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A STUDY OF NIKOLAI MEDTNER'S COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUE:

FORM AND NARRATIVE IN TALES

by

OLIVER MARKSON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Musical Arts, The City University of New York

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Abstract

A STUDY OF NIKOLAI MEDTNER'S COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUE:

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Oliver Markson

Advisor: Richard Kramer

This dissertation delves into the compositional approach of Russian-born composer Nikolai Medtner. A discussion of Medtner's own words on composition from his book *The Muse and Fashion: Being a Defence of the Foundations of the Art of Music* is followed by original analyses of four Tales. I focus on the composer's philosophy regarding the relationship between form and narrative, in association with his expressed warnings of the dangers behind shifting compositional dominance from pure music to extra-musical narrative. The analyses are followed by a discussion of the vital importance of Medtner's music and writings for future generations of composers. The dissertation aims to illuminate this pertinent message on composition from one of the last classicists of the twentieth century towards the classical scene of today.

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For all that I am today, I owe everything to my parents. For all the dreams of tomorrow I owe everything to my wife Judy.

PREFACE

In his book *The Muse and Fashion: Being a Defence of the Foundations of the Art of Music*, the composer Nikolai Medtner wrote explicitly of the desired relationship between natural correlations in musical language and extra-musical narrative. He uses the word “senses” to describe these correlations, the word “contents” to describe the inexpressible components of music that are to be expressed through these correlations, and the word “subject matter” to refer to extra-musical narrative.¹ Within the sphere of compositional decision-making, he outlines the importance of the theme as being the kernel from which all other features of the composition must grow organically. On the other hand, he explains that subject matter may be present in the music but never placed above contents and form in importance. Hence, this raises a difficult question as to where the frontier between the contrasting elements of contents and subject matter should exist in Medtner’s creative process. If contents are always to be given priority over subject matter, where and how can subject matter exist? A simple interpretation of Medtner’s words indicates that the prioritization of contents mandates that regardless of subject matter, the music must make sense in its own terms. Hence, subject matter given too much authority will intrude into the music by defying its internal laws, just as building a house in mid-air would defy the laws of gravity. Internal laws in the context of music refer to this vital correlation between the contents, senses, and form. In Medtner’s understanding, the result of breaking this correlation would be artistic incoherence. Hence my hypothesis is that the analyses of selected Tales, would demonstrate organic correlation between these individual elements of musical language, hand in hand with a seamless incorporation of subject matter that doesn’t upset this cohesive structure.

¹ The terms “contents,” “senses,” and “subject matter” will be used in accordance with Medtner’s own usage.

Few of his works are titled with a clearer suggestion of extra-musical narrative than the Tales.

The Schumann-esque marriage of classicism and romantic literary connotation in these character pieces make them perfect candidates to explore these very questions. Thus in addressing both a scarcity of in-depth scholarship on the Tales, and the question of this interaction between contents, senses, form and subject matter, four Tales have been selected with specific regard for their individual approaches to subject matter.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Nikolai Karlovich Medtner was a Russian-born composer and pianist of Livonian/German descent. He was a younger colleague of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff. The latter was to become a lifelong friend and admirer who proclaimed that Medtner was “the greatest composer of our time.”² Rachmaninoff dedicated himself to the promotion of Medtner’s music even going a step further by referring to him as the greatest pianist alive. Despite this pianistic wizardry that had astonished many musicians, the monotony of being asked to play particular virtuoso works Medtner considered artistically vapid, made his swiftly amassing passion for composition a more appealing pursuit upon graduation from the Moscow Conservatory. Alongside dedicating his life primarily to composition, the few concerts he gave of his own music in America, Canada, Britain, France, Germany and Russia were met with euphoric enthusiasm from most while provoking skepticism from the avant-garde of the time. Medtner and his wife Anna stayed in Russia during the First World War and subsequent revolution. They then lived for some time in Germany and France before finally settling in Britain in 1936. In the last decade of the composer’s life that had yielded minimal international recognition, financial backing arrived from the most unlikely of places. In 1946 the Maharaja of Mysore offered to sponsor a Medtner Society dedicated to recordings of Medtner’s compositions. This led to a series of HMV recordings in which the composer himself recorded some solo works, his first violin sonata, a selection of songs, his piano quintet and three piano concerti. Much of our present-day awareness of his music owes itself to this fairytale-like good fortune that served to

² Zarui Apetovna Apetjan, ed., *N. K. Medtner: Pis'ma* (Moscow: Sov. kompozitor, 1973), quoted in Martyn, 145.

illuminate briefly a musical career, which in spite of fervent support from many individuals had largely been shrouded in obscurity.

This dissertation delves into Medtner's compositional approach with an unwavering assertion of his place amongst the greats, and the theory that it has been overlooked for a multitude of reasons separate from true artistic value. A review in the *Musical Courier* of Medtner's 1924 performance of his music at New York's Town Hall Recital advanced a plausible explanation to the question of his relative lack of fame:

It quickly became evident that one was in the presence of genuine greatness. . . . There were expressions of wonder that this man's works were not already better known in America. The answer is that art that never descends below the highest classic standards and never deals either with trivialities nor the lightly obvious has a longer way to go to popular recognition than that of a simpler and more ephemeral nature. Medtner is one of the world's great classic masters, and it is to be hoped that America will realize it.³

Almost a century on from this however, we appear still to be asking ourselves the same question – Why is his music not better known? To those familiar with Medtner's distinctive tonal palette, his rich romanticism, his intensely nostalgic Russian expression, his often vivid evocation of folklore, and a Teutonic dialectical rigor not unlike Beethoven, of whom he considered himself a disciple, this obvious question emphatically demands an answer. This is especially so when considering the resolute reverence Medtner's music had invited from so many notable musicians during his lifetime, from his teacher Taneyev who remarked that he was “born with sonata

³ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1995), 168.

form,”⁴ to Rachmaninoff’s aforementioned assertion that Medtner was the greatest composer of the era.

We can assume that the reasons for lack of recognition are most often multifactorial. One can reasonably speculate that appreciation for Medtner’s music may have taken flight to a much larger degree if it were to have rested on the shoulders of a more active performing career, as had been the case with Rachmaninoff in the US. Perhaps his particular brand of intellectual exactitude would find itself eclipsed by the accessibility of many popular works by Rachmaninoff as well earlier works by Scriabin. On the other hand, this religious loyalty to such classical ideals rendered Medtner virtually taboo in the world of then modernist thinking. As a composer who considered himself one of the last lines of defense against modernism, as demonstrated in his book *The Muse and Fashion: Being a Defence of the Foundations of the Art of Music*, Medtner would have had few allies amongst followers of Schoenberg, Bartok or Stravinsky. We may hypothesize that the changing tides of musical thought in the 20th century failed to carry with them the last utterances of classicism from a composer somewhat misleadingly called the “Russian Brahms.” Yet as the idea of modernism in music has fluctuated time and time again, Medtner’s music has experienced a growth of interest from pianists and scholars particularly in the last twenty years. Perhaps it is in this modern climate of uncertainty in musical direction, that his music can be viewed increasingly for its own individual depth and expression.

The largest collection of original manuscripts of Medtner’s music can be found in the “*Fond Metnera*” (Medtner Resource) at the Glinka Museum of Musical Culture. The contents of

⁴ Ibid., 26.

this collection were brought to Moscow by Medtner's widow in 1958 when she was allowed to return to the Soviet Union. This is what was to become the basis for the most authoritative compilation of Medtner's music, known as the Medtner Collected Edition, published by Moscow State Music Publishers between 1959 and 1963. Consisting of twelve volumes, the edition was edited by pianists Sofronitsky and Goldenweiser with reference to original manuscripts provided by Medtner's widow. Changes the composer made to his music as well as corrections to earlier editions are incorporated here. Although copies of this edition are hard to come by outside of Russia, the Dover edition of the Tales and Piano Sonatas is based on the Collected Edition. This dissertation makes use of musical excerpts from the Moscow Muzgiz edition (the name given from 1930 to 1964, to what used to be Moscow State Music Publishers. After 1964 they republished all works from the Collected Edition under the name "*Muzyka*.”) A critical edition of his Op. 39, 49 and 51 has also been edited by Christoph Flamm and published by Zimmerman in 2005.

From 1915 to Medtner's death in 1951, scholarship on Medtner's music was limited to a handful of journal articles. The most important primary source with regards to his attitude to composition is the aforementioned *The Muse and the Fashion, Being a Defence of the Foundations of the Art of Music*, written in Russian by the composer himself in 1935. It was later translated into English by Alfred J. Swan, and published by the Haverford College Bookstore in 1951. In this book, Medtner mapped out not only his own approach to composition, but his views on the general direction of music in the western world. In 1955, Richard Holt's *Nicolas Medtner, A Tribute to His Art and Personality* collected personal accounts and tributes from a wide range of musicians associated with the composer. Since the first dissertation on the subject by Lona Ruth Ginsburg in 1961, dissertational interest has continued into the 1970s before coming to a

pause of nearly twenty years. Barrie Martyn's 1995 biography of Medtner appeared alongside growing interest in Medtner's music from modern pianists, most notably Hamish Milne and Marc-André Hamelin. Martyn's book is definitive as both a comprehensive biography with the inclusion of many letters written by the composer, and analytical descriptions of his output placed in context with his life. Alongside the continued rise in performing interest in Medtner's music, there has been a rebirth of interest in it as a topic for doctoral dissertations between 2000 and the present.

There are currently eight dissertations on Medtner's Tales. Each employs an arguably one-dimensional approach to analysis, which ceases at the level of an introduction to stylistic traits of composition, but does not extend to linking these traits to the expressive vocabulary of each individual work. Although much effort has been placed into the separation of Medtner's composition technique into melody, harmony, rhythm, ornamentation, counterpoint and form, there is a danger that such discussions of the music, being too heavily weighted towards categorization, have blinded themselves to the details existing between categories and the sum-total of all details which finally make each individual work what it is. In my opinion, there is consequently still very little writing that successfully explores the dramatic intricacies of the Tales.

Thus the main body of this dissertation will consist of analyses of a cross-section of Tales chosen for their individuality of form giving attention to the methods by which Medtner channels musical elements into an overarching dramatic narrative particular to each piece. Where appropriate, terminology specific to traditional classical form will be utilized, not as a means of mere classification, but as a comparative template to highlight the specialized characteristics of each new form constructed in the Tales. A principle intention in these analyses will be to

delineate the specific relationship between form (amidst all its sub-components of melody, harmony, rhythm) and extra-musical narrative as suggested strikingly by the title of “Tale.”

The Tales

Although Medtner was often compared with Brahms for his adherence to classical form, his frequent use of thirds and sixths, his use of cross-rhythms, and above all his self-confessed reverence for Beethoven, this interlinking between absolute music and literary connotation far more resembles Schumann. Like Schumann, Medtner immersed himself fervently in literature, and one of his strongest passions in this regard was for the writings of Goethe. With both composers, one is often struck by a collaboration of literary or extra-musical connotation and traditionally based classical form. Such symbiosis is abundantly evident in the 38 Tales – one of the largest groups of piano works in Medtner’s output. Written between 1904 and 1928, these compact character pieces contain a seemingly limitless diversity of expression. No two Tales are remotely alike. While they vary in length from about a minute and a half (Op. 26, No. 2) to eight minutes (Op. 48, No.1), many possess an emotional and philosophical gravity seldom found in other character pieces. The pianist and champion of Medtner’s music Hamish Milne wrote of the Tales: “Although Medtner reserved the title for his shorter pieces, these are no miniatures. There is more incident, more concentrated thought and feeling and sheer statue here than can be found in many a sonata or symphony.”⁵ Although the composer sanctioned the English title of “Fairytale” for the publication of his last two sets Op. 48 and Op. 51, he had expressed a preference for the simpler title of “Tale.” As Barrie Martyn wrote, there is nothing resembling a

⁵ Hamish Milne, foreword to *Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano by Nikolai Medtner* (Mineola: Dover, 2001), vii.

fairy in Russian folklore, while the extra-musical inspiration behind these Tales appears to transcend mere folklore by a long way. Purportedly closest to Medtner's intentions was the original title —the German word *Märchen* often used in German romantic poetry, which the composer so adored.⁶—the French equivalent being *Contes*, and the Russian equivalent being *Skazki*. This term could be used to depict all manner of dream tales. As the Russian composer, musicologist and music critic Boris Asafyev remarked: “These are not descriptive tales or tales relating adventures of some kind. These are tales about personal experiences, about the conflicts of a man's inner life.”⁷ Though many of Medtner's works contain extra-musical references, this can be said most aptly about the Tales, some of which have individual titles, (e.g., “La Campanella,” “Ophelia's Song,” “Russian Folktale,” etc.) while others contain epigraphs from poems and plays. (e.g., Op. 35, No. 4 contains a line from a monologue in Shakespeare's *King Lear*) Considering these references together with the overall title of Tales, there is an almost certain suggestion of extra-musical narrative akin to Chopin's *Ballades* or Dvorak's *Legends*. This dissertation will delve into the nature of this narrative and concomitant approach to form in the broadest sense.

⁶ Martyn, 35-36.

⁷ Martyn, 36.

Chapter 2

MEDTNER'S THOUGHTS ON MUSICAL CONSTRUCTION, FORM, AND NARRATIVE

When raising the concept of narrative, we often intend this to imply an extra-musical influence on the structural trajectory of each composition. The basis for hypothesizing that such an extra-musical influence occupies Medtner's mind in composing his Tales is drawn first from the suggestive titles accompanied occasionally by epigraphs, and secondly from noticing a highly individual use of form. Before analyzing a cross-section of Tales so as to examine the nature of this narrative in the music, it is important to note Medtner's own words on the subject in *The Muse and the Fashion*, a commentary on the fundamental principles of music and the state of music in his time. Upon scrutinizing his book, anyone in search of definitive technical descriptions of the composer's own approach to musical narrative is likely to be disappointed, as the language is thoroughly idiosyncratic and the overall points general if not philosophical. Yet one can endeavor to extract some generalities from Medtner's subtle usage of musical terminology that may partially elucidate the question at hand.

It is impossible to talk about music. It talks itself, and does so precisely at the moment when words fail. It helps man to formulate more accurately what he contemplates... It talks itself. It has its own "language". The miraculous gift of this language was discovered by man when he felt his solitude still more poignantly and was drawn to his fellow man still more irresistibly.

But if one cannot and must not talk about music, or endeavor to put into words the inexpressible which it alone can express, it does not mean at all that the language of music does not possess certain clearly definable and long defined elements. If these elements had not been defined, we would not possess the great music of history, as an art.⁸

Medtner repeatedly stated that music expresses what words fail to express. But despite the futility of talking about something inexpressible in words, he justifies the need to analyze definable elements of music. This distinction between the definable and indefinable in music is key to his entire philosophy. He refers to the definable as “senses,” and the indefinable as “contents”: “the fundamental senses of the musical LANGUAGE common to all, must never be confused with unutterable sense – the contents of musical SPEECH, i.e. the sense of each given work.”⁹

In effect, he uses the term “contents” to refer to the meaning of a musical work, or in simpler terms – what is inside the music. “*Smysl*,” the Russian word for “sense,” indicates sense associated with meaning rather than sensation. Furthermore, “fundamental senses of the musical language” (or more often he simply writes “senses”) refer to the interrelationships between definable elements of musical language: “What we must acknowledge to be the fundamental senses of music are correlative conceptions, that stand in unbroken relationship to each other.”¹⁰

⁸ Medtner, 6–7.

⁹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

Musical senses are to be understood as the interconnecting means of different elements of musical language by which musical meaning or “contents” are expressed. In the introduction to the book, Medtner describes how the fundamental senses of the musical language follow the critical coordination in music of diversity and complexity into unity and simplicity:

But the man who intoned the inexpressible was not alone. He was irresistibly drawn to share his song with others. He never considered or called this song his own. In his humanity he deemed the inexpressible to be likewise in the souls of others and endeavored to coordinate the reflection of the inexpressible in those souls with its reflection in his own. He aimed not at the multiplicity itself of these reflections or at their diversity, but at the coordination of this multiplicity and diversity into ONE WHOLE. He aimed only at the truth of the inexpressible. And insofar as this aim was not disturbed, he really approached that truth.

On the path towards this general aim, this encompassment of the truth of the inexpressible, there was formed the musical “language”. Its elements are in no need of justification inasmuch as they (subordinated, as they are, to the human spirit, each one separately and in their interrelation) betray the same centralization and coordination in their aim towards UNITY and SIMPLICITY.¹¹

In the first chapter he proceeds to map out these “senses” in the following table (see Table 1):

¹¹ Ibid., 7.

Table 2.1: Medtner's scheme for the senses

AN APPROXIMATE SCHEME OF THE FUNDAMENTAL SENSES OF THE MUSICAL LANGUAGE ¹²		
	CENTRE	ENCIRCLEMENT (gravitation)
1)	the contemplated sound (heard by the inner ear)	the emitted or affixed sound
2)	time, the plane of music (the horizontal line of harmony- the placement of musical sounds)	the movement in time of all musical senses and elements (the vertical line of harmony – the capacity of musical sounds)
3)	the tonic (the root note of the mode, scale, tonality)	the mode, the scale, the tonality
4)	the diatonic scale (diatonism)	the chromatic scale (chromaticism)
5)	consonance (as interval)	dissonance (an interval)
6)	the tonic (the fundamental triad)	the dominant (a triad that is the coordinate of tonality)
The relationship between tonic and dominant (as of repose and motion) is the simplest and most elementary form of cadence and modulation. This relationship functions in the simplest (brief) constructions of form, as over its widest expanses.		
7)	tonality	modulation
8)	prototypes of consonant chords – the triads and their inversions	prototypes of dissonant chords – four-note formations (chords of the seventh) and five-note formations (chords of the ninth) and their inversions.
9)	prototypes of consonant and dissonant chords and their inversions	casual harmonic formations (suspensions, anticipations, passing, auxiliary, and sustained notes)

¹² Ibid., 21.

Medtner explains how each item on the right hand side of the table should encircle or gravitate towards the corresponding item on the left hand side. Hence a scale or tonality gravitates towards its tonic, while chromaticism gravitates around diatonism etc. Above all, he repeatedly warns of the dangers of breaking the natural interrelationships between the senses.

