problematic proposition. Further conflating the issue of classification, not all of Medtner's *Lieder* referring to a muse contain the so-called "Muse" theme (such as *Geweihter Platz* ["Hallowed Ground"], Op. 41, No. 1). In my opinion, greater insight can be gained through a discussion of the literary/musical genres (and associated topics) pertaining to the motive's varied appearances.

Conventions of three earlier-mentioned genres (Pastoral, Elegy and Pastoral-Elegy) will now be discussed as they relate to works containing the Muse theme. The Pastoral's depiction of a picturesque innocence, rural life and shepherds, and a mythical golden age (including an appeal to a muse) are often found in Medtner's choice of poetry. Pushkin's "The Muse," set to music in Medtner's Op. 36, No. 1, is highly characteristic of this idyllic sentiment.

In days when I was young her love to me she gaveth,
The pipes with seven tones, the shawm to me she tendered,
She heard my melodies and smiled,
And with lightest touch upon the clear and penetrating reeds
I oft did strive to play with weak and childish fingers
The hymns magnificent, inspired by gods immortal,
The songs serene and pure by Phrygian shepherds sung.

From morn till eventide in silent shade of oaks—
With zeal I heard the laws told by the mystic virgin
Rejoicing my young heart with recompense most rare,
And tossing curling locks from clear and lovely brow.
Herself from out my hand the shawm she gently took,
The reeds were filled with life, inspired by her spirit.
My heart was filled with wondrous joy and holy rapture.²²

²² This translation, by Edna Illes, was used by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf in her recording of the song with Medtner at the piano.

Another pastoral theme evident in certain treatments of the Muse theme is transcendence attained through divine revelation. In addition to Op. 36, No. 1's ("The Muse") expression of a muse as a goddess-teacher, Medtner quotes Christ's scriptural teachings on a student score of the *Sonata-Ballade*, right at the theme's first entrance. The sonata's pastoral setting of the Muse theme (to be discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5) relates to the Pastoral's association with Christian themes; it is often used to depict Christ as the Good Shepherd.²³

Elegy is most directly referenced in Medtner's works using the term in the title: the *Sonata-Elegy*, Op. 11, No. 2, *Two Elegies*, Op. 59, and the *Lieder* Op. 28, No. 5, Op. 45, No. 1 and Op. 52, No. 3. As a literary genre, the Elegy's conventions include the absence and mourned loss of a loved one, a funeral procession of mourners, and a general expressive trajectory moving from grief to consolation.²⁴ In some instances, this move from sorrow to solace concludes with the (metaphorical) resurrection of the agent being mourned, typically to an alternate (poetic) dimension of existence.²⁵ Regarding Elegy as it pertains to Russian music in particular, Gregory Smith writes:

It is not difficult, considering the emotive musical language of Tchaikovsky and Medtner, to see the relationship between programmatic music and the genre of the elegy. In a way, the elegy is programmatic in the sense that the composer consciously identifies a lament as being the theme of the piece. Discussion of the "elegy" seldom seems out of context when discussing Russian music from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Fyodor Dostoevsky described, "there is an indispensable measure of suffering even in the happiness of the Russian people, for without it, its happiness is incomplete." Even in the salon context in

²³ Robert S. Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 80.

²⁴ T.V.F. Brogan, Peter Sacks and Steven F. Fogle, "Elegy," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 322.

²⁵ Joshua Scodel, "Elegy," *The Classical Tradition*, Reprint edition, ed. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis (Cambridge, Mass. u.a.: Belknap Press, 2013), 303-306.

the nineteenth century, the majority of songs published, bought and sung were Russian: “most of them are written in the minor mood—then and now considered more appropriate for the expression of elegiac moods, regret, and gentle sorrow than for raging, tragic grief.”²⁶

“Raging, tragic” outbursts, however, are occasionally found within Elegiac literature.²⁷ In Medtner’s music, this is perhaps best exemplified in the opening of both Op. 59 Elegies. (Example 1.17, p. 30) Maria Yudina, who recorded several of Medtner’s works, elaborates on a semantic connection between Elegy and music:

"Elegy" (as essence, sign, symbol, or notion) comes from a flute-like old Greek instrument *elegeia* that accompanied the singing (by a different person) of poems of various character: contemplative, amorous, or poetic (of course the same performer could also take turns singing and playing). "Elegeia" means reed, of which this instrument was made.²⁸

This imagery is also pastoral; a “reed” instrument is also referenced in Pushkin’s “The Muse.” The origins of Elegy as a literary genre, in fact, can be traced to Pastoral laments as early as the 3rd century, B.C.²⁹ Similarly, the Pastoral-Elegy shares a common heritage in classical antiquity as one of the earliest and most influential forms of Elegy.³⁰

Also classified as a subgenre of the Pastoral, the Pastoral-Elegy places a greater emphasis on pastoral imagery, such as shepherds, rustic life, and nature. Like an Elegy, it typically concerns a procession of mourners and a lament with a conciliatory conclusion. Its additional elegiac features often include an invocation of the Muse, and an appeal to (or questioning of) the deities on the topic of death or fate. By contrast to the Elegy, the Pastoral-Elegy usually presents a shepherd, or equivalent rural character archetype, as the

²⁶ Gregory Michael Smith, *Performance Practice Issues in Russian Piano Music* (University of Newcastle, 2003), 156.

²⁷ Brogan, Sacks and Fogle, 332.

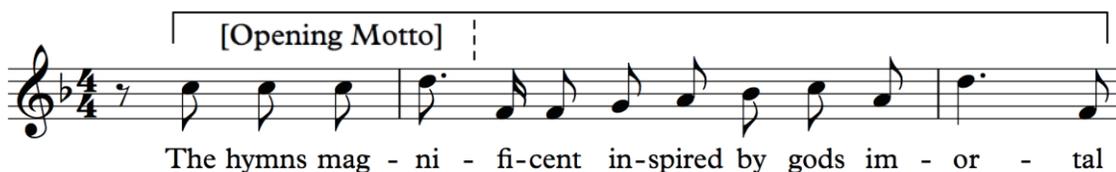
²⁸ Maria Yudina, “Yudina on Brahms’ Intermezzi,” trans. Lenya Ryzhik, accessed October 24, 2016, <http://math.stanford.edu/~ryzhik/brahms.html>

²⁹ T.V.F. Brogan, J. E. Congelton, “Pastoral,” *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 885. Brogan, Sacks and Fogle, 332.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 332.

subject of its lament. Other distinct conventions sometimes found within the genre include a sense of natural order being disrupted by death, an answer by a divine figure that imparts truth and/or consolation to the mourners, and a potential allegorical connection to Scriptural drama relating to death and resurrection.³¹ Two of Medtner's *Lieder* incorporating the Muse theme, the Op. 45, No. 1 "*Elegy*," and Op. 15, No. 4 ("*Sieh mich, Heil'ger, wie ich bin*"), could be related to the Pastoral-Elegy, although neither is entirely prototypical.

Before proceeding with a discussion of individual works, I will first address how the Muse theme can be identified within them. The Muse theme is initially recognizable by its opening four-note motive: a three repeated-note anacrusis leading to a higher pitch on a principal beat. I will refer to this pattern as an opening motto, as labeled in Example 1.2:



Example 1.2: "The Muse," Op. 29, No. 1, mm. 10-12.

This fragment in Medtner's theme can be contrasted with Beethoven's "Fate" motive.³² Regarding himself as a pupil of Beethoven in spirit,³³ Medtner quotes the "Fate" motive directly in at least one work: the *Funeral March*, Op. 31, No. 2. Comparatively, the Muse theme departs from Beethoven's model by rising from the repeated pitch, as opposed to

³¹ Scodel, 303-306.

³² The version of the motive I am referring to is the model with four repeated pitches ending on a downbeat, taken from the third movement of 5th symphony. It should be noted that "Fate" is Ferdinand Ries's (Beethoven's pupil) hermeneutic descriptor, and not Beethoven's own.

³³ Martyn (1995), xi.

falling or remaining in place. Still, “Fate” is often a topic of relevance in the places Medtner references the Muse theme in his *Lieder*. In some cases, this suggests a connection to the Elegy or Pastoral-Elegy genres.

As this chapter proceeds with a discussion of individual works, the relevance of particular topics to the Muse theme’s appearances will be addressed in light of each work’s dramatic context. But first, I wish to discuss the general expressive connotations of a few of Medtner’s varied implementations of the opening motto.

Approaching the Higher Note by Step

Medtner often departs from the repeated pitch of the opening motto by an upward step of either a major or minor 2nd. Both intervals are sometimes used within a single work, as illustrated in “The Muse” (Figure 1.1, p. 17). Where the minor 2nd interval is employed, the opening motto tends to function as modulatory device, destabilizing the key area and often iterated in a sequence. When the passage can be considered more positive, it tends to elicit a sensation of yearning or reaching. Alternatively, used in a negative context, the interval tends to evoke a struggle or climatic release of tension.

The major 2nd interval, by contrast, typically remains closer to the established key area. If the opening motto begins in a major key and on $\hat{5}$, its motion to $\hat{6}$ evokes the (pastoral) pentatonic mode, particularly if harmonized under tonic. But Medtner often moves to a submediant harmony on the rising pitch. Less frequently, the rising major 2nd interval is used in developmental passages with modal tonality, such as Dorian ($E\flat$ minor with raised- $\hat{6}$ $C\sharp$), as found in the violin in mm. 2-3 of this excerpt from the Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 45:

Example 1.3: Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 44, I. *Allegro Appassionato*, mm. 139-141.

If the minor 2nd upward step can be characterized as the striving of a virtual embodied agency (in its yearning, reaching, or struggling), the major 2nd upward step may be considered as more transcendent or idyllic in character.

Approaching the Higher Note by Leap

In the posthumous Piano Quintet and *Elegy*, Op. 45 (among other works), the repeated note is occasionally left by an interval larger than a second. Since both pieces contain the stepwise motion *and* this leap variant, it can reasonably be inferred that each contour is suggestive of the theme. Indeed, existing analyses of the Piano Quintet have referred to the leaping contour as a reference to the Muse theme.³⁴

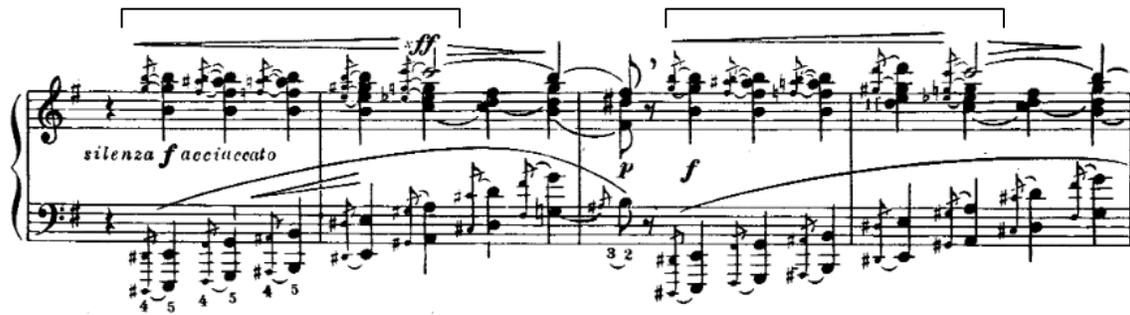
Following the upper note, Medtner either returns to the initial pitch or resolves downward by step, as an appoggiatura. The former tends to elicit serenity (Piano Quintet, Example 1.21, p. 34), whereas the latter is encountered more frequently in works with a

³⁴ David John Skvorak, “Thematic Unity in Nicolas Medtner’s Works for Piano: Skazki, Sonatas, and Piano Quintet” (D.M.A. treatise, University of Cincinnati, 2003), 55, 71. Skvorak considers this a “herald” theme that is “somewhat reminiscent of the [sic.] theme unit” in “The Muse,” Op. 29, No. 1 and *Sonata-Ballade*.

tragic character. (“Insomnia,” Op. 37, No. 1, Example 1.6, p. 18) The appoggiatura treatment is found in passages of heightened intensity, but it is also occasionally used as a sighing gesture of relief.

Delaying the Higher Note after the Anacrusis

Lastly, Medtner sometimes delays the arrival of the higher note to a weak beat. This is usually accomplished by reiterating the principal pitch a fourth time, bringing it closer to Beethoven’s “Fate” motive. The effect of articulating the higher pitch on the offbeat is often jarring and unsettling. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt from the *Night Wind* sonata, containing two variants of the Muse theme’s opening motto in succession. The first begins with the high note delayed and approached by step. In the second, the higher pitch is attained by the leap of a third to a downbeat.



Example 1.4: “Night Wind” Sonata, Op. 25, No. 2, II. *Allegro molto sfrenatamente, Presto*, mm. 383-386. The staggered entrance of voices contribute to the passage’s intensity.

By reaching the *sforzandissimo* climax only in the first iteration, there is a suggestion of hierarchy to each contour’s expressive intensity.

In my opinion, this delay of the higher note is the variant least emblematic of the Muse theme's contour in Op. 29, No. 1. Nevertheless, it was indirectly referenced at the Medtner Study Day (2016) by Francis Pott, who suggested the theme might be present in the opening of the *Sonata-Tragica* (to be discussed in this chapter, pp. 26-27).³⁵ Its expression in this work, and the *Night Wind* sonata, could intertextually relate to the character of certain presentations of the opening motto in the *Sonata-Ballade*. Particularly, this would apply to the instances in which the high note enters on a syncopated beat. (In later chapters, I will refer to this as a "corrupted" variant of the theme.)

VOCAL WORKS

Sieh mich, Heil'ger, wie ich bin, Op. 6 No. 7 : ("See me, Lord, as I am" - Goethe)

Completed in 1906, *Sieh Mich Heil'ger* is the first of Medtner's published works to contain the Muse theme. The text originates from an excerpt of the libretto by Goethe for a Singspiel entitled *Erwin und Elmire*. Martyn summarizes the excerpt Medtner selects as "the despairing lament of a girl who bitterly regrets having rejected her now dead lover [and which] alternates with more animated recollections of past happiness."³⁶ The Muse theme's 4-note opening appears within the initial animated section, as Elmire reminiscences about her lover, Erwin:

³⁵ Pott discussed this within a Q&A session following his talk at the Medtner Study Day, London, January 2016.

³⁶ Martyn (1995), 31.

poco animato, ma non subito

p

Ach! es war ein jun - ges Blut, War so lieb, er war so gut!
 Ах! Как он пре - кра - сен был, мо - лод, не - жен, по - лон сил!

p

crescendo *con passione* *f* *Tempo I*

Ach! so redlich liebt er mich, Ach! so heimlich quält' er sich! Sieh
 Ах! как он ме - ня лю - бил! Ах! как он ме - ня лю - бил! Варр

crescendo

Example 1.5: “Sich mich, Heil’ger, wie ich bin,” Op. 6, No. 7, mm. 13-20.

At first, the opening motto ascends by step to the higher note. After falling back to the initial pitch, it rises by a third, reaching the climax of the phrase. This rising third gesture next becomes part of the opening motto in two following iterations, sequenced a third apart. The second of these is modified to descend by half steps, reflecting the text’s emotional shift from “Ah, he loved me faithfully!” to “Ah, he suffered so for me!”³⁷

³⁷ Translated by Henry S Drinker, *English Texts for the Songs of Nicholas Medtner*, (Place of publication not identified, found at the Library of Congress, 1946), x.

The plot in *Erwin and Elmire* further contextualizes Medtner's chosen excerpt from the libretto. Incorporating the Pastoral, Elmire is a shepherd girl who callously drives away Erwin, her lowly-born suitor. Disguised as a hermit, Erwin later listens to her impassioned prayer, and thereafter, reveals his true identity to her. References to death in Elmire's lament (she thinks she has driven Erwin mad and he has died) highlight that her grief extends beyond mere heartbreak. Likewise, her appeal to a deity suggests her soliloquy could be viewed as a Pastoral-Elegy. Erwin's pseudo-resurrection when he suddenly appears to her can also be considered evidence to support this interpretation. Several of the topics found within *Erwin und Elmire* and *Sieh Mich Heil'ger* (including shepherds, hermitage, prayer, deity, death and resurrection) will find relevance again in religious contexts in the *Sonata-Ballade*.

Myza, Op. 29 No. 1 : ("The Muse" - Pushkin)

Since Pastoral literary topics in Pushkin's text have been discussed earlier in this chapter, I will focus now on the original manner Medtner integrates the Muse theme within his musical formal design. Figure 1.1 provides the Muse theme's initial appearance (earlier shown in Example 1.1) within the context of the phrases that come before and after it:

poco cresc. *mf* Muse Theme

I oft did strive to play with weak and child-ish fin - gers The hymns mag-

Muse Theme (sequenced)

ni-fi-cent in-spired by gods im-mor-tal The songs ser-ene and pure by Phry-gian shep-herds

tenebroso

sung. From morn till e - vent-side in sil-ent shade of oaks_____

Figure 1.1: “The Muse,” Op. 29 No. 1, mm. 8-16. The four-note motive is indicated by dotted slur lines.

As illustrated, a rising four-note motive in the prior phrase can be found in augmentation within the rising contour of each iteration of the Muse motive in its sequencing—creating a step progression, B \flat -C-D-E \flat , that culminates in the climactic F at the end of a sequential unit. A direct return to the initial motive bookends the Muse theme within the larger motivic context.

Бессонница Op 37. No. 1 : (“Insomnia” - Tyutchev)

The setting of Tyutchev’s “Insomnia” is notable for incorporating both the Muse theme and an augmentation of the Beethoven “Fate” motive, appearing shortly after a reference to fate in the text. First, a variant of the Muse theme’s opening motto enters in the vocal line under the words ‘prophetic farewell voice’ (“Пророчески прощальный глас”), a depiction of the passing of time. The vocalist reiterates its initial pitch five times,

instead of three, then leaps up from it by a third in mid-measure, to an appoggiatura that then resolves to the expected pitch of the motive.

crescendo
 глу_хи_е вре_ме_ни сте_нанья, про_ро_че_ски про_щаль_ный
Der Stun.de Stöhnen und Er_ban.gen Ver_neh-men als ein Ab_schieds.
crescendo
poco rit.
 м. 29208 Г

72
 глас? Нам
 - wort! Die V

Example 1.6: “Insomnia,” Op 37. No. 1, mm. 15-18.

Beethoven’s “Fate” motive enters between the two stanzas that follow: the first describing a human struggle against Fate as a force of Nature, and the second, an outer body experience of watching one’s own life fade away. Medtner’s treatment of the motive in this song is shown in the following excerpt:

con moto, agitato

И на
Da steht

poco a poco con moto

crescendo

Example 1.7: “Insomnia,” Op 37. No. 1, mm. 25-28. (The “Fate” motive is shown in brackets, instead of the Muse theme’s opening motto.)

Lastly, the work concludes with an extended vocalise after the closing line: “[The clock’s] metal, funereal, voice sometimes mourns us.”³⁸ Here, the Muse theme’s opening motto appears in the accompaniment.

³⁸ My translation of: Металла голос погребальный Порой оплакивает нас.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Insomnia," Op. 37, No. 1, measures 65-69. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line is marked "pleno" at the beginning and "poco" at the end. The piano accompaniment features a "sempre mancando" (always diminishing) marking over the right hand and a "riten." (ritardando) marking over the left hand. The piano part also includes a "p" (piano) dynamic marking and a "poco" marking. The score concludes with a double bar line and a "ff" (fortissimo) marking in the bass line.

Example 1.8: "Insomnia," Op 37. No. 1, mm. 65-69. (The singer's line is vocalise.)

The Muse theme, representing the voice of Time's farewell, also now mourns the principal subject at its funeral. This subject's questioning of Fate and Nature, in addition to its (symbolic) funeral, are suggestive of a Pastoral-Elegy. Although no deity is referenced, Time itself may be interpreted as a divine, immortal character. The subject's ghostly state of limbo, detached from the world but unable to leave her memory behind, finds a parallel in the *Elegy*, Op. 45, No. 1, to which I now turn.

Элегия, Op. 45, No. 1 (“Elegy” - Pushkin)

Two different references to the Muse theme are found in the *Elegy*, Op. 45. The first begins on the words “И невидимо навещают” (“And invisibly visit”), a reference in the poem to the souls of the dead returning to console the living. In its opening motto, the raised pitch is displaced to the middle of the measure and leaps up a third to a chord tone, instead of an appoggiatura, as seen in the previous example.

The image shows a musical score for the vocal and piano parts of 'Elegy' Op. 45, No. 1, measures 32-33. The score is in 10/8 time and D major. The vocal line is marked 'molto tranquillo' and 'p dolceissimo'. The piano accompaniment is marked 'pp molto tranquillo'. The lyrics are: 'И не ви ди - мо на ве ща - ют' and 'Unsichtbarna - hen sie den Stel - len,'.

Example 1.9: “Elegy,” Op. 45, No. 1, mm. 32-33.

The second Muse theme reference occurs a few measures later, with the fourth note once again approached by step and oriented to the downbeat. A dotted rhythm continues from it, which falls back to the initial pitch in a similar fashion as in the Piano Quintet (see Example 1.20, p. 34).

Più mosso e sempre più appassionato

espressivo *molto ritenuto* *ppp legatissimo*

О - ни, бес - смер - ти.е вку - Schon die Un - sterb - lichkeit ge -

М. 29308 г.

sempre più mosso e crescendo

Sempre con Pedale

- ша я, их под - жи - да ють Э - ли -
- nie - bend Harr'n im E - ly si - um sie dann

p sempre accelerando e crescendo

f marcato *dimin.* *p legato sempre accelerando e crescendo*

- зей, как ждёт на пир семья род -
dein. Wie man den Gast noch spät er -

Example 1.10: “Elegy,” Op. 45, No. 1, mm. 40-51.

The initial phrase in Example 1.10 is next sequenced up by a minor second to conclude the poetic stanza, provided below in a translation by Henry Drinker:

"They wait, these loved ones in Elysium,
these shades with life immortal blest,
as mortals at a family banquet
await a tardy, welcome guest."³⁹

The Muse theme in this work, therefore, is associated with an idyllic view of the afterlife, of Death itself as a passage to a heavenly feast. This is a departure from its prior associations in "Insomnia," where Death was viewed as being at a cold distance from the living, without the possibility of providing consolation. These two, distinct outlooks on Death illustrate the range of perspective in which the Muse theme can be applied to a single topic (Death).