Having elaborated upon his description of the above-mentioned scheme, Medtner explains that form refers to the shape of musical matter attained when “contents” are channeled through the prism of these musical interrelations that are the “fundamental senses.” Consequently, his use of the word “form” targets a broader spectrum of musical construction than the mere ordering of sections and relationships between them: “A great many people are inclined to call rational any art that is incarnated in a clear and definite form (melody, harmony, structure).”¹³ At times, he specifies a more conventional usage of the term by adding the word “architectonics” in parentheses:

Finally the interrelation between tonic and dominant, as the principal coordinates of tonality (as symbols of repose and movement), has resulted in the simplest (fundamental) form of cadences, which function as a temporary or final completion of musical thought and hence determine the stages (a kind of breathing) of musical form (architectonics).¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., 123.

¹⁴ Ibid., 26.

Here he refers to the inevitable link between numbers 6 to 7 in Table 1 and form in the conventional meaning. While every aspect of the senses should in Medtner's ideal correlate with form, the most important sense is purposefully left out of the table:

In making the scheme of the fundamental senses of the musical language I naturally did not dare to include in it the most primary, fundamental, supreme "sense" of music – the theme, which is the kernel of form, its principal contents; and the development of the theme which is, as it were, the opening up of the kernel, the form of the whole composition.¹⁵

He explains that this omission is a result of the crucially intuitive nature of the theme. Medtner believed that the theme's transformation into the principle elements of musical language constituted a transition from indefinable elements to definable elements of music. Consequently, he felt passionately that one should not theorize intuition of the theme:

The theme is above all an intuition (in German *Einfall*)... While all the other senses of the musical language lend themselves to a certain extent to a schematic definition, the theme is ineffable, and can be defined or expressed only by itself.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., 43.

The scheme of fundamental senses outlined in Table 1 provides a basic system of correlations by which the theme may ultimately be linked with all other components that make up form. Hence, Medtner affirms that in following the natural interconnectivity of the senses, the theme contains within itself rhythm, tonality and harmony, which give rise to cadences and modulations, which give rise to form:

The theme is the most simple and accessible part of the work, it unifies it, and holds within itself the clue to all the subsequent complexity and variety of the work. It is the law that regulates each separate work. Every inspired theme bears in itself all the elements and senses of the musical language. It has its own pulsation (rhythm), its own chiaroscuro (harmony), its own breathing (cadence), its own perspective (form). Often it needs other themes as its vassals. Suggesting them, calling them forth, it often reveals in its own flowering their seeds.

The theme is not always, and not only a melody. It is more than a melody, for – as Bach has proved it in his fugues, and Beethoven in his symphonies – it is capable of turning into a continuous melody the most complex construction of form.¹⁷

Medtner emphasizes as particularly crucial, the connections between theme and harmony as well as between harmony and form:

¹⁷ Ibid., 44.

The fundamental senses of harmony determine the fundamental senses of form construction, define the strong beat, determine the place of form, (stand-still, departure, return, beginning, middle, end, etc.).

But in insisting upon the priority of harmony among the other disciplines of music, we must not forget that its role is subsidiary to that of the song-theme. In constituting the principal encirclement of the song-theme, harmony acquires the seal of inspiration only in its gravitation toward it.¹⁸

Hence in Medtner's philosophy of musical creation, the contents of music are expressed through a system of correlations or senses around a theme. Once again, the musical shape taken as a result of this interconnectivity and determined by the theme is form. He summarizes this later in his book:

We cannot visualize contents outside of form, just as form turns into a dead scheme the minute we consciously separate it from contents. Therefore whenever we directly approach a living work of art, the two above notions will automatically merge into one.

¹⁸ Ibid., 68.

Musical contents are ineffable. Musical form is nothing else than musical contents directed towards our musical consciousness.¹⁹

In order to tackle questions of narrative in Medtner's music, the two chapters of his book, "Contents and Subject Matter" and "'Program' Music" need to be examined. We must firstly clarify one final term – "subject matter." The original Russian word, *syuzhet* signifies a story or plot. Hence "subject matter" is used to describe extra-musical matter. This may include as one of its manifestations what some might call the programmatic element in program music. Medtner specifies later that "subject matter" is meaning that can be expressed in words:

The contents of music, indefinable through words, demand the most clear-cut form in sounds. On the other hand, the contents that can be expressed in words and are in reality only the subject matter of music, often disturb and violate the musical sense making musical form inaccessible to our musical consciousness.

On the other hand the contents of the Beethoven symphonies, though ineffable and irrational to the point of intoxication, have become acceptable to our musical consciousness, thanks to the divine clarity and precision of the musical form. The subject matter is a subject (servant) both of the contents and of the form. As a subject it has a right to citizenship in music and in any art. But woe if the subject matter begins to dictate

¹⁹ Ibid., 122–123.

its conditions, where its business is only to be silent, i.e. be absent. Submit it must always. No matter how beautiful the subject matter in itself, any aspiration on its part to be treated as contents or as form, makes the work of art valueless.²⁰

This passage affirms a hierarchy of musical value in Medtner's mind, whereby subject matter (taken to mean the extra-musical element expressible in words) must never be placed above contents (the inexpressible meaning of the music) or form. This is to say that the music must operate on its own terms with its own logic (or senses), no matter what external ideas may be associated with the work. The result of senses being violated by overbearing subject matter would be to produce incoherence in form and expression. This contrasts with Beethoven's symphonies which can contain irrational contents expressed coherently through clear correlations between senses and precision in form. This leads to a vital preliminary question – if music is truly the art of expressing that which is inexpressible in words, how could something expressible in words be any part of it? The last sentence of Medtner's chapter "Contents and Subject Matter" provides the following answer:

But when music or poetry have succeeded in transforming the images of such subjects into its own images, and its own forms, what we are confronted by, is no longer subject matter, but artistic images and forms.²¹

²⁰ Ibid., 123. Adapted from Swan's translation.

²¹ Ibid., 123.

In other words, subject matter may exist inside the music, so long as it is converted into the language of music. Thus, the expressible in words must be transfigured into the realm of the inexpressible and only then music maintains its necessary sublimity. Herein lies the main question to be posed in this dissertation – if contents and form are always to be placed above subject matter in importance, where in the music can subject matter reside? Medtner elaborates on this in his discussion of program music:

In reality, however, program music is only music in which the form itself and contents are dictated and justified by a certain program or subject matter. Thus the very strict sonata form of Beethoven's *Coriolanus* (a title which reflects merely the heroic mood, and not the historic subject of *Coriolanus*) precludes any possibility of assigning this work to the category of program music, and one might far rather suspect some program which Beethoven had in mind when he constructed some of the forms in his last sonatas and quartets that have no program heading.²²

The inverted commas in Medtner's chapter title already hint at his general scorn for the term "program," or at the very least, for its misuse. More than any title or epigraph, in Medtner's way of thinking, it is the treatment of form and contents that validates or negates the suggestion of a program. Although as previously mentioned he uses the term "form" in a broader sense, the

²² Ibid., 124.

principle difference between the examples he raises is one of form in the conventional sense: hence Coriolanus exhibits a stricter example of sonata form, while some of Beethoven's later works seemingly contort such traditional templates into radically newer forms. Thus we may consider the characteristics of architectonic form in any given work as a principle clue as to whether Medtner would consider it program music. This later sentence on program in songs reveals more about his desired manner of incorporating subject matter:

As a matter of fact, even the whole song literature that would always seem to have a certain program in its texts may belong to the domain of program music, or may be pure music, as the expression goes, i.e. the poetic text may beget a purely musical song which flows along, sometimes uniting itself with the text, but never forsaking its own musical bed. Or the same text may not beget any song, melody, or any musical declamation or as an illustration of separate and mostly external points such as the trills of a nightingale, the rustle of the water, or the howling of the wind. The music of such songs, that is entirely guided by the text and has no self-sufficient musical sense of contents, naturally belongs to the domain of program music, since in writing it the musician, like a school boy, was merely taking down a dictation of the poetic text.²³

Medtner uses the term program music for such songs entirely guided by text, as well as for Beethoven's late sonatas and quartets. When considering his disparaging comments about the former and his infinite respect for the latter, it would appear that his use of the term does not

²³ Ibid., 125.

involve a value-judgement. In his musical philosophy, subject matter or a program may be permitted, but the fundamental qualitative difference between the two above-mentioned examples lies in the fact that these works of Beethoven never relinquish the logic of pure music. Hence music completely guided by text (or subject matter) while possessing little or no internal musical contents is to be considered juvenile and fatuous in its approach to composition. To maintain what Medtner considered the critical sanctity of music, subject matter must be converted into musical contents, without calling for cuts in the senses that would destroy the purity of musical expression.

Hence this lends some perspective to our discussion of narrative in Medtner's Tales. Medtner clearly acknowledges the role that subject matter can play within a composition, yet how precisely it may manifest in different technical aspects of a composition is not specified in his writings. He emphasizes the inadequacy of music whose form and contents are entirely dictated by subject matter. Hence one might suppose that it would be unlikely to find in any of his compositions a form that would follow a story-line to a very literal or obvious degree--as might, for example, be found in the tone poems of Richard Strauss, for whom Medtner had little respect. Nonetheless, he has specifically mentioned form as playing a primary role in intertwining the music's inner narrative with extra-musical narrative. We must then suspect Medtner's acknowledgement of some coordination or cooperation between the two concepts when we notice, as he alludes to in the case of Beethoven's works, that there are particularly unconventional cases of form, while reaffirming that the musical logos followed by the inner musical elements will always stand above subject matter in importance. In essence, "the fundamental senses of the musical language" must not be cut in the act of accommodating subject matter. What we are looking for then, is not form and contents subservient to an extra-

musical narrative, but form and contents that present their own inner-musical narrative inexpressible in words, which nonetheless may allow themselves the occasional windows of cooperation with an extra-musical narrative. Extra-musical narrative (subject matter) may be converted to inner-musical narrative (contents) so long as the internal correlations or logic (the senses) are not overturned in the process. We must in essence shift the definition of “narrative” from outside to inside the music.

The primary objective of the analyses will be to unravel expressive vocabulary particular to each Tale with a specific view to uncovering the role of subject matter. In following Medtner’s discussion of interrelations between differing elements of musical language and the dangers of subject matter obstructing these senses, it is of the utmost importance to highlight interconnectivity between senses or more broadly – theme, harmony and key structure. The four selected Tales have been placed in order of increasing size and complexity so as to exhibit a spectrum of creative range emanating from this same manner of interconnectivity. In attempting to seek the greatest clarity from the perspective of subject matter, two of the selection have been chosen for their inclusion of epigraphs, which are a gift of well-defined reference for analysis aimed at extra-musical narrative. The other two have been chosen for striking features within the music distinctly suggestive of extra-musical connotations.

Chapter 3

Tale in F minor Op. 26, No. 3 (1912)

As compared with the great depths of complexity plumbed in many of Medtner's larger scale works, this Tale exemplifies beauty founded on the utmost simplicity. It is pervaded with a sad and nostalgic undertone of lyricism. Many of its most outstanding elements are immediately evident upon first glance. It is in rounded binary form, with typically compact use of motivic material as held in check by the subtlest of development. For the purpose of clarity in analysis we will refer to the form as ABA. Thus we can say that the B section stems without a break from the first A section. The B section constitutes a harmonic journey away from the tonic, which ultimately displaces the main theme of the A section up a semitone by the point of its return. The final A section is a meandering chromatic restatement of the opening phrase, which is allowed to fall fluidly back to F minor.

Figure 3.1: Tale, Op. 26, No. 3, mm. 1–6



The economy of motivic material is evident from the outset. As highlighted by the red rectangles in Figure 3.1, the resulting second phrase beginning at the end of m. 4 when taken from its second note C, is simply a sequence of the first phrase from the note A flat. Moreover, the first two notes of this second phrase (F and C) echo the same stressed interval of a perfect fourth

between D flat and A flat in m. 2. This direct derivation of material from the first phrase continues throughout the A section.

Figure 3.2: mm. 1–16, indicating motivic interconnection

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Narrante a piacere" with a tempo marking of ♩ = 92-100. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The tempo is marked "mp molto cantabile" and the instruction "sempre con Ped." is present. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (mm. 1-6) contains "Phrase 1" (measures 1-2), "Phrase 2" (measures 3-4, described as a "Perfect 4th + sequence of notes from 3rd note of Phrase 1"), and "Phrase 3" (measure 6). The second system (mm. 7-12) contains "Phrase 3" (measures 7-8, described as a "sequence of Phrase 2") and "Phrase 4" (measures 9-12, described as an "Inverted and adjusted version of Phrase 1"). The third system (mm. 13-16) begins with "poco ritenuto" and ends with "Pedale". Red rectangles and circles highlight the specific phrases and their interconnections as described in the annotations.

As shown in the red rectangles in Figures 3.2, one observes that the third phrase beginning at the end of m. 6 now sequences the entire second phrase from the note F down a tone. Its being initiated on a different beat of the measure allows for a passing cross-rhythmic variation. After this displacement of the original strong beat, the two red circles highlight how the fourth phrase from m. 9 is an inversion of the first phrase with some notes adjusted to the shifting harmony while keeping precisely the same rhythm and standing within the meter. The fifth phrase reiterates the first phrase exactly concluding the section (A) with the same cadence that began the Tale. Considering briefly the prevalence of melodies initiated by a minor stepwise motion up

a fifth from the tonic in a manner similar to this Tale, it is interesting to compare this example with some of its previous Russian incarnations. (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4)

Figure 3.3: 2nd movement of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto Op. 35



Figure 3.4: Etude Op. 2, No. 1 by Scriabin



As compared with these spiritual predecessors however, Medtner's theme is endowed with a more improvisatory character, first by the undulating motion back and forth between primary melodic notes and harmonic notes (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: m. 2, undulation between melodic and harmonic notes



Secondly the cross-rhythmic displacement of the melody enables a less conventionally schematized feel to the overall structure of the phrase. Yet all this air of freedom in melodic creation is nonetheless balanced by tight economy of material as outlined above²⁴. Put another way, the improvisatory manner is founded on a deliberate imitation of melodic and rhythmic characteristics of improvised melodies while maintaining a strict conformity with the opening melodic motive, so as to be able to play out the entire section as an exploration of a single thought. Finally, the improvisatory feel is strengthened by the freedom in timing called for in the opening instruction “*narrante a piacere*,” demonstrated most remarkably in the composer’s own recording of the work.²⁵ (The indication translates roughly to “narrate freely” – suggesting the need for some rhythmic flexibility, perhaps hinting at the possibility of an extra-musical narrative being portrayed.)

This seemingly improvisational melody is colored poignantly by a left hand accompaniment of deceptively simple harmonic underpinning. A simple measure-by measure chordal analysis would reveal a four-measure segment simply establishing the tonality, followed by an eight-measure segment with chromatic descent emphasizing the submediant, and finally another four-measure segment re-establishing the tonic from the point of view of the submediant. Yet such chordal analysis, when limited to one chord per measure doesn’t do justice to the overlap of harmony in each section of the phrase, which enables the resulting atmosphere of gentle yet fluctuating sentiment (see Figure 3.6).

²⁴ In her dissertation, *The Motivic Economy in Nikolai Medtner’s Sonata Romantica*, Seng-Quinn presents a detailed analysis of motivic economy in Medtner’s *Sonata Romantica* to demonstrate the principle outlined by the composer in his *Muse and Fashion* of motives being derived solely from the first encountered theme.

²⁵ Medtner’s recording of Tale Op. 26, No. 3 can be found in Volume 2 of the CD label APR’s Medtner series.

Figure 3.6: mm. 1–18, chordal analysis

Narrante a piacere $\text{♩} = 100$ Op. 26 № 3

mp molto cantabile

sempre con Ped.

7

poco ritenuto

13

Più mosso (non subito)

cantando

Pedale

Chordal analysis labels (from measure 1 to 18):

- Measure 1: i
- Measure 2: (VI)
- Measure 3: $IV(7)$
- Measure 4: $V7$
- Measure 5: i
- Measure 6: $i7$
- Measure 7: i
- Measure 8: $i(7)$
- Measure 9: $IV(7)$
- Measure 10: $IV7$
- Measure 11: $F\ flat$
- Measure 12: $V9/III$
- Measure 13: $V7/VI$ Aug 6th (V/VI)
- Measure 14: VI
- Measure 15: $v7$
- Measure 16: (i)
- Measure 17: $II65$
- Measure 18: III (sharpened fifth to lead to 3rd of VI)

Arrows have been added here to show how some notes carry their functional intent for longer than their literal duration as retained tones. Parenthesized seventh chords indicate that they are minor seventh chords as opposed to dominant seventh chords; in addition to a coloristic function served by these extra sevenths, they fulfill the voice-leading of the upper parts by means of a suspension, with the effect of heightening the pull towards each next chord. Hence chord $I(7)$ of m. 5 or $IV(7)$ of m. 6 is essentially chord I and IV , with an added harmonic affect. If we are to take only the second measure, we can observe that it functions as a IV in preparation of $V7$ in the third measure. But the subtly oscillating atmosphere is enabled by harmonic motion of greater nuance. As shown above, the second measure begins with the lingering sensation of I from the previous measure. On the second beat, the D flat in the right hand melody functioning as an

upper neighbor to C, also harmonizes momentarily with the left hand notes A flat and F to give a passing VI6. (While at first this passing chord may seem too fleeting to be worthy of mention, it is crucial at the background level in preparation for the more significant emergence of chord VI in the fourth phrase at m. 9, and even more vitally in the final phrase at m. 13). Only on the third beat of m. 2 does the greater function of IV complete itself. Furthermore, the melodic D flat on the second beat, previously an appoggiatura still lingers in the memory enough to form part of IV (indicated by the arrow to join B flat, D flat, F, and A flat). In order to make sense of the varied harmonic feel of the opening, one must therefore look closer at the smaller shifts of chords within each measure, some of which in turn reveal larger structural connectivity.

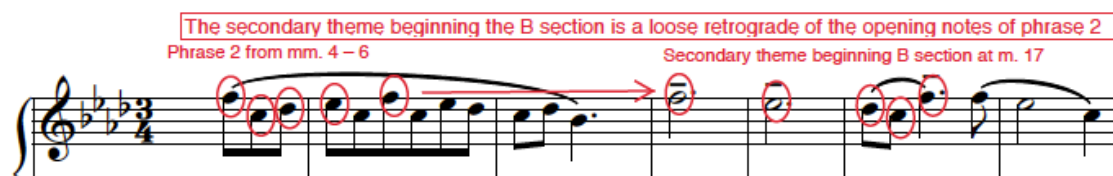
The use of the Neapolitan sixth chord in the closing phrase is not only apt in terms of restating the opening phrase more intensely than at first, but is pivotal in emphasizing the flattened second degree of the scale, which is to become a crucial structural element in the rest of the Tale.

Thus the A section introduces a wandering melancholic melody with an air of narrating some sad forgotten story. A seemingly new melody with a more waltz-like rhythmic construction and a far greater sense of forward movement begins at m. 17 in what we are referring to as the B section (see Figure 3.7B). There is a distinct atmosphere of having seamlessly fallen into a state of recollection of some dance. Hence, the earlier-mentioned fluidity in timing delicately enables a gradual rise in velocity, which culminates in a point of climactic anxiety and distress. The indications of *Più mosso* (non subito) in m. 17, *poco a poco quasi valse* in m. 19, and *sempre accelerando* in m. 20, *Tempo di Valse* (*sempre accelerando*) in m. 26 prepare a systematic increase in tempo, which if followed with precision and sensitivity should flow naturally out of the fluid movement of the opening:

Figure 3.7: A) motivic derivation of secondary theme from Section A

B) mm. 13–30, with motivic analysis

A)



B)

Figure 3.7A shows how the secondary theme that begins this section in m. 17 is motivically derived from the second phrase of the A section. By constituting a motivic cell of four note stepwise motion seemingly extracted from the five-note stepwise ascent of the opening, the new

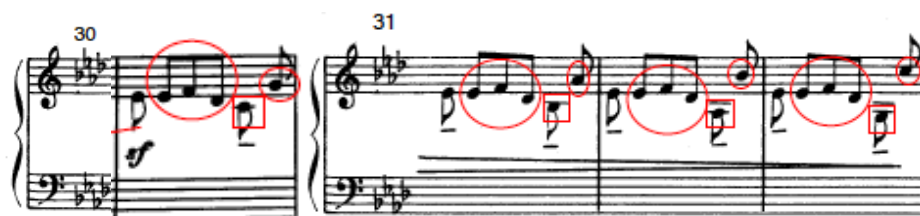
secondary theme moves stepwise down a fourth from F to C (m. 17 to 19), up a fourth from E flat to A flat (m. 21 to 22), and then down a fourth from A flat to E flat (m. 23 to 24). In mm. 17 to 25, the rectangles indicate the stepwise motion of a fourth, then from m. 26 onwards, they indicate how this is incorporated back into a stepwise motion of a fifth as in the opening. The circled notes highlight an embellished version of this stepwise fifth motive in descent from mm. 22 to 26. The single lines indicate a further sub-motive of three-note stepwise motion born out of the two previous stepwise motives. One may observe that in m. 26, upon arriving at the tempo of a waltz, the freshly formed upward scale is created out of the sum of the previous motive of a fifth and the motive of a third. The intersection between these two motives can be seen clearly by the separation of articulation from legato to tenuto. With the adoption of a D flat as part of a dominant seventh chord the relative major is established. With the *sempre accelerando* underway, the motive of a rising scale ushers in an undulating inner voice in m. 30, built on a combination of the stepwise fourth motive and the motive of a rising second and falling third as circled in Figure 3.8 displaying the opening.

Figure 3.8: mm. 1–3, motivic fragment to be used in m. 30



One can observe in Figure 3.9, that the motive of a fourth in stepwise motion can be seen in descending notes on each third beat with the notes C, B flat, A flat, and G, and in ascending notes on each sixth eighth-note with the notes G, A flat, B flat, and C, as if suggesting a kaleidoscopic vision.

Figure 3.9: mm. 30–33



With the above-mentioned undulating inner line continuing, the secondary theme first witnessed in m. 17 returns in the bass in octaves at m. 34 (see Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10: mm. 34–36



As shown in Figure 3.11, what was at mm. 17 to 26 one continuous melody is now divided into two opposing entities as indicated below by different colours. Effectively a destabilization of expressive orientation is represented by the breaking of one musical idea into two divergent thoughts. The imposing insistence of the first part of the original melody in bass octaves (in red) is answered at m. 38 by a softening second part of the original melody in the mid-range of the piano (in green), as if representing some plea for conciliation:

Figure 3.11: mm. 31–46

The image displays a musical score for measures 31 through 46. The score is written for piano (left hand) and voice (right hand). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The tempo/mood is marked 'com moto'. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings like 'crescendo', 'diminuendo', and 'cantando'. Red circles highlight specific notes in the piano part in measures 31-36. A red box highlights the vocal line in measures 31-36. A green box highlights the piano accompaniment in measures 37-46. A red box highlights the vocal line in measures 37-46. A green box highlights the piano accompaniment in measures 42-46. The score is annotated with harmonic analysis in red text: 'B flat minor: V9 V43 I' and 'A flat major: V42 V9/II' in measures 37-38, and 'B flat minor: V42 Aug 6th with ninth (V)' in measures 42-44. The word 'cantando' is written above the vocal line in measures 31-36. The word 'diminuendo' is written above the piano line in measures 37-40. The word 'crescendo' is written above the piano line in measures 42-44. The word 'm. 2.' is written above the piano line in measure 37. The word 'V' is written above the piano line in measure 42.

Travelling down a fourth from E flat to B flat, the first phrase overlaps with the second phrase indicated in green at the point of modulation into B flat minor. The shift in accompaniment to off-beat chordal accompaniment in the right hand serves to maintain a restless tension. The relationship of a fourth continues as the previous phrase in octaves from mm. 34 to 38 is repeated now in a minor mode beginning on F. Each exchange of phrases follows the perfect fourth relationship derived from its motivic realization in mm. 17 to 19, which in turn is derived from the stressed interval of perfect fourth between D flat and A flat in m. 2. As shown in Figure 3.12 this structure of perfect fourth interrelation is increasingly destabilized by a tritone:

Figure 3.12: mm. 19–46 Harmonic relation of fourths in middle section

(poco a poco quasi valse) A flat major

19 *sempre accel.* *cresc.*

First note outside the tonality of A flat major is a tritone away from the tonic

Tempo di Valse (sempre accelerando) E flat dominant

25 *f* *con Ped.*

31 *cantando*

E flat dominant disrupted by A natural, a tritone away from E flat – this acts as a leading tone to B flat

B flat minor

37 *m.s.* *diminuendo*

F dominant

42 *crescendo*

F dominant disrupted by B natural, a tritone away from F

As shown in Figure 3.13, the final culmination of mounting tension in the middle section follows from this tritonal destabilization, whereby a reintroduction of the first phrase of the Tale oscillates between two modal settings – one built over the augmented sixth chord emphasizing the above-mentioned tritone relationship of F to B, and the other raised to F sharp over a dominant ninth on B:

Figure 3.13: mm. 47–51

The musical score for measures 47-51 is presented in a grand staff. The key signature has three flats (B-flat major). The score is marked with dynamics *mf* and *pp*. A red box with the text "Tritone sustained from previous phrase" points to a tritone (F-B) in the bass line. The score includes an augmented sixth chord (V9/E) and a dominant ninth chord (V9/E). The score is labeled with "Aug. 6th (V/E)" and "V9/E".

Besides the contrast in expressive inflection as enabled by the difference of harmony, the change of dynamics from *mf* in the first phrase to *pp* in the second phrase, articulates a commotion between radically different emotional states. The back and forth motion between two harmonic palettes arouses deliberate uncertainty over which direction will ultimately be taken – one seemingly pointing back to B flat minor and the other towards a tonal center of E. At the end of the final phrase of the section in m. 54 (see Figure 3.14), we find that both harmonic implications are superseded by a third motion whereby a diminished seventh chord formed from the final bass note of B sharp beckons for a resolution to C sharp minor:

Figure 3.14: mm. 52–54

52

cresc. ed accelerando

poco

(V9)

V9/E

dim 7th

V/C sharp

M. 27734

Together with a *crescendo* and *accelerando*, the tritone F to B is driven up a half step to F sharp and B sharp in a diminished seventh chord at the end of m. 54 halted dramatically by a sudden pause of silence. The climactic surge towards this chord seemingly reminds the musical consciousness of the opening of the Tale. The result of this turmoil together with its subsequent abrupt moment of reflection is a somewhat inevitable return to the opening section of the Tale in a far more lamenting frame of mind (see Figure 3.15).

Figure 3.15: mm. 55–59

55

Tempo I

mp

57

The effect of the upheaval of the middle section is to reintroduce the opening melody still haunted by the realization of what came before. This is conveyed by its return in the “wrong” tonality of F sharp minor, up a half-step from the tonality of the Tale.²⁶ This emotional

²⁶ Some may perhaps be forgiven for jumping to use the label of “Russian Brahms” when here one is reminded of the first movement of Brahms’ Clarinet/Viola Sonata, Op. 120, No. 1 in the same key of F minor with a restatement of the opening theme in F sharp minor at the end of the development section before returning to the tonic.

destabilization by means of the raised tonality is perceived subconsciously, and similarly the nature of destabilization has been prepared in our subconscious by the flattened second degree in the Neapolitan chord of m. 14. Hence the G flat enharmonically forecasts the destabilization of F to F sharp in our musical intuition. Further destabilization occurs as a result of the motive occurring over a chord in 6/4 position, hence there is a sense of unrest in its need to resolve. The section continues parallel to the opening in this raised tonality for 6 measures. But then we experience a subtly gradated chromatic descent– as if indicating a relinquishment of the previous disarray while drifting back to the original thought through a stream of consciousness. Thus, what began in F sharp minor begins to change almost imperceptibly in m. 61 with the inclusion of a C natural instead of a C sharp in the melody (see Figure 3.16).

Figure 3.16: mm. 61 with pickup–66

The image displays a musical score for measures 61 and 62. Measure 61 is labeled "61 F sharp minor" and "V7/III". Measure 62 is labeled "62" and shows a harmonic sequence from G minor to F minor. The sequence includes chords III(7), V7, I(7) in G minor, V7, and V42. Red annotations indicate "half dim. 7th = II in G minor" and "half dim. 7th = II in F minor", and a box labeled "resolution postponed" under V42.

Overall m. 61 functions as a secondary dominant to A minor (III in F sharp minor). From m. 62 onwards a harmonic sequence descends from A minor down to G minor and finally F minor.

Each segment of the sequence is indicated above in rectangles. If one looks at m. 62, one observes that before any sense of resolution in A minor is allowed to linger, the chromatic descent of the fifth degree to E flat alters the function of the chord to a predominant substitution of a half diminished seventh chord (chord II in minor), which then leads in the next measure to V7 of G minor. The same process is again repeated to move from G minor to F minor. By m. 65, the melodic line has regained exactly its original shape as it had been in the opening, and by m. 67 (see Figure 3.17) with the resolution into F minor the left hand harmonic accompaniment reaches the same point of modulation to follow the same measures of the opening exactly.

Figure 3.17: mm. 67–71



A coda begins in m. 71, with the second phrase of the opening in diminution (see circled notes in Figure 3.17). While this phrase repeats in descending scale degrees of the F minor scale (see Figure 3.18), there is a left hand articulated counter-melody, which contains more than a passing resemblance to the *Dies Irae* (a theme used significantly by Medtner in other works – e.g., Tale, Op. 33, No. 4, and his Piano Quintet). Together with the quite bold appearance of the lowest bass note F in m. 71, the involvement of this counter-melody provides an ending of quite unexpectedly solemn gravity to the Tale.

Figure 3.18: mm. 72–81



Despite its relative tranquility and water-like fluidity, this accelerated manifestation of the theme invokes an air of somber finality leaving behind only a lingering spirit of melancholic introspection. The simple left hand accompaniment as taken from the opening concludes the Tale in the simplest of motions under a suspended tonic in the melody.

In identifying fundamental correlations that enable the ultimate unity and simplicity of this Tale, the genesis of later thematic material from the opening theme has been highlighted in the course of analysis. Moreover, the inclination of the theme to stress the half tone between C and D flat in m. 2, gives rise to the harmonization of D flat in mm. 9 and 13, which leads to a smoother transition to the Neapolitan sixth underpinning of m. 14. The necessary tension between the tonic and G flat as part of the Neapolitan sixth, converts a melodic relation of a half tone from m. 2 into a harmonic relation later to culminate in the restatement of the opening section being raised to F sharp minor (see Figure 3.19).

Figure 3.19: Correlations between the theme, harmony and key structure

Op. 26 № 3

Narrante a p 1. Melodic emphasis of half tone

mp molto cantabile
sempre con Ped.

7

VI

2. Passing chord VI prepares its appearance in m. 9, and as V/flat II in m. 13 to prepare a smoother transition to Neapolitan sixth in m. 14

13

poco riten

3. Melodic half tone emphasis leads naturally to Neapolitan sixth stressing a half tone between tonic and flattened supertonic

VI (V/flat II)

Pedale

52

cresc. ed accelerando

Tempo I

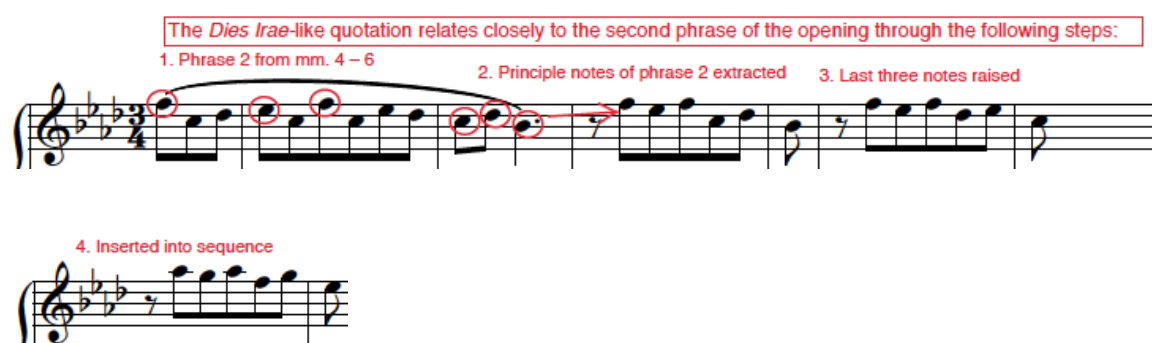
4. Tonality of return raised up a half tone to F# minor

f mp

Similarly the opening theme's melodic emphasis of the perfect fourth from D flat to A flat in m. 2 together with its immediate harmonic motion from I to IV links directly to the fourth-related harmonic structure of the wandering middle section (previously indicated in Figure 3.12). It is of

importance to note that the two musical events most suggestive of extra-musical reference, namely the appearance of a waltz and the concluding *Dies Irae*-like quotation, are thematically linked to the opening melody. The connection between opening motivic material and the upward scale in the waltz has been discussed at Figure 3.7B. See Figure 3.20 for an illustration of the link between the second phrase of the opening and the *Dies Irae*-like countermelody:

Figure 3.20: Thematic relation between Phrase 2 and *Dies Irae*-like countermelody



Hence such suggestions of subject matter are seamlessly built into the musical structure so as to be constructed organically from the work's own theme and contents.

Without wishing to impose an artificial event to prove the existence of an inbuilt narrative, it is of value to summarize the course of the Tale in mere emotional terms linked to “events” in the music. The Tale in F minor displays simplicity in its primary expression of sad lyricism achieved by the subtlest devices of motivic and harmonic development. As expressed in the above analysis each new phrase within each section stems organically from the first phrase of the Tale. One witnesses the germinating of each new melodic segment in a manner much like a stream of consciousness – fragments of old thoughts bloom into new thoughts. In general, the improvisatory character built from a combination of meandering melodic line, delicately fluctuating harmonic palette and the performance indication of *rubato*, further intensifies the

overall impression of melancholic story-telling in a state of wandering contemplation. With a heightened atmosphere of wistful reminiscence, we enter gradually into a waltz. This is emphasized most deliberately in mm. 26 to 29, whereby the indication “*Tempo di Valse*” is performed by the composer with the specific and literal *rubato* of a waltz. It is as if in the midst of recollection, we have arrived at the occasion of a joyful dance. From this point in the Tale there appears a progressive escalation of longing with the harmonic motion down a series of fourths (A flat–E flat–B flat–F). The breakup of the secondary theme into two emotionally opposing segments once again resembles a stream of consciousness – as if two aspects of a thought have become incongruous with one another. In this vein, rapidly shifting thoughts and yearnings amass a spirit of conflict. The culmination of this conflict takes place in the break in motion of fourths when moving down a tritone to a bass B natural (mm. 47 to 53). The utmost agitation resulting from a composed out disorientation as to which harmonic direction should be taken, is answered in m. 54 by the upward motion of a half-step to B sharp (mirroring the minor second connection between the tonic and G flat or F sharp). After a sudden silence, the raised tonality of the final section enables a more mournful realization of the theme. The systematic and gradual return to F minor returns one’s thoughts to the original mood of humble sadness with increased solemnity, as if transfigured by the turmoil of recollection that preceded it. As described above the quite unexpected additional layer of sternness in the final coda section (m. 71 to the end) completes the emotional picture: whereby drifting reminiscences have stumbled upon fleeting blissful memories only to have proceeded on to the aching realization of their undoubted unattainability, one is finally left in a mood of reflection more somber than the point at which these thoughts had begun.