Молитва, Op. 61 No. 5 : ("The Prayer" - Lermontov)

The Muse theme's opening motto makes a brief appearance at the line "*В созвучьи слов живых*" (In the sound of living words), as part of this poem's perspective on a sacred, consoling power that is present in the recitation of a prayer. The upper note this time is reached by a leap of a fourth, rather than approached by step, but continues with the same dotted rhythm:

³⁹ Drinker, xx.

- ДАТ - НА - Я ВОС - ВУ - ЧЬЕ СЛОВ ЖИ - ВНЫХ,
 Wun - der.kraft Ein je - des Wort er.füllt,

Example 1.11: “The Prayer,” Op. 61, No. 5, mm. 17-19.

While Lermontov’s text does not reference a particular religion or mythology, Medtner’s musical setting reinforces the Muse theme’s connection to prayer and the power of divine recitation. These elements will be further explored in the Piano Quintet, and within the chapters on the *Introduction* and *Finale* movements of the *Sonata-Ballade*.

INSTRUMENTAL WORKS

“Night Wind” Sonata, Op. 25, No. 2

The “Night Wind” sonata was conceived with inspiration from Russian poetry. It was published with an epigraph from a poem by Fyodor Tyutchev:

What are you wailing about, night wind, what are you bemoaning with such fury?
 What does your strange voice mean, now indistinct and plaintive, now loud? In a
 language intelligible to the heart you speak of torment past understanding, and
 you moan and at times stir up frenzied sounds in the heart!

Oh, do not sing those fearful songs about primeval native Chaos! How avidly the
 world of the soul at night listens to its favourite story! It strains to burst out of the
 mortal breast and longs to merge with the Infinite . . . Oh, do not wake the
 sleeping tempests; beneath them Chaos stirs!

In an interpretive summary of the text, Martyn explicates “chaos as man’s natural inheritance.”⁴⁰

The first theme of the second movement (of two) likely corresponds to the opening of the second stanza. Its melody begins in the left hand, with four repetitions of $\hat{5}$. Intertextually, it could be considered as an augmentation of Beethoven’s ‘Fate’ motive, and also precursor to the more dramatic presentation of the Muse theme later in the movement (shown in Example 1.4, p. 13).

Example 1.12: “Night Wind” Sonata, Op. 25, No. 2, II. *Allegro molto sfrenatamente, Presto*, mm. 1-9.

⁴⁰ Martyn, “Sonata in E Minor ‘Night Wind,’ Op 25, No 2 (Medtner) - from CDA67221/4 - Hyperion Records,” accessed October 30, 2016, http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W4728_67221

After the initial descent in the second measure of Example 1.12, the melody begins a new statement of the ‘Fate’ motive on $\hat{1}$. This time, however, it follows the Muse theme’s opening contour by ascending to a higher note by step. The higher note is articulated on an offbeat, instituting a variation of the Muse theme’s opening motto. In resignation, the line recedes back to the initial tonic pitch, then to a lower fourth with a sighing, two-note slur gesture. Throughout the excerpt, the right hand conjures a chaotic wind with swirling, tempestuous passagework reminiscent of a Chopin etude (particularly Op. 10, No. 4). Martyn’s interpretation of the poem (chaos as man’s inheritance) is supported by the troping (merger) of all three ideas: the “Fate” motive, a singing-style melody, and the tumultuous wind topic.

Sonata-Tragica, Op. 36, No. 5

As mentioned previously, Pott suggested the possibility of a reference to the Muse theme in the opening of the *Sonata Tragica*:



Example 1.13: *Sonata-Tragica*, Op. 36, No. 5, mm. 1-3.

The opening contour delays the raised pitch with a fourth repeated note. Unlike prior excerpts, the raised pitch is not accented, either metrically, dynamically, or through

articulation. Instead, Medtner emphasizes the repeated note preceding it, jarringly setting up an anticipation of the resolution reached in the third measure.

Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 44

Only the first movement of this sonata contains a reference to the Muse theme. The theme's opening motto begins the movement's subordinate theme. Shortly thereafter, the motive is iterated in a sequence:

The image shows a musical score for Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 44, measures 93-102. It consists of three systems of music, each with a violin part and a piano accompaniment. The first system is marked "sereno cantabile" and "p non legato". The piano part features a sequence of repeated notes (Rea) with various articulations and dynamics. The second system is marked "crescendo". The third system is marked "p subito" and "pp legato". The piano part features a sequence of repeated notes (Rea) with various articulations and dynamics.

Example 1.14: Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 44, mm. 93-102.

This melodic idea (beginning with the opening motto) is presented three times in sequence. Its high note corresponds with a lowered-mediant key shift in harmony, eliciting a sensation of being uplifted in inspiration. In the piano accompaniment, rising quintuplet-sixteenth notes and rolled chords contribute to the theme's soaring affect.

In addition to the modal passage mentioned earlier in this chapter (Example 1.3, p. 12), there is another treatment of the Muse theme found at the initiation of the development.

Example 1.15: Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 44, mm. 128-131. The Muse motive is sequenced again in the measures immediately following this excerpt.

As a chorale-like setting of the Muse theme that enters after a pause, this passage has an earlier intertextual counterpart in *Sonata-Ballade*'s introduction movement (Example 4.12, p. 92). Medtner's rhetorical use of this texture is suggestive of a Greek chorus, in that it appears to comment on the prior discourse.

Skazka, Op. 51, No. 1

This piano miniature is associated with "Ivan the Fool," a stock character in Russian folklore. Unlike better known fools (such as Don Quixote), Ivan's naiveté and heart-oriented decisions are generally portrayed with a lighter tone. The same characteristics

could be said to apply to this piece, as well as Medtner's treatment of the Muse theme within. The theme's opening motto appears only in the following passage:

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a dynamic marking of *pp leggerissimo* and later transitions to *f subito*. The lower staff features a melodic line with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *f*. The second system also consists of two staves. The upper staff starts with *pp* and later has a dynamic marking of *p*. The lower staff begins with *senza Pedale*, followed by a dynamic marking of *f*, and ends with *senza Pedale*. Various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and fingerings are present throughout the score.

Example 1.16: *Skazka*, Op. 51, No.1, mm. 162-131.

The profundity of the Muse theme is humorously dismantled in this excerpt, as it is twice undercut dynamically, and by a sparsely textured reply. This response—a playful, teasing dance—elides with the end of the opening motto. Perhaps Medtner was lightly poking fun at the serious, reflective nature of the theme in his other works. In keeping with the naive character of Ivan, there are no tragic consequences.

Two Elegies, Op. 59

Both Elegies in this opus begin with the Muse theme's opening motto displaced to the center of the measure, similar to the beginning of the *Sonata-Tragica* and the *Night*

Wind sonata excerpt in Example 1.3 (p. 13). However, an eventual shift to the barline occurs within a stretto entrance of the theme in mm. 4-5 of each excerpt:

A)

I

Op. 59 No. 1

Andante largamento

B)

II

Op. 59. No. 2

Andante con moto, sempre cantabile

Example 1.17: *Two Elegies*, Op. 59: A) No. 1, mm. 1-5. B). No. 2, mm. 1-6.

Another distinction is the gestural sense of disengagement, highlighted by breath marks, at the end of each Muse theme reference. Instead of being lifted toward a new goal or direction, or intensifying a conflict, the opening motto in Example 1.17 is more akin to a delayed exhaling of one's breath.

These pieces are the last works written for solo piano. The outwardly youthful energy in the *Night Wind* sonata is stripped away, supplanted by inner anguish and desolation. A small exception, perhaps, can be found with a brief recall of fantasy in the first Elegy's coda.

Piano Quintet, Op. Posth.

The Muse theme is prominently featured in the Piano Quintet; statements of the opening motto are found in all three movements. Medtner wrote three scriptural quotations in Russian in his own rough copy. The first is Luke 6:21, a beatitude on consolation for the hungry and sorrowful, which appears beneath a theme introduced in the first movement's coda.⁴¹ Likewise, Psalm 24:11, 16, 18 and 20, concerning repentance, are presented above themes in the second movement.⁴² David Skorvak suggests that Psalm 24:11, in particular, could apply to the second movement as a whole, due to its written placement in the score.⁴³

The Muse theme initially appears in the subordinate theme area of the first movement. It enters after a major key iteration of the *Dies Irae* motive at rehearsal letter C.

⁴¹ Konstantin Klimov, "The Last Instrumental Composition: The Piano Quintet" in *Nicolas Medtner, 1879-1951: A tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: Rimington, Van Wyck, 1955), 209.

⁴² Ibid. Luke 6:11 appears above a theme in the first movement's coda. Klimov unfortunately does not specify which Psalm verse correlates with which second movement theme.

⁴³ Skorvak, 66.

Example 1.18: Piano Quintet, Op. Posth., I. *Molto Placido*, mm. 65-74.

Example 1.18: Piano Quintet, Op. Posth., I. *Molto Placido*, mm. 65-74.

The melodic line beginning at the opening motto matches the early draft that Flamm uncovered, which as previously mentioned, is underscored by a line from a Christian poem by Fet that Medtner would reference in the *Sonata-Ballade*.⁴⁴ This particular contour, however, does *not* appear within the *Sonata-Ballade*. Perhaps the omission of Fet's poem

⁴⁴ See Chapter 3, p. 35.

in the quintet is a sign that Medtner found it more applicable to the *Sonata-Ballade*'s program.

Regardless, a motivic connection between the two works is reinforced in the second movement. Shortly after rehearsal letter B, the Muse theme is presented in the first violin:



Example 1.19: Piano Quintet, Op. Posth., I. *Molto Placido*, mm. 41-44.

Its contour closely matches a presentation of the Muse theme in the *Finale* movement of the *Sonata-Ballade*. This correlation goes much further than the version found in “The Muse,” Op. 29, No. 1 (Example 1.1, p. 1).⁴⁵ By contrast to the *Sonata-Ballade* and Op. 29, No. 1, the Muse theme in Example 1.19 is presented in a minor key (A minor).

Several more statements of the Muse theme’s opening motto are found throughout the quintet. These include its canonic treatment in the first movement’s development section, and a chordal, *attaca* transition to the *Finale* movement. In the *Finale*, the Muse theme’s opening motto is adapted as a superimposed augmentation within the opening theme.

⁴⁵ The Muse theme, in the form found in “The Muse,” Op. 29, No. 1, is also stated in the first movement’s coda (in a major key).

Allegro vivace $\text{♩} = 76$

f *mp* *legato*

Example 1.20: Piano Quintet, Op. Posth., III. *Finale*, mm. 1-4.

Further augmentations of the opening motto, in half notes, can be found in the ten measures before the *Finale*'s recapitulation section.⁴⁶

Each presentation of the Muse theme discussed in the quintet thus far has used a stepwise ascent in the opening motto. A leaping variant is also found within the *Finale* movement, and is first introduced at rehearsal letter B. It also slightly varies the rhythm of the opening motto:

B poco tranquillo, sereno

mf

Red *~~~~~* *

Example 1.21: Piano Quintet, Op. Posth., III. *Finale*, mm. 48-49.

This motive, associated with serenity (*sereno*), is reused several times within the movement, including its use as a unit in a modulatory sequence.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Skorvak, 78.

⁴⁷ An example can be found in the measures leading into rehearsal letter M.

Chapter 2: Sonata-Ballade: Introduction to Analytical Premises

Nikolai Medtner's *Sonata-Ballade*, Op.27 (1914) is a three movement work⁴⁸ written in a late-Romantic tonal idiom. Anecdotal commentary from his former students indicate three main narrative themes:⁴⁹ (1) overarching the entire work, a struggle between the light and dark in the human soul, (2) in the first movement, a springtime devoid of religious belief in a creator, and (3) in the second and third movements, a connection to the poem "Когда Божественный бежал людских речей" ("When Christ Ran from Idle Human Talk") by Afanasy Fet. Medtner actually wrote quotations from this poem in a student's score, an additional primary source that supports the composer's intent.⁵⁰ (This practice of referencing religious texts anticipates the scriptural quotations in the posthumously-published Piano Quintet, earlier discussed in Chapter 1, p. 31)

In this sonata, conflict within the "human soul" is communicated through the subjectivity of an internalized virtual agent (the soul) that is embodied (human), to apply concepts from working theory of virtual agency by Robert S. Hatten.⁵¹ As a portrayal of a protagonist's inner struggles, its perspective can be characterized as human in its flaws, but also in its potential for growth and development. The principal agent is more impressionable, and bipolar, than the religious actors introduced in Fet's poem (Christ, Satan, angels), who are more consistent in their oppositional associations with "light" or

⁴⁸ Some analyses consider the *Introduction* and *Finale* as two parts of a single movement. Given the *Introduction*'s length, form, and breadth of its musical narrative, I will refer to it as a movement that is paired with the *Finale*.

⁴⁹ Martyn (1995), 95-96.

⁵⁰ Boyd, Malcolm, "Medtner and the Muse," *The Musical Times* 121, no. 1643 (1980), 24.

⁵¹ The internal agent's perspective, virtually embodied in the music's inferred protagonist, is the "individual subjectivity with which we identify, whether as performer or listener." Hatten (2004). 224-225, 230. In Chapter 5, pp. 100-103, I expand on a discussion of Hatten's theory of virtual agency, using Medtner's *Skazka*, Op. 34, No. 2 and the *Sonata-Ballade*, Op.27 as musical references. For further development of the theory, see Hatten, *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Music* (forthcoming).

“dark.” The *Sonata-Ballade*’s Christian-religious topics are foregrounded within a biblical drama which advances externally from the principal agent’s subjectivity. Within Medtner’s musical dramatization of scriptural events, religious actors and agencies are composited, by a narrative persona, into an implicitly dialogical discourse.

A convincing interpretive analysis of the *Sonata-Ballade*, in my belief, must account for both the internal agent’s subjectivity and the external biblical drama. Their interaction is central to the positive conclusion of the *Finale*’s coda, and to the lack of resolution at other junctures in the movement. The chart below provides a sketch of foregrounded subjectivity throughout the sonata:

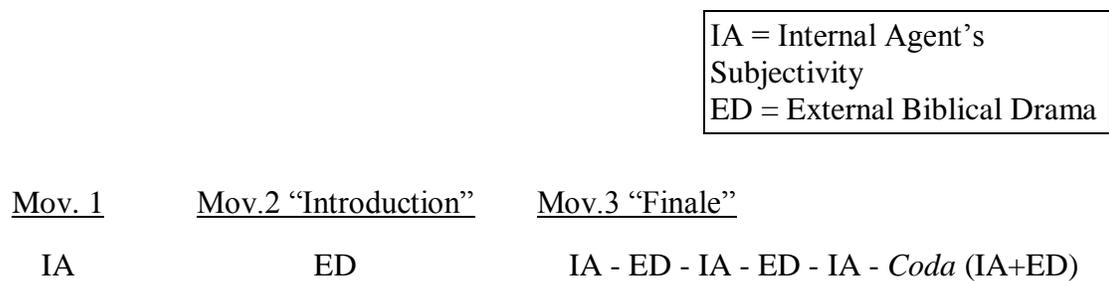


Figure 2.1: An outline of subjectivities in the *Sonata-Ballade*.

The first movement portrays a spiritual conflict within the principal agent that ends in tragedy. The second provides a formal introduction to the religious actors referenced by Fet’s poem.⁵² The third movement culminates in their integration, after a struggle within the principal agent between the forces of “light” and “dark,” staged as a religious drama in music.

When one perspective is highlighted across a section or movement, the influence of the other is felt more subtly as passive, or even dormant, until the discourse yields to it.

⁵² Martyn (1995), 96.

However, certain musical cues suggest that the backgrounded perspective can have an understated, agential influence on the foreground. Evidence can be found in the use of topics associated with the subjectivity not being foregrounded. In the first movement's development, for example, Scriabin-esque mysticism and learned-style counterpoint evoke spiritual/high-religious drama, which on the surface may seem opposed to the protagonist's implied lack of faith in a creator. Still, these topics are articulated within the context of the principal agent's subjectivity, singularly highlighted in continuity throughout the movement by a saturation of developing variation.⁵³ The protagonist, therefore, is able to exhibit qualities of spiritual enlightenment and religious turmoil. This clues the listener to an otherworldliness that exists beyond the protagonist's internal strife. However, without the religious narrative presented in the second movement (*Introduction*) and developed by the third movement (*Finale*), this premonition would be lacking in context. Themes associated with the religious actors are absent in the first movement, indicating that the principal agent has yet to acknowledge them, and is instead more focused on its inner self. This subtle layering of subjectivities suggests that the principal agent exhibits a self-guided spirituality in the development. The resoundingly negative closure to the first movement suggests that the protagonist's brand of religiosity is flawed, and thus implies a tragic flaw in the movement's larger drama.

Likewise, the external religious drama, when foregrounded, takes topical cues from the principal agent's subjectivity. After the agent's tragic fall from grace in the first movement's coda, the second movement begins *attacca*, eliding into a funeral march with a held, low register octave. Here, the religious narrative is enriched by the context of the preceding material, bridging Fet's biblical drama with a section that appears to be

⁵³ This insight is partially informed by Hatten (2004), 290: “. . . We can identify at least one fundamental agency as created and sustained through the developing variation of a thematic gesture.”

mourning the principal agent's inner-spiritual demise. The held octave consequently takes on a thematic association with death; this motive will have further narrative implications as the sonata progresses.

A less discursive example of topical interplay across subjectivities is found in the next phrase of the *Introduction*, with the entrance of a noble march that, as I will later argue, is emblematic of empty human pride. There is a stubbornly boastful quality to this excerpt (Example 4.6, mm. 9-16), which will be further detailed in Chapter 4 (pp. 80-83). As the first appearance of the noble march topic, its prideful sentiment cannot be directly attributed to the broken-spirited principal agent. Instead, pride is personified in the second movement by "mankind," as a collective actorial entity, as distinct from the principal agent. This characterization allows the religious drama to briefly adopt a human model of expression without yielding to the principal agent's subjectivity.

In addition to topics, the influence of agential perspective may be uncovered in thematic material. Some motives are encountered outside of the perspective in which they originated. These references are often discrete in the musical texture, altered in form through augmentation, diminution, fragmentation, or other variational techniques. Several examples are discussed in Chapter 5. There, the analysis of the *Finale* demonstrates references to external drama as a means of pivoting to internal subjectivity.

Such references can also be applied in the opposite direction. An earlier example can be found in the opening phrase of the first movement, which has similar features to the Muse theme's six-note opening motto. Figure 2.2 provides a comparison, with the principal beats of the first movement's opening metrically superimposed.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ A similar augmentation of the Muse motive was discussed in Chapter 1, with respect to the Piano Quintet.

A)

B)

Figure 2.2: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, A) Opening melody B) Muse theme in *Finale*.

Both excerpts highlight the motion from $\hat{5}$ - $\hat{6}$, emphasize $\hat{5}$ three times, and incorporate a fall from $\hat{6}$ to a resolution on the tonic pitch. The similarities hint at a compatibility of the two themes, which later supports their tropological merger,⁵⁵ when they are layered in the *Finale*'s coda. Furthermore, it suggests a degree of compatibility between the two subjectivities. This might seem to be counterintuitive in the first movement, as the principal agent does not yet subscribe to the Christian theology inherent to the external religious drama in later movements. However, the opening phrase's subtle connection to the Muse theme,⁵⁶ outlined in Figure 2.2, suggests the religious dramatic perspective as an undercurrent within the first movement. As Martyn describes, the opening song of Spring "implies the immanence of a Creator and the need for religious faith."⁵⁷ Thus, a creator God persists as the underlying source of the Springtime in which the principal agent initially takes joy.

⁵⁵ Hatten (2004), 297. The author defines troping in music as "novel interactions between otherwise contrasting musical entities that spark new (emergent) meanings."

⁵⁶ The Muse theme in the *Sonata-Ballade* is representative of Christ, as will later be detailed in Chapter 4.

⁵⁷ Martyn, Barrie. "Sonata-Ballade in F Sharp Major, Op. 27 (Medtner) - from CDA67221/4," accessed October 4, 2016. http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W4729_67221

The outlined possibilities for interplay between subjectivities will be further addressed in subsequent chapters, as examples appear within a discussion of individual movements. I will now proceed with an analysis of the opening movement, and an argument for its discourse as adhering to a singular, continuous subjectivity.

Chapter 3: Sonata-Ballade: I. Allegretto Movement

The first movement begins with a lyric pastorale representative of “the joys and songs of springtime,” according to Medtner’s student Bernard Pinsonneault.⁵⁸ A springtime setting is often associated with the pastoral style genre, which permeates the larger movement. The opening melody (PT) contains several pastoral characteristics, including a siciliano rhythm, frequent returns to tonic harmonies, and a swaying melodic contour.

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Sonata-Ballade, Op. 27, I. Allegretto, mm. 1-6. The score is in 6/8 time and D major. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' and 'molto comodo, ma a tempo'. The dynamics are 'mp cantando' and 'p'. The score shows the opening melody in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The melody is characterized by a siciliano rhythm and a swaying contour. The accompaniment features sustained trills and undulating accompaniment.

Example 3.1: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 1-6. (PT theme)

Echoes of the Chopin Barcarolle may also be heard in its sustained trills, undulating accompaniment, and choice of meter and key. A more direct intertext is Chopin’s second Ballade, which contains a melodic fragment appearing as a seminal motive in Medtner’s theme.

⁵⁸ Pinsonneault, 38.



Example 3.2: Chopin's *Ballade*, No. 2, mm. 1-5. Motive marked in bracket.

The sonata as a whole is one of Medtner's most intertextual works, borrowing from other composers' styles and themes, as well as his own, in creating an original narrative framework.

What the opening theme does not evoke, however, is clear expression of an absence of belief in a creator. Moreover, a Springtime *not* reaffirming Creation and a creator God would appear to contradict Medtner's own religious conceptions. To quote the composer: "Flowers are ornaments for some, medicine for others . . . To me, it seems that their true 'aim' is revealed to us by their symbolic movement upward. That is why I am inclined to say that flowers flourish only for the glory of God."⁵⁹ An expression of a creator-less nature, therefore, would presumably originate from a being with the free will to express disbelief, intoned in this work by the internal embodied agent. However, the *cantando* opening melody can still be postulated as human in expression. In this chapter, I will argue that the singular subjectivity of the internal embodied agent permeates the movement, and that shifts in the level of its discourse pertain to differing states of consciousness and self-

⁵⁹ Dominique Laberge, "Homage to Medtner," in *Nicolas Medtner, 1879-1951: A tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: Rimington, Van Wyck, 1955), 148.

reflectivity. A case for the continuity of the agent’s perspective can be traced, in Medtner’s use, to a saturation of developing variation technique.

Most of the short motives Medtner develops in the first movement originate from the opening theme area. The following chart outlines the motives I will identify, for ease of reference:

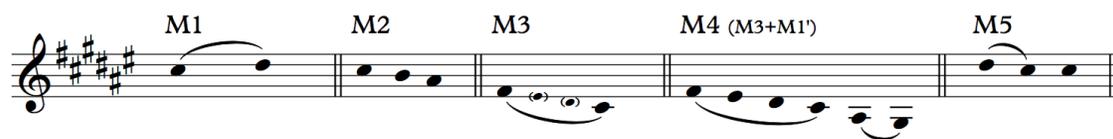


Figure 3.1: Motives (subject to inversion and other variation techniques)

The M1 motive, a swaying major 2nd gesture, was earlier referenced in Chapter 2 (p. 39). At first metrically superimposed, the gesture may be heard as inverted in diminution as the phrase proceeds towards its cadence (Figure 3.2, m. 3). The closing trill in measure 4 could also be regarded as a further diminution of the motive.

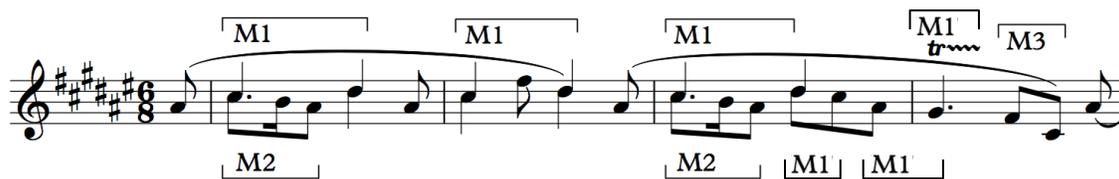


Figure 3.2: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. Allegretto, mm. 1-4. Stems are added to highlight M1’s contour.

Charles Keller (1971) identifies another short, motivic gesture in the opening measure: a falling stepwise motion of a third (corresponding to my M2 motive) associated with the opening siciliano rhythm.⁶⁰ However, his theory of the sonata’s thematic

⁶⁰ Charles William Keller, “The Piano Sonatas of Nicolas Medtner” (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1971), 158.

development differs substantially from my view of a continuity rooted in developing variation. Keller believes that the M2 (falling stepwise) motive “inaugurates all principal thematic material” and that “except for this unifying element, the thematic principle is not always evolutionary— that is, one motive or theme does not always suggest another.”⁶¹ By contrast, I will argue that the additional motives in Figure 1 are the underpinnings of the movement’s themes and transitional material alike.

A third thematic gesture appears after the initial cadence is reached: a falling 4th (M3). Its descent from a resolved pitch might be interpreted, in the context of the pastoral mode, as a carefree sigh. Its intervallic roots can also be traced to the first measure, where both falling and rising 4ths are embedded within the melodic line.

The swaying 2nds gesture (M1), in its inverted and condensed form, opens the next phrase of the primary theme.

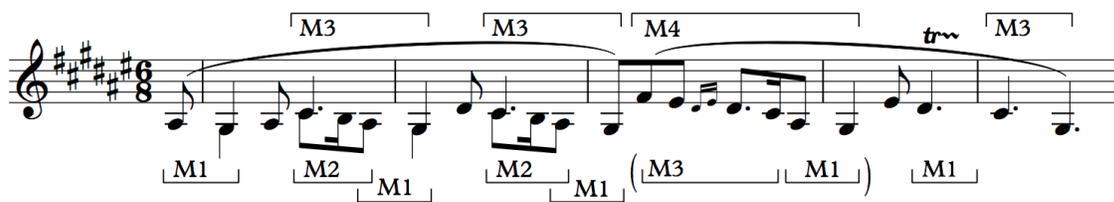


Figure 3.3: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. Allegretto, mm. 5-9. (stems are added to show the perfect 4th of motive 3)

As a variation of the opening phrase, this second phrase (Figure 3.3) displaces the siciliano rhythm to the middle of the measure. Strong beats now highlight rising/falling 4ths (M3) instead of 2nds (M1). Each of these changes suggests the second phrase can be interpreted as sort of altered reflection, or distorted mirroring, of the first—perhaps as an indication of the internal embodied agent’s reflective subconscious.

⁶¹ Keller, 158.

The second phrase's motion toward its cadence is further expanded from the initial phrase. Another contour is present that Medtner will thematically develop: a mostly-stepwise, descending scalar passage that concludes with a falling 2nd (M4). Its origin can likewise be traced to earlier material: the stepwise descent appears to be derived from the filled-in falling 4th motion (M3) in Figure 3.2, and its closing major 2nd to the swaying gesture (M1). Swaying 2nds also comprise part of the grace-note turn, which is an ornament not typically found in later statements of the M4 motive. It expressively highlights the shift from C# to D# in the middle measure 7, and also anticipates the forthcoming trill on D# leading into the cadence.

The opening theme area continues with a modulatory passage (P_{Tr}) that might, at first hearing, be mistaken for the opening of a transition section.

Example 3.3: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 7-14. (P_{Tr} theme)

Continuing a pattern of inversive mirroring and developing variation, the melodic line now follows a *rising* 4th contour (M3). The top note of this interval, however, is briefly evaded by an appoggiatura-like gesture (M1) that reverses direction. The pitch it resolves to, C#, is repeated in the following measure, introducing a gesture of repetition (M5) that Medtner will later develop.

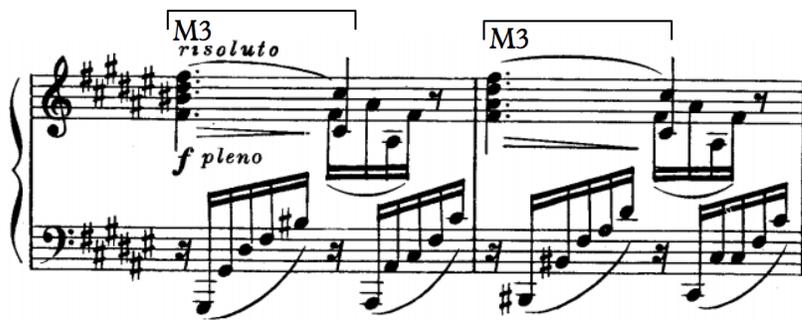
Altogether, the first measure of Example 3.3 is a diminished, inversional variant of M4's descending contour. Its chorale-like accompaniment, upward motion, and leap might be interpreted as the embodied agent reaching for a higher, religious experience than was provided in the initial theme. *Tenutos*, likewise, imply a heightened sense of weight and nobility of striving. This is undercut, however, by a sighing 4th gesture (M3) in the next measure, marked by a return of the previous accompaniment pattern. After the passage is sequenced a fifth higher, the opening contour of Example 3.3 becomes stuck through repetition, finding escape only through a sequence of elisions of the M5 motive:



Example 3.4: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 15-16.

In addition to the fragmentation and repetition, articulation is also changed from Example 3.3 to Example 3.4, from *tenuto* to *staccato*. Example 3.4's emphasis on repetition and shortened articulation could be interpreted as the internal agent's obsessiveness in its struggle to resolve tension.

The conclusion of the primary theme area reconciles the internal agent's emotional instability with a spirited return to the movement's initial pastoral character. Two iterations of the sighing 4th gesture (M3) enter in the measures after Example 3.4, as a counterbalance to its repetitions.



Example 3.5: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 17-18.

A new ‘closing’ theme (P_{Cl}) follows, built as an augmentation of the descending-line motive (M4) with its last interval inverted.



Example 3.6: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 19-22. (P_{Cl} theme)

The phrase’s initial, descending 4th gesture (M3) also appears in canon within the right hand (marked by *tenutos*), and is also inverted in augmentation within the left hand’s ascent. The passage concludes with a cadential motion similar to the second phrase: another statement of the descending line motive (M4) leads to a prolonged trill and

cadence. The M4 motive's chordal, *tenuto* treatment suggests that the chorale topic has been integrated within the original pastoral affect, resolving earlier conflict. Of notable significance, the cadence resolves in the tonic key, creating a closed, ternary-form thematic presentation.

Other scholars have noted the atypical features of the primary theme area. Keller remarks that the exposition “never really establishes its dominant key level (C#).”⁶² Wendelin Biztan, alternatively, considers the first two phrases (cadencing in C#) as a “self-contained entity” lacking “developable, open-ended material.”⁶³ In my perspective, the initial dominant-key, authentic cadence creates an expectation for a modulation. However, this expectation is reversed by the opening theme area's trajectory back to the tonic. The purpose of the contrasting material (m. 11), then, is both to suggest a “potential for development”⁶⁴ in the internal agent's subjectivity, and to function as a contrasting middle. By adapting previous cadential material to a closing section in the original tonic key, the primary theme area recovers from its brief excursion away from the tonic.

With the primary theme area employing transition-like material, the transition section proper (TR) opts for a more extreme contrast. Its entrance comes across as a sudden burst of inspiration, playful in nature, which denies the primary theme any rest after its closing cadence.

⁶² Keller, 157.

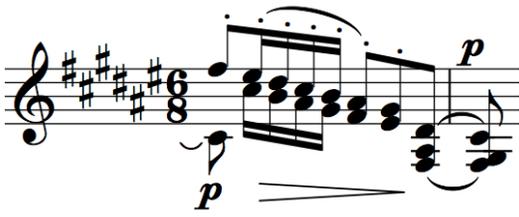
⁶³ Biztan (forthcoming).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has two staves. The upper staff is marked with 'poco rit.' and 'con vivezza (più mosso)'. It features a melodic line with a bracketed section labeled 'M1'. The lower staff is marked with 'p leggierissimo M3' and 'dimin.'. It contains a descending sequence of notes with asterisks and a 'Ca.' marking. The second system also has two staves. The left hand of the second system has a bracketed section labeled '(P_{C1} fragment)'. Both systems include various fingering numbers (2, 1, 2, 1, 3, 5, 4, 3, 4, 5) and other performance instructions like 'p'.

Example 3.7: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 22-28. (TR theme)

One might be quick to attribute this passage to a new agency in dialogue with the internal, embodied subject. However, the expressive text ‘*con vivezza*’ suggests a fresh insight from *within* the agent. Several established motivic gestures continue into the transition, likewise suggesting a continuity of the internal agent’s subjectivity. A sequence of falling sixteenth-notes in measure 24 develop the swaying 2nd motive (M1) in diminution. The rising, contrary-motion, cantabile line is another inverted variant of the M3 idea, harkening to the left hand’s counterpoint in Example 3.6 (mm. 19-20, 21, p. 47). Arguably, the clearest connection is a fragment of the P_{C1} theme that reappears in the left hand in Example 3.7’s second system. This is followed by a scalar expansion of the M4 motive:



Example 3.8: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 27-28, right hand. (M_{Tr} motive)

This particular outgrowth of M4 is frequently found in subordinate theme areas - I will reference it as an M_{Tr} motive. Overall, these motivic connections to the primary theme group strengthen an argument for a continuation of the agent's perspective, even given the marked contrast of the transition's texture and topic (that of an ecstatic dance).

Robert S. Hatten offers a theory of agential continuity that could relate to the transition section's opening measures (in Example 3.6):

[Some disruptions] imply what I have called *shifts in level of discourse*, in that the sudden reversal suggests a self-reflexive response or shift in consciousness on the part of a single agent, rather than an external agency antagonistic to the progress of a protagonist. Such shifts may also imply a Romantic ironic comment on the prevailing musical discourse, subverting or dismissing that which is seen as too self-indulgent, too naïve, or simply in need of midcourse correction.⁶⁵

In relation to this observation, the primary theme area could be considered "self-indulgent" in its return to the tonic, even if motivated by a pastoral tendency toward stability. Because the movement as a whole has a dysphoric trajectory, naïveté could also be implicit in the agent's perspective. On this topic, however, the transition's opening appears to emphasize a pastoral naïveté with comical lightheartedness. Perhaps then, the embodied agent is attempting to prolong its blissful sentiment.

Hatten also discusses the implications of such an attempt at preservation:

⁶⁵ Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting musical gestures, topics, and tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 47.

“Interestingly, some of these disruptive strategies are motivated by the very temporal extensions and irregularities that result from working out the premise of desired plentitude. When continuities overly prolong states of fulfillment, they may begin to imply states of distraction, diffusion, wandering, or winding down from euphoria into a state of depression . . . The fulfillments of plentitude are thereby made to appear fragile, and hence more valuable, since they are subject to eventual decay or displacement.”⁶⁶

This idea can apply to the remainder of the transition, which gradually disseminates the carefree affect, then settles into a melancholic, secondary theme (ST). Hatten’s observation also underlines a tragic flaw which manifests itself in larger drama: the internal agent’s frustrated tendency to hold on to the blissful and euphoric, believing it has attained peace of mind or spiritual enlightenment. Martyn broadly paints the primary theme area as “the need for religious faith,” and the second theme as a denial of this calling.⁶⁷ I am more inclined to classify the former as ‘peace in the idea of religious fulfillment in nature,’ and the latter as ‘the darker side of the human subject’s spiritual state.’

Martyn continues to describe the second subject as “restless and anxious in spirit,” with “conflict reflected in the cross-rhythm of the accompaniment.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid., 47.

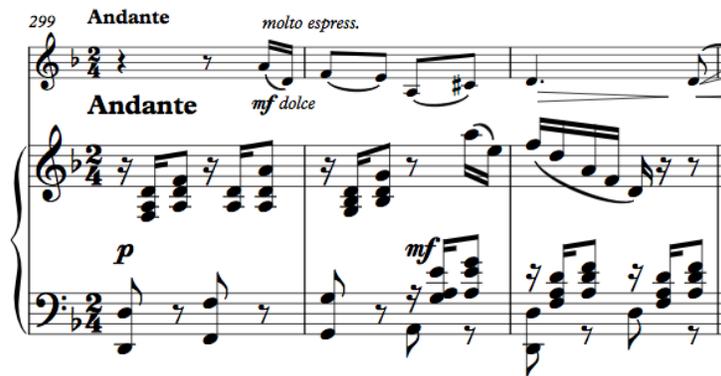
⁶⁷ Martyn, Barrie. “Sonata-Ballada in F Sharp Major, Op. 27 (Medtner) - from CDA67221/4,” accessed October 4, 2016. http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W4729_67221

⁶⁸ Ibid.



Example 3.9: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 34-36. (ST theme)

Its melody has a curious resemblance to a minor key variation in Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations*:⁶⁹



Example 3.10: Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, Op. 33, Variation 6 (Version B), mm. 1-3.

Medtner's theme, however, is agitated beyond sadness. It modulates aimlessly, unable to settle on a key area as if it were a development section. Oddly, the theme achieves its greatest stability outside of the formal area that presents it. The second theme is first embedded within the Transition's closing cadential material, a typical strategy of Medtner's.

⁶⁹ Alexander Karpeyev discussed this intertext in a conversation at the International Medtner Study Day (London, January 2016).

Example 3.11: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 29-39. The secondary theme (ST) begins at the first *a tempo*.

The second theme's opening interval, a falling 5th, could be regarded as an expansion of the falling 4th motive (M3). The cross-rhythms Martyn references are built from a canon featuring the siciliano rhythm, but here obsessively repeating a half-diminished-seventh chord. A fearful, almost trance-like anxiety pervades this passage (mm. 34-35). Escape is reached through an accelerated inversion of the rising third gesture (M2), followed by the repetition motive (M5) reduced intervallically to a minor 2nd and decorated with a grace note. The condensation of these motives implies a hurried effort, by the internal agent, to will itself out of its anxiety. Each attempt departs from the established tonal area in search of an escape, and the stability of a cadence. Using secondary dominants, the sentence-

structured phrase pivots to a new key at the end of each basic-idea unit. After a reintroduction of the M_{Tr} motive, the phrase cadences in $E\sharp$ major, a whole step away from its starting location. But even this relative stability is subverted, as the M_{Tr} motive continues into a reprise of the cadential material which led into the second theme. Expressively, this cadential material functions as a counterweight to the agent's willed ascent.

The image displays a musical score for Example 3.12, consisting of two systems of staves. The top system features a piano (p) staff and a vocal staff. The piano part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a *risoluto* (resolute) character. The vocal line starts with a *diminuendo* (diminishing) dynamic. The bottom system also features a piano (p) staff and a vocal staff. The piano part begins with a *poco calando* (slightly slowing down) marking, followed by a *a tempo* (return to tempo) marking. The vocal line begins with a *p dolce* (piano, sweetly) dynamic. The piano part concludes with a *rit. portamento* (ritardando with portamento) marking.

Example 3.12: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 40-45.

A fully-diminished-seventh chord is reached instead of a half-cadence, indicating a lack of progress in reaching tonal, and by analogy, mental stability.

Regardless, another attempt is made by the secondary theme. This time (Example 3.13), the left hand contains a new hemiola pattern mainly comprised of falling 4ths ($M3$)

and 5ths. An extra measure of fragmentation, built on 2nds (M1), leads to a cadence in the distant key of A major.

(Extra measure of M1 fragmentation)

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system includes annotations such as 'M3' under two measures, 'crescendo' over a four-measure phrase, and a fingering diagram (5 4 5 4 / 1 2 1 2) above the final measure. The second system includes 'f risoluto' and 'p' markings.

Example 3.13: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 46-52.

Greater panic is elicited by an earlier re-entrance of the secondary theme, which is now layered on top of the post-cadential, M_{Tr} material. The two motivic ideas (ST and M_{Tr}), once alternating, now symbiotically unite to create a single expression. Their combined meaning, as a trope, could be interpreted as part of an ongoing drama in which the principal agent grows impatient, and fails to find peace of mind. Impatience is further evoked by an interruption of a new ST presentation before the phrase's expected cadence. By truncating material, one receives an impression that the music is building toward a climax.

After two added measures of fragmented M1 material, a Chopin-esque culminating point (returning to an arpeggiated accompaniment) is reached on a tonic major-seventh chord:

(Extra two measures of M1 fragmentation)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). A bracketed section in the treble clef is labeled '(Extra two measures of M1 fragmentation)' and includes fingerings 5, 1, 4, 2. Below this section is the instruction 'molto cresc.'. The second system continues the piece with the instruction 'poco riten.' above the treble clef. It includes dynamics 'f' (forte) and 'pp' (pianissimo). The instruction 'carezzando' is written above the treble clef, and 'poco a poco' is written above the bass clef. There are also some 'x' marks in the bass clef, possibly indicating specific notes or ornaments.

Example 3.14: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 56-61. (S_{Cl} theme begins in m. 61.)

Interestingly, M_{Tr} is repurposed here as a grandiose, melodic gesture. Its role reversal, from transition to melody, can be considered the principal agent's first real achievement in the secondary theme area. The agent's discovery of a new dimension to the theme reflects an altered state of its inner psyche.

A dominant-key, half cadence is reached in the last measure of Example 3.14. It elides with a closing theme (S_{Cl})—a hocketed variation of the repetition (M5) motive. After another statement of M_{Tr} and S_{Cl}, Medtner atypically returns to both the primary theme and the tonic.



Example 3.15: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 65-70.

Its stability is immediately called into question by a half-diminished-seventh harmony, which alternates with the tonic. At the end of its first phrase, Medtner modulates to the dominant using an extended ii chord as a pivot. The opening theme's second phrase continues in this key, and concludes with an authentic cadence. Thus, Medtner employs primary theme material to establish the dominant—the usual key area closing a sonata-form exposition. However, this return to the opening melody results in an unconventional ABA structure for the entire exposition, echoing the ABA symmetry of topics found within the primary theme area itself.

In its expressive context, the exposition likewise contains a departure from, and return to emotional stability. Biztan, referencing his translation of Aleksandr Alekseyev, notes that the sonata's "continuous changes of mood, expressed in the alternation between the bright 'ballade theme' and the gloomy contrasting subjects, are described as a process of 'emotional rocking' or 'swinging' producing a dialectic struggle between

light and dark forces.”⁷⁰ To this, I would add that a highly developmental and modulatory secondary theme creates a dilemma for the composer as to where to take the development section. The principal agent, after all, has already undergone considerable growth and change within the exposition.

Ekaterina Podporinova, another author Biztan cites,⁷¹ supplies one answer with the concept of “mirror symmetry.”⁷² She notes that the development introduces each of the principal themes in reverse order, adhering to a palindromic design. Depending on the emphasis placed on transition-section material, however, this mirroring is not entirely exact:

Order of Themes Introduced in the Exposition and Development

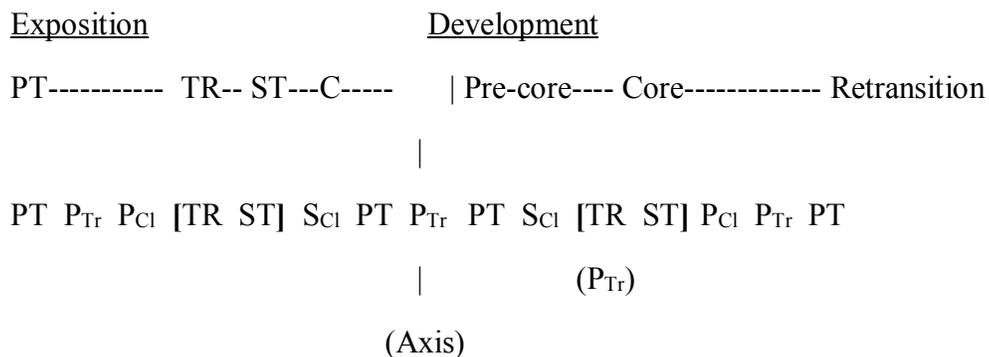


Figure 3.4: Adaptation of Podporinova’s analysis. Labels apply to each theme’s initial appearance in the Exposition and Development (with the exception of PT and P_{Tr}, to illustrate a reverse ordering of primary themes).

⁷⁰ I believe it is likely that this choice of hermeneutic language was inspired by the sonata’s opening swaying contour. Furthermore, Biztan notes that the verb “раскачать” (to start swinging) has a curious resemblance to “рассказать” (to narrate), implying a narrative persona at the level of a super-subjectivity (see Chapter 5, pp. 101, 103).