In considering the subject matter of the waltz, one may go as far as to speculate that the division of the waltz theme into two separate phrases in the middle section may represent two people growing increasingly disconnected from each other. The climax at the end of the section in which two emotionally contrasting renditions of the opening melodic phrase alternate, could similarly be interpreted as the point of ultimate conflict and resulting estrangement between the two individuals. Ultimately it is not possible to know whether there was indeed any such intended representation, or whether the *Dies Irae*-like phrase towards the end of the Tale carries more than an accidental resemblance to the Latin hymn. However, when considering the central presence of a dance combined with the concluding atmosphere of tenebrous solemnity as if a judgment has been passed, some unanswerable yet worthwhile questions may be pondered as to whether Medtner was thinking either of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (which similarly contains in its subject matter a ball scene, the estrangement between two individuals, and a quotation of the *Dies Irae*) or of the legend of Faust (closely associated with the *Symphonie Fantastique* in subject matter). In the context of our focus on subject matter in Medtner's music, it is important to note that the resulting inner-narrative of the music remains of the utmost importance. This is to say that whatever elements of outer-narrative or subject matter the Tale may have accommodated, the overall emotional statement and scheme of psychological nuance as produced by the music's contents stand above extra-musical implications in expressive importance. No definitive statement can be made on the precise identity of the subject matter, yet by the same token we must attest to the presence of probable references to extra-musical matter. The arrival of these aspects of composition at the doorstep of extra-musical matter is of secondary importance to their part in building the expressive structure of the Tale. Finally, it is in

better understanding this expressive structure and inner-narrative, that the unanswerable questions of subject matter serve their most important purpose.

Chapter 4

Tale in A minor Op. 51, No. 2 (1928)

As illusively as this Tale in A minor begins, its three larger sections contrasted by different dance rhythms would bring to mind some modern descendant of the minuet and trio. However, the *siciliano* rhythm in the A section is played out at such a slow tempo that there is little feeling of a true dance. It enters more dreamily like the memory of a dance (see Figure 4.1):

Figure 4.1: Tale, Op. 51, No. 2, mm. 12–16



An unmistakable feeling of dance is only introduced later in the B section in A major from m. 69 (see Figure 4.2):

Figure 4.2: mm. 57–64





The key structure is also not untypical of a minuet and trio whereby the two outer sections are in A minor while the middle section is in A major. (For an earlier example, in F minor and F major, see the Menuetto and Trio from Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 2, No. 1). Although minuets and trios are in ternary form, on the surface of things this Tale would appear to follow something closer to a rounded binary form as the sections run into each other, the reprise of the A section at the end is not as long as its first appearance, and there is a distinct overlap of thematic material between the sections.

Also untypical of any piece in ternary form, is the quite continuous sense of development throughout the Tale. Thus in a piece which does not travel far from its tonal center, Medtner nonetheless creates the impression of a journey with the development of motivic material. How this development is achieved through the use of variation is particularly individual to this Tale.

Figure 4.3: mm. 1–12

The musical score for mm. 1–12 is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 1–3) is marked *Cantabile, tranquillo Tempo accelerando.* and *f* *Natural minor*. The second system (mm. 4–6) is marked *con moto* and *sempre accelerando*, with a *crescendo* and *Dorian mode* annotation. The third system (mm. 7–9) is marked *f* and *dim.*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

The overall pastoral atmosphere of the Tale is initiated by the alternation of the above melody between forte and piano, as if to evoke a scene of echoes in a mountain (Figure 4.3). The application of the Dorian mode from m. 5 onwards imbues the passage with a mystical ambience while enabling the melodic motion from E to F#, which is to become a central device for later harmonic motion. The first measure of the Tale contains the motivic material that will blossom into the Tale in its entirety; The melodic fragment of a descending third followed by rising second will be referred to as Motive A. The rising second originally in the left hand will be referred to as Motive B. The stepwise descent of a fifth to result from Motive A will be referred to as Motive C. The thematic formation of this introductory section (mm. 1–12) from the components of m. 1 is summarized in Figure 4.4:

Figure 4.4: Development of thematic material in introduction

The thematic material of m. 1 gives rise to all further thematic material in the introduction.

Motive A: The melodic fragment of a descending 3rd followed by a rising 2nd is highlighted by rectangles:

Motive B: The rising second from A to B is indicated by arrows:

In m. 3 the upper melody follows the pattern of left hand motion in rising to E an octave higher, before falling with a sequence of Motive A:

With the change of harmony from I – v to I – IV from m. 5 onwards, Motive B moves to the upper part between E and F#. Motive A also attaches itself to this F#:

A min: I v

m. 3

m. 5-6

I IV I IV

Motive C: m. 5 introduces a stepwise variant of the descent down a fifth from E to A in m. 3, which had moved down through a sequence of Motive A.

Motive C appears solely in m. 5, while mm. 3, 4, 6, and 7 contain instead the original sequence of Motive A. As this brief melodic variant makes arguably little audible difference to the music at this point, one could reasonably hypothesize that Motive C was created for the purpose of correlation with later motivic material in the Tale. Indeed, the accompanying figure from m. 13 is founded on the stepwise motion of a fifth, while the left hand *siciliano* melody is derived from the upper line of m. 1 (see Figure 4.5):

Figure 4.5: mm. 12–26

The image shows a musical score for measures 12 to 26. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto cantabile ed espressivo' with a metronome marking of 50-60. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is written for piano (p) and includes the instruction 'p i tranquillo'.

Measure 12: The right hand (RH) features a melodic line with a red circle highlighting a four-note motif labeled 'Motive C'. The left hand (LH) has a bass line with a red circle around the first measure. Chord symbols below the LH staff include 'A min: I', 'I6', and 'V'. A red asterisk is placed below the first measure of the LH staff.

Measure 17: The RH continues with a melodic line. The LH has a bass line with a red circle around the first measure. Chord symbols below the LH staff include 'I', 'I6', 'V', 'I', 'I6', and 'V'. A red asterisk is placed below the first measure of the LH staff.

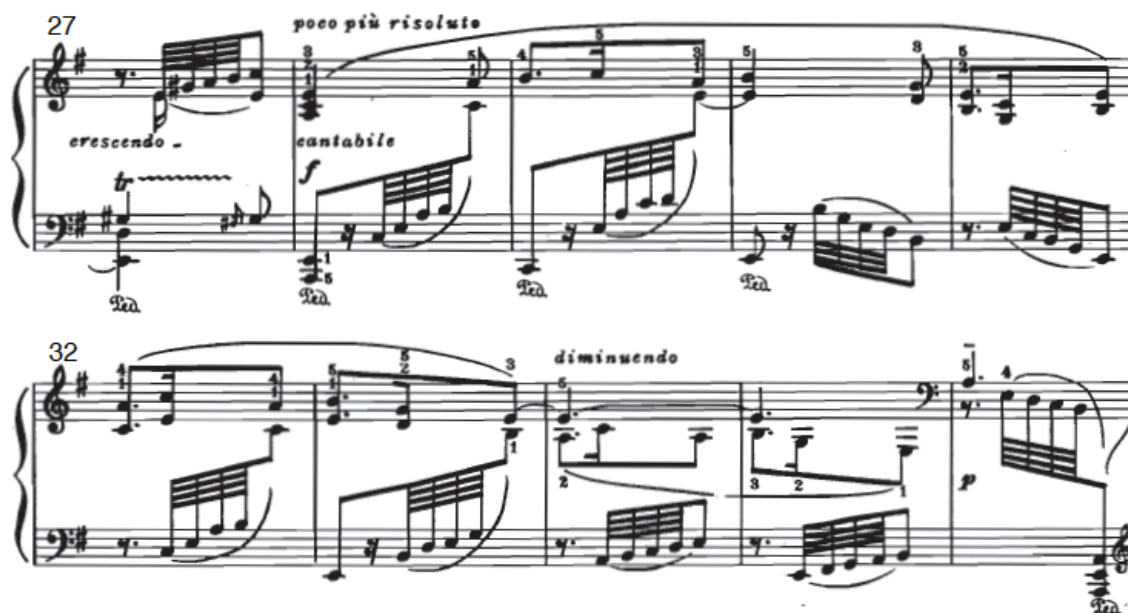
Measure 22: The RH continues with a melodic line. The LH has a bass line with a red circle around the first measure. A red box highlights the text: 'Sixth degree of A Dorian scale is used as the third of dominant chord to resolve to G major chord'. Red circles highlight the notes F#4, F#5, and F#6 in the LH staff. Chord symbols below the LH staff include 'flat VII6', 'V/flat VII', 'V(4)3', 'flat VII6', 'V42/flat VII', 'V/flat VII', and 'flat VII'. A red asterisk is placed below the first measure of the LH staff.

A reverie-like ambience is maintained through the substantial use of pedal under clusters of stepwise notes in the upper part accompanying the main melody. As annotated in Figure 2.4, the above-mentioned enablement of the raised sixth degree of the scale by means of the Dorian mode, is pivotal in allowing a natural transition to the G major chord in m. 26. Thus F sharp functions as a leading note to G major.²⁷ As can be seen in m. 27 (Figure 4.5), the move to G major has yet to show its true trajectory as it is sidestepped simply with a dominant chord.

²⁷ Despite being labelled here as a flat VII, the G major chord is essentially VII in the sense that it is true to the original Dorian mode on A.

The first use of variation occurs at m. 28 (see Figure 4.6). Here the original melody played in the left hand is now brought to the upper part while the fast accompanying groups of notes are played in the bass. The same harmony and melody is kept only as far as m. 33 after which, the melody of mm. 32 and 33 is echoed an octave down in mm. 34 and 35:

Figure 4.6: mm. 27–36



In relation to the corresponding second phrase in mm. 20–27, the harmony and melody of m. 37 onwards are subtly altered so as to further prolong this motion to the G major chord (see Figure 4.7). Hence there is only the use of variation in the loosest sense:

Figure 4.7: mm. 37–46

The image displays a musical score for measures 37 through 46. The score is written for piano (left hand) and right hand (treble clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#), indicating D major or A minor. The time signature is 4/4.

Measures 37-41: The right hand features a melodic line with a *fespress.* (frescissimo) marking. The left hand provides harmonic support. Harmonic analysis below the staff indicates the following chords: I (tonic held from m. 36), IV (#3rd), I, I6, IV (#3rd), I, V43/flat VII, and II7. A *diminuendo* marking is present at the end of measure 41.

Measures 42-46: The right hand continues the melodic line. The left hand features a *poco ritenuto* marking. Harmonic analysis below the staff indicates the following chords: III64, I4, V/flat VII, I (G maj: II), V/flat VII, V, and flat VII (V/II) I. A *f* (forte) marking is present at the beginning of measure 44.

Alternations between D major and A minor chords continue until another textural variation is created in mm. 44 to 46, whereby the faster accompanying notes are dismissed in favor of grand tenuto chords that add a layer of solemnity. The earlier included motion to a G major chord at m. 26 is once again reemphasized with a perfect authentic cadence into G major in mm. 45–47, yet Medtner unexpectedly continues to move down another fifth for the next variant of the *siciliano* melody gravitating around C major. With continued tonal orbit around G major, the C major phrase is imbued with an otherworldly Lydian modal palette through its raised fourth (see Figure 4.8):

Figure 4.8: mm. 47–56

The image displays a musical score for piano accompaniment, spanning measures 47 to 56. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The tempo/mood is indicated as *a tempo, poco a poco più vivo*. The melody in the right hand is marked *cantabile*. The left hand provides harmonic support with various chords and textures. Harmonic analysis is provided below the staff, identifying chords such as G maj: IV, I, IV64, V43, vi64, ii6, iii, B min: V, and I. A red box highlights the F sharp note in measure 54, with the text "F sharp as root of dominant" pointing to it. The score includes fingerings and articulation marks throughout.

This version of the melody varies not only by its suggestion of modality but also by the accompaniment in the upper part, which is now constructed with continuous sixteenth notes. After the appearances of the dominant chord in m. 49 and m. 51 there is a seamless move to the relative minor of the dominant via a F sharp dominant chord in m. 54. Just as F sharp as leading tone was pivotal in reaching the G major chords of mm. 26 and 46, F sharp is again crucial in m. 54 as the root of the dominant that resolves to B minor. This is made possible by not having a full resolution from G major into C major in m. 47, but instead extending the overall contents of G major over the subsequent passage which encircles its subdominant. As a result, the C Lydian palette enables F sharp instead of F natural. From m. 55, there is a return to the Dorian mode of the opening with a recurrence of the melodic material from mm. 47–54. Just as the A Dorian of the opening had emphasized its motion to its raised sixth degree of F sharp used as leading tone to G major in mm. 26 and 46, the B Dorian here emphasizes its motion to G sharp used as leading tone to A major in m. 69 (see Figure 4.9):

Figure 4.9: mm. 57–70

The image displays a musical score for measures 57 through 70. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Vivo (ma non troppo allegro)'. The score includes dynamic markings: 'crescendo' (mm. 57-61), 'diminuendo' (mm. 62-66), and 'per crescendo e più mosso' (mm. 67-70). The section is labeled 'B section' and 'B Dorian'. Red circles highlight specific notes, and red lines connect them to explanatory text boxes. The first box points to G# in measure 57, stating: 'B Dorian enables same emphasis of fifth to sharp sixth degree G# as experienced in mm. 5–7'. The second box points to F# in measure 62, stating: 'just as sixth degree F# became the third of a dominant chord to G major in mm. 25 and 45, G# becomes the third of a dominant chord to A major'. The third box points to G# in measure 69, stating: 'G# becomes the stressed note of the melody by means of its dissonance with the underlying tonic harmony'.

The raised sixth degree enabled by the choice of mode, allows IV of B Dorian to be the same as V of A major. Hence the subtle use of the mode not only provides an ethereal palette of sound, but is structured around its path of resolution to the tonic. The dominant signals the return to A as tonal center but combined with the increase in tempo we are to arrive newly in the major at m. 69. Here the previously crucial leading tone G sharp becomes a stressed feature of the upper melodic part. This melodic contour is loosely derived from mm. 3–4 of the opening as highlighted in Figure 4.10:

Figure 4.10: Comparison of melodic contour between mm. 3–4 and mm. 69–71



Separated from preceding material through faster tempo and a change of key, the B section (m. 69) is permeated with bass fifths in pedal notes as if to evoke the rustic sound of bagpipes (see Figure 4.11):

Figure 4.11: mm. 67–79

Figure 4.11 shows musical notation for measures 67–79, illustrating the B section. The tempo is marked *Vivo (ma non troppo allegro)* with a 2/2 time signature. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

The notation is divided into three systems, each with a treble and bass staff. Red arrows indicate the tonic as a retained tone and the dominant as an internal pedal. The harmonic progression is as follows:

- Measure 67:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on F# (tonic). Harmonic label: A maj: I.
- Measure 68:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on C# (dominant). Harmonic label: (IV).
- Measure 69:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on F# (tonic). Harmonic label: I.
- Measure 70:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on C# (dominant). Harmonic label: (IV).
- Measure 71:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on F# (tonic). Harmonic label: I.
- Measure 72:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on C# (dominant). Harmonic label: (IV).
- Measure 73:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on F# (tonic). Harmonic label: I.
- Measure 74:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on C# (dominant). Harmonic label: (IV).
- Measure 75:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on F# (tonic). Harmonic label: I.
- Measure 76:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on C# (dominant). Harmonic label: (IV).
- Measure 77:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on F# (tonic). Harmonic label: I.
- Measure 78:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on C# (dominant). Harmonic label: (IV).
- Measure 79:** Treble staff has a melodic line. Bass staff has a pedal point on F# (tonic). Harmonic label: I.

The same process of retained tone + internal pedal continues here on the dominant.

The notation includes various musical markings such as *mp grazioso legato* and dynamic markings like *f* and *mp*.

The left hand melody in mm. 69–76 evolves out of the thematic material of the opening (shown later in Figure 4.14) and continues to develop until a seemingly new melody is formed in mm. 93–101 played first in the treble then in the bass (see Figure 4.12):

Figure 4.12: mm. 93–101



The height of bucolic joy is set free with this new melody, which must have carried further narrative significance for Medtner as he quoted it later in his Violin Sonata No. 3 (see Figure 4.13):

Figure 4.13: Medtner Violin Sonata No. 3 “Epica” Op. 57, 4th movement, mm. 69–74



Despite the narrative implications of this melody in isolation with the conceivable subject matter of pastoral connotations, it is built systematically from the opening thematic material of the Tale (see Figure 4.14):

Figure 4.14: Thematic construction in the Tale, Op. 51, No. 3

1. Absorbed into m. 5 are both Motive A (indicated by circles) and Motive B (indicated by arrows) from m. 1. Motive B is crucially from the note E to F# underpinned by harmonic motion from I to IV. Introduced in this measure was also motive C (indicated by the rectangle).

2. Motive C was the basis for the accompanying cluster of notes from m. 13 onwards.

3. The new left hand melody at the beginning of the B section joins together both elements introduced in m. 5 – Motive B underpinned by motion from I to IV, and Motive C.

4. The upper melodic part of the B section (Figure 2.10), contains both Motive C and Motive A.

5. The new melody combines all three motivic fragments.

mm. 5-6

A maj: I IV I IV I IV I

mm. 13-15

mm. 69-72

A maj: I IV I IV I IV I

mm. 77-78

mm. 93-96

A maj: I IV I

When the A section returns in m. 109, it is particularly striking that the order of events has been reversed as compared with the opening (see Figure 4.15). As if to evoke a mirror image, the *siciliano* melody now precedes the triplet sixteenth notes that opened the Tale. The transition between sections is made seamless by continuing the B section upper melody into the A section as accompaniment:

Figure 4.15: mm. 107–112

The image shows a musical score for measures 107 to 112. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass staff. Measure 107 is marked with a red box and an annotation: "Upper melody of B section continued into return of A section". The tempo is marked "Tempo I" and "legatissimo". The dynamics are marked "p" and "tranquillo". Measure 108 is marked with a red box and an annotation: "Return of A section". Measure 109 is marked with a red box and an annotation: "Melodic material from m. 93 (Figure 2.14)". Measure 110 is marked with a red box and an annotation: "Continuation of accompaniment based on B section upper melody". Measure 111 is marked with a red box and an annotation: "Accompanimental clusters as in mm. 17-19". Measure 112 is marked with a red box and an annotation: "Continuation of accompaniment based on B section upper melody". The tempo is marked "poco f. espress.".

The accompanying passagework now alternates between melodic material of the B section and the original stepwise cluster first heard in m. 13. In this way the A section bears the memory of the B section through its accompanimental constitution.²⁸ This process is extended when the final melody of the B section reappears from mm. 122 to 126 (see Figure 4.16). Played here in the Dorian mode at a slower tempo, it comes across as a melancholic and pensive reminiscence as compared with its jubilant first appearance in m. 93:

²⁸ One recalls the use of a similar technique used by Brahms in the first movement of his 3rd Violin Sonata whereby the recapitulation begins with the first theme accompanied by passagework specific to the development.