⁷¹ Biztan (forthcoming).

⁷² Ekaterina Viktorovna Podporinova, *Соната в творчестве Н. К. Метнера как отражение идейно-художественной концепции композитора*, (Charkov University of the Arts, 2007), 139.

As shown by my brackets, the transition and secondary themes (TR and ST) remain ‘unmirrored’ in the development. The transition is substantially truncated from the exposition, from eleven measures to three. Furthermore, the P_{Tr} motive (right hand) is added on top of an inversion of the exposition’s TR material (left hand):

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system is marked with the tempo instruction "sempre più risoluto (mobile)" and a forte dynamic "f". It features a complex, chromatic texture with many accidentals and slurs. The second system is marked "risoluto" and shows a more rhythmic, eighth-note pattern in both hands. The notation includes various clefs, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

Example 3.16: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 98-103.

This earlier than anticipated reference to P_{Tr} suggests an unsymmetrical imperfection. Perhaps it might even be interpreted as the principal agent resisting the mirror-like structure of the development. Podporinova considers the themes to be subordinate to this mirror form,⁷³ which is evidently supported by the failure of such an attempt to break away from its conventions.

It should be noted that Figure 3.4 pertains only to the order in which themes are *first* introduced, and does not detail a complete outline of their appearances. Several

⁷³ Ibid., 139.

discrepancies may be found in the conjectured ‘mirrored’ form of the development. To mention one example, the S_{Cl} theme alternates with PT in the development, whereas it alternates with ST (and M_{Tr}) in the exposition. Consequently, I consider the more general ‘altered reflection’ / ‘distorted mirroring’ imagery introduced earlier as a more apt description of the development’s form. On a related note, Podporinova uses the symbolism of “crystal symmetry” to describe the principal theme’s appearance at the beginning and end of each large, sonata-form area (excluding the coda).⁷⁴ The refractive qualities of crystal could also be interpreted as analogous to the development—as a prism or a lens revealing the internal agent’s subconscious.

A study of topics within the development, furthermore, suggests it also pertains to an inner spiritual struggle. As mentioned in the prior chapter, Medtner opens the development with a Scriabinesque mystical treatment of the primary theme. Its extended harmonies and ethereal, upper-register texture supports this intertextual allusion.

⁷⁴ Biztan (forthcoming).

Example 3.17: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 80-88.

The harmonies in Example 3.17 come close to Scriabin’s Mystic chord, which is particularly intriguing given that Medtner detested Scriabin’s late style. After Scriabin’s death, Medtner remarked that the late composer had become a “mad butterfly,” and that “towards the end, with all his mystical and theosophical slogans, even he lost his true path as an artist.”⁷⁵ As this movement was being written, the two had a heated argument over Scriabin’s mystical beliefs, especially theosophy. Its emphasis on revelation through individual spiritual intuition, rather than a rootedness in biblical accounts, was regarded by Medtner as heretical.⁷⁶ If the intertext was intentional, perhaps it might explain the earlier publication of this movement as a way of suggesting a musical critique of religious beliefs

⁷⁵ Martyn (1995), 112.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

opposed to his own (given that the movement's dramatic trajectory concludes in tragedy and trauma).

The development, alternatively, is guided towards an expression of ethereal bliss, which arrives at the opening of the recapitulation. In the Core section of the development, Medtner works out earlier themes with *tempesta* and learned-style counterpoint topics, as is prototypical within this formal area. The Retransition consists of a standing-on-the-dominant passage that anticipates the primary theme. Recollections of the mysticism topic—earlier found opening the development—emerge to neutralize the surrounding *tempesta*.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system consists of a treble and bass clef. The treble clef part features a melodic line with various ornaments and a final flourish with fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 4, 2, 1, 4, 3, 2. The bass clef part has a rhythmic accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *ff* and the instruction *m. s.* are present. The second system also has a treble and bass clef. The treble clef part has a melodic line with fingerings 2, 4, 1, 2, 4 and a dynamic marking of *m.d.*. The bass clef part has a melodic line with fingerings 5, 3, 1, 2, 5 and a dynamic marking of *piano*. A bracketed section in the bass clef is marked *8*. The system concludes with the instruction *diminuendo con gradazione*.

Example 3.18: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 134-139.

Again, extended harmonies in the high registers of the piano are used to create a spellbinding affect. After a second journey to the upper regions of the instrument, Medtner begins a luminous recapitulation of the lyrical primary theme in an unexpected key: the lowered mediant, A major.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system is marked *poco più tranquillo* and contains the following annotations: *m. s.*, *m. d.*, *ritenuto calando*, and *p*. It features a treble and bass staff with various rhythmic figures, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and a fermata over a measure in the bass staff. The second system is marked *Tempo I (molto comodo)* and includes the annotations *calando (riten.)*, *pp sereno*, and *con*. This system also consists of two staves with rhythmic patterns, including a triplet in the treble staff and a fermata in the bass staff.

Example 3.19: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 146-151.

The spiritual ecstasy of this transition might be considered a moment of mystical transcendence. Furthermore, its return to a pastoral serenity implies that the principal agent has attained spiritual enlightenment from within the natural world. While this could be regarded as an evocation of “light” within the human soul, it apparently does not constitute a saving grace, as is apparent in light of the movement’s tragic closure. Furthermore, signs of emotional instability continue to appear within the recapitulation. In a few places, they are even more pronounced.

The recapitulation adheres closely to the order of thematic material outlined in the exposition. In its harmony, however, there remains a critical question of how the tonic key will be reintroduced and maintained. Medtner begins to modulate away from A major in the P_{Tr} section, but in the P_{Cl} motive a more disparaging reality sets in; the key of resolution implied is the tonic *minor*. The pitch responsible for this change of modality also happens to be ‘A,’ the transcendent tonal region that was previously tonicized.

Before a cadence is reached within the minor tonic, a sudden deceptive motion opens the transition (TR) in the implied key of A major. This could imply that the principal agent appropriates this key area to overcome its human flaws. But the gesture might also be interpreted ironically, suggesting the internal agent's postponement of a problem that was not sufficiently addressed. A remnant of the minor tonic key can be found in the recapitulation's second theme area, in place of M_{Tr} 's lyrical transformation.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system shows a right-hand part with complex, strident chords and a left-hand part with a more rhythmic accompaniment. A 'molto cresc.' marking is placed above the right-hand staff. The second system continues the piece, featuring a 'f' (forte) dynamic in the right hand, followed by a 'dimin.' (diminuendo) and a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The tempo is marked 'poco rit.' (poco ritardando) and the texture is described as 'careszando' (caressingly). Both systems include first endings marked with an '8' and a dashed line.

Example 3.20: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 204-209.

This rage-fueled insertion of the minor tonic (mm. 207-209) continues the earlier fragmentations, and incorporates strident $F\sharp$ minor chords in the right hand. Before the primary theme enters again, the lyrical transformation of M_{Tr} makes a brief return:



Example 3.21: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 210-212.

The addition of *tenutos* and an ascending countermelody create a more ponderous impression than found in earlier statements in the exposition. This sets the stage for the return of the primary theme, which sits over an arrival 6/4 and pedestal dominant pedal⁷⁷ for almost an entire page of the score.

In transitioning to the coda, Medtner again recalls Chopin's *Barcarolle*, with a very audible reference to its climax.

⁷⁷ See Hatten (1994), 15, 97 and (2004), 24 for these terms. As an aside, the author interprets an arrival 6/4 in the first movement of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata Op. 101* as a moment of "saving grace" and "positive spiritual insight." (1994), 97.

A)

Musical score for Chopin's *Barcarolle*, Op. 60, mm. 92-93. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex, arpeggiated texture in both hands. The right hand has a melodic line with many grace notes and slurs, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes. The piece is marked *cresc.* and *ff*. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5. The piece ends with a *rit.* marking.

B)

Musical score for Chopin's *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 228-231. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex, arpeggiated texture in both hands. The right hand has a melodic line with many grace notes and slurs, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes. The piece is marked *ff*. The score ends with a *Coda.* section.

Example 3.22: A) Chopin's *Barcarolle*, Op. 60, mm. 92-93. B) *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 228-231.

There are a few notable differences between the two passages: the contour of the left hand, the starting pitch, some voicing choices, and a dip in the *Sonata-Ballade*'s contour. Martyn notes that this latter melodic difference is derived from a section of the opening theme (P_{Tr}).⁷⁸ Regardless, the audible, intertextual effect is still preserved, particularly given the

⁷⁸ Martyn (1995), 96.

similarities in their closing gesture. The intertext creates an expectation for a triumphant return to an earlier theme, and also provides hope for a victory for the principal agent. By narrative choice, however, Medtner does not fulfill either promise. Rather, his coda constitutes an extended struggle with spiritual “darkness,” concluding with the internal agent’s defeat. Its inner strife is once again expressed in the use of *tempesta* and learned-style topics, but with a greater sense of forward momentum and apotheosis in the Coda.

I will next highlight a few central developments in the Coda. A chart outlining its progression of its thematic material is provided below:

Employment of Themes in the Coda

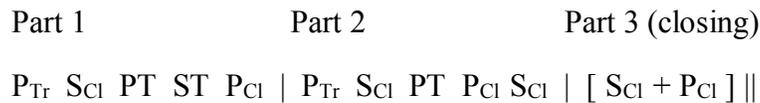


Figure 3.5

Medtner begins the Coda in the major Tonic key, but quickly turns from the ecstatic to the tragic within the reference to the first Primary theme.

mf
sempre con Ped.
crescendo
ff adirato
p
Ped. *

Example 3.23: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 239-241.

In the Part 2 outlined in Figure 3.5, the Primary theme is briefly transformed in a more tender (*teneramente*) presentation in F major. It constitutes a final reminiscence of an idyllic pastoral landscape before tragedy overwhelms the principal agent.

pp teneramente, ma sempre a tempo

Example 3.24: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 257-259.

In the transition to Part 3, Medtner incorporates another standing dominant pedal. This passage effectively parodies the earlier Barcarolle intertext with its own dysphoric climax after a series of trills:

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system shows a series of trills in both hands, with a standing dominant pedal in the bass clef. The second system continues the trills and includes markings for *m.d.* (medium dynamics), *m.s.* (mezzo-soprano), and a trill in the right hand. The third system is marked *a tempo* and features a standing dominant pedal in the bass clef, with a trill in the right hand. The score includes various musical notations such as trills, dynamics, and articulation marks.

Example 3.25: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 272-280.

Lastly, the movement ends with a chord progression that Martyn calls “a series of angry chords.”⁷⁹

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The music features dense, complex chords in the right hand and a more active bass line. The instruction "accelerando" is written above the bass staff, and "sf" (sforzando) is written below the right hand staff. The second system continues the piece, with similar complex chordal textures. It includes dynamic markings such as "sf", "m. d." (mezzo-forte), and "m. s." (mezzo-piano). The piece concludes with the instruction "attacca" written below the bass staff.

Example 3.26: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, I. *Allegretto*, mm. 290-296.

Biztan notes that the concluding cadence is missing a Dominant (function) chord,⁸⁰ resulting in a sudden, jarring shift to the tonic. Likewise, he describes the motion from G-F# as a “Phrygian clausula.” I consider the contour of this closing progression to be a variant of P_{Tr}, with its closing repetition gesture (the S_{Cl} variant of the M5 motive) displaced to the lower register. The movement concludes with a hollow bass octave, indicating that the principal agent has succumbed to “darkness.”

In conclusion, the first movement of the *Sonata-Ballade* expresses the singular subjectivity of a virtual protagonist, relatable as embodied agent of the “human soul.” Its perspective is held throughout the movement by the saturation and developing variation of

⁷⁹ Martyn (1995), 97.

⁸⁰ Biztan (forthcoming).

several motives introduced in the Primary theme area (not only one, as Keller claims). Tragedy results as the agent's self- and nature-oriented reflections are unable to lead it to attain lasting peace. As its secular spirituality ("without a belief in a creator")⁸¹ reaches the breaking point in the coda, a semantic space is left for the external, biblical drama of the *Introduction* to begin.

⁸¹ Bobby Hughes Loftis, "The Piano Sonatas of Nicolai Medtner" (Ph.D. diss., University of West Virginia, 1970), 41.

Chapter 4: Sonata-Ballade: II. “Introduction” Movement

The second movement of the *Sonata-Ballade* continues *attacca* from the first, emerging from the sonority of a held bass octave. Titled *Introduction*, this movement introduces thematic material that will be further developed in the *Finale*. It also contains the first citations of Fet’s poem, “When Christ ran from idle human talk,” as found in Medtner’s pupils’ scores.⁸² Bernard Pinsonneault, one of the composer’s students, remarked that this poem was Medtner’s programmatic inspiration for the movement.⁸³ Indeed, Fet’s dialectical religious subjects—Christ and Satan—are easily expressed by the music’s implicit dichotomy of “light and dark.” Rhetorical shifts are more explicit than in the first movement, indicating that agencies within the *Introduction* are attributable to actors within a new, discursive subjectivity. As discussed in Chapter 2, this movement pertains to a religious drama external to the sonata’s principal agent.

Unlike a mere overture, the *Introduction* features a substantive narrative arc that contextually enriches the *Finale*. Before turning to an analysis of the score, it is worthwhile to discuss the poetry Pinsonneault cites:

When Christ ran from idle human talk
And empty pride,
And forgot the hunger and thirst of many days.
Listening to the voice of the desert,

Him, who craved to pray on grey cliffs,
The prince of the world came tempting
“Here at your feet are all the kingdoms,” he said,
“With all their charm and glory.”

Only recognize the obvious, fall down to my feet.

⁸² Martyn (1995), 95-96.

⁸³ Bernard Pinsonneault, *Nicolas Medtner : Pianiste, Compositeur, 1879-1951*. Présentation de Marcel Dupré (Beauchemin, 1956), 38.

Forget for a second your spiritual reflection,
All, all this beauty, all the power I will give Thee
And then I will resign in this deceitful battle.”

But He answered: "It is written
Only the Lord thy God shalt thou serve!”
And the devil left Him - and the angels came
To await Him in the desert.

Afanasy Fet, 1871⁸⁴

Fet’s poem can be divided into three sections: an establishment of the setting, Satan’s temptation, and Christ’s response that provokes Satan to leave. The opening stanza describes Christ’s retreat to the desert of Judea, where He fasted in spiritual preparation for future ministry. Additionally, it incorporates the topic “idle human talk and empty pride,” which I will abbreviate as “empty human pride.” The second and third stanzas both reference Satan’s attempt to tempt Christ. Curiously, Fet uses only the last of the three biblical temptations from Matthew 4:1-11.⁸⁵ This distinction presents a potential dilemma for the composer: either adhere to Fet’s poetic outline, or adjust the musical form to further reflect the detail of the Scripture which inspired it. Finally, the last stanza relates to Christ’s response, which concludes the trial of temptation and ushers in the angels who will tend to Him in the desert.

The formal arrangement of style topics in the *Introduction* does not directly correlate to Fet’s poetic design. For example, Christ’s response to Satan in the final stanza is indicated by Medtner in a quote in Pinsonneault’s score at measure 38, roughly halfway through the movement.⁸⁶ As Pinsonneault mentions, Medtner considered his *Introduction*

⁸⁴ Translation by Veronica Shenshin, “The Metaphysical and Poetical Universe of A. A. Fet” (Ph.D. diss. University of Illinois, 1994), 112.

⁸⁵ This same temptation is re-ordered as the second, in Luke 4:1-13.

⁸⁶ Pinsonneault, 38.

to be “inspired by” the poem, which allows room for the composer to creatively rearrange or expand on its structure.⁸⁷ The observable tangents and departures from it, therefore, can be attributed to Medtner’s compositional voice—itsself a narrative agency with influence on the movement’s dramatic subjectivity. Medtner’s choices in diverging from the poem could indicate his desire to incorporate what Fet omits from Scripture. At the very least, they are ways that Medtner ties the narrative of the *Introduction* to the both the first movement and the *Finale* third movement.

From the opening of the *Introduction* movement, Medtner evokes a topic not even implied by Fet’s poem: a funeral march.



Example 4.1: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 1-6.

This passage was mentioned briefly, in Chapter 2, as an allegorical response to the principal agent’s failure to remain in a state of grace. The topic further associates the agent’s tragic/ironic end in the first movement with death. Within the religious context of the *Introduction*, the spiritual limitations of this embodied subject are made manifest. The agent’s internal perspective alone is ultimately not capable of leading it to attain lasting peace. The ensuing Christian narrative implies that the principal agent’s saving grace will

⁸⁷ Ibid.

involve a resolution of conflict within the external, dramatic narrative first established by the *Introduction*.

Existing studies of this movement, so far as I am aware, do not identify a funeral march topic. For this reason, I will elaborate on its relevance. The opening of Chopin's *Marche Funèbre*, from his *Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 35*, contains many features similar to Medtner's opening theme of the *Introduction*:



Example 4.2: Chopin's Sonata No. 2, Op. 35, III. *Marche funèbre*, mm. 1-2.

Common intertextual relationships include the harmonic spacing, low register, *pesante* expression marking, and an oscillating ostinato between two chords. Medtner's opening, on the other hand, lacks the dotted-eighth note rhythm present in Chopin's excerpt—a common feature to funeral marches.⁸⁸ Instead, its most active rhythm is a double-grace-note anacrusis before the downbeat of measure 2, evocative of the so-called 'drag' pattern for the drum. The ritualized pattern may suggest a funeral cortège.

⁸⁸ Brian Casey, "Funeral Music Genres: With a Stylistic /Topical Lexicon and Transcriptions for a Variety of Instrumental Ensembles" (D.A. thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2007), 44.

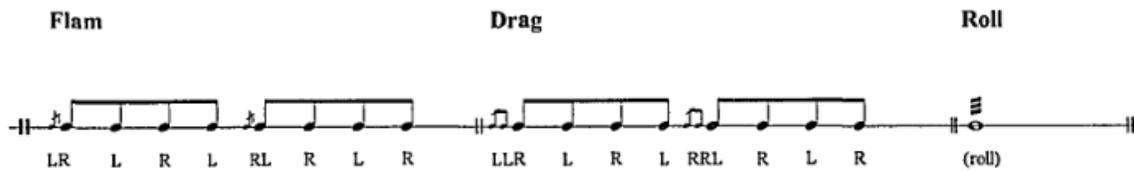


Figure 4.1: Examples of drum rudiments⁸⁹

Casey Brian, in his dissertation on funeral music genres, indicates that there is a tendency in piano music to mimic these percussive gestures.⁹⁰ However, he does not claim that the presence of rudiment-like articulations is enough to establish that a funeral march topic is being employed.

The clearest evidence that Medtner intentionally used the topic is provided in a comparison to another of his own compositions: the *Funeral March*, Op. 31, No. 2. In Example 4.3, this work's opening measures are provided above the second appearance of the *Sonata-Ballade's Introduction* theme within its primary theme area:

⁸⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

A.)

Andante lugubre ♩=54

Op. 31 №2

sordamente

P marcato

con afflizione

sempre con Pedale

B.)

cresc.

tre corde

Example 4.3: A.) *Funeral March*, Op. 31, No. 2, mm. 1-4, B.) *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 17-20.

The isolated pitches in the low register of each excerpt are identical. Likewise, the two-chord ostinato pattern strongly suggests a shared topic. A lack of dotted rhythms or drum rudiments in the *Funeral March*'s opening may suggest that Medtner regarded the ostinato as a clear enough indication of the topic. Both excerpts' gestural emphasis on slow, plodding movement can further be related to the Dirge, a subgenre of funeral march focused on the heavy steps of a mourning party.⁹¹

The *Introduction*'s melody is harmonized in thirds, which might suggest a pastoral influence, but one not sufficient to overcome the desolate mood. The second movement of Schubert's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major D.960 is a relevant intertext in harmony and

⁹¹ Ibid., 26-27.

expressive character. Although the texture and meter differ, Schubert's melody is harmonized in thirds while similarly imparting a plodding expression of isolation and grief.



Example 4.4: Schubert's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major D.960, II. *Andante Sostenuto*, mm. 1-6.

In both of the previous *Introduction* movement excerpts, (Examples 4.1 and 4.3) the melody has a tendency to circle around the tonic pitch. However, tonic harmonies are not as clearly defined; on downbeats they appear in second inversion with an added sixth. The lack of authentic cadences, characteristic of most of the *Introduction* movement, further contributes to harmonic instability. Together, these elements can suggest the poem's image of wandering within an unforgiving environment. With the dissonant, inexorable funeral topic, Medtner may also have intended to evoke the harshness of the Judean desert and Christ's subjection to it. I propose a further image, that of the famished Christ who is mourning man's fall from grace in sin as a spiritual death, and who bears this sorrow as reflected in the weight of His steps.

Martyn's analysis of the *Introduction*, alternatively, classifies the movement's opening as representative of Satan.⁹² He cites the intertextual relevance of a different work, Medtner's *Scherzo Infernale*, Op. 2 No. 3. In passing, he refers to the following excerpt, with regard to its three note anacrusis:

⁹² Martyn (1995), 97.



Example 4.5: *Scherzo Infernale*, Op. 2, No. 3, mm. 156-157.

Its melodic line descends by a minor 2nd after an extra (enharmonic) repeated pitch, similar to Examples 4.1 and 4.3. The expressive marking *pesante* also appears. The similarities in texture are not as striking, but the *Scherzo Infernale* is still relevant as an intertext suggesting a demonic influence. Fet's poem, however, creates significant interpretive challenges in considering the opening theme of the *Introduction* as principally associated with Satan. First, one would have to be convinced that the primary theme area correlates more directly with the devil than with the environmental/situational topics in the first stanza. Second, one would expect the 'Satan theme' to reappear in the dramatic action of temptation immediately preceding Christ's response. On both accounts there is convincing evidence for my alternative interpretation, which I will detail further in this chapter. But rather than dismissing Martyn's ascription outright, I believe the intertext he notes can be regarded as a foreshadowing of a later "Satan theme." In this interpretation, the opening theme can thereby be said to represent an environment of contention between Christ and Satan.

An allusion to the "empty human pride" topic within the primary theme (mm. 1-24) indicates that this formal area relates to the first stanza. The passage I will discuss is the B-section (mm. 9-16) of the opening's ABA ternary design.