Figure 4.16: mm. 117–123

Figure 4.16 shows musical notation for measures 117–123. The score is in G major, 3/4 time. Measures 117–123 are marked *diminuendo*. A red box highlights a melodic return in measures 119–120, with a red arrow pointing to it and text: "Melody of mm. 93–96 returns in the upper part, juxtaposed over the end of the *siciliano* melody in the lower part". Other markings include *sempre ritardando e diminuendo*, *p*, *espressivo*, and *poco a*.

From m. 128 the triplet sixteenth note passage of the opening is brought back an octave higher (last measure of Figure 4.16). Then like an after-thought it is the *siciliano* melody which returns once again in m. 137 completing the Tale with the impression of heavenly ascension (see Figure 4.17):

Figure 4.17: mm. 129–142

The musical score for measures 129–142 is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 129–132) is marked *poco accelerando, ma sempre diminuendo*. It features a treble staff with a continuous eighth-note melody and a bass staff with a simple harmonic accompaniment. A *Ped.* marking is present at the end of the system. The second system (mm. 133–137) begins with a measure rest, followed by a *ritenuto* section. Dynamics include *pp* and *ppp*. A *Tempo I* marking appears at the end of the system. The third system (mm. 138–142) continues the *ritenuto* section, with a *ten.* marking and a *ppp* dynamic. The system concludes with a *Ped.* marking and an asterisk. Performance markings such as *(Pedare)*, *8*, and *ten.* are also present.

The Tale seemingly drifts in and out of a dream of pastoral musings in an air of celestial divinity. The simple three-part structure enables this overall narrative. Yet the continuous motivic development and textural variation enables a sense of journey despite a relatively static key structure. Thus a continuous flow of music is achieved despite the considerable difference of mood between the larger sections. The benefit of such juxtaposition between a sense of journey and remaining fairly static as dictated by key structure is to create a narrative constantly more dream-like. This is to say the sense of movement occurs within an unchangeable space (like a memory or dream), while any large-scale harmonic progression to a distant key would provide a level of activity unworthy of such a trance-like state.

Chapter 5

Tale in A minor Op. 34, No. 3 (1916-17)

Unlike many other Tales, the initial epigraph, discreet and understated though it may be, significantly divulges something of the narrative behind the Tale: “Forest spirit (but a kindly, plaintive one).” The mood is at once quirky and mysterious, maintaining constant unpredictability with often agitated outbursts giving way to moments of melancholy and longing. Hence the Tale is organized into a distinctive form and key scheme that emphasize constant mystery and impulsiveness.

The two other important key areas besides the tonic of A minor are G sharp minor and C sharp minor – both unconventional tonal destinations from the point of view of the tonic. Hence the choice of principal tonal hierarchy already disfigures conventional expectation. Yet as unexpected as these choices of key may be, they are also justified by an inner logic embedded deeper inside the piece. A study of each subsection will be conducted as a means of exploring this logic behind the above irregularities.

Section 1

After the opening passage on the dominant chord, the A minor theme beginning in m. 4 is at once whimsical and even grotesque albeit in an innocuous child-like manner (see Figure 5.1). The theme in the bass will be referred to from here onwards as Theme 1. Such intricate emotional characteristics are founded on the juxtaposition of the rapid harmonic rhythm of the

upper right hand part changing chords every eighth-note and the slower change of bass note on each quarter note.

Figure 5.1: Op. 34, No. 3, mm. 1–12

The musical score for Op. 34, No. 3, mm. 1–12, is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 1-4) shows the right hand with a rapid eighth-note chordal pattern and the left hand with a slower quarter-note bass line. The second system (mm. 5-8) features a 'Theme 1 in bass octaves' in the left hand, marked 're sostenuto' and 'tenebroso'. The third system (mm. 9-12) continues the bass line with 'poco rinforzando' and 'pp' dynamics. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like 'dolcissimo', 'pp', and 'semp.'.

An otherworldly harmonic palette is created from a combination of the upper part's brisk harmonic rhythm in stark contrast with the air of the Phrygian mode ushered in by the octaves in the lower part. The rattling grace notes that accompany each downbeat octave give off the impression of deliberately defacing the rhythmic regularity of the two-part counterpoint. Furthermore, the bass part is imbued with a quite austere feel aided by its more than passing resemblance to the medieval Latin hymn "*Dies Irae*." (This quotation comes across as impish and quite blackly comic as compared with the more somber impression of its appearance at the

end of Tale, Op. 26, No. 3 or its religious symbolism in the Piano Quintet). Having set up this modal proclivity, we are surprised by the apparent wrong turning in m. 9 when a D sharp is emphasized by a preceding crescendo and sforzando. What functions as a chromatic neighbor to the dominant is thus given the air of an interrupting “wrong note,” which sets the bass melody into a state of disarray moving chromatically rather than modally from m. 11. Both the surprise D sharp and the Phrygian palette given to Theme 1 is subconsciously prepared by the thematic components of by this introductory passage (see Figure 5.2):

Figure 5.2: Motivic interconnection in mm. 1–12

1. Tension between the dominant note E and its upper neighbor F contained in the introductory arpeggiation seemingly prepares the Phrygian palette from m. 5 created by the flattened super tonic stressed by grace notes in the bass.

2. Tritonal tension between the dominant note E and A# foreshadows the "surprise" motion to D# in m. 9.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Allegretto tenebroso" with a tempo marking of ♩ = 92-100 and the instruction "sempre al rigore di tempo". The score is written for piano and includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *pp*, *ppc*, and *poco rinforzando*. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into three systems. The first system (mm. 1-4) features an arpeggiated introduction with a tritone between E and A# in the bass. The second system (mm. 5-8) shows a Phrygian mode in the right hand and grace notes in the bass. The third system (mm. 9-12) begins with a "surprise" D# in the bass. Red circles and arrows highlight specific notes and intervals discussed in the annotations: the E-F interval in m. 1, the E-A# tritone in m. 1, and the D# in m. 9.

The dominant chord is reached in m. 12, so as to dissipate back to the same passage on the dominant that had begun the Tale. A transitory chromatic passage in mm. 13–16 once again emphasizes the tension between the dominant and its upper neighbor (see Figure 5.3):

Figure 5.3: mm. 13–21



After a restatement of Theme 1, we are again surprised by another wrong turn arriving sooner on a C sharp in m. 25 (see Figure 5.4):

Figure 5.4: mm. 22–28

The musical score for measures 22-28 is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 22 to 25, and the second system covers measures 26 to 28. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. In measure 26, the word 'crescendo' is written above the staff. In measure 27, a red circle highlights a note in the left hand, with the text 'Second unexpected note' written in red below it. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and fingerings (numbers 1-5).

Besides merely constructing a pattern of unexpected turns of phrase, these “wrong notes” conceal within themselves logic of a larger scale. Their apparently accidental appearances are essential in their links to the two important tonal areas besides the tonic. Hence this deviation of C sharp directly prepares its tonicization later in the Tale. C sharp minor is not established unequivocally until m. 75, while it is instead highlighted in passing from mm. 29 to 40, (see Figure 5.5) and with the same motivic material in mm. 61 to 74:

Figure 5.5: mm. 29–40

29

C sharp minor

diminuendo

ten.

33

leggero

F# min: V9 I

37

crescendo

C# min: V9 I

mf

This upper melodic part from m. 29 onwards seemingly evolves out of the previous right hand passage from m. 5 conveying an impression of transitional passagework. Yet the melody is nonetheless secured thematically in the listener's mind by two further repetitions – one an octave higher from mm. 33 to 36 and another in F sharp minor from m. 37 onwards. C sharp minor returns at the end of this second repetition via a dominant seventh. The same chord progression is instantly repeated abruptly and unexpectedly in m. 41 with the same motivic material, now resolving into G sharp minor (see Figure 5.6):

Figure 5.6: mm. 39–41

39 *mf* C# min: V9 I

41 *rinforzand* G# min: V9 I

As explained previously, what is unexpected at the foreground level is nonetheless prepared at the background level. The first supposed wrong note of D sharp in m. 9 was combined with the notes G sharp and B in the upper part. Hence this point of emphasis, which Theme 1 gravitates towards and then away from, spells out a G sharp minor chord. This is then to become a subconscious preparation for the key of the first truly melodic section of the Tale from mm. 41 to 52 (see Figure 5.7):

Figure 5.7: mm. 41–52

The image displays a musical score for measures 41 through 52. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 41-44) features a piano part with a chromatic left-hand melody and a violin part with a melodic line. Dynamics include *legatissimo*, *rinforzando, diminuendo*, and *diminuendo*. The second system (measures 45-48) introduces 'Theme 2' in the piano part, marked *lencbroso* and *pp*, with a *doiente* marking. The violin part continues with a melodic line. The third system (measures 49-52) shows the piano part with *dimin.* and *crescendo* markings. A red circle highlights a tritone interruption in the piano part at measure 52, labeled 'tritone interruption' in red. The violin part continues with a melodic line.

The unlikely key of G sharp minor in a piece in A minor, is made coherent at the background level by its fleeting but nonetheless significant appearance in a chord in m. 9. The resulting section at m. 41 initiated by an ostinato figure formed of adjacent diminished chords, is isolated not only by its remote key, but by its wandering left hand chromatic melody which fails to progress anywhere beyond where it began. This left hand melody will be referred to as Theme 2. These attributes let the section stand significantly apart from the rest of the piece despite the melodic line being so brief with just one reiteration. The fact that the theme never returns further inculcates it with a sense of unexplainable mystery. Theme 2 appears to be loosely related to Theme 1 in its being initiated by seconds and thirds. Having rocked back and forth from a perfect fifth (G sharp to D sharp) Theme 2 is interrupted with a tritone (G sharp to D natural) in m. 52

giving way to the next passage which sees the absence of the previous melody but the continuation of a similar accompanying figure in the upper part (see Figure 5.8). This “unexpected” interruption is prepared subconsciously by the similarly unexpected D sharp of m. 9 in Theme 1, which was also a tritone away from the tonic. With nothing left but the continuing accompanying figure, it is as if the G sharp minor theme has quite literally vanished into nothingness, leaving in the upper part a mere undulation of energy like a disembodied spirit. This passage from m. 53 is striking in its unashamed simplicity whereby the upper accompanimental part plays sequentially over bass notes that fall systematically down a chain of perfect fifths:

Figure 5.8: mm. 53–60



In this manner, the bass note of D sharp is reached in m. 61 via an enharmonic fifth relation to B flat (see Figure 5.9). With the minor pause on this note, we imagine momentarily that this wayward sense of falling has concluded. Yet the chain of fifths has not yet completed itself. With the reintroduction of the transition melody, the fifths continue down to a G sharp in m. 65 and a C sharp in m. 66:

Figure 5.9: mm. 61–69

The image displays two systems of musical notation for measures 61 through 69. The first system, measures 61-65, features a piano part with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic and a right-hand part marked *pochiss. leggierissimo* (very, very light) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). A *diminuendo* (diminishing) instruction is placed over the right-hand staff. The second system, measures 66-69, continues the piano part with a *pp* dynamic and the right-hand part with a *Con* (Concise) marking. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

As a result of the chain of fifths, the material of mm. 29 to 40 is recalled in its original key.

While we have a simple layout, of transitional sections in C sharp minor on either side of Theme 2 in G sharp minor, (first from mm. 29 to 40, then later from mm. 61 to 74) this key of Theme 2 is arrived at abruptly as if portraying a wrong turning, and it is abandoned equally abruptly with the D natural of m. 52 which falls down a chain of fifths so slowly that the eventual departure from the chain towards C sharp minor sounds purely accidental. Once again everything that is logical at the background level is made to seem illogical in the foreground.

Section 2

Figure 5.10: mm. 73–80

The musical score for Figure 5.10, measures 73–80, is in C major (one sharp). The score is written for piano. Measures 73-74 are marked *leggiere* and *ritenuto*. Measure 75 is marked *p* and *V7*. Measure 76 is marked *f* and *V7*. Measure 77 is marked *mp* and *sostenuto*. Measure 78 is marked *ten. (senza Xa)*. Measure 79 is marked *ten.*. Measure 80 is marked *Xa*. The bass line features a continuous 16th-note pattern. The upper part features a counter melody with various ornaments and slurs.

With the most affirmative perfect cadence in the Tale so far occurring from mm. 75 into 76, a developmental section begins in C sharp minor (see Figure 5.10). While Theme 1 is used as the principal theme in the bass, the countermelody in the upper part is no longer playing in continuous 16th notes, as was the case in m. 5. Instead the rhythm is broken up into seemingly quasi-Baroque rhythmic patterns in contrapuntal texture. In combination with the chromatically altered harmonic palette similar to what we had heard in Theme 1, the passage carries the impression of some ghoulish mimicry of 17th century counterpoint.

What follows is a chromatic ascent in tonality from C sharp to D in m. 85, to D sharp in m. 90 and finally to E in m. 92 (see Figure 5.11):

Figure 5.11: mm. 81–98

Figure 5.11 displays a musical score for measures 81–98, featuring piano (p) and mezzo-forte (mf) dynamics, and a crescendo. The score is annotated with red circles and text highlighting specific musical features:

- Measures 81–84:** The piano part shows a chromatic ascent from C sharp to E, highlighted by red circles. The annotation reads: "Circles highlighting chromatic ascent from C sharp to E".
- Measures 85–88:** The piano part features a theme in diminution, highlighted by a red box. The annotation reads: "Theme 1 in diminution".
- Measures 89–91:** The piano part shows a simplified theme contour, highlighted by a red box. The annotation reads: "simplified as compared with original theme contour".
- Measures 92–95:** The piano part features a counter-melody in diminution, highlighted by a red box. The annotation reads: "Diminution of counter-melody into triplets".
- Measures 96–98:** The piano part features a further diminution of Theme 1 into triplets, highlighted by a red box. The annotation reads: "Further diminution of Theme 1 into triplets".

The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass staves, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamic markings. The tempo/mood markings include *agitato* and *sempre accelerando*.

From m. 88 onwards Theme 1 is played in diminution, and from m. 96 in triplets. The gradual rise in the speed of note values is accompanied by a similar metamorphosis of rhythm in the upper counter-melody, whereby it is varied with syncopation on the second half of each second beat from m. 84, then transformed into the continuous running 16th note pattern particular to m. 5, from m. 88 onwards. Finally in m. 96 sextuplets are played in accordance with the triplets of Theme 1. The systematic acceleration of note-value over the chromatic ascent in tonality from C sharp to E, creates a feeling of amassing hysteria, as if to portray our forest spirit in a state of chaos and turmoil.

The arrival of the dominant on E links organically into the introductory passage that preceded Theme 1 also on the dominant (m. 107 in Figure 5.12). This passage is now further embellished at the top of the phrase as if to attempt to extinguish the accumulated spirit of irascibility. (see mm. 110 to 112) Thus the frantic picture painted by section 2's systematic increase of velocity is here placated in signaling the return of Theme 1:

Figure 5.12: mm. 102–24



The figure displays three systems of musical notation for piano, spanning measures 102 to 124. The first system begins at measure 105, marked with a treble and bass clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 3/4 time signature. It includes the instruction *sostenuto* and a dynamic marking of *p*. A red annotation reads "Return of m. 1-3 now extended with embellishment". The second system starts at measure 110 and features a dense texture with many beamed sixteenth notes. The third system begins at measure 113, marked *Tempo I*, and contains the red annotation "Theme 1". The score concludes with an *Ossia* section.

Section 3

In this final section of the piece beginning in m. 107, the first deviation from what was presented in the opening occurs from the end of m. 121 (see Figure 5.13):

enharmonically down to a D sharp from B flat as the chain of fifths did before, the pattern of fifths is broken by a tritone moving to E in m. 129. This is only unexpected given the context of the unbroken chain of perfect fifths earlier in the Tale, yet is entirely in harmony with its being self-contained in the key of A minor. Thus the interval of a tritone that was used unexpectedly to evade the key of G sharp minor in m. 52, is now used normatively to resolve in the key of A minor in m. 130. Again the significant role of this interval is also prepared subconsciously by its emphasis from E to A sharp in the first three measures of the Tale, as well as crucially between A and the supposed wrong turning of D sharp in m. 9. Hence the underscored interval earlier in the Tale is to become a major structural device without which these distant key areas could not have been reached. In this manner, there is a definite correlation between melody, harmony, cadences and key structure. In m. 132, the interceding D sharp from m. 9 is enharmonically altered into an E flat in m. 132 (end of Figure 5.13). The adoption here of the seemingly wrong chord of A flat major chord instead of G sharp major (which would more closely resemble the same point in the opening phrase at m. 9 in G sharp minor), perhaps can be explained by its logic in terms of the above-mentioned chain of fifths (see Figure 5.14):

Figure 5.14: Comparison of chain of fifths in mm. 52–66 and mm. 121–130

<p>Chain 1: Measures 52 to 66 (D natural interrupts G sharp minor section by means of a tritone and falls to C sharp minor via chain of perfect fifths. This harmonic motion is also enabled by the enharmonic change of the expected E flat to D sharp)</p> 
<p>Chain 2: Measures 121 to 130 - Same chain of fifths occurring without breaking from the key of A minor. In this context there is a greater pull towards the tonic by means of the B flat appoggiatura instead of a B natural. In the context of the previously experienced chain of fifths however, this chain is self-contained within A, thus denying the opportunity of moving further down to E flat. Hence the appearance of E flat is avoided for a second time.</p> 

As compared with D sharp, E flat is the “correct answer” in terms of the next step in the chain of fifths from B flat in mm. 52 to 60. Thus the misdirection of the first chain of fifths to D sharp instead of E flat, then of the second chain of fifths to E natural, builds the expectation of an E flat which is provided as the highest point of harmonic tension within an A flat major chord from which there is a final resolution back to A minor. Once again it is of great significance that the enharmonic “correction” taking place here corresponds with the first “wrong note” of D sharp in Theme 1. After a briefly eruptive coda recalling the frantic rhythmic velocity of the end of section 2 (sextuplets against triplets), E flat is again stressed in the final cadence in mm. 143 to 144 (see Figure 5.15):

Figure 5.15: mm. 133–144

The image displays a musical score for measures 133 through 144. The score is written for piano (p) and includes a vocal line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The time signature is 4/4.