Mesto $\text{♩} = 92$ all'rigore di tempo

A

mp pesante

una corda

B

p

cresc.

tre corde

f

p subito

cresc.

A

f

mp subito

una corda

cresc.

tre corde

Example 4.6: Sonata-Ballade, Op. 27, II. Introduction, mm. 1-24.

While the first stanza of Fet's poem does not adhere to an ABA form, ternary structures are often found in primary theme areas of a slow movement.⁹³ Medtner may have felt compelled to use the form to adhere to common practice. Alternatively, the composer could have viewed it as an opportunity to elaborate on the scope and breadth of his source text. Nathan Uhl, presenting at the 2016 International Medtner Study Day, provided a relevant example of this approach in another opus. Medtner's through-composed *Lied* "Geweihter Platz," Op. 41, No. 1, he argued, was the expressive foundation for the wordless *Sonata-Vocalise*, Op. 41, No. 2, expanded formally as a single-movement sonata.⁹⁴ While the opening to the *Introduction* is not as lengthy, the expansion of Fet's stanza to a musical ternary form would echo the composer's view that content, absent a form relevant to its medium, is raw material.⁹⁵

It should be noted that the outlined B-section does not constitute a secondary theme. Its length, only two four-measure phrases, is not substantial enough to encompass a separate formal area. Furthermore, it directly utilizes motivic and textural ideas from the preceding measures, including the opening melodic contour and use of half notes in the lowest voice. This suggests that the B-section is a developing variation of the first two phrases. The return to the initial A-section idea indicates that the B-section is a contrasting middle for a ternary first theme.

One distinct feature of the B-section is the prevalence of dotted-rhythmic patterns. These figures could be viewed as further evidence of a funeral march topic. They also initiate a change in harmonic rhythm—the dotted patterns become saturated to a point where the bass is unhinged from its half-note pulsation. (mm. 11-12, 15-16) This lowest

⁹³ William E. Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 211.

⁹⁴ International Medtner Study Day, London, January 2016.

⁹⁵ Medtner, 49.

voice joins the agency of the upper lines in abandoning its prior pattern. The upper voices' dotted rhythms, ascending in immediate succession, evoke a noble march—a topic associated with the authority of man.⁹⁶ It is improbable that this quickened march is an expression of the sonata's principal agent, still being mourned. Rather, the noble march's depiction of man is here actorialized as a parenthetical commentary within the external, dramatic subjectivity introduced by this movement. This new agency may suggest the “human talk” that is renounced in Fet's poem as idle.

But is “empty pride” also suggested by the noble march? Its harmonic and cadential structure provides an answer to this question. In the first phrase of the B-section, the music begins as if attempting to modulate to C# minor, the key of the minor dominant. Yet by following the upward trajectory of its ascending line, it overextends itself on the downbeat in measure 12, reaching instead the relative major of C# minor, E major. The melodic line proceeds to drop stepwise from G#, the chord's 3rd, to D# in anticipation of an authentic cadence in E major. In a disgruntled gesture, the music moves instead to an A# major chord, frustrating the D# by a drop to C#. Likewise, the bass leaps by a tritone to E#, rather than to E. Further evoking man's stubborn temperament, a grumbling, glissando-like bass flourish leads into a resetting of the phrase, beginning a second attempt. Viewed in the perspective of the religious program, this prideful gesture could be considered symbolic of Satan's influence on man.

In the second phrase of the B-section, an authentic cadence is reached in the key of G# major. The G# major chord could also be heard as the half cadence of an expected modulation to C# sharp major. In either case, the noble march successfully reaches a point of resolution that it failed to achieve in the prior phrase. What follows, however, suggests

⁹⁶ Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 51.

that even this small victory amounts to relatively little. Medtner immediately returns to the A-section material in the original key of F♯ minor, indicating its conflict was not resolved. The *una corda* pedal marking also returns,⁹⁷ further undercutting the significance of this human agency’s ‘noble’ achievement. Therefore, an apparent stubbornness indicative of “empty human pride” is fully discernible within the score. This is additional evidence that the primary theme area corresponds to the opening stanza of Fet’s poem.

Before discussing the second theme area, it is worth addressing Medtner’s thematic use of the submediant pitch as a transitional pivot. In the measure before the B-section’s entrance, the melody stops its stepwise encirclement of the tonic, dropping instead to $\hat{6}$. The pitch is then reiterated in a half-note pulse, motivically relating to the movement’s opening. In the beginning of the B-section, the first two notes of the melody continue to reiterate $\hat{6}$ in the same rhythm, bridging the A- and B-sections. When moving away from the primary theme area (m. 24), Medtner again uses $\hat{6}$ as a transitional cue. The second theme area, which follows, similarly begins melodically from this pitch. However, the rhythm in which $\hat{6}$ is reiterated is cut from half notes to quarter notes:

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is the right hand and the bottom staff is the left hand. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The music is in a minor mode. The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a steady quarter-note pulse. The tempo/mood markings are 'p tenebroso' and 'poco cresc.'

Example 4.7: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 25-27.

⁹⁷ The *una corda* marking was absent in the first publication of the score, but appears in the composer’s handwriting in his student Edna Illes’s score.

This immediate change in pulse contributes to a more evident rhetorical shift, which is also marked by differences in articulation and texture.

Predictably, the *Introduction* movement's second theme (Example 4.7) is oriented to the demonic. With the primary theme area corresponding to the first stanza's establishment of the setting, it follows that the secondary theme would relate to the next stage of the poem's drama: Satan's temptation of Christ. Medtner continues to musically elaborate on the poem's topics with an additional intertext. In the staccato accompaniment, the left hand moves in a pattern of an ascending second and a falling third. This is reminiscent of notes 2 through 6 of the medieval *Dies Irae* chant.

A) 
Dies i rae dies il-la,

B) 
p tenebroso

Example 4.8: A) Opening contour of the *Dies Irae* chant, B) *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 25 (left hand).

This allusion is the second time the composer evokes the topic of death in connection to a source outside of Fet's text. Death could be taken as an allegory for the emptiness of the devil's lies in tempting Christ. It may also indicate that Satan's agency is present under the surface of a foregrounded topic.

On closer inspection, Medtner extends his *Dies Irae* quote by adding a fourth iteration of the sequence. Furthermore, the left hand does not reiterate (or hold) the tonic pitch, imply a specific key area, or utilize the same intervallic pattern of half steps and whole steps as found in the chant. Considering this, it would fair to question if the *Dies Irae* is truly applicable to this passage. One can find similar descending patterns in several

of Medtner's compositions that do not explicitly concern death. On the other hand, most of the other elements of the chant are present in Medtner's melodic line, rhythmically augmented. Reading only the contour of the line and not the repetition of pitches, an outline of the *Dies Irae* melody (without its initial pitch) emerges:



Figure 4.2: Melodic contour in *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 25-27. The upper-stemmed notes outline the *Dies Irae*.

It still lacks the opening note of the chant, but otherwise retains its intervallic structure, implying C# Aeolian. Medtner's *tenebroso*⁹⁸ and *tenuto* markings together suggest that the soprano line relates to a portentous chant. This melody reinforces the *Dies Irae* intertext within the same temporal context as the accompaniment. So while neither part contains a direct reference, together they strongly imply the *Dies Irae* without explicitly stating it. Perhaps similarly, Satan's temptations are not explicit in their underpinning motivation: to leave man in a state of spiritual death by convincing Christ to abandon the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy.

A second musical reference is also embedded in Example 4.7: the four-note opening motto of the composer's Muse theme. Figure 4.3 illustrates the motto's placement and outlines the apparent connections to the *Dies Irae*:

⁹⁸ Derived from the Latin *tenebrae*, which pertains to the extinguishing of candles in the Roman Catholic Matins and Lauds services on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of Holy Week. Entry for "Tenebrae" in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge, Mass, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 839.

Muse Theme's Opening Motto

Used in Sonata-Ballade

Di - es i - rae di - es il - la

p tenebroso *poco cresc.*

Figure 4.3: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 25-27.

Unlike other statements of the Muse motto discussed in Chapter 1, the rhythm is displaced to orient the rising note to the final beat of the measure, as opposed to the motto's natural accentuation.

Wendelin Bitzan, at the 2016 Study Day, proposed it would be more appropriate to refer to the Muse theme instead as a “temptation” motive in works having a distinct religious meaning.⁹⁹ In this movement, there is little reason to question its appearance within the context of temptation. Where I might disagree with Bitzan is in the aptness of his label for indexing the motto's expressive, religious connotations. Its *Dies Irae* intertext in Figure 4.3, for example, may have motivated the distortion of the theme's characteristic rhythm. If regarded as part of Satan's temptation monologue, the theme may be heard as a “corrupted” variant of the Muse theme, perhaps attributable to the devil in his deceit. This leads us to ask what a purer, “uncorrupted” presentation of the theme might be, and if it occurs in this movement, and the larger work. I will pursue this issue below.

⁹⁹ Bitzan (forthcoming).

As the second theme continues, cadences are avoided in similar fashion as earlier in the sonata. The second phrase of the theme area avoids cadential resolution with an A# major harmony, a tonal evasion encountered earlier in the opening's B-section:

The image shows a musical score for a piano introduction. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure features a melody in the treble staff with a slur and a dynamic marking of *sf* (sforzandissimo). The second measure continues the melody with a dynamic marking of *ten.* (tenuto). The third measure shows a change in the bass line with a dynamic marking of *p leggiero* (piano and light). There are some markings below the bass staff, including a double bar line with a star and a small asterisk.

Example 4.9: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 31-33.

This excerpt suggests not only an allusion to pride, but a further intensification of the topic, evident in the *sforzandissimo* marking and the ensuing, rageful variant of the secondary theme in diminution (mm. 33-36). It would not make much sense to attribute this development to a human agency, given its location in the drama. Instead, we can interpret that pride in this sonata is ultimately rooted in Satan, who instills this “darkness” in the soul of man. Thus, several elements can be said to evoke the devil as an actor within the external, religious drama: the *Dies Irae* motive, rhythmic distortions of the Muse theme, unusual and jarring cadential evasions, and shifts in the metrical emphasis to offbeats. Of these, the corrupted Muse motive is arguably the most indicative of a “Satan theme. I would further classify it as a theme that enacts Satan’s voice, defined as his own direct expression. This distinction is helpful in highlighting when Satan’s expression is foregrounded, since I have already suggested that Satan’s agency is not limited in its influence to a single actor, musical gesture, or motive—or even to one subjectivity.

Christ's answer to Satan appears as a second subordinate theme in the key of the submediant. Diminutions of the earlier theme yield to an ethereal texture of arpeggiations and open fifths, setting up the response.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano piece. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system shows a right-hand part with a complex, arpeggiated figure and a left-hand part with a simple, rhythmic melody. The second system continues the arpeggiated texture, marked with '(mobile)' and 'diminuendo'. The third system shows further development of the arpeggiated theme, also marked with 'diminuendo'. The text "Only Bow before God the Father" is written below the first system.

Example 4.10: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 37-42.

In a student score,¹⁰⁰ Medtner writes “Only Bow before God the Father,” a quotation from Fet’s poem, as drawn from Matthew 4:10, below the entrance of the left hand’s theme. This melody is yet another presentation of the Muse theme, now with the fourth note’s ascent reoriented to the downbeat. In this use, the theme could be interpreted as Christ’s

¹⁰⁰ Pinsonneault, 38.

triplets. Furthermore, the opening motto rises only by half step, gesturally creating an impression of yearning rather than idyllic transcendence (recall the distinction from Chapter 1, p. 11-12).

Later, in the second theme of the *Finale* movement, the contour and rhythm of *The Muse* setting is presented in its most prototypical form. The posthumous Piano Quintet likewise contains statements of the theme sharing the *The Muse*'s intervallic structure (p. 33). The *Muse* theme's treatment in the *Introduction* is not found elsewhere in Medtner's output. Given this distinction, it can be interpreted as a variant of the theme—or perhaps more aptly, an approximation of it. Within an introductory movement, it would not be expected that every theme be presented in a fully developed form. A passage with strong similarities in gesture and contour, as this movement contains, could suffice as an “introduction” to the theme. I consider the earlier, “corrupted” version of the *Muse* Theme shown in Example 4.7 as too far removed in its rhythm and length (containing only the opening motto) to be regarded as the *Muse* theme's principal, introductory entrance.

The discrepancies in the *Introduction* movement's “uncorrupted” *Muse* theme, outlined in Figure 4.2 (p. 85), can be attributed to its contextual use within Fet's temptation narrative. To ground the *Muse* theme within the movement's dramatic setting, Medtner returns to the (earlier thematized) half-note harmonic rhythm at its cadence (mm. 41-42). Two harmonies alternate in each measure: the new tonic of D# major, and an E half-diminished-seventh chord in first inversion. The primary theme area, likewise, begins with a rocking motion between the tonic and a first inversion half-diminished--seventh chord. Both passages are highly distinct in texture and register; their similarity in harmonic rhythm suggests that the *Muse* theme was already articulated within the *Introduction* movement's virtual environment. While Christ's response to Satan briefly evokes the transcendent and

ethereal, it is ultimately not an escape from the desert. Fet's poem speaks to this, in that "the angels came to await Him [Christ] in the desert" after the trial concludes.

Attributing a musical agency to the "angels" is a more challenging proposition. One possible interpretation could be that angels are already invoked by the right hand's arpeggiations. From this perspective, it might follow that the gradual dissipation of the texture (ending in Example 4.11) represents a reprieve from temptation, indicating that Satan has departed.



Example 4.11: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 43.

This would effectively represent closure, corresponding to the end of Fet's narrative. Further interpretation might consider the chorale-like setting of the Muse theme's opening motto, which appears next, as symbolic of an angelic chorus:



Example 4.12: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 44-49.

However, it becomes evident as Example 4.12 proceeds that this ascription is problematic. Another half-diminished-seventh chord is introduced in its second measure, this time fortified by a root position spelling. It disrupts the relative purity of the E \flat major chord, foreshadowing a resurgence of conflict. Perhaps the music in Example 4.12 plays a role as commentary, as signaled by a topical reference to a Greek chorus. That role would help explain the passage's use as a transition between two (theme) areas of dramatic action.

No true reprieve is reached in Example 4.12; even during the rests we sense harmonic ambiguity. As the opening motto ascends in half steps, it grows in dynamic intensity, becoming increasingly strained in its “yearning” with each iteration. Medtner follows a chromatic wedge to reach F \sharp major, and with it, a recapitulation of the opening theme. In spite of being rewritten in a major key, there is nothing triumphant or victorious about its return. Instead, the mood is searing, perhaps even vengeful, in reasserting the desert's theme as an expression of hostility and contention. By reaching another climax, Medtner would appear to be choosing to circumvent the conclusion of Fet's poem, thereby prolonging the conflict between Christ and Satan. Consequently, both of the aforementioned interpretations are put into question by Medtner's narrative arc. At this point, it would be problematic to claim that an agency of ‘angels’ is elevated to the role of an actor within the musical discourse. Instead, I am more inclined to regard ‘angels’ as a

plausible agency within the larger modality of “light,” which foregrounds Christ as its referent.

A battle between “light” and “dark” continues within the recapitulation. As in the second theme area, the high and low registers of the instrument correlate, respectively, with these two affects. In Example 4.12, the *allargando* statement of the Muse Theme’s opening motto elides with the recapitulation. Its high register and tenuto markings evoke a strong, oral declamation. This can be interpreted as Christ commanding Satan to re-emerge, in full awareness that he has not yet left. In the left hand, low-register notes are again articulated on off-beats. This recalls the end of the primary theme area, where the brooding character of its off-beat pitches foreshadowed the entrance of the secondary theme area. Here, in the recapitulation, they help to dismantle the positive state that would otherwise be gained from a shift to a major-key modality. After the aforementioned elision, the texture shifts to the middle-to-low registers of the piano, but is again lifted to a higher plane at the *poco più mosso*:

The image shows a musical score for a piano introduction. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The treble staff begins with a melodic line that is then harmonized in chords. The bass staff features a rhythmic accompaniment with notes on off-beats. There are several dynamic markings: 'poco più mosso' above the treble staff, 'poco rit.' above the treble staff, and 'poco' below the bass staff. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with various note values, rests, and articulation marks.

Example 4.13: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 52-26.

However, the off-beat notes remain in place, harmonized in octaves as they were at the outset of the recapitulation. This further intensifies a conflict between the upper and lower registers, and can be regarded as the first occasion in which “light” and “dark” agencies

are placed in dialectical opposition. Building on earlier interpretive premises, this could signify a heightening of the struggle between Christ and Satan, within the desert environment.

Instead of revisiting the ABA structure of the primary theme area in the recapitulation, Medtner cuts directly to a coda, built from the secondary themes, after a fermata closing the initial A-section.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The top system is in treble clef, and the bottom system is in bass clef. Both systems begin with the instruction *ritenuto accelerando*. The left hand in both systems is marked *senza Ped.* and *tenuto*. The right hand in both systems features a melodic line with fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and a dynamic marking of *f*. The score includes a fermata over the first measure of the right hand in each system.

Example 4.14: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 57-60.

In keeping with a pattern of abridging earlier material, the “corrupted” version of the Muse theme is now presented in diminution. New to this presentation are cross-rhythm triplets and a *ritenuto accelerando* marking (presumably meaning a ritard followed by an accelerando). Both drive the music to a statement of the “uncorrupted” Muse theme in the next measure, which is further tormented in its dialogue with the demonic. The raised pitch

in this version of the opening motto is now articulated in the middle of the measure, but clearly on a strong beat. The *Two Elegies*, Op. 59 and “Insomnia,” Op. 37, No. 1, discussed in Chapter 1 (pp. 17-20, 29-31), are relevant intertexts with respect to this metric placement. Anguish is a common sentiment in these works, although the passage in the *Introduction* (Example 4.14) is more rhythmically active than the treatments of the Muse theme in Op. 59.

This interlude repeats a second time, with the iteration of the “uncorrupted” theme stated in a higher key. Its fortissimo treatment in a high register recalls the transition into the recapitulation. Earlier, when discussing the secondary theme area, the “corrupted” and “uncorrupted” versions of the Muse theme were attributed to the voices of Satan and Christ, respectively, within a dialogue of temptation. Perhaps in returning to these themes, Medtner alludes to the two temptations in Scripture that are omitted in Fet’s poem.

The next phrase proceeds with a further diminution of the “uncorrupted” Muse theme, eventually liquidating in triplet sixteenths in the lowest register of the piano:

The image shows a musical score for a piano introduction, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The score is divided into three measures. The first measure is marked 'ritenuto accelerando' and 'con rabbia'. The second measure is marked 'veloce'. The third measure is marked 'tr - molto sostenuto' and 'pp perdendosi'. The score ends with a fermata and the instruction 'senza Ped.'. A bracket under the first two measures is labeled with the number '8'.

Example 4.15: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 64.

This passage stands out as the most likely representation of Satan’s departure. The *veloce*, diminuendo descent evokes a rage in being denied a proper continuation of the phrase, and likewise, an aural sense of distancing itself from the dramatic discourse. The two isolated

eighth-notes at the *perdenosi* section could be compared to the demonic opening of the Liszt B-Minor Sonata. This intertext reinforces an interpretation of the passage pertaining to Satan, but also may suggest that like the Liszt sonata, a “dark” agency still has a significant role to play in the musical narrative to follow.

Medtner wrote an additional title for the movement, “Satan stole away,” in one of his student’s scores.¹⁰¹ Given the *Introduction*’s dramatic trajectory, this epigram evidently pertains to the end result of the narrative, and *not* to its opening dramatic expression. This is worth highlighting, as it may also have implications for an interpretation of the *Finale* movement, which Medtner similarly marked with a quote from Fet’s poem. Since the remaining measures of the *Introduction* have a greater relevance to the *Finale*, I will discuss them in the chapter to follow.

The liberties Medtner takes in adapting Fet’s poem musically draws the music’s narrative closer to the pastoral-elegy as a genre (Chapter 1, pp. 7-10).¹⁰² By troping an elegiac funeral march (mourning the internal, spiritual death of a human agent) with pastoral Christian drama (the temptation in the desert), a window is opened to a theologically informed interpretation of the first two movements. I would not assert that opening movement is a literal reference to a Garden of Eden narrative, even when it concludes with the spiritual death (fall of man) of a human subject. The topic of original sin, however, has universal and hereditary implications in Christian theology. It is easier to accept that the Garden of Eden can be related to the first movement’s pastoral setting as an allegory for the internal agent’s failings.¹⁰³ The agent’s process of spiritual

¹⁰¹ Martyn (1995), 95. From Fet’s poem. A more apt translation, ‘And the Devil Left Him’, was provided earlier in this chapter (Shenshin, 112)

¹⁰² Hatten (1994), 70. Hatten discusses the pastoral topic as premise for a larger pastoral trajectory or “expressive genre.”

¹⁰³ Allegorically, its failures may also be mapped onto the “human soul.”

resurrection—a noted possibility within pastoral-elegy¹⁰⁴—will begin with a vision of hope at the start of the *Finale*.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 1, p. 10.

Chapter 5: Sonata-Ballade: III. “Finale” Movement

The Sonata-Ballade’s *Finale*, proceeding *attaca* from the *Introduction*, is a sonata-rondo movement that follows the formal outline: A - B - A - Fugal Development - A - B - Coda. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the *Finale* concerns an interplay between the internal embodied agent’s perspective and the external drama introduced in the *Introduction*. There are two places where internal and external themes are fully integrated: the fugal development, which presents a dark and dramatic religious conflict, and the coda, which enacts a victory of light.

In the student score of Medtner’s English pupil, Edna Illes, the composer wrote wavy line symbols in his instructions, one curved [], and the other jagged [, at different points in the *Finale*.¹⁰⁵ Alexander Karpayev was the first to discuss these markings. I was also able to study this manuscript (in the British Library) at the 2016 International Medtner Study Day in London. In this chapter, I will first expand on the possible hermeneutic implications of these symbols within the *Finale*. This will include a discussion of Robert S. Hatten’s theory of virtual agency and Raymond Monelle’s theory of temporality. I will conduct an interpretive analysis of the *Finale* as guided in part by Medtner’s annotations in Illes’s score.