- Measure 133:** The piano part begins with a bass line featuring a triplet of eighth notes (B-flat, A, G) and a quarter note (F). The vocal line starts with a half note (B-flat) and a quarter note (A). The tempo marking *poco a poco più mosso* is written above the vocal line.
- Measure 136:** The piano part continues with a bass line of eighth notes. The vocal line features a half note (B-flat) and a quarter note (A).
- Measure 138:** The piano part features a treble line with a series of eighth notes and a bass line of eighth notes. The tempo marking *ff presto quasi trillo* is written above the piano part.
- Measure 140:** The piano part continues with a treble line of eighth notes and a bass line of eighth notes.
- Measure 142:** The piano part features a treble line with a series of eighth notes and a bass line of eighth notes. The tempo marking *a tempo (senza rit.)* is written above the piano part. The dynamics *pp* and *monando* are written below the piano part. The vocal line features a half note (B-flat) and a quarter note (A).

While we can say that the form of the Tale is distinct and cannot be categorized as any conventionally known form, the 3 sections of the Tale bear some resemblance to the sections of traditional sonata form. The obvious deviations from any traditional prototype excludes the possibility of calling it sonata form. Yet by linking this Tale to sectional nomenclature specific to sonata form, we can draw up a clearer picture of the new form assumed (see Table 5.1):

Table 5.1: Form in Op. 34, No. 3 using sonata form terminology

Section 1	Exposition	Mm. 1 to 16	Theme 1 in A minor
		Mm. 17 to 40	transitional theme in C sharp minor
		Mm. 41 to 52	Theme 2 in G sharp minor
		Mm. 53 to 61	transitional passage with movement via a circle of fifths down from G back to D sharp minor (using enharmonic equivalence of E flat and D sharp)
		Mm. 61 to 75	return of transitional theme from mm. 17 to 40 in C sharp minor
Section 2	Development	Mm. 75 to 106	Developmental section – beginning in C sharp minor, then moving up chromatically until the dominant E is reached
Section 3	Recapitulation	Mm. 107 to 130	Theme 1 in A minor
		Mm. 130 to 144	Coda in A minor

In sympathy with a traditional sonata form layout, we can identify two contrasting themes within the exposition separated by a transition, a development section arriving on a dominant pedal, and a recapitulation, which remains broadly in the tonic of A minor. In contrast with sonata form however, the oddity of the transitional theme appearing on both sides of Theme 2 is noteworthy. This seemingly adds to a narrative air of wandering back over previous steps created as much by the unsettled harmony of the transitional sections as by the descending chain of perfect fifths in the second theme group. Despite the suggestibility of such subject matter, the return of transitional material in its gravitation around C sharp minor also aids in building towards a more solid affirmation of the key by means of its cadence into Section 2 (m. 75). Moreover the lack of

a full reappearance of Theme 2 in the recapitulation is most striking. As a justification of this point, it is noteworthy that mm. 122 to 126 recall the chain of fifths from mm. 53 to 61 that could be thus perceived as inextricably linked to Theme 2. In terms of narrative therefore, we very much feel a reminiscence of the second theme group despite Theme 2 itself not reappearing. The fact that Theme 2 only appears once in its entirety also aids in creating its overall mysteriously fleeting character, as if it was something almost illusory not meant to be witnessed. While this resulting mood comes across as specific to the subject matter of this Tale, omission of Theme 2 in the recapitulation can also be found in other works of Medtner some of which can be described unashamedly as following a sonata form layout (E.g., Sonata Tragica, Op. 39, No. 5).

Once again, the purpose of this comparison is not to prove that the Tale is in sonata form, but rather to consider the possibility a genetic kinship while highlighting abnormalities specific to this work. The idiosyncratic choice of important key areas remains one of the most individual aspects of form in this Tale, and aids in shaping its enigmatically impulsive character. As discussed above however, each surprising deviation from expectation seemingly suggestive of subject matter is built into a larger scale logic of senses stemming from the first phrase of the piece.

Hence a novel form a few steps removed from sonata form is crafted with an unusual key structure, thus enabling a narrative with the ambience of a “forest spirit.” Contrary to any purely programmatic work in which form is directly dictated by a storyline, the result of this particular narrative is to enable the evocation of a complex range of imagery from momentary otherworldliness and dream-like longing, to grotesque accumulations of rage which are in every case short-lived, and dissipate melancholically back to the fragile state that pervades the whole Tale.

Chapter 6

Tale in C sharp minor Op. 35, No. 4 (1916-1917)

“Thus the very strict sonata form of Beethoven’s Coriolanus (a title which reflects merely the heroic mood, and not the historic subject of Coriolanus) precludes any possibility of assigning this work to the category of program music...”²⁹ We may hypothesize that Medtner’s words on Beethoven’s treatment of inspiration from a Shakespeare play, may carry weighty relevance when delving into the Tale seemingly inspired by another Shakespeare play.

Medtner selected Russian and German (mainly Goethe, together with some Heine and Nietzsche) poems as a literary source of song settings as well as inspiration for some of his solo piano works. One may reasonably guess that in this respect the absence of literature in any other language as a source of musical inspiration could be inferred from Medtner’s lack of proficiency in other languages. (Although he spoke Russian and German fluently, his English was reportedly poor). Yet as an ardent Shakespeare-enthusiast, and a composer that commonly used literary associations in his music, it would only be natural for Medtner to crave some format in his compositions for the inclusion of inspiration from Shakespeare’s works. This happened only once in Medtner’s output. (According to Ekaterina Chernaya-Oh, Tale, Op. 14, No. 1 Ophelia’s Song did not refer to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, but instead was intended simply to evoke the image of an ordinary girl from an old legend.³⁰) Thus we may ponder a little over Medtner’s choice of

²⁹ Medtner, 124.

³⁰ B. Dolinskaya, “Nikolay Metner: Monograficheskiy Ocherk,” (Moscow: Muzika, 1962): 116, quoted in 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*. (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2008), 29.

Shakespearian stimulus for just one of his Tales. The epigraph above the music reveals the “mood” and “subject” from King Lear’s famous soliloquy:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanes, spout
 Till you have drench’d our steeples, drown’d the cocks!
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,

 Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ the world!
 Crack nature’s moulds, all germens spill at once
 That make ingrateful man!

The once powerful King Lear has ceded control over his kingdom to two of his three daughters in response to their fawning assertions of love towards him. He has angrily and impetuously disinherited a third daughter who refused to express her love in any such manner similar to her siblings. At a time when he no longer holds any power, it is his shocking realization of the two daughters’ true ungratefulness and contempt for their father, which drives him out to shout at the storm in hysterical exclamation against the cruelties of fate. With the cessation of his power and his accelerating decrepitude, he is forced into bowing towards the most mundane needs of every human. Ultimately man’s tortured acceptance of powerlessness to influence love and fate, is

symbolized by the downfall of this most powerful of characters. As the great Shakespearian thespian Ian McKellen noted:

The play doesn't seem to be concerned with the past. The story so far is not covered by Shakespeare. You just begin it... ...the story of Lear happens as it happens, as you the audience are viewing it. It's not a retrospective of a life. You're flung right into the middle of it. You're told all you need to know, but what you're told about is really about the present, so what happens next becomes the story rather than what happened before.³¹

One may conjecture that the above-mentioned immediacy of drama and suggestion of narrative incompleteness by means of omission of the past may have appeared ideal for inspiration towards Medtner's Tales, many of which themselves similarly present musical references only to fleeting segments of life. (See, for example, Tale, Op. 34, No. 2 with the epigraph from Tyutchev's poem: "When we have called a thing ours, It departs from us forever.") As we will discover as recurring attributes of form to many of the Tales, the erosion of boundaries between sections and the consequent interconnectivity or overlapping musical material between sections are symptomatic of this very aspect of narrative. Similar to Lear, and to an even greater extent to the storm scene in Lear, we witness in many of Medtner's Tales a musical moment packed with the experience of life compressed into a small fragment of time.

Above Medtner's Tale only the first line "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!" is displayed. For the eponymous main character of the play, this is a moment of the utmost grief,

³¹ StagingShakespeare. "Ian McKellen: Understanding King Lear, the Character." Filmed [February 2014]. YouTube video, 10:49. Posted [February 2014]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahFtoCq6CHw>.

anger, bitterness, hopelessness and destitution. If we are to follow Medtner's own words on the extent of literary connections to the creation of the music, or in his own terminology --the place of subject matter in defining content-- it is most important to take these general sentiments to heart as opposed to scanning the text for more discernible creative derivations.

Just as Medtner noted the "very strict sonata form" of Beethoven's Coriolanus, one can observe here a more clearly discernible sonata form layout (referred to as Type 3 by Hepokoski and Darcy³²), than in many other Tales, whose forms can only pass as distant relatives of sonata form. Hence we will use the terminology of traditional Type 3 sonata form to clarify Medtner's approach to form in this Tale. As with the majority of works by Medtner, the analysis will show how the kernel of musical material presented in the opening subsequently flowers into the Tale's multiple musical properties with an innate feeling of inevitability. Once again, observations of categorized individual musical dimensions on their own (melody, rhythm, harmony, form etc.) will never arrive at an understanding of the larger scheme of senses with which all of the above are inextricably connected. It is this internal scheme that each of the following analyses will aim to illuminate.

The Tale, Op. 35, No. 4 is undoubtedly one of the most tragic and breathlessly dramatic of all Medtner's Tales. Broadly speaking, it is this overall mood and atmosphere that is the subject matter allowed residence in the music. In addition however, an aspect of subject matter pervading the entire Tale, is the storm as represented by the ceaselessly undulating triplet passagework (see Figure 6.1):

³² James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, "Sonata Form as a Whole: Foundational Considerations," *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16-20.

Figure 6.1: Tale, Op. 35, No. 4, mm. 1–3



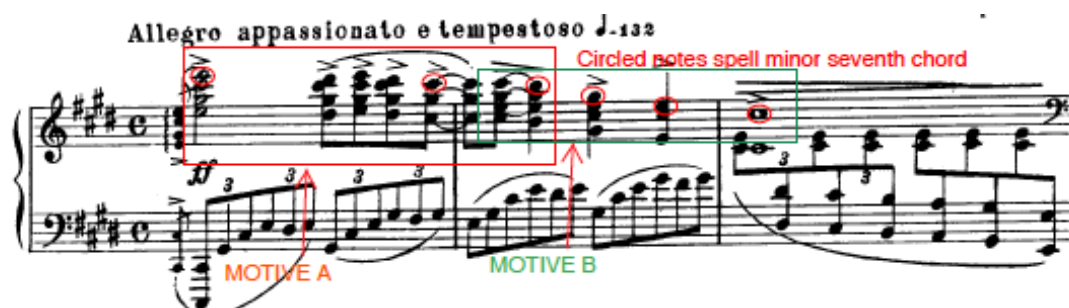
The first right hand melody enters in a grand declamatory manner as if to evoke Lear's impassioned imploration to the howling winds represented by the left hand triplet accompaniment. The sheer range covered from E6 down to C#1 in the first measure converging at a meeting point in the middle of the piano with the C sharp overlapping between two parts in m. 3, allows for a most grandiose evocation of the sweeping storm. The effect is compounded by its further descent to the same bass note where the left hand began the Tale in m. 5 (see Figure 6.2). Large range in both melodic lines and passagework seemingly representative of winds enables a broad scale of sonic gradation to conjure an equally grand canvas in one's visual imagination. In what will be a recurring process of *diminuendi* in such passagework as found in m. 4 adds to the impression of winds moving to and fro:

Figure 6.2: mm. 4–6



We can observe how the entire first theme area is constructed simply from the opening declamatory statement (see Figure 6.3):

Figure 6.3: Motivic breakdown of mm. 1–3



To clarify how the first phrase is divided in terms of its motivic content, the red rectangle represents the first motive of the phrase (we will refer to this as motive A), and the green rectangle represents the second motive (motive B) of the phrase, while red circled notes highlight how the entire phrase is built on a minor seventh chord (Figure 6.3). From m. 5 onwards, the declamatory statement of the first four measures is repeated and elaborated upon in a more extensive melodic sweep of passionate longing. As shown below in Figure 6.4, this more elaborated version of the melody is constructed of the motives of the introductory phrase. It begins with motive A shown by the red rectangle. Then it ascends via a series of descending thirds as seemingly extracted from the intervals of the original minor seventh chord. In the midst of a transient sense of nostalgic longing evoked by a move to the relative major in m. 8, the second phrase adopts motive B shown by green rectangles:

Figure 6.4: motivic breakdown of mm. 4–12

The image shows a musical score for measures 4 through 12, with annotations for motivic analysis. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo/mood is marked 'cresc.' and 'cantando'. The score is divided into three systems, numbered 4, 7, and 10. The first system (measures 4-6) shows a melodic line in the treble staff and a bass line in the bass staff. The second system (measures 7-9) continues the melodic line and bass line. The third system (measures 10-12) shows the final measures of the theme. Annotations include: a red box around measures 4-6; a red line connecting the notes E, F#, and G# in measures 7, 8, and 9; a blue line connecting the notes E, F#, and G# in measures 10, 11, and 12; a blue circle around the G# in measure 10; a blue circle around the F# in measure 11; a blue circle around the E in measure 12; and a blue line connecting the G# in measure 10 to the G# in measure 12. The text 'Relationship of thirds taken from minor seventh:' is written in red above measure 7. The text 'To tonicized G sharp:' is written in blue above measure 10. The text 'Motive C' is written in blue above measure 10.

We may further observe that the final two measures of the theme combine two different elements. Firstly a reiteration of motive A (indicated by the red line), and secondly a repeated sighing phrase constructed of the notes E, F sharp and G sharp (indicated by blue circles – we will refer to this as motive C). This latter motivic fragment appears perfectly set up by the highest pitch in the melodic line of the first section (excluding the first four measures which serve more as an introduction) – as shown by blue lines, the G sharp at the end of m. 7 was approached from the F sharp on the second beat, and the E in the upbeat from the previous measure. It is this melodic climax that is to be made the next point of tonicization as a natural result of Theme 1. The meeting of the two contrapuntal voices on G sharp in m. 13 finally elevates it into a tonal center (see Figure 6.5):

Figure 6.5: mm. 13–21

The musical score for Figure 6.5, measures 13–21, is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 13–15) is marked 'diminuendo' and 'tenebroso'. The second system (measures 16–18) features a triplet in the right hand. The third system (measures 19–21) includes the lyrics 'cre - seen - do' and 'caniando'. The score shows a transition from a G major chord in measure 13 to a G major chord with a missing third in measure 14, and then to a G major chord with a minor third in measure 15.

The clear break in texture and tonicization of G sharp make m. 13 an apt point to consider the beginning of the transition. When beginning the section in the context of C sharp minor we have heard a G sharp chord with a third missing, which could naturally be perceived as a dominant chord. Once a minor third is introduced into the descending scale, (as opposed to the major third expected of a dominant) the journey away from C sharp minor becomes audibly clear. Of all the individual themes introduced in this Tale, the transition theme beginning at m. 15 conjures the movement of howling winds most vividly as a result of long sustained melodic notes in the right hand allowing for greater attention to be drawn towards the more turbulent left hand passagework beneath. With a melodic contour seemingly extended out of motive B, the left hand

descending passage continues the previously mentioned diminuendi as found in most of the storm-like material in the Tale. It is worth noting, that it is typical of Medtner to write in dynamic markings that refer only to one line, and in this case the diminuendo only refers to this storm-like representation in the bass, while the right hand melody is unchanging in terms of dynamics until m. 20. This right hand melody founded on the stepwise motion of a third, emerges as a transitional extension to motive C from the end of Theme 1. At this point the tonality of G sharp minor is made to feel somewhat unstable by the use of the Phrygian mode in construction of the transition theme. When considering this perceived instability of the tonic via the use of modal writing together with textural configuration that draws attention to its rapidly moving passage work, the section appears increasingly transitional in nature. The bass E sharp in m. 20 momentarily disembarks from the Phrygian palette to render the melody at m. 21 in F sharp minor. The melodic notes A, G sharp, B at this point are simply a transposition of notes from earlier in the transition melody—E.g., M. 16 – A, G sharp, A, B—but with the middle note omitted (Compare Figures 6.6 and 6.7).

Figure 6.6: mm. 16–17

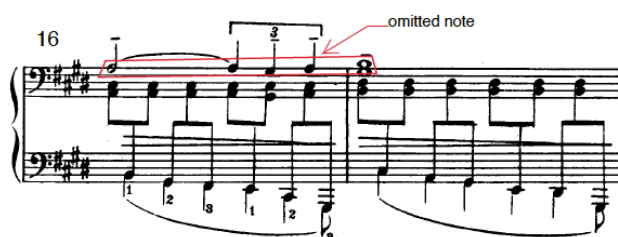
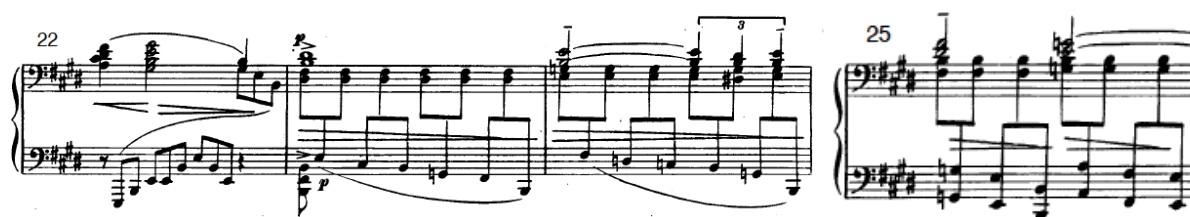


Figure 6.7: mm. 19–22



While there is a momentary suggestion of F sharp minor being the new tonal destination, it becomes clear by the next measure that this was simply a II, V, I progression in E major. As the relative major of the opening key, this moment in the major comes across only as a fleeting sigh of retrospection, after which the tonality continues to shift by means of the Aeolian dominant scale (notes B, C sharp, D sharp, E, F sharp, G natural, A) at m. 23 in a resumption of material from the first part of the transition (see Figure 6.8). Just as G sharp, the highest note of Theme 1 had subsequently become tonicized, B natural is tonicized here having appeared as the highest note of the transition on the 3rd beat of m. 21:

Figure 6.8: mm. 22–25



While there is an alternation between the Aeolian dominant scale on the B major chords and the Phrygian mode on the E minor chords, the upper melody on its own implies an octatonic scale with its notes D sharp, E natural, F sharp, G natural, A. Similar to the previous use of the Phrygian mode on its own, the effect is to diminish perceptible gravity towards a tonal center. The B natural at the end of m. 26 breaks the octatonic pattern to form a dominant seventh chord (see Figure 6.9). For all the modal coloring present in the section, the broader harmonic journey has taken place via a simple series of II, V, I progressions – G sharp, C sharp dominant, F sharp followed by F sharp, B dominant, E followed by B, E dominant, A minor.

Figure 6.9: mm. 25–28

This paves the way for a different section at m. 27, which we will refer to as Theme 2. Although the impression of a new section is projected out of both the change of accompanimental texture and the apostrophe indicating a small breath before it, the melody itself has already been heard as part of the transition (i.e. A, G sharp, B–F sharp, G sharp, in mm. 21–22 B–becomes C, B, D–A, B, E in mm. 27–28). In the same manner as the brief appearance of F sharp minor, we hear m. 27 in A minor, as the A minor chord is on the first beat of the measure and it has been approached from a dominant seventh chord. Yet as we will have the most recent memory of F sharp minor being part of a II, V, I progression to E, we also expect the same thematic material in A minor to be used similarly in a II, V, I progression to G. This is hinted at by the secondary dominant in the second half of m. 27. However any possibility of a resolution to G is avoided by moving instead to a harmony of B minor then a dominant seventh on E. Although A minor is the most assertive tonal center at this point, there is more than a suggestion of restlessly craving to move towards other tonalities. For the time being, this unanswered urge to progress to G is to be lodged in the listener's subconscious memory. It is in the very nature of this irresolutely wistful theme, that the tonality cannot be given space to settle. There is in essence a harmonic state of flux from the outset.

Figure 6.10: mm. 29–35

Figure 6.10 shows a musical score for measures 29–35. The score is written for piano (p) and includes dynamic markings such as *poco*, *a poco crescendo ed agitato*, and *ff*. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The harmonic analysis labels are as follows:

- Measure 29: A min. 1 (9), V7/G
- Measure 30: II (9), V7 sharp 5th leading to III
- Measure 31: III, dim 7th (V/V), function (v/III)
- Measure 32: III, V7/V (v/III)
- Measure 33: dim 7th (V/V), (v/III)
- Measure 34: V7/V
- Measure 35: V7/V

One can observe from the harmonic labelling in Figure 6.10, that there are multiple suggestions of harmonic intent without the intent actually being followed through. An unruly series of diminished chords and dominant seventh chords from mm. 31 to 34 is held in check by the repeating bass notes G to C. The C itself ultimately becomes part of a dominant seventh chord at m. 35 where Theme 1 is reintroduced. None of the dominant seventh chords and half-diminished seventh chords of mm. 31 to 35 are allowed to resolve. This harmonic evasiveness continues in the ensuing passage bringing with it a pervading spirit of turmoil and disarray (Figure 6.11):

Figure 6.11: mm. 34–42

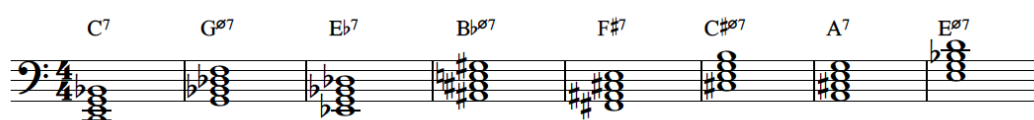
Figure 6.11 shows a musical score for measures 34–42. The score is written for piano (p) and includes dynamic markings such as *ff*. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The harmonic analysis labels are as follows:

- Measure 34: V7/V
- Measure 35: half dim 7th



Yet what is seemingly moving adrift in the foreground is organized very specifically in the background level. This contrapuntal reintroduction of Theme 1 is underpinned by bass notes in the octatonic scale (see orange circles in Figure 6.11), which serve as a foundation to a surprisingly logical chord progression displayed in Figure 6.12:

Figure 6.12: chord progression in mm. 34–42



Here are the root position chords of the progression from mm. 35 to 42. They show a simple sequence of deceptive cadences with dominant chords leading to half diminished seventh chords (V–II). Despite this deceptive property the half diminished chords are also natural extensions of each dominant chord – if the dominants were eleventh chords they would encompass each subsequent half diminished seventh chord. If we take the bass notes of all the dominant seventh chords we may assemble the notes F sharp, A, C, E – i.e. a diminished seventh chord functioning as a dominant that still signals for a move towards G. The previously aborted proclivity towards

G as a tonal center is present at a background level of harmonic motion. The octatonic bass underpinning also serves to combine in a somewhat camouflaged manner the melodic material of Theme 1 and the transition, whose melody in mm. 23 to 25 had first introduced this octatonic palette. In effect melody has become harmony.

From mm. 43 to 48, we experience a continued fixation with the dominant 9th of m. 41 and the half diminished seventh chord of m. 42 (see Figure 6.13):

Figure 6.13: mm. 43–46

The image shows a musical score for measures 43 through 46. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass staff. Red annotations highlight specific harmonic elements:

- Measure 43:** Labeled 'Dominant 9th' and 'Underlying tritone tension'. The bass line features a chromatic scale.
- Measure 44:** Labeled 'half dim 7th root = E'. The bass line continues the chromatic scale.
- Measure 45:** Labeled 'Dominant 9th'. The bass line continues the chromatic scale.
- Measure 46:** Labeled 'half dim 7th root = G'. The bass line continues the chromatic scale.

 The score also includes dynamic markings such as 'p subito' and 'crescendo'.

Harmonic ambiguity is intensified by the chromatic scale in the left hand. The innermost harmonic tension can be felt in the tritone motion of E in mm. 43 and 45 to B flat in mm. 44 and 46. This crucial B flat is maintained despite the half diminished seventh chord subtly altering its root from E to G and flattening its D in m. 46. The diminution of the rhythm at 44 is taken a step further at m. 47 by moving into triplets (see Figure 6.14). The melodic content of each group of four notes within the triplets (indicated by rectangles) is picked up from the offbeat notes of (also enclosed in red) mm. 45 and 46:

Figure 6.14: mm. 45–48



The tritone tension between E and B flat continues inside the two half diminished seventh chords, while in the left hand motive B descends in diminished seventh chords. After the pull towards B flat is briefly strengthened with the addition of a B flat minor chord in the bass at the beginning of m. 48, the tritone conflict shifts to G and C sharp from m. 49 (see Figure 6.15):

Figure 6.15: mm. 49–51



Having inverted the upper and lower parts, the pattern of half diminished chords is propelled from a G minor chord in m. 49 to a C sharp minor chord in m. 50. This reference to the home key of the Tale is by no means a return of any kind. Instead it has been encountered as an ephemeral byproduct at the height of chaos. It is thus superseded by the G minor tonality in m. 51. Although the G minor has been approached from a tritone clash with C sharp minor, it is

further harmonically justified as the answer to previously discussed dominants calling for G. (Mm. 27 and 29, followed by the larger scale spelling of diminished chord F sharp, A, C, E flat in mm. 35 to 42)

One must acknowledge that the development of material and harmonic exploration typical of a traditional development section have already been occurring as far back as Theme 2. It is indeed typical of Medtner's second theme groups to contain ample motivic development and harmonically explorative tendencies, while it is also typical of his Tales to elide the traditional boundaries between sections. Hence we will refer to m. 51 (see Figure 6.16) as the beginning of the development section for reasons of expedience, while bearing in mind the obvious textural difference and vital importance in the tonal emphasis at this point. The transition theme is reintroduced here with its initial implication of octatonicism:

Figure 6.16: mm. 51–57

Figure 6.16 shows musical notation for measures 51 through 57. Measure 51 is a piano introduction. Measures 52-54 are marked *diminuendo* and *p tenebroso e minaccioso*. Measure 55 is marked *pp* and *half dim. 7th root = E*. Measure 56 is marked *half dim. 7th root = C#* and *poco crescendo*. Measure 57 is marked *poco crescendo*.

One notices that by means of utilizing the octatonic scale, the phrase continues to traverse from G minor in m. 53 to the same half diminished seventh chord with root C sharp in m. 54 and half diminished seventh chord with root E in m. 56, as had been repeated obsessively in mm. 43 to 48. The restatement of the transition theme has aligned itself with the previously heard clash of half diminished seventh chords and its innate tritone conflict. Turbulence is increased in the left hand passagework, which now moves upwards and downwards (as opposed to simply downwards in its original appearance). By comparison with its first appearance in mm. 15–26, the transition theme is rendered more tempestuous and unstable by means of added chromatic scales in the bass part and the above-mentioned adoption of a different harmonic substructure.

There is the resulting impression of a larger storm in the making. In mm. 57 to 58 the chromatic undulation of the left hand is adopted by the melody in the right hand to usher in a volatile recurrence of Theme 2 in m. 59 (see Figure 6.17):

Figure 6.17: mm. 58–60



Once again, similar to the transition theme, this appearance of Theme 2 is destabilized by the pervading chromatic harmony. After a repetition one octave higher of the phrase from mm. 61 and 62, there is a chromatic ascent towards G sharp as the dominant of the home key (see Figure 6.18):

Figure 6.18: chordal analysis in mm. 63–66

Figure 6.18 provides a chordal analysis for measures 63–66. The score is divided into two systems: measures 63–64 and 65–66. Red boxes highlight specific chords and their functions.

Measure 63:

- V7 root = C
- Aug 6th V/D
- V64 in G min
- V7/Aflat
- Aug 6th in B flat V/F min
- V64 in B flat min
- Fsharp min 7th
- Aug 6th G sharp V/G sharp
- Aug 6th V/G sharp

Measure 64:

- Aug 6th V/G sharp
- (G sharp half dim 7th B) V/B
- (half dim 7th) V/D
- Aug 6th D (half dim 7th) V/F
- Aug 6th F (half dim 7th) V/G sharp

Measure 65:

- Aug 6th V/G sharp
- (G sharp half dim 7th B) V/B
- (half dim 7th) V/D
- Aug 6th D (half dim 7th) V/F
- Aug 6th F (half dim 7th) V/G sharp

Measure 66:

- Aug 6th V/G sharp

The score includes performance markings: *p* (piano) at the start of measure 63, *molto crescendo* at the start of measure 65, and *ed agitato* in measure 65. The key signature changes from two flats to two sharps between measures 65 and 66.

As shown in the harmonic labeling above in Figure 6.18, the entire passage from m. 59 to m. 66 is effectively keyless as it spins out a passage of constantly shifting chromatic harmony akin to that of Wagner. The chromatic blurring of harmonic direction is further strengthened by the overlap of melody notes against a triplet rhythm – thus what we hear as four beats per measure is divided up with a faster harmonic rhythm with chords shifting every two triplet eighth notes. Inside of this continuous harmonic fluctuation, groupings of progressions have been indicated by rectangles to highlight Medtner's escalating incorporation of augmented sixth chords to lead the movement to each following harmonic destination. Of particular significance in this progression, is the enharmonic transformation of G natural, as found in the resolution to the first augmented 6th progression in m. 63, to F double sharp at the end of m. 64 as part of another augmented 6th chord, which itself needs to resolve to G sharp. This same augmented sixth chord is continuously apparent in the first beat of m. 65 and very distinctly at the end of m. 66. This is the chord that this search seemingly devoid of a tonal center has awaited, so as to find the dominant G sharp and return to the tonic. At the background level of harmonic movement, we can observe that the tritone tension between C sharp and G natural in mm. 49 to 51, is brought back via an enharmonic transformation of function – we may see mm. 59 to 66 as a prolongation of the previously attained dominance of G minor. Consequently, on the path to reasserting the dominance of C sharp, the G natural altered to F double sharp is to become a lower neighbor to the dominant G sharp.

This dominant is then secured with bass pedal notes under a combination of chromatic and diatonic passagework (see Figure 6.19):

Figure 6.19: mm. 67–68



The dominant pedal ominously descends to a bass trill while motive B is reintroduced over a six-four harmony at m. 69 (see Figure 6.20):

Figure 6.20: mm. 69–72

With the bass trill still continuing, Theme 1 returns in augmentation, with the exultantly climactic resolution to C sharp minor occurring in m. 75 at the intersection between motive A and B (see Figure 6.21):

Figure 6.21: mm. 73–78

The figure displays a musical score for measures 73 through 78. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass staff. Measure 73 is marked with a tempo change to *allargando* and a dynamic of *sf pesante*. A red box highlights the bass staff in measure 73, with a red arrow pointing to the text "Motive A in augmentation". Below the bass staff, a red line indicates the key signature change from C# minor to V64 (F# minor) and then to V7 (D minor). Measure 75 is marked with a tempo change to *a tempo* and a dynamic of *ff tempestoso*. A red arrow points to the treble staff in measure 75, labeled "Motive A". A green box highlights the bass staff in measure 75, labeled "Motive B". Measure 77 is marked with a tempo change to *tempestoso* and a dynamic of *ff*. A green box highlights the bass staff in measure 77, labeled "Motive B". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and fingerings.

The grandeur of this first theme is further magnified by the combination of motive A in the treble with motive B in the bass. In mm. 77 and 78 the juxtaposition of motive B with chromatically descending sixths spans directly from mm. 69 to 72 – it is as if the calamitous force of the storm as amassed in the subsequent section is carried over into a reaffirmation of the declamatory statement from the opening.

As part of a recapitulation, mm. 79 to 85 resemble exactly the material of Theme 1 from mm. 5 to 11. In its final measure however, Theme 1 takes a different turn to omit the transition and move directly towards Theme 2 (see Figure 6.22):

Figure 6.22: mm. 85–87

85

diminuendo

p Theme 2

tranquillo e cantabile (dolce)

p Transition theme

C sharp min: ii65 Vmin
(F sharp min: II V iv I pp V/iv* (V)

The initial approach to G sharp minor in the opening (m. 13) placed it in a point of elevated intensity, yet here by comparison the G sharp minor chord in m. 86 is approached via a diminuendo. It is as if the abundant sense of devastation and anguish, here momentarily gives way to a mood of sighing reminiscences. It is in this spirit that Theme 2 is played out in a quite tenderly understated manner as compared with its first appearance. The disappearance of the transition is explained by its surreptitious insertion into Theme 2, where it plays as a countermelody in the bass (see Figure 6.23). The Theme 2 area now adopts a climate of bittersweet recollections where encircling winds have been reduced to a gentle breeze:

Figure 6.23: mm. 87–94

The musical score for measures 87–94 is presented in four systems. The key signature is C# minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#). The tempo/mood is marked *tranquillo e cantabile (dolce)*.

- Measure 87:** Features **Theme 2** in the treble clef and a **Transition theme** in the bass clef. The bass line includes fingerings (2, 4, 3, 1, 3, 1, 5) and dynamic markings *pp* and *pp*. Chord symbols *iv* and *V/iv* are indicated below the bass staff.
- Measure 88:** Continues the themes. Chord symbols *V7/IV*, *iv*, and *V43/IV* are shown. The bass line has a *pp* marking.
- Measure 91:** Shows further development. Chord symbols *VI*, *V64*, *V9/III*, *iv*, and *(7)* are present. A red arrow points from the *V9/III* chord to the *iv* chord.
- Measure 94:** The final measure of the excerpt, marked *diminuendo*. Chord symbols *iv(7)* and *V6* are indicated.

The constantly modulating nature of the theme allows for the overall feeling that we have not altogether modulated to F sharp minor, which can still be expressed as the subdominant in C sharp minor. Thus this amalgamation of Theme 2 and the transition theme can be analyzed from the perspective of the tonic. The abundant proclivity towards the relative major (E major) finally corresponds with the short-lived reference to it in Theme 1 (both mm. 8 and 82). In both this

section and Theme 1, one witnesses a typical Medtnerian approach of utilizing relative major and minor as two permutations of the same tonal semantic field. In other words, they are treated as if they were the same key. Consequently in the context of this Tale, the tragic drama of passages in C sharp minor inhabits the same space as poignantly nostalgic passages in E major. Hence this also lends credence to the idea that this second theme is recapitulated in the tonic when for a large part of its duration it stays closer to E major than C sharp minor. From m. 91, one observes the exchange of themes between right and left hand –the bass part adopts Theme 2, while the treble part plays a rhythmically altered version of the transition theme, which slows down by means of increasing note values – it is as if the dream-like reminiscence is fading together with the gentle breeze that had summoned it. Having arrived at the end of m. 94 on a weak dominant chord owing to its inverted position, there cannot yet be a strong enough resolution to the tonic that would be in balance with the tension of the rest of the Tale. M. 95 to the end therefore, constitute a Coda that serves to prolong this final push towards resolution. In this vain the quasi-Wagnerian chromaticism of mm. 58 to 66 returns once again to build tumultuous intensity towards the final climax of the Tale. Thus as shown again in the Figure 6.24 below, the indication of a key in this section is somewhat arbitrary as the harmony is in a constant state of flux – besides the entirely convenience-based designation of the starting point of F sharp minor in m. 95, the following labels have been constructed only in reference to where the immediately next expected location is in terms of harmony (i.e. V/B instead of V/chord symbol in relation to a specific key). After the combination of second theme and transition theme in mm. 87 to 94, it is the arrival of Theme 1 in the bass underneath the continuing transition theme that brings with it the harmonic palette of irresolution. Then from m. 99, it is Theme 2 that continues to build agitation towards the conclusive resolution.