Karpayev’s dissertation addresses Medtner’s unusual, wavy line markings from the perspective of a performer’s interpretation, as is the context in which they were introduced to Edna Illes in lessons.¹⁰⁶ According to her, Medtner’s jagged and curvy lines indicate “energetic” and “rounded singing” passages. In the composer’s instructions, transcribed by Illes: “All music consists of contrasts between energetic parts [] and rounded

¹⁰⁵ The manuscript is available in the Edna Illes collection at the British Library.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Karpayev, “New Light on Nikolay Medtner as Pianist and Teacher” (Ph.D. diss., The City University, London, 2014), 117-118.

and singing parts [].”¹⁰⁷ With these symbols, Medtner wished to illustrate how to interpret the energetic profile of specific passages in the *Finale*. Accordingly, they were intended to inform Illes’s sound production, as well as to enhance the character of contrasting sections.¹⁰⁸

Medtner’s jagged [] lines should not be mistaken as a label pertaining to disjunct melodies or jagged contours. While these features are present in some [] marked passages, his conception of an energetic style is more deeply rooted in a vibrancy of articulation and kinetic gesture. According to Karpayev, *Risoluto* and *Al rigore di Tempo* are often cues to Medtner’s conception of an energetic affect, as are such style topics as marches and spirited dances.¹⁰⁹ Karpayev further relates that the composer included “fast music in a stable tempo” in his ascriptions.¹¹⁰ However, this is not a defining characteristic of Medtner’s categorization, as is evident in the opening phrase of *Finale*: a fast passage, marked [], which closes with a ritard.

In regard to “rounded” passages, Illes recounts that the composer described *cantabile* playing as such; Medtner often used *cantabile* and “rounded” interchangeably in his teaching.¹¹¹ Elaborating on Illes’s notes, Karpayev explains that “the density of texture or a tempo” does not define the roundedness of a passage as does its “underlying content”: particularly, the foregrounding of a lyrical melody, and topics or genres conducive to it (hymns, songs, Dithyramb).¹¹² Referencing Illes, Karpayev cites the *Skazka*, Op. 34, No. 2, as an example of a rounded work with a comparatively energetic accompaniment:

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 119

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 103.

¹¹² Ibid., 119.

Example 5.1: *Skazka*, Op. 32, No. 2, mm. 1-4.

Using this work as referential context, I will briefly address a theory of virtual agency, in development by Robert S. Hatten, that has informed this analysis of the *Sonata-Ballade*, and most particularly, its *Finale*.

Each staff in Example 5.1 pertains to a distinct musical actant:¹¹³ the right hand’s cantabile melody to a vocal expression, and the left hand’s sixteenths to a force of nature—an ominous, howling wind. In working collaboratively, the two integrate into what Hatten describes as a “tropological fusion” implying a single agency.¹¹⁴ The resulting troping of actants can thus be considered a virtual agent, personified in this occasion as a voice in the wind. Karpeyev suggests the passage’s “rounded” profile is retained due to the melodic foregrounding of the cantabile line, which contributes also to a characterization of the agent’s disposition.¹¹⁵ This texture permeates the entire work, strongly hinting at a singular subjectivity tethered to the agent’s expressions. A higher, allegorical level of subjectivity

¹¹³ Hatten (2004), 225. For further development of the theory, see Hatten, *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Music* (forthcoming).

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 224.

¹¹⁵ Karpeyev, 119.

is further alluded to by the epigraph Medtner attached to the work: “. . . what we once called ours is gone forever,” taken from the poem “Peace,” by Tyutchev. This illustrates the agential role of the composer’s voice, as a virtual persona, perhaps as a super-subjectivity. A further analysis of this work might benefit from an intertextual comparison to the “Night Wind” Sonata, as suggested by Ekaterina Chernaya-Oh in a dissertation on Medtner’s *Skazki*.¹¹⁶ Indeed, this depiction of an agential hierarchy could apply equally to the second “Night Wind” Sonata excerpt discussed in Chapter 1 (Example 1.12, p. 25).

In other places in Medtner’s output, gestural contrasts are too oppositional, or independent, to rationalize the merger of actants into a unified agent. The individualized roles of actants might instead warrant their consideration as distinctive agencies.¹¹⁷ If encountered as thematized elements in a passage interpreted as dialogical, these agents can be further elevated to an actorial role within the musical narrative.

However, even highly dialectical music is occasionally marked as “rounded” by the composer. A particularly striking example can be found within the fugal development section of the *Sonata-Ballade*’s Finale:

¹¹⁶ Ekaterina Chernaya-Oh, “The *Skazki* (Fairy Tales) of Nikolai Medtner: The Evolution and Characteristics of the Genre with Compositional and Performance Aspects of Selected Fairy Tales.” (D.M.A. thesis, University of North Texas, 2008), 43-44.

¹¹⁷ Hatten (2004), 225.



Example 5.2: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 228-233.

The right hand's theme of contention (between Christ and Satan), which first appeared in the *Introduction* movement, is juxtaposed against the left hand's material, interpretable as a more collective agency, such as mankind in general.¹¹⁸ What ultimately determines the passage's "rounded" profile is the treatment of the "contention" theme. Marked *espressivo* in the score, it proceeds at a slower, more measured pace than the undauntedly boisterous accompaniment. Even within the melody, contrasts of "light" and "dark"—correlating to Christ and Satan¹¹⁹—are suggested by extreme registral displacements. Notably in this passage, the agency which commands the greatest empathy from the listener (by its melodic foregrounding) is Christ's, not mankind's. This recalls the perspective of the *Introduction* movement's dramatic level, which highlighted Christ as its principal protagonist. Whereas the *Introduction* was set against the backdrop of a desert, the "contention" theme in Example 5.2 is contextualized by another conflict, one attributable

¹¹⁸ See pp. 38, 82-83.

¹¹⁹ See pp. 93-94.

to mankind’s pride. In conclusion, the agents identified in this passage do not merge, but rather retain their individual roles, and are elevated dramatically as actors within a musical-narrative construct.

A brief summary of levels of agency I have described is provided in the chart below, adapted from Hatten:¹²⁰

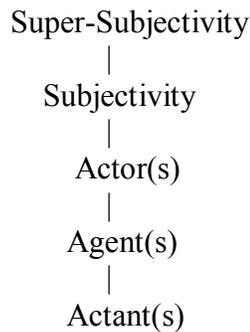


Figure 5.1: Levels of virtual agency in music, adapted from Hatten (2016).

Medtner’s [] and [] markings pose significant questions of interpretation stemming from their context in the musical discourse. A performer wishing to incorporate insights from Illes’s score should not, in my opinion, regard them as a straightforward instruction to play either lyrically or energetically. Doing so might ultimately lead to a stilted or forced quality to the music; one risks emphasizing a projection of these lines above insights already afforded by the score. On this topic, Karpeyev elaborates:

“Such rigorous categorization of music is of course arbitrary and simplistic, and while we can acknowledge that degrees of energy and roundness do exist, it is difficult to imagine all music fitting comfortably within one or the other category.”¹²¹

¹²⁰ Robert S. Hatten, “An Introduction to Virtual Agency in Music,” in *Semiotics 2015: Virtual Identities*, ed. Jamin Pelkey (Yearbook of the Semiotic Society of America, 2016), 1–9.

¹²¹ Karpeyev, 118.

To successfully integrate Medtner's markings in Illes's score into a performance, the interpreter must be able to demonstrate their meaning within a larger dramatic or narrative context.

A careful study of the movement reveals that not all transitions between rounded and energetic passages are equally disruptive. The shift between them may "occur either suddenly or when preceded by a build-up," according to Karpeyev.¹²² The same applies inversely: the movement from energetic to rounded can be sudden, or prefaced by a winding-down process that customarily falls in register. A salient example of a winding-down transition is found at the end of the second rondo-theme area.¹²³

I will refer to building-up and winding-down passages between Medtner's symbols as *gradated* discursive shifts. In both circumstances, it is common to find agencies therein that promote a change in energetics. Appropriately, these *gradated* passages are often pivots between the *external drama* and the internal (principal) agent's subjectivity: motives or sentiments associated with the non-highlighted perspective can be utilized as a vehicle of transition between them. Alternatively, there are some gradual transitions in which agencies are unable to be connected to an outer source. These shifts reside within a single subjectivity, and can indicate growth and/or dramatic progression within the highlighted perspective. Depending on how subliminal the changes are, they might not be attributable to an agency within the narrative, but rather to an unspecified actant.

Karpeyev's model can be expanded to include these possibilities. The following chart is a proposed spectrum of Medtner's marked energetic shifts as encountered in the Finale movement:

¹²² Ibid., 119.

¹²³ A reduction is found in Figure 5.5, p. 133.

**Energetic Shifts Marked
by the Composer**

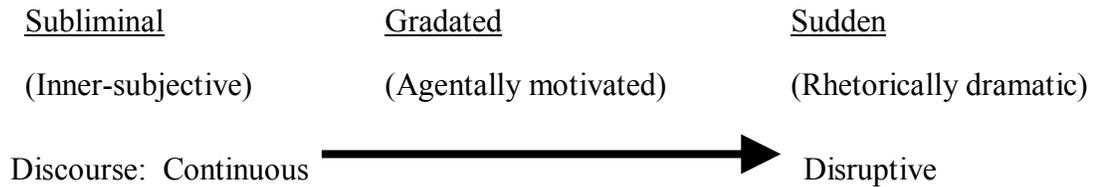


Figure 5.2

The *subliminal* category pertains to a subtle (subconscious) continuation of a particular agent’s perspective within an energetic shift. *Gradated* shifts, as mentioned, can be more directly attributed to agencies, in that they promote a change in energetics. On the disruptive end of the chart, *sudden* shifts in the *Finale* can function rhetorically as an interplay between actors or as an alternation between external and internal agencies.

It is certainly possible to find discursive shifts, ranging from the *subliminal* to *sudden*, which are not marked by the composer’s lines. However, the locations of Medtner’s symbols suggest that these passages do not constitute a modulation of energetics.¹²⁴ In one example, the transition from one rounded theme to another in the second theme area (Muse theme to “contention” theme), would not warrant the use of a second [] marking to distinguish it. In other [] sections, there are identifiable traces of the [] energetic profile. But these moments are too fleeting to imply a shift to an energetic formal area. Medtner, however, does have a tendency to mark two []

¹²⁴ Exceptions may be found in recapitulated material where energetic shifts were earlier established.

lines in succession in these circumstances (see Example 5.3 on p. 107), signaling a re-introduction of the “rounded” affect.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the Finale, I will briefly address a theory of temporality and tense in music that affords additional insight in interpreting Medtner’s symbols. Raymond Monelle, in *The Sense of Music*, proposes a dichotomy between lyrical time and progressive time. Drawing from A.B. Marx’s *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, Monelle relates lyrical time to *Sätze*: a collection of delineated structures (individually referred to as *Satz*) that together constitute a thematic passage.¹²⁵ Progressive time, alternatively, pertains to a shift in temporality that cognitively demarks a theme, in form and memory, as a past utterance. Monelle classifies passages that gradually achieve this shift, or that constitute a “semantically inactive space,” as *Gang*—Marx’s counterpart to *Satz*.¹²⁶ He is careful to note that formal “Transition” sections are not representative of a *Gang*, which is locally defined as an open-structured “continuation of a thematically rich section.”

Monelle prefers Hatten’s depiction of *Satz* as “present-directed” and *Gang* as “future-oriented” to Marx’s own ascriptions: *Ruhe* (rest) and *Bewegung* (movement). One reason provided is that *Satz* passages are not always restful. A *Gang*, on the other hand, typically retains a *Bewegung* (movement) quality, regardless of the way it can be varied. This provides another perspective to explain the “future-oriented” function of certain energetically-marked sections in the *Finale*.¹²⁷

“Future-oriented” passages which *are* enriched with semantic content, such as clear references to thematic material, are typically signaled by one of Medtner’s line symbols.

¹²⁵ Monelle, 104-105.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

Alternatively, those sections that transition to an energetic shift, while also adhering to Monelle’s description of *Gang*, can be classified as a *subliminal* shift. This provides an outlet to further distinguish between *subliminal* and *agential* categories. Each *agential* shift may still be considered as a point on a spectrum between *sudden* and *subliminal*. Its placement would depend on its degree of semantic highlighting within the discourse.

The first line markings in Illes’s score appear in the final measures of the *Introduction* movement.



Example 5.3: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 65-68. (Markings are placed on a public domain score. The original manuscript can be found in the British Library.)

In the edition Illes used, this excerpt appears as the top system of a page, and is followed immediately by the *Finale*’s opening. One can speculate this formatting is the reason why Medtner’s lines are present here and not elsewhere in the *Introduction*. A more convincing rationale is that this excerpt is restated *within* the *Finale* movement, in the first transition back to the rondo theme. Medtner’s choice to annotate Illes’s score was likely pedagogical in its intent, prompted by his pupil’s playing. Illes was a capable pianist; Medtner regarded her as his most talented student, once describing her as “the bravest and ablest besieger of my musical fortresses.”¹²⁸ Still, the appearance of these markings suggests that Medtner

¹²⁸ Ates Orga, “Medtner: Music for Two Pianos,” Hyperion Records, accessed October 22, 2016, http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDH55337

sought a clear articulation of energetic contrasts in the *Finale*. Their presence suggests that he considered shifts of energetics particularly relevant to the movement's dramatic and narrative structure.

To return to the prior excerpt: Example 5.3's melody is derived from the opening "contention" theme in the *Introduction*. But rather than starting from the tonic pitch, it begins on the mediant of the parallel major (A#, in the key of F# major). While the excerpt does contain a *tenebroso* marking, there is a slight sense of relief in being lifted out of the instrument's lowest octave, reached in the preceding measure (Example 4.15, p. 95). Similarly, the theme's texture is thinned to octaves, which further softens the negative sentiment pervading most of the *Introduction* movement. As a consequence of the new starting pitch and key, the first interval is now presented as a major 2nd, from A# to G# - a motion earlier thematized within the primary theme area of the first movement. If this can be regarded a faint allusion to the first movement's pastoral setting, the topic is more directly hinted at by a soft horn call in the upper register.¹²⁹ It interrupts the theme following its ascent to the submediant pitch, which the horn call highlights harmonically.

If the theme in Example 5.3 were allowed to continue without interruption, its emphasis on A# could be utilized, as a dominant, to modulate to the relative minor (D#). Medtner indeed follows this trajectory within the *Finale*'s fugal development, to be discussed later. Thus, the *tenebroso* marking may be considered a foreshadowing of a future modulation to D# minor. Here in the transition to the *Finale*, however, its negative implications are mostly deflected by the passage's orientation toward the subdominant, instead.

¹²⁹ Sarah Louise Kinley, "A Performer's Analysis of Eight Piano Sonatas of Nicholas Medtner" (MA thesis, UCLA, 1970), 45.

Example 5.3 has an additional narrative function in the manner it progresses into the *Finale*. Hatten, citing Janet Levy (1982, 528), describes the process of opening a movement with low-register octaves as a “curtain-raising” gesture that opens a larger drama.¹³⁰ While Example 5.3 does not technically start the *Finale* movement, Medtner’s *attacca* transition contains fragments of the *Finale*’s opening, indicating a direct linkage. The texture can also be compared to the opening of Medtner’s Piano Sonata in G Minor, Op. 22, which incorporates ominous ‘curtain rising’ octaves, a *tenebroso* expressive marking, and a higher-register chordal contrast:



Example 5.4: Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 22, mm. 1-3.

This passage similarly leads into a primary theme area, articulated after a double bar. Both excerpts suggest that Medtner understood the semantic implications of low, isolated octaves as a narrative device. Furthermore, a held, low octave was charged with implications of death at the end of the *Sonata-Ballade*’s first movement.¹³¹ Thus, the foreshadowing in Example 5.3 may also constitute a “dark” omen of a fatal conflict within the *Finale*. Its two upper-register [] interruptions, by contrast, are glimmers of hope for a victory of “light.”

¹³⁰ Hatten (1994), 14.

¹³¹ See p. 74.

The opening theme of the Finale, built on the horn-call motive, recalls the pastoral topic of the first movement.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the opening of the Finale. The first system is a piano introduction in 2/4 time, key of D major, marked 'Allegro sempre al rigore di Tempo'. It features a wavy line above the title. The first system shows the piano introduction with 'P leggierissimo' and 'ten.' markings. The second system shows a 'poco riten.' section with 'pp' and 'ppp' dynamics.

Example 5.5: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 1-4.

Pinsonneault, recounting the composer’s program, elaborates: “The initial theme of spring returns, but this time there is the belief and the faith in a true Creator.”¹³² His reference to an “initial theme” is not a literal reference to a particular melody, but rather to the pastoral genre. Both Example 5.5 and the first movement’s primary theme repeatedly emphasize a motion from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{6}$, which can be regarded as a motivic connection. Whereas the first movement’s theme is marked *cantabile*, implying a “rounded” character, this new theme area is marked with a [] line.

Medtner’s *Violin Sonata No. 2*, Op. 44, similarly evokes a more energetic recollection of the pastoral in its rondo-form *Finale*. Figure 5.3 provides a reduction of the

¹³² Pinsonneault, 38. Translated in Loftis, 41.

tonic and subdominant harmonies, and rising two-note slur gestures separated by brief rests. The violin sonata's note and rest values are longer, although staccatos at the end of slurs help preserve the intertextual connection. By contrast, the *Sonata-Ballade's* rondo theme is much less grounded in the tonic. Lifted gestures carry it twice to a held fermata on the subdominant, the harmonic goal of its basic idea within the sentence structure. Rising to the subdominant reinforces a pastoral connotation, and also gesturally suggests an embodied subject gazing upward in reflection. Labarge hermeneutically interprets the *Finale* as symbolic of "Man's" change of belief, as he "sees in the joy of spring the hand of the Creator."¹³⁴ Swan and Pinsonneault make similar assessments, but without explicitly referencing a change in man's perspective.¹³⁵ They do consider the *Finale* to be a return to the same pastoral mode as the first movement, but oriented heavenward by a newfound faith embraced by an unspecified subject. Their insights collectively suggest a return to the perspective of the sonata's internal, embodied agent—as I have classified it.

Without Labarge's insight on the *Finale*, however, it might be tempting to interpret this subject as an angelic actor. On the first page of the *Finale* in a student's score, Medtner included an epigram from Fet's poem: "And the Angels Came."¹³⁶ Granted, the Introduction movement similarly was entitled "Satan Stole Away," which is ultimately depictive of the movement's dramatic conclusion but not its opening phrase. This is enough to question whether Medtner's epigram in the *Finale* pertains to an immediately-stated dramatic event. To better address this concern interpretively, I will consider evidence from the score supporting Labarge's account of the program.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 149.

¹³⁵ Alfred J. Swan, "Das Leben Nikolai Medtners, 1880- 1951," *Musik des Ostens*. IV (1967), 79-80. Pinsonneault, 39-40.

¹³⁶ Martyn, Barrie. "Sonata-Ballada in F Sharp Major, Op. 27 (Medtner) - from CDA67221/4," accessed October 4, 2016. http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W4729_67221

The “empty human pride” passage from the *Introduction*, outlined in Chapter 4, contains an earlier allusion to the *Finale*’s rondo theme.

Example 5.6: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 9-12. The ascending dotted rhythm motive is shown in brackets.

Although the *Introduction*’s passage contains longer note values and dotted rhythms instead of rests, the contour and rhythm correlate to the extent that a thematic connection is evident. *Tenutos* are likewise found in both examples. In the *Finale*, however, this articulation is absent on the first eighth note reached in Example 5.5. Medtner’s choice to omit it may have been for performance reasons; a pianist could be tempted to take additional time on the last thirty-second note to agogically emphasize the following eighth. This rubato would be out of character with the lift gestures in an *Allegro* tempo. Alternatively, in Example 5.6, the statelier, noble-march topic of the *Introduction* leaves less room for the performer to disrupt the character of the dotted rhythms. Although the noble sentiment is not as pronounced as in the *Finale*’s opening, it still pertains to a subject of human origin, due to the motivic connection. Thus, the “empty human pride” theme is transfigured into a joyful affirmation of faith, professed now by the first movement’s principal agent. In this manner, the internal agent comments on the *Introduction*’s drama through a motivic connection (a possibility first conjectured in Chapter 2).

Another intertext, the *Préambule* movement from Schumann's *Carnaval*, further illustrates a connection to human expression in both the *Introduction* and *Finale*.¹³⁷



Example 5.7: Schumann's *Carnaval*, Op. 9, I. *Préambule*, mm. 1-6.

Both the *Préambule* and *Introduction* begin with a short-long rhythmic pattern where $\hat{5}$ moves to $\hat{6}$. The idea is reiterated three more times, with the last two repetitions compressing the length of the long note. Subsequently, the gesture is utilized as part of an ascent to $\hat{5}$ in a higher register (and then to $\hat{6}$ in the *Sonata-Ballade*). These common elements are enough to create an audible reference to the *Préambule* movement, even when the texture appears quite different at first glance.

Rests and shorter note values in the *Finale*'s opening (Example 5.5, p. 110) kinesthetically instruct the performer to play in a more breathless, scurrying manner than in the stately style of Schumann's theme. The tempo, higher register, softer dynamic and thinner texture can be said to evoke a more personal proclamation, calmer than Schumann's more strident fanfare. The *Finale* theme's reflective and retrospective quality, mentioned earlier, is further suggested by its prolonged lingering on the subdominant and the echoes in the outer registers of the piano. All of these differences do not make the intertextual

¹³⁷ A "striking resemblance" between the two works is noted by Cenieth Catherine Elmore, "Some Stylistic Considerations in the Piano Sonatas of Nikolai Medtner" (Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1972), 119.

connection to *Carnaval* less recognizable, or less probable as an inspiration. As with the Chopin Barcarolle allusion leading to the first movement's coda, it would be surprising if Medtner himself were not aware of the resemblance.

Schumann's influence is also found in the *Finale*'s development, shown in the following comparison to passages from the second movement of the Op. 17 *Fantasie*:

A)

Example 5.8A shows a piano accompaniment for the final movement of Chopin's Sonata-Ballade, Op. 27, III. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with a 'crescendo' marking and a 'ff' dynamic at the end.

B)

Example 5.8B shows a piano accompaniment for the second movement of Schumann's Fantasie in C, Op. 17, II. The music is in C major and 3/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a 'ff' dynamic.

C)

Example 5.8C shows a piano accompaniment for the final movement of Schumann's Fantasie in C, mm. 244-245. The music is in C major and 3/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a 'ff' dynamic.

Example 5.8: A) *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 225-226. B) Schumann, *Fantasie in C*, Op. 17, II. *Mäßig. Durchaus energisch*, mm. 187-189. C) *Fantasie in C*, mm. 244-245.

My conversations with Bitzan and Karpayev at the Medtner Study Day (2016) often concerned the Germanic qualities of this *Finale* movement, in drawing more from Schumann's style and Beethoven's formal designs than Chopin's lyricism, which was more

prevalent in the first movement. These are insights in support of a theory that Medtner was purposefully attempting, in the *Sonata-Ballade*, to bridge his influences with his own compositional voice and sensibility. These intertextual connections may also be of consequence to the dramatic design of the work. One previously discussed example in Chapter 3 (pp. 65-66) concerned the first movement's Barcarolle allusion, which lulls the listener into a false expectation of a positive, affirming climax and peaceful resolution.

There is perhaps reason to suspect that the *Carnaval* allusion relates to the topic implicit in Schumann's title. *Carnaval*, Op. 9, is programmatically associated with a pre-Lenten parade in Florence, Italy.¹³⁸ While not an official liturgical holiday, Carnival is celebrated before the beginning of Lent in the Roman Catholic tradition, as a last chance to indulge in worldly comforts inappropriate for a season of penance and prayer. Lent proceeds for approximately forty days before the Easter Triduum begins, and is observed in part as a commemoration of Christ's temptation in the desert. Christ's trial in the *Sonata-Ballade*, however, is placed *before* the *Carnaval* intertext. Medtner's more tempered take on Schumann's theme alludes to a development in the principal agent's understanding of spiritual joy in the *Finale* - from a self-oriented view of fulfillment to a quiet embrace of Christian faith. The theme's retrospective qualities also suggest that the agent may be reminiscing about a past joy in anticipation of the coming Easter festival. One of Medtner's early works, *Reminiscence of a Ball* from *Improvisations*, Op. 2, No. 3, portrays another recollection evoked by lingering on an inconclusive harmony.

¹³⁸ Chllung-Wel Chou, "Aspects of Historical Background, Literary Influence, Form, and Performance Interpretation in Robert Schumann's 'Carnaval'" (D.M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 1998),

N. MEDTNER. Op. 2.
(1898 r.)

Schwärmend.
(M. M. $\text{♩} = 40.$)

PIANO. *sempre Pedale e cantabile*

leggierissimo

Example 5.9: *Eine Ball-Reminiscenz* (“Reminiscence of a Ball”), Op. 2, No. 2, mm. 1-14.

Its *leggierissimo* flourish in measures 11-12 could also be intertextually related, in its expression of contemplation, to the upper register echo in the *Finale*’s opening (m. 4 of Example 5.5, p. 110).

A program note by Adám Fellegi, published with his recording, describes the *Finale*’s opening theme as reminiscent of Schumann.¹³⁹ Likewise, Flamm notes its similarity to *Carnaval*.¹⁴⁰ However, Medtner’s rondo theme is in a softer dynamic, higher register, and thinner texture, implying that it is more internalized than Schumann’s stately opening. This temperance corresponds to a development in the internal embodied agent’s understanding of spiritual joy: from a self-oriented view of personal fulfillment in the first

¹³⁹ Adám Fellegi, “MEDTNER: Sonata-Ballade / Sonata Reminiscenza,” accessed October 21, 2016, http://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs_reviews.asp?item_code=8.223372&catNum=223372&filetype=About%20this%20Recording&language=English

¹⁴⁰ Flamm, 438.

movement, to a quiet embrace of Christian faith. The rondo theme's retrospective qualities suggest the agent could be reminiscing about a past joy, perhaps even the carnival itself, in anticipation of a religious victory (and arrival of Spring) at the sonata's conclusion.

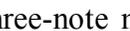
In the continuation phase of the opening sentence, a *Gang*-like (semantically inactive) extension passage constitutes a subliminal transition from an “energetic” to a “rounded” profile.

(...)



The musical score consists of three systems of piano and right-hand staves. The first system includes markings for *poco riten.*, *pp*, *mp*, *lusingando*, *a tempo*, and *ten.*. The second system includes *p* and *crescendo*. The third system includes *cantando*, *f*, and *mf*. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and various articulations such as slurs and accents.

Example 5.10: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 8-19.

A corresponding “winding-down” effect is hinted at by the passage’s liquidating fragmentation, which is also a syntactic cue for the expected end of a musical sentence. Rests and slurred gestures subside, as the fragments are liquidated into a descending chromatic scale, which reaches a half cadence in measure 16. The beginning of the “rounded” section, marked *cantando*, continues the sixteenth-note pulsation in its accompaniment. Fragments of an earlier introduced motive (identified in brackets in mm. 9-10, 17-18) are found within both hands. As in the first movement, the continuation of the internal agent’s perspective is also implied by the use of developing variation technique in adjacent sections. The *Gang*-like “winding down” passage bridging [] and [] sections develops this three-note motive by reversing its initial two pitches. Altogether, the subtle changes in texture and articulation are not ascribable to any specific agency, suggesting a *subliminal* shift in the internal, embodied agent’s subconscious.

The lyrical passage in the first “rounded” theme area of the *Finale* has a contour comparable to the build-up to the first movement’s coda:

A) B)

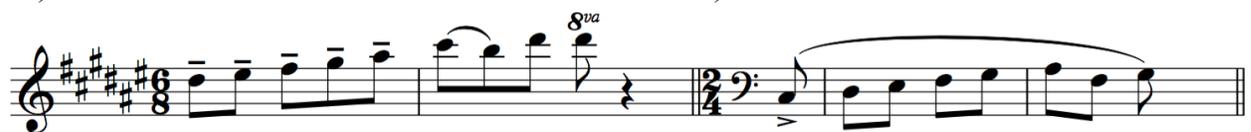


Figure 5.4: Motivic reductions from *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, A) First movement mm. 229-230, B) III. *Finale*, mm. 16-18.

In both cases, the ascending scale and closing turn figure elicit a growing sense of anticipation. Similarly, the stepwise, descending-fourth pattern in the left hand (Example 5.10, mm. 17-19) recalls the M3 motive from the first movement. The *Finale*’s first

“rounded” [~~~~~] passage has a transitional function, although it is reiterated in subsequent presentations of the rondo theme. As the [~~~~~] section continues, dactylic rhythms [long-short-short] are introduced:

The image shows a musical score for piano and right hand. The piano part is in the lower system, and the right hand part is in the upper system. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The piano part starts with a wavy line above it, followed by a dactylic rhythm (long-short-short) marked with a wavy line and the text "(dactylic rhythm introduced)". The piano part has dynamics *p* and *crescendo*. The right hand part starts with a wavy line above it, followed by a dactylic rhythm marked with a wavy line. The right hand part has dynamics *ff* and *mp*, and is marked "sempre al rigore di tempo". The right hand part features a sequence of eighth notes with fingerings 2 3 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 3. There are also triplets and a doublet in the right hand part.

Example 5.11: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 20-27.

This rhythmic pattern was last encountered in the first movement, which suggests that the passage still pertains to the internal agent. At the end of the phrase, Medtner writes a [~~~~~] symbol in Illes’s score, which is sustained for only two measures before another [~~~~~] appears. This is the shortest excerpt to be marked with contrasting energetic lines. Its texture and melody are only minimally altered from the preceding discourse. In Hatten’s (1994) terminology,¹⁴¹ this would constitute an “unmarked” change. Still, Medtner was inclined to mark an energetic shift. This may have been prompted by a

¹⁴¹ Hatten (1994), 291-292.

pedagogical intention to instruct Illes to play in a more excited manner. Structurally however, this fragment is soon given thematic emphasis; it reappears in a later [] passage transitioning to the movement's B-section.

In Example 5.11, this brief [] section's contour descends in its second measure, rather than ascending, as in the preceding bars. This turning-away motion could be interpreted as the embodied agent's self-denial of an expected climactic resolution. Perhaps this restraint was learned as a result of the misguided optimism adopted in the first movement. Harmonically, the passage leads to a secondary dominant, preventing a half-cadence resolution on the standing-dominant pedal. Example 5.11's second phrases comprise another []-marked variation of the initial "rounded" theme, suggesting another attempt to reach an unattained goal. This suggests that the two energetic shifts are motivated by another agent, and thus could be classified as *graduated*. Still, the internal agent's perspective is maintained without any apparent influence from the religious drama of the *Introduction*.

Alternatively, the next energetic shift begins a pivot to religious drama. In the process of transitioning to the next [] passage, Medtner introduces a four-note slur motive derived from the opening version of the Muse theme.

Example 5.12: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 28-36. (The four-note, Muse-derived motive is bracketed.)

A *marcato* climax arises from this mediant key, A \sharp minor, earlier alluded to in the “curtain raising” lead-in to the *Finale*. The [~~~~~] phrase which follows is metrically displaced by the right hand’s hemiola accompaniment. Its off-meter accents could be attributed to the Satanic agency first found in the *Introduction*. Even without an explicit reference to the Muse theme, the “light” and “dark” agencies that prompted this *gradated* energetic shift can be attributed the *Introduction*’s dramatic premises.

Soon, the sixteenth-triplet rhythms in the right hand slow to straight sixteenths; throughout, a pedal point is reiterated on the mediant. The internal agent's two-measure [] section is then re-introduced, but sternly answered by a dotted rhythm fragment (earlier introduced at the end of of Example 5.12). This can be interpreted as the internal agent's attempt to resist the mediant key area, which was earlier established as a foreboding environment.¹⁴² This process repeats as the internal agent's motive is sequenced lower, as if fading into the background.

Surprisingly, relief from the pedal point comes in the form of a subordinate theme in the key of the *major* submediant. The pedal point (A#) is enharmonically reinterpreted as the root of a dominant-seventh chord leading to E \flat major. By modulating to the relative minor (D# minor), Medtner suggests that a positively-oriented agent has modally uplifted the music.

¹⁴² See the discussion of Example 5.3, pp. 107-109.

(...~~~~~)

sempre legatissimo
pp
p

molto egualmente e
dolce pacatamente

leggierissimo

^{*)} Как колебание воздуха (сop poco Pedale).

Example 5.13: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 43-51.

This denial of the relative minor key is also met with an immediate change in texture: the resurgence of triplet rhythms. The coinciding [~~~~~] marking, therefore, might be classified a shift residing somewhere on a spectrum between *gradated* and *sudden*. However, Medtner also marks a second [~~~~~] line at the entrance of the *Finale*'s secondary theme: the Muse theme. As a result, it can be concluded that the introduction

of the new theme area (a B-section) was motivated by an actor (Christ)¹⁴³ within the religious, dramatic narrative.

The *Finale*'s version of the Muse theme places the melody in the middle register of the piano, underneath an accompaniment suggestive of an ethereal invocation. As with the transition to the B-section, its hemiola triplet pattern creates an impression of being unhinged. However, here the effect is not as disruptive. Instead, a freedom from metrical convention is used to create a supernatural ambiance (similar to a better-known example, the opening of Ravel's *Ondine*). The topic of mysticism, discussed in Chapter 3, may also have relevance here. But whereas mystical passages in the first movement tended to wander without direction, the accompaniment in Example 5.13 is oriented to the Christ theme through a luminous, pentatonic allusion to the pastoral. The image of the Good Shepherd is thereby implicit in this music, if not also transfigured to a higher plane of supernatural emphasis.

Earlier in this chapter, I proposed that the *Introduction*'s temptation narrative can be understood as a Lenten prompt for the internal agent's conversion. The rondo theme, alternatively, signifies that the agent is anxiously "striving heavenward" with a newfound "belief in a creator God."^{144,145} With a jubilant expression of Easter bells forthcoming at the end of the sonata, one could speculate that there is still a religious narrative to be addressed before the sonata's conclusion. To reach a point in which the *internal* (human soul) and *external* (biblical text) can be integrated within an "Easter blessing," the summit of conflict of the *Finale* must pertain to man's role in Christ's crucifixion.

¹⁴³ This connection was earlier established from Medtner's quotation of Scripture in the *Introduction* movement.

¹⁴⁴ Keller, 156.

¹⁴⁵ Pinsonneault, 38-39.

If the narrative is to be viewed as a mapping onto a temporal progression of liturgical-seasonal time,¹⁴⁶ as experienced by the internal embodied agent, a discussion of Holy Week liturgies could yield additional insight. In the Russian Orthodox tradition,¹⁴⁷ the Lord's Supper and liturgical act of consecration are both referenced as a Mystical Supper.¹⁴⁸ On Holy Thursday, a hymn entitled "Of thy mystical supper" is inserted in place of a Cherubikon, relating to angels.¹⁴⁹ A Cherubikon is not heard until the midday Holy Saturday Liturgy, in which the hymn "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" is substituted, which references angels in its second half.¹⁵⁰ This liturgy, in the orthodox tradition, is practiced as a commemoration of Christ's burial and the Harrowing of Hell. Finally, the standard Cherubikon returns as part of the midnight Easter liturgy, symbolically connecting the congregant's voices to a choir of angels.

Of Thy Mystical Supper

Of Thy mystical Supper, Lord,
let me partake, O Son of God,
for of Thy mysteries I will not speak to Thy enemies
nor kiss Thee like Judas,

¹⁴⁶Several authors (Swan, Biztan, Martyn, etc) reference "Easter" in their analysis.

¹⁴⁷ Although Medtner was not Russian Orthodox at the time of the *Sonata-Ballade's* composition, he was familiar with Orthodox liturgy. The composer attended the services as a young child, and his longtime romantic interest (and later wife), Anna Bratenskaya, came from the faith tradition. The *Finale's* integration of Germanic musical and Russian spiritual influences is paralleled in a quote attributed to the composer a decade earlier (1903): "Is it not true, how much there is in common between German art and Orthodox religion?" Mitchell, 269, 272. I propose that the *Sonata-Ballade's Finale* movement is a musical demonstration of this principle.

¹⁴⁸ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture*, 1st edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 279

¹⁴⁹ Orthodox Eastern Church, *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church* (Association Press, 1922), 213.

¹⁵⁰ Hans-Joachim Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy*, tr. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1986), 35-37.

but like a thief on the cross I will confess to Thee:

"In Thy Kingdom, Lord, remember me."

Alleluia.

Let all mortal flesh keep silent

Let all mortal flesh keep silent, and stand with fear and trembling, and in itself consider nothing of earth; for the King of kings and Lord of lords cometh forth to be sacrificed, and given as food to the believers; and there go before Him the choirs of Angels, with every dominion and power, the many-eyed Cherubim and the six-winged Seraphim, covering their faces, and crying out the hymn: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Cherubikon

We who mystically represent the Cherubim,
and who sing to the Life-Giving Trinity the thrice-holy hymn,
let us now lay aside all earthly cares
that we may receive the King of all,
escorted invisibly by the angelic orders.

Alleluia

If the B-section is to be considered emblematic of the Holy Thursday liturgy, we need evidence beyond the given pretexts of the Muse theme, a mysticism topic, and the theme's location in the narrative. Further supporting evidence may be found later in the sonata. In the reprise of the B-section after the fugal development, the upper accompaniment line is transformed into a *pianissimo* canon on the Muse theme (Example 5.14):

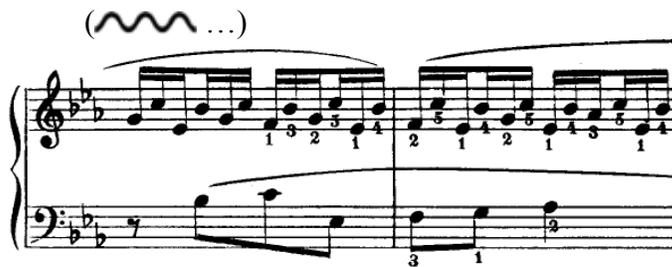
The image displays a musical score for Example 5.14, consisting of two systems of music. The first system features a piano part on the left and a violin part on the right. The piano part begins with a wavy line and the text "(...)" above it. The violin part starts with a fermata and the marking "molto tranquillo". Both parts are marked "pp" (pianissimo). The piano part includes the marking "ten." (ritardando) and "ad." (ad libitum). The violin part includes the marking "cantando espr." (cantando espressivo) and a fingering sequence "3 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1". The second system shows the piano part continuing with the marking "poco a poco a tempo" above it. The piano part includes a fingering sequence "5 2 1 2 4 1 3".

Example 5.14: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 310-317.

This additional voice echoes the Christ (Muse) theme in a higher register. Its entrance marks the most plausible position of the entrance of angels, foretold by the epigraph from Fet’s poem. Similarly, the *molto tranquillo* and *pianissimo* markings could be considered a reference to the “silence kept” by human souls awaiting salvation after commemorating the Crucifixion.

Having established a plausible connection between the subordinate theme areas and both Holy Thursday and Saturday liturgies, I will suggest that the fugal development pertains to Good Friday, and thus to Christ’s Passion. (Indeed, the more each of these liturgies correlate to particular theme areas in the *Finale*, the greater evidence there is to support the interpretation as a whole.) A discussion of this movement’s temporality can be extended to encompass a liturgical-season time, pertaining to the progression of a religious drama that concludes with Easter Resurrection.

As the first B-section progresses, the Muse-like motive from the transition re-emerges before its first cadence, reinforcing its connection to the Muse theme:



Example 5.15: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 52-53.

In the next phrase, the triplets gradually steer the music toward a half cadence and pedal point on G, implicit of a move toward C minor (a tritone away from the original tonic):



(cont'd)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff with a melody and a bass clef staff with a bass line. The melody in the first system includes a triplet of eighth notes marked with '3', followed by a first ending bracket marked '1' and a second ending bracket marked '2'. The second system also has two staves, with the word 'tenebroso' written above the treble staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as beams, slurs, and dynamic markings like 'p'.

Example 5.16: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 56-74.

The G pedal-point then drops an octave, furthering a sense of inevitability of the modulation to C minor. Ultimately, C minor is tonicized by a reprise of the “contention” theme last heard in the lead-in to the *Finale*. Unlike its earlier statement, however, the melody sulks below the original contour, coming to rest on the lowest C on the instrument. From here, the “contention” theme returns with two statements nearly identical to the end of the *Introduction*. The one discrepancy to note is that the first statement actually begins in C minor, rather than on A#, and is therefore imbued with a minor-key sentiment. However, it does manage to transition back to the rondo theme, as before.

The second appearance of the rondo theme is mostly unchanged from the first. However, Medtner tends to be less scrupulous with his energetic marks in recapitulated material. Two of the prior [] lines are omitted: one at the two-measure section analogous to Example 5.11 (p. 121), and the other at the fortissimo climax after the Muse-

like transition. The latter now modulates to the key of F minor, with a decoration in broken octave polyrhythms:

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system consists of two staves. Above the top staff is a wavy line with the text "(...)" underneath it. The music includes various rhythmic markings such as "5 4 5 1 5 8" and "3 3". A "crescendo" marking is placed between the staves. The second system also has two staves. It begins with the marking "espressivo" and "crescendo". The music features complex rhythmic patterns and a "ff" (fortissimo) dynamic marking. At the end of the system, there is a "Ped." (pedal) instruction.

Example 5.17: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 103-109.

In transitioning from the second rondo section to the fugal development, Medtner employs a different motive in place of the two-measure [] fragment. The new idea, taken from the continuation portion of the rondo theme's first phrase, descends in sequential repetitions. The contour of the line, highlighted in Figure 5.5 below, suggests the underpinnings of the *Dies Irae* motive.



Figure 5.5: Melodic reduction of *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 116-125. The *Dies Irae* contour is shown with upper stems.

This treatment could be likened to the second theme area in the *Introduction*, where the *Dies Irae* is also sequenced. The reference is much less explicit in the *Finale*, however, as evidenced by the need for my reduction to highlight it. Regardless, this decent foreshadows the references to death within the fugal development, when interpreted as a Crucifixion narrative.

The fugal development begins after an ascending scale, reminiscent of a similar flourish in the “empty human pride” episode of the *Introduction* movement.

A)

(~~~~~...)

calando

m. s. p

B)

5 4 1

f

p

3

5

Example 5.18: A) *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 127-130, B) *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, II. *Introduction*, mm. 12-13.

The ensuing modulation to B \flat minor indicates that the pedal point on F, unique to the second A-section, was strategically placed to be reinterpreted as a dominant. Thus, the first A-section's failed attempt at modulating to B \flat minor is rectified, as a "dark" (Satanic) agency devises a new method (the V/V pedal) to stabilize the minor key. The fugue's subject begins at the "Tempo I" marking, although a "rounded" line appears only when the texture thins to an isolated voice:



Example 5.19: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 131-135.

Medtner’s word choice of *stentato* (labored) aptly depicts the character of the fugal subject, gesturally emphasized by *tenutos* and breath marks (as the line ascends). The subject itself is recognizable as the “contention” theme, an agency of the religious drama. Unlike the theme’s presentation in the lead-in to the *Finale*, it is fully transposed here into the key of B♭ minor. According to Hatten (1994, 87) and Ratner (1980, 260-71), fugues have a stylistic correlation with Baroque church genres. This is often manifest in the “authoritative” (if not overtly religious) character of a fugal subject. The reduction of the texture to an isolated voice could therefore be considered a singling out of an authoritative agency. Registrally, the entrance of the subject on B♭ directly correlates with the past appearance of the Muse theme in the *Finale* (Example 5.13). Given my earlier claim that the development enacts the Crucifixion drama, there is sufficient reason to believe that this fugal subject pertains to Christ, an authoritative religious figure, under duress from a foreboding “darkness.”

The opening of the fugue is intensely personal and temporally static, in a manner which can be regarded as a *Satz*.¹⁵¹ If not for the thematic connection to the *Introduction*, the fugue might initially be regarded as an expression of the sonata’s principal embodied subject. Perhaps Medtner borrowed its ponderous characteristic as a means of portraying

¹⁵¹ Monelle, 110, discusses classical themes as subsisting in a temporality of “lyric time.”

Christ as an empathetic figure. This has pertinent theological implications, as traditional Christian belief holds that Jesus was both man and God.