Figure 6.24: mm. 95–102

The figure displays a musical score for measures 95 through 102. It consists of three systems, each with a piano (p) and bass (b) staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

- System 1 (mm. 95–96):** Labeled "Transition theme" in red. Measure 95 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bass staff has a "Theme 1" label in red with the analysis "(F sharp: V7 - V7/III V ii65)".
- System 2 (mm. 97–99):** Labeled "Transition theme" and "Theme 2" in red. Measure 97 includes the instruction *poco a poco crescendo*. Measure 98 includes *ed agitato*. The bass staff has a "Theme 1" label in red with the analysis "(half dim. 7th (altered) VI ii7 V43/VII natural B flat 64) (dim 7th [V/B] V7/B-----)".
- System 3 (mm. 100–102):** Labeled "Deceptive cadence in suspension" in red. Measure 100 includes the instruction *cresc.*. The bass staff has a "Deceptive cadence in suspension" label in red with the analysis "(G half dim. 7th (V/A or V/A 64) (B7) half dim. 7th V42/B (B7) (V/B or V/B 64) (C sharp 7) (V/F sharp))".

The deceptive cadence (V7/B–VI (G)) from m. 99 into 100 is of great structural importance. It is the repetition of deceptive cadences that spurs the overall passage of chromatic ascent towards the most dramatic cadence of the Coda in mm. 107 to 109. (See deceptive cadences in mm. 102 to 103, 105 to 106 and 107 to 109 in Figure 6.25)

Figure 6.25: mm. 103–110

The figure displays three systems of musical notation for piano, spanning measures 103 to 110. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

- System 1 (mm. 103–105):**
 - Measure 103: *p* (piano). *dolce subito, ma sempre crescendo ed appassionato*. **Deceptive cadence in suspension**. Chords: (V9/G), dim 7th (V/E), E9 (V9/A).
 - Measure 104: Continuation of the melodic line.
 - Measure 105: Continuation of the melodic line.
- System 2 (mm. 106–107):**
 - Measure 106: **Deceptive cadence in suspension**. Chords: (dim. 7th (V/F sharp)), F sharp 9 (V/B).
 - Measure 107: *f risonante* (forte resonant). **Theme 1** begins. Chord: E9 (V9/A).
- System 3 (mm. 108–110):**
 - Measure 108: Continuation of the melodic line.
 - Measure 109: *molto crescendo*. **Deceptive cadence (V-IV6)**. Chords: (E6), V/C sharp altered).
 - Measure 110: Continuation of the melodic line.

This most intense of deceptive cadences is played out over the last utterance of Theme 1 in its original register. It is however a chord V–IV6 deceptive cadence as opposed to the last three deceptive cadences in mm. 100, 103 and 106, which were V–VI. The V–IV6, which in a sense functions as a V–VI (6–5 suspension) plays out more dramatically with its suspended E natural – having embedded itself inside the E minor chord and the following G sharp dominant seventh in

m. 110, the E natural builds further tension by anticipating its resolution in C sharp minor where it continues as the third degree of the chord. The chromatic ascent in the bass to G natural, has reenacted the same motion to F double sharp in mm. 63 to 66. Instead of F double sharp forming part of an augmented sixth chord which resolved to a chord with G sharp as the root (V 64) in m. 66, a G natural in m. 109 enables the above-mentioned anticipation of E natural by means of choosing a V–IV6 deceptive cadence. Once again the chromatic ascent was bolstered by augmented sixth chord progressions in the former passage (mm. 63–66), and by deceptive cadences in the latter passage. Furthermore one can observe how the expectation of this usage of deceptive cadences has been prepared by the sequence of deceptive cadences in mm. 35 to 42.

With the resolution in C sharp minor we have another contrapuntal rendition of Theme 1 played chromatically in the bass and diatonically in the treble (see Figure 6.26):

Figure 6.26: mm. 111–113



From m. 115 two chromatic lines span out in contrary motion stemming from the chromaticized rendition of Theme 1 (see Figure 6.27). The chromatic rendition of motive B continues in the bass part as if to evoke an image of Lear's speech becoming one with the storm:

Figure 6.27: mm. 114–116



When in m. 119, the summit of this storm-like chromatic passage in contrary motion is reached on octave C sharps on either side of the piano, we hear the most jaggedly disjunct chord progression of the entire work (see Figure 6.28):

Figure 6.28: mm. 117–122

Annotations in red:

- half dim 7th root = Fx
- half dim 7th root = E
- half dim 7th root = A sharp
- half dim 7th root = D sharp
- half dim 7th root = C sharp

Once again the chord symbols will demonstrate that none of these half diminished chords on their own logically lead to the C sharp minor chords that follow them except for the last chord – D sharp, F sharp, A, C sharp in root position. It is as if there is a battle of dominance between the C sharp minor representing Lear's woeful proclamation of fate and the disjunct half diminished chords enacting his continued struggle to believe that this fate could be otherwise. The crushing

answer to this ragged series of chords in the D sharp half diminished seventh chord has also been prepared in the listener's subconscious – it is the first such chord in the Tale appearing simply as the natural chord on the second degree of the C sharp minor scale in mm. 8, 10 and 12. In m. 8 it resolved to the relative major in a VII7–I progression (see Figure 6.29):

Figure 6.29: mm. 7–8



In mm. 10 and 12 it resolved to G sharp minor in a half diminished seventh with 5th degree root–I progression. (This is extracted from the more traditional II–V–I progression, whereby chord II is naturally a half diminished chord in the minor) Yet here at the end it is used in a II7–I progression – a typically Russian-sounding progression often used by Medtner. Hence he uses the same chord repeatedly with shifting function alongside a shifting state of emotion. Table 6.1 summarizes the key points of the analysis:

Table 6.1: Form Chart

Exposition		Notes
1 st theme	Mm. 1–12	C sharp minor – motion to relative major (two uses of half diminished seventh chord with root D sharp – towards relative major, then towards G sharp) Theme 1 is founded on a descending minor seventh chord which gives rise to motivic subdivisions based on the interval of a third.
Transition	Mm. 13–26	The transition theme is built out of motive C of the Theme 1 area – based on the interval of a third. mm. 13 to 22: G sharp minor (Phrygian), II, V, I progression to F sharp minor–Transition theme morphs into the Theme 2 by omitting one stepwise note so as to

		<p>leave a skip of a third, followed by another II, V, I progression into E major.</p> <p>mm. 23 to 26: Transition theme in B major (octatonic), II, V, I progression to A minor of Theme 2.</p>
2 nd theme	Mm. 27–50	<p>A minor for 4 measures with an unanswered secondary dominant implying resolution to G.</p> <p>mm. 31 to 34: C-G fifth pedal in bass.</p> <p>mm. 35 to 42: octatonic bass ascent with string of deceptive cadences V–II43 (half diminished). Octatonic bass line extracted from melodic line in transition.</p> <p>mm. 43 to 48: builds E to B flat tritone tension, followed by C sharp to G tritone tension in m. 49–50.</p>
Development	Mm. 51–74	<p>G minor as answer to both the tritone conflict between G and C sharp, and the unanswered secondary dominant to G at the beginning of Theme 2.</p> <p>mm. 51 to 58: Transition theme in octatonic at first.</p> <p>mm. 59 to 66: Theme 2 without any clear key – chromatic ascent via augmented 6th chords. Final bass destination = F double sharp (enharmonic transformation of G) which functions as lower neighbor to dominant – the result of prolongation of G from the beginning of the development section.</p> <p>mm. 67–74: V64 -53–I with dominant pedal. Theme 1 carried over into recapitulation.</p>
Recapitulation		
1 st theme	Mm. 75–86	<p>C sharp minor – an exact reiteration of exposition from mm. 79 to 85.</p> <p>mm. 86: Attenuated G sharp minor harmony so as to function as II of II, V, I progression to F sharp minor in second theme.</p>
2 nd theme + transition	Mm. 87–94	<p>Transition section omitted, while instead transition theme is weaved into a contrapuntal passage with Theme 2. Although the section seemingly begins in F sharp minor, this appears to function more as IV to C sharp minor and II to</p>

		E major – hence the passage can be seen as existing in the area of the tonic.
Coda	Mm. 95–122	<p>mm. 95 to 98: The return of harmony with unclear tonal center Theme 1 + transition theme in counterpoint.</p> <p>mm. 99 to 110: Melodic liquidation of Theme 2. Chromatic ascent as in development, but this time dominated by deceptive V–VI cadences. With arrival of Theme 1 on final deceptive cadence V–IV6, (extended out of deceptive cadences in Theme 2 area of exposition) there is a resolution to C sharp minor.</p> <p>m. 111: Continuation of Theme 1 in two-part counterpoint (diatonic + chromatic) followed by merely chromatic.</p> <p>m. 119 to end: Final chords – battle between half diminished seventh chords and C sharp minor chords. Final half diminished seventh with root D sharp resolves to C sharp minor = also the same half diminished seventh chord as introduced in Theme 1.</p>

Both the development section and coda contain areas of broad chromaticism particular to this Tale. There is hardly any another Tale in which a tonal center can appear abandoned for such durations. Yet this abandonment and resulting feeling of chaos are only an illusion of the foreground. Passages of chromatic ascent are orchestrated precisely by augmented sixth chords in the development and deceptive cadences in the coda. Furthermore there is meticulousness in timing from the point of relinquishing a clear tonal center to the moment at which it is reestablished. Both densely chromatic passages ultimately function to prolong the Tale's vital structural underpinning of the lower neighbor G to the dominant G sharp. This use of chromaticism perfectly echoes the composer's own words on the subject:

Chromaticism, which developed later, causing a deviation from the mode, is justified in so far as it surrounds the mode and gravitates towards it in the same manner as the other notes of the mode gravitate towards the tonic. Chromaticism, as an encirclement of the diatonic mode, is also one of the fundamental senses of the musical language. But a chromaticism that has detached itself from the mode turns into a swamp that cannot serve as a foundation for any musical construction.³³

In the context of this Tale, and beyond the general harmonic function of intensifying the tonic, the injection of this broad chromaticism seemingly evokes the meandering spirit and the weariness of the soul. For all the tragic definitiveness presented in sections with the home key of C sharp minor, its repeated juxtaposition with these sections conjuring such conflict and disorder, brings to mind Lear's visceral struggle to accept a fate vastly different from what he had envisioned. There is conflict between these two fates, as well as between harsh acceptance and an appeal to the heavens for things to be another way. It is in this vein that one might be inclined to conclude that the constant fluctuating tendency of tonality particular to this Tale as found in the second theme groups, put together with the chromaticism as found in the development and coda, align themselves specifically with the subject matter of the Tale.

To dwell on one further anomaly in the context of sonata form, we have observed how the transition theme is storm-like in essence when compared with the first or second themes. It is this theme that is omitted in the recapitulation, only to be combined with Theme 2 into a

³³ Medtner, "Part 1, Chapter 1, An Approximate Scheme of the Fundamental Senses of the Musical Language," in *The Muse and the Fashion*. 24.

bittersweet melodic texture. Speaking in terms of narrative, it is as if the storm represented by the transition theme and Lear's declamatory statement as represented by Theme 1, are more disjunct at the outset. By the recapitulation however, the storm has in effect been internalized in the consciousness and memories of the protagonist. The systematic alignment of previously discordant entities seemingly symbolizes a mood of sorrowful resignation. Finally one may perceive the ebb and flow of motivic and harmonic intensity in this Tale as designed to correspond with varying states of tension between Lear and the storm, dreams and inescapable destiny.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The analyses of four contrasting Tales allow us to ponder closely questions of form and narrative. In previous scholarship on the subject, strained efforts to find musical elements common to all Tales as a means of generalization have often resulted in barring one's path to understanding the true depth of each work: "Most of the fairy tales are written in ternary form, sometimes with traits of the sonata form, but some pieces are written in rondo and sonata form."³⁴ Quite a number of dissertations fail to go much further than shallow observational description as epitomized by sentences like this, which present an over-generalization providing almost no insight into the music itself.

In searching for something as broad as the essence of the composer's individuality, one must naturally probe the individual intentions within each work. Although one would be hard-pressed to find any two Tales alike amongst the thirty-eight, this cross-selection thus represents some of the most distinctly contrasting of the set. In broad terms, we may observe that every example demonstrates a musical entity tightly interwoven in terms of thematic unity, with the seamless aligning of melody, harmony, cadences, key structure and form. Yet the true gestalt of the work comes to light only when observing how these elements serve the particular narrative of each Tale. Having selected works that would be referred to as Tales or Fairytales, we have presupposed that some form of extra-musical narrative must play a significant part in the resulting entirety of musical expression. To elaborate on this process, we must first return to Medtner's own thoughts on narrative:

³⁴ Chernaya-Oh, 17.

The subject matter is a subject (servant) both of the contents and of the form. As a subject it has a right to citizenship in music and in any art. But woe if the subject matter begins to dictate its conditions, where its business is only to be silent, i.e. be absent. Submit it must always. No matter how beautiful the subject matter in itself, any aspiration on its part to be treated as contents or as form, makes the work of art valueless.³⁵

The analyses do indeed confirm a compositional approach at harmony with the above-described philosophy – not only that each work, however suggestive of extra-musical ideas or subject matter, is conceived as music for the sake of music, but furthermore that the music’s own inner narrative (quite separate from any notion of an outside “story” or series of events) navigates its journey based on the logic of its own contents (pure musical expression) and senses. But this does not negate the presence of subject matter. As previously hypothesized, it is in a seamless negotiation between inner and outer narrative that the work is allowed to reach its final qualities of innate expressivity. Rather than search for some all-encompassing rule as to how subject matter can be incorporated into every work, it is necessary to approach the problem from the other end of the creative spectrum – in essence the music must first make sense in its own terms. The subject matter can therefore be allowed visible prominence in multiple dimensions of composition so long as the music follows a logical path out of the nature of its contents to accommodate it. This is why one cannot readily find disruptions or anomalies in this creative path for the purposes of narrative, as the nature of the accommodation must be logical. Hence

³⁵ Medtner, “Part 2, Chapter 10, Contents and Subject Matter,” *The Muse and the Fashion*, 123.

narrative will overlap perfectly with the contents of the work without any such disruption being necessary to achieve this symbiotic relationship. It would follow that had such a disruption been contemplated at an earlier stage in the work's genesis, its form would have been reset to include the disruption as its inevitable component by back-formation. Thus as listeners we will only encounter Medtner's work functioning as absolute music that coincides with extra-musical suggestion. It is necessary to note that the subordinate place subject matter holds in the creative process in relation to contents, need not result in reduction of its expressive role within the completed work. In accepting that subject matter in the context of music can only be expressed in the language of musical contents, one can arrive at the logical conclusion that a prioritization of coherence in contents maximizes the expressivity of subject matter.

Each studied example serves to illuminate the process by which the theme takes the shape of melody, which contains within it characteristics of modality, harmony, and cadences, which correlate with the key structure and ultimately architectonic form of the work in its entirety. Furthermore subject matter particular to each work can be expressed through a sum-total of all above-mentioned elements of musical language. Each moment in which a clearer indication of extra-musical matter arises can thus be traced back through tightly interwoven logic stemming from the initial theme.

While the Tale, Op. 26, No. 3 comprises musical events credibly suggestive of extra-musical matter such as the jubilant waltz and the quotation of the *Dies Irae*, the analysis explicitly demonstrates Medtner's economy of motivic material. We can be witness to how each and every new-sounding melody or fragment of melody develops with the utmost fluency out of the opening phrase of the piece. In terms of the connection between melody and harmony, we can observe the emphasis on two different intervals in the first phrase – a minor second between

C and D flat, and a fourth between A flat and D flat. The perfect fourths link directly to the key structure of the wandering middle section (A flat–E flat–B flat minor–F). What comes across as fluid and scattered as a stream of consciousness is logically underpinned by a connection of perfect fourths derived from the opening melody. The minor second first gives rise to the Neapolitan harmony with flattened second degree under the last phrase of the first section, followed by the crucial reprisal of the opening theme in the “wrong key” a half-step above the original key. This musical connotation of being turbulently altered by a heightened state of dream-like recollection is also built out of a chromatic disruption augured by the previously underscored flattened second degree.

Tale, Op. 51, No. 2 similarly gives the impression of a caricature of a pastoral dance. Yet the subtle use of modes and textural variation within a relatively static key structure elevates the dance to a continuously wavering dream-like sequence. The analysis also explores the intricate dual role of modality in facilitating key structure while contributing immediate shifts of affect.

In the Op. 34, No. 3 Tale (Forest Spirit), the two “wrong notes” embedded in the lugubrious left hand *Dies Irae*-like melody hint at the harmony of G sharp minor and C sharp minor respectively – these are to become the main key areas to which the Tale travels from its tonic of A minor. The G sharp minor section provides a fleetingly mysterious and lyrical segment as a first contrast to the opening, while the C sharp minor key area encapsulates a developmental section of the utmost contrapuntal density and feverish intensity before returning to a restatement of the opening. Another highly important feature was its chain of falling bass fifths only finding its predestined sense of direction in its second appearance when it is interrupted by a tritone instead of a fifth. Once again this was prepared by the “wrong note” in the left hand melody of the opening, which spells a tritone in relation to the tonic. The

unpredictable, cantankerous and erratic character of this Tale thus spans from this unusual form with its disjunct principle key areas – this form is inextricably linked with harmony, which is inextricably linked with the opening melody.

Finally Op. 35, No. 4 (Lear) juxtaposes a powerful statement of Lear's despair and defiance with an evocation of constant howling winds. Broad passages of rich chromaticism are held between often fleetingly stable harmonic areas. In a work in C sharp minor, the intense dissonance of G natural as a primary point of harmonic arrival in the middle section paves the way towards its later enharmonic transformation to F double-sharp as the lower neighbor to the dominant. The grand canvas of pathos rests on this harmonic underpinning, whereby the prolongation of motion from the subdominant sharp to dominant is progressively intensified throughout the Tale.

One must note that if, in every case studied here, it is tempting to assign labels of form, a great deal of nuance would be lost in the tendency for the discussion of form to conclude at the point of assigning such labels. Upon initial examination one will certainly notice that some of the Tales more markedly follow a format resembling classical prototypes such as sonata form, while others have strayed far beyond any traditional precursor. Upon further examination, one must acknowledge that the true nature of form necessitates many innate interconnections, much illuminated through probing the relationship between contents and subject matter. This is not to say that labels are worthless as tools to better one's understanding, but they can only present the first step from which all other deeper questions need to be posed. The label can sometimes present a link to the genesis of a specific composition. Hence when dealing with a composer who employed such strikingly delineated sonata form in all his piano sonatas, it is of interest to observe how subject matter may in contrast have compelled Medtner to dispense with such

delineation in his Tales. Or put another way, his enabling of musical contents