The entrance of additional voices in the fugue does not necessarily imply additional actors, but could rather be considered an enrichment of the “contention” theme. As Hatten notes, an agent’s expression “may at times be enhanced or thickened or refracted by associated contrapuntal, imitative, or accompanimental lines that are derived from the primary *melos* [thematic continuity] and are thus highly dependent upon it.”¹⁵² Medtner illustrates this concept in *The Muse and the Fashion*:

“Through the complexity of the coordination of Bach's polyphony one can easily arrive at the simplicity and divine clarity of his themes. It is as if we were drawn in by the inherent, relentless gravitation of this complexity to the simplicity of the theme . . . The theme is not always, and not only melody. It is more than a melody, for—as Bach has proved it in his fugues . . . it is capable of turning into a continuous melody the most complex construction of form.”¹⁵³

While Medtner does not employ the same terminology, he clearly shares a belief that polyphonic voices can integrate thematically into what he constitutes as a “continuous melody,” or in Hatten’s term, *melos*.

As earlier discussed, the previous appearances of the contention theme in the *Finale* foreshadow a summit of Christian-religious tragedy (Crucifixion) that is reached later in the movement. The development’s definite turn toward the tragic, therefore, may be understood as a rhetorical cue marking a narrative beginning to the Passion narrative. Given that the sonata ends on a victorious, triumphant note, the remainder of the work could be likened to Hatten’s depiction of religious drama:

¹⁵² Robert S. Hatten, “Melodic Forces and Agential Energies: An Integrative Approach to the Analysis and Expressive Interpretation of Tonal Melodies,” in *Music, Analysis, Experience. New Perspectives in Musical Semiotics*, ed. Constantino Maeder and Mark Reybrouck (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015), 315-30, citation on p. 315.

¹⁵³ Medtner, 16, 44.

". . . The tragic-to-triumphant genre appears to be interpretable in terms comparable to the theatrical category of religious drama—namely, tragedy that is transcended through sacrifice at a spiritual level. The pathos of the tragic may be understood as stemming from a kind of Passion music, depicting a personal, spiritual struggle; and the "triumph" is no longer a publicly heroic victory but a transcendence or acceptance that goes beyond the conflicts of the work (after having fully faced them)."¹⁵⁴

One discrepancy, I should note, is that the "Passion music" within the *Finale* is both an internalized struggle *and* a dramatic reenactment. This duality becomes more evident as the development veers toward a dialogue of agencies, leading to an ultimate synthesis of the internal subject as part of the religious drama.

After the entrance of a third voice, sixteenth notes become increasingly prevalent:

¹⁵⁴ Hatten (1994), 79.

(~~~~~...)

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano accompaniment. The first system begins with a wavy line above the staff, followed by a series of notes with fingering numbers (1, 3, 4, 5) and the instruction "legatissimo". The second system continues with more notes and fingering numbers (2, 1, 1, 3, 5, 4, 3, 2, 6, 4, 3). The third system features a "poco calando" instruction and ends with "pochissimo".

Example 5.20: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 141-153.

The *Dies Irae* motive briefly appears as a diminution of the accompaniment pattern in the *Introduction*'s Satanic theme. Later within the development's Core, this fragment will function as an incessant countersubject to an even more unrelenting fugal exposition. But here, its momentum stalls, leading instead to the *Dies Irae* variant of the *Finale*'s rondo theme. This implies there is another human participant in the drama, distinguishable from Christ. Given the motivic connection to the rondo theme, it could be that this agent, as a human protagonist, is virtually coaxed into an analogous dramatic role within the larger

Passion narrative. All throughout this first fugal exposition, Medtner’s “rounded” [] affect is retained.

After the fermata on an unresolved harmony in Example 5.20, a second, more chaotic flourish abruptly restarts the fugal exposition. This time, the fugal subject on B \flat is reinterpreted as $\hat{3}$ within G minor.

( ...)

Più risoluto



The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. Above the staff, there is a wavy line symbol followed by an ellipsis. Below the staff, the instruction "Più risoluto" is written. The score itself consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, with various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamics like "sf".

Example 5.21: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 154-159.

Medtner once again writes a [] line near the opening of this second attempt at a fugue. *Più risoluto*, therefore, is not bold enough of an instruction to warrant a [] line in this particular passage. Its opening flourish still functions rhetorically: here, as a gesture akin to being shaken awake after losing consciousness. This second fugue ends similarly to the first, although abridged in length:

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a wavy line above the treble staff. The music is highly chromatic and includes the instruction "dimin.". The second system also consists of two staves, with the instruction "poco calando" appearing above the bass staff. The notation is dense and features many accidentals and slurs.

Example 5.22: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 164-171.

Notably, there are now only two measures of running sixteenths with a *Dies Irae*-like contour, as opposed to four. The alto line above is also a highly chromaticized variant of the chant. Together, these two measures are considerably less stable harmonically than the preceding material. This alludes to a force motivating change—an agency that revels in death. Darkness is further evoked by a continual descent. Consequently, the rondo theme variant is presented in a low register, and furthermore has its upper and lower pitches inverted. This might be considered as a sign that man has gradually succumbed to the darkness in his soul. Intertextually, one can hear a faint recall of the opening motive of Liszt’s *Piano Concerto No. 1*. Liszt’s setting of German words to this motive (in private) “None of you understand this, haha!”¹⁵⁵ could apply equally to the uncertainty of this second fugue’s ending.

¹⁵⁵ (“*Das versteht ihr alle nicht, haha!*”)

The third and last attempt to restart the fugue begins with another rising flourish. This time, B \flat is reinterpreted as $\hat{5}$:

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The tempo marking is 'Risoluto sempre al rigore di Tempo'. The score begins with a rising flourish in the right hand, marked with a forte 'f' dynamic and 'm.d.' (mezzo-dolce). This is followed by a series of notes in both hands, with a 'diminuendo' marking over the right hand. The piece ends with a 'm.s.' (mezzo-solito) marking. A wavy line symbol is present in the upper right corner of the score area.

Example 5.23: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 172-177.

Medtner returns to the intervallic structure from the lead-in to the *Finale*, and likewise, to its presentation in octaves. Uninterrupted by fragments of the rondo theme, the music freely continues along the contour of the contention theme. Soon after, the top voice isolates itself in a metrically offset sequence. This addition to the phrase is unique, creating uneasiness in the music’s apparent lack of direction. Suspense is further elicited as the music briefly pauses on A \flat , the seventh of the B \flat dominant harmony (end of Example 5.23).

Whereas the *Finale*’s lead-in was originally a reprieve from the dramatic climaxes of the *Introduction*, its “curtain-raising” function in the development seems to transition from the inward-looking Pre-core to a tempestuous Core. Medtner wrote a [~~~~~] line in Illes’s score next to the *Risoluto* marking. Another rhetorical shift is found at the *una corda*, marking the turn to a more driven and maniacal fugal treatment of the “contention” theme:



Example 5.24: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 178-181.

This fugue marks the beginning of the principal dramatic conflict of the development. The earlier fugal expositions, therefore, can be regarded as spiritual preparation for an impending religious conflict.

Two authors have proposed alternative interpretations of the Pre-core section, although neither extensively defends his claims. Lockwood regards the development's inability to initially settle on a key area as a humorous gesture.¹⁵⁶ While I disagree with his wording choice, there is certainly Romantic irony in Medtner's decision to restart his "failed" fugues. In the context of the work's program and religious dramatic tone, perhaps it is wiser to attribute this faltering to an agency (or tragic flaw within an agent) that is involved in the conflict. Loftis, alternatively, suggests that the threefold attempt at a fugue (again) represents the three temptations of Christ in the desert.¹⁵⁷ While this parallel could be noted, the rondo theme's reference at the end of each fugal area indicates that an agency of mankind has a larger role to play in this discourse than in the *Introduction*. Furthermore, there is a notable transformation of texture and intensity at the third fugal area, which marks the beginning of the Core of the development.

¹⁵⁶ Albert Lewis Lockwood, *Notes on the Literature of the Piano* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1940), 138.

¹⁵⁷ Loftis, 59.

My interpretive view is that the two opening fugal expositions are relatable to the Agony in the Garden. Christ, the foregrounded subject, prays intensely while awaiting death, perhaps symbolized by the contention theme as a fugal subject. The apostles, meanwhile, could find representation in the rondo theme's variations at the end of the fugal expositions. The sighing gestures in the upper voice could reflect Christ's sorrow, whereas fermatas on unresolved harmonies might insinuate that the apostles have succumbed to sleep. This parallels the Passion account in Luke's gospel, in which the apostles are found "sleeping in their grief."¹⁵⁸ Twice, they are awakened by Christ,¹⁵⁹ perhaps symbolized by the rising flourish gesture, either calling them back to prayer (a second solemn fugue) or to witness His betrayal. Thus, the Crucifixion narrative would proceed into the tempestuous Core of the development, as Christ is symbolically carried away by his detractors.

Whereas the events of the Agony evidently correlate with the Pre-Core, the remainder of the Crucifixion narrative is difficult to map as explicitly onto biblical events. Similar to his musical interpretation of Fet's poem in the *Introduction*, Medtner would not merely attempt a musical "dictation" of a non-musical source.¹⁶⁰ Rather, the composer seems to draw more from the expressive and symbolic content of the biblical narrative, and less from its rhetorical design, in developing his thematic material.

The Core, as previously mentioned, utilizes a countersubject derived from the *Dies Irae* accompaniment from the *Introduction*. Its sixteenth-note rhythms are a diminution of the original idea, quickening the pulse. Unlike the *Dies Irae* in Berlioz's *Symphonie*

¹⁵⁸ Luke 22:43.

¹⁵⁹ Mark 14:26-42, Matthew 26:31-46

¹⁶⁰ To quote the *Muse and the Fashion*, Medtner, 125.

Fantastique,¹⁶¹ Medtner’s countersubject does not celebrate death, but presses on toward it. In this regard, its treatment of the topic is more closely related to the “March to the Scaffold” movement. One section of Medtner fugue actually bears a passing resemblance to the first Bassoon solo within Berlioz’s march:

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system begins with a wavy line and the instruction *p sempre crescendo (ma poco a poco)*. It features a treble and bass clef with various fingerings and dynamics. The second system continues the piece, including a *Ped.* marking. The notation is complex, with many notes and rests, and includes some performance instructions like *ped.* and *tr.*

Example 5.25: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 186-193.

A)

A single line of musical notation in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats. It shows a series of notes and rests, with some slurs and accents.

B)

A single line of musical notation in treble clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of three flats. It shows a series of notes and rests, with some slurs and accents.

Figure 5.6: A) Bassoon solo from Berlioz’s “March to the Scaffold,” from *Symphonie Fantastique*. B) Reduction from Medtner’s *Finale*, mm. 187-191.

¹⁶¹ Particularly as used in the “Witches Sabbath.”

A reference to the corrupted Muse theme, representative of Satan's voice, is also found within the left hand in Example 5.25. This motive, which participates in the sequence in Figure 5.6, is possibly emblematic of the devil's influence in mobilizing the relentless sixteenths. The relentless character of this fugue is reinforced by a lack of episodic material, which would provide relief from the fugal subject. Several measures after Example 5.25, Medtner instructs Illes to lift the *una corda* pedal, held since the beginning of the development's Core.¹⁶²

¹⁶² The original edition contained no *una corda* marking; the *tre corda* marking in Example 5.26 is from Illes's score.

(~~~~~...)

tre corde

ff

1 1

Example 5.26: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 202-217.

Instead of this gesture marking a transition to an expected fugal episode, the composer begins a further, condensed stretto of the contention theme. In a brilliant example of contrapuntal writing for the instrument, Medtner crafts a stretto of the subject in a multiplicity of registers and voices, while the countersubject is kept in perpetual motion.

As the stretto reaches a climax, the contention theme is presented in bass octaves against a variation of the countersubject moving across the keyboard. Next, the texture is inverted; the roles of each hand are traded, placing the subject and countersubject in opposite registers. As in the *Introduction*'s recapitulation, this climax can be regarded as the apex of a struggle between Christ and Satan. The two closing chords in Example 26, likewise, are a clear reference to the manner in which the *Introduction* departs from the contention theme. If earlier precedent is kept, a reference to either the “empty human pride” or “Satan’s voice” themes could be expected to follow.

A sudden drop in dynamics, from *fortissimo* to *piano*, marks a rhetorical shift to a passage that evidently highlights the “empty human pride” topic. The right hand presents this melody as encountered in the *Introduction*, whereas the accompaniment incorporates rhythms from the rondo theme.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system is marked with a wavy line above the staff, followed by a treble clef, a key signature of three flats, and a common time signature. The music is marked *p* and *leggiero*. The right hand features a melodic line with various ornaments and fingerings (4, 5, 4, 2, 5, 4, 2), while the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment with fingerings (4, 3, 1, 1, 2, 1). The second system begins with a dynamic shift to *sf* and *p*, also marked *leggiero*. The right hand has a melodic line with a fingering of 5, and the left hand continues with a rhythmic accompaniment with fingerings (5, 3, 2). The notation includes various ornaments, slurs, and dynamic markings throughout.

Example 5.27: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 218-224.

Their integration in the third bar could indicate that the principal agent identifies with the “dark” of the human soul in this particular vignette. It is interesting to note that the authoritative effect of the earlier fugal section carries over to the sonata’s human agents through a prideful march topic. In the Passion narrative, mankind’s pride ultimately leads to the Crucifixion. It is not a coincidence that the Muse theme reappears in this excerpt (mm. 221-222), subjected to man’s jarring thirty-second-note rhythms. Sharp pangs are further elicited by the high-register dissonances, which could be interpreted as shrill cries.

This violent expression of “empty human pride” leads into a reprise of the contention theme, discussed earlier in this chapter as an apotheosis of the development (Example 5.2, p. 102). Its climax pertains to each of the sonata’s dramatic actors, including mankind’s role within the greater existential conflict between Christ and Satan. As the culminating point of the drama, the music in Example 5.2 could correspond to Christ’s being nailed to the cross. The “contention theme” rings out percussively with accents, perhaps symbolic of the requisite hammer blows.

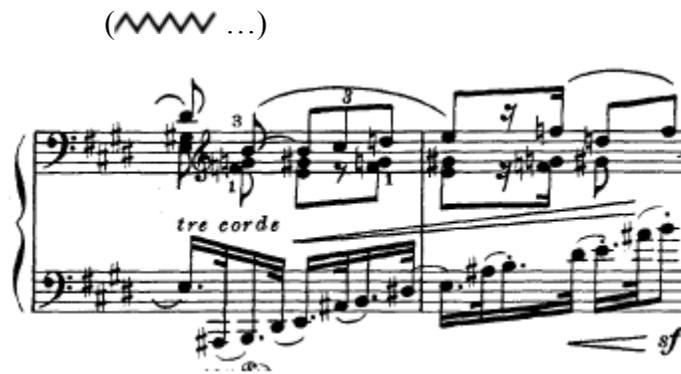
The two C# octaves bridge into a recollection of the “Satan’s voice” theme, symbiotically supported by the tritones outlined rhythmically in the rondo.

The image shows a musical score for piano and bass. The piano part is in the upper staff, and the bass part is in the lower staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The score includes several annotations: a wavy line with "..." above the first few notes; "affannato, ma sempre a tempo" above the right-hand piano part; "P sordamente (una corda)" below the piano part; and "senza Ped." below the bass part. The bass part features complex rhythmic patterns with fingerings (3 1, 3 1, 3 1, 3) and accents.

Example 5.28: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 234-236.

Another motive, however, is introduced at the end of the phrase beginning in measure 236. Its origins might be traced to an idea within the rondo theme area:¹⁶³

A)



B)



Example 5.29: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, A) mm. 240-241, B) mm. 27-28.

In the interpretation I have proposed, I believe this theme's upward motion could have two possible hermeneutic explanations: 1) The cross is hoisted upward from the ground, as man is provoked by the devil to crucify Christ, or 2) Satan and the "darkness" within man awaits Christ's death, looking up at the cross as an instrument of execution rather than of salvation. I find the latter more convincing, if only because it supports the dramatic trajectory of the remainder of the development.

Similar to the *Introduction's* coda, the Satan's voice theme is repeated a second time in a higher key. At this point in the analysis, it can be observed that the development's

¹⁶³ This idea is a variation of the first "rounded" theme.

Core loosely follows the *Introduction*'s initial progression of themes and topics: the “contention” theme, an expression of “empty human pride,” a return to the “contention” theme, and then an invocation of the devil through the “corrupted” Muse theme.

In a moment of transcendent vision which soon follows, the modality suddenly shifts to major, as a prophetic sign that Satan will not ultimately be the victor in the religious drama:

cantando, sempre più appassionato

mf *cresc.*

(... to mm. 258)

ponderoso

pp

ff

Example 5.30: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 248- 251, mm. 258-263.

The “gazing” or “hoisting” motive is transfigured into an upward gazing gesture, answered by the Muse theme in a higher register. This is one of two places in the *Finale* in which agencies attributable to the internal agent and those involving religious characters work together to form a positive religious expression. The second occurs later, in the movement’s coda, where they arrive at an even further symbiotic relationship.

Christ’s last breath is perhaps symbolized in a statement of the Muse theme which releases built-up tension, as if exhaling (Example 5.30, mm. 260-263). Closing the development is a dark, thunderous treatment of the theme – this could be interpreted as the earthquake referenced in Matthew’s Passion gospel.

(~~~~~ ...)

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The key signature has four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#) and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo marking 'poco allargando' is written above the first staff. The music features a series of chords in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. A dynamic marking 'f' (forte) is placed below the second staff. The score ends with a fermata over the final notes.

Example 5.31: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 268–271.

Medtner instructs the performer to retain only a hollow octave in this texture, which links it to the first movement’s closing imagery of death.

The last A-section (rondo theme) of the *Finale* enters after a brief pause. Its immediate energetic impulse is again marked by one of Medtner’s [~~~~~] symbols, indicating a *sudden* rhetorical shift. More striking than this change in energetics, however, is the instantaneous sense of optimism after the trauma of the development. This signals that the principal agent has returned to an anticipation of an Easter Spring, and has moved

past dwelling on the events of the Crucifixion as recounted in liturgy. This particular transition would be difficult to explain in terms of other rhetorical strategies. Perhaps it might even be subject to criticism, were it not connected to both a liturgical narrative and the expressed subjectivity of a principal embodied agent.

At the end of the first ascent of the “rounded” transition in this recap, Medtner alters the ending of the phrase to reach a half cadence within the tonic.

(~~~~~ ...)



Example 5.32: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 291–299.

Adhering to the form of the first two rondo theme areas, the music continues to a second statement of the lyrical transition theme. However, this presentation is already developed by arpeggiated triplets and an accompanying, high-register statement of the Muse motto. A parallel can be drawn to the development’s turn to a positive disposition, where the Muse theme received a similar presentation. (Example 5.30) The Muse theme saturates the texture as the music transitions to the second-B section, perhaps compensating for the

heavy use of the “contention” theme within the development. Sequences of fragmented material, derived from the Muse theme, outline a progression of descending keys areas: F# Major, E Major, D Major, and finally, C# as dominant of F# minor.

(~~~~~ ...)

The image shows a musical score for a piano and voice. The piano part is in the lower register, with a wavy line above the staff indicating a specific texture or articulation. The vocal line is in the upper register, featuring dynamic markings such as *pp* and *cantando espr.*, and fingering numbers like 8 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1. The score is marked *molto tranquillo* and *ten.* (tenuissimo).

Example 5.33: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 310–313.

This temporary reference to a minor key is not a turn to the tragic, but instead a method Medtner uses to evoke transcendence at the recapitulated B-section (Example 5.33, *molto tranquillo*). The decent leading into it might be regarded an allegory to Christ’s triumphant descent to hell, with the intent of raising the dormant souls of the deceased to heaven.¹⁶⁴ By the arrival of the B-section, motives associated with the principal agent disappear, indicating man’s silence.¹⁶⁵ Here we experience a complete shift to the external, religious drama and its actors: Christ and the Angels.

The *Finale* movement’s first B-section concluded with the “contention” theme, foreshadowing its use as fugal subject. Here in the B-section’s recapitulation, Medtner instead transitions to a coda which incorporates motives from the opening movement. The closing theme from the first movement’s primary theme area (Pc) is recalled at the apex of

¹⁶⁴ This biblical event is often referred to as the “Harrowing of Hell.”

¹⁶⁵ This could be a symbolic connection to *Let All Mortal Flesh be Silent*, as earlier theorized on pp. 127-129.

Example 5.32, marked *molto espressivo*, and bookended by melodic material from the *Finale*'s B-section:

(~~~~~ ...)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. The music is marked *molto espressivo* and *sempre crescendo*. The second system also consists of two staves with the same key signature and time signature, marked *crescendo*. The notation includes various rhythmic values, slurs, and fingering numbers (1, 2) for the left hand.

Example 5.34: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 330–337.

A chromatic wedge involving the bass line and inner voices heightens the emotional depth of the P_{cl} theme. Its anguished expression could be considered a final purification, or exorcism, of the inner demons of the internal agent's past. In case the theme's reference did not register on first hearing, Medtner subsequently states the theme in a more strident, Chopinesque variation:

(~~~~~ ...)

Example 5.35: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 338–347.

The first movement's initial Springtime theme is next recalled, underneath a bell-like, hemiola texture derived from the "Muse" theme—now representing Christ's triumph over death (in "an Easter blessing").

(~~~~~ ...)

Example 5.36: *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, III. *Finale*, mm. 352–355.

An emergent, allegorical meaning of their tropological merger might be an Easter celebration shared by celestial powers and the natural world, which includes mankind's joy, as vocalized by the internal, embodied subject. A chorale-like setting of the Muse theme (a positive transformation of Examples 4.11 and 5.31) closes the sonata with the words "Only bow before God the Father!" reiterated from the Muse theme's first appearance in the Introduction movement.

In conclusion, the *Sonata-Ballade* may be interpreted as a conversion from a self-guided, mystical spiritualism to the orthodoxy of the Christian faith, within the context of a progression of liturgical seasons and Scriptural events. Pastoral-Elegy and Passion music (Hatten, 1994) relate to Medtner's choice of topics, including funeral march, songs of nature, the death of a shepherd (principal agent, or the persona of Christ), and a dramatic trajectory from intense tragedy to a spiritual triumph of resurrection. Composed only three years before the Bolshevik Revolution, the *Sonata-Ballade* also has historical significance as an artistic repudiation of the growing anti-religious sentiment (and unorthodox spiritualities) appearing in early twentieth-century Russia. Ultimately, the sonata can be viewed as the composer's own metaphor for his conservative artistic beliefs, as he expresses faith in his spiritual "muse" to prevail over those modern trends he dismissed as mere "fashion."

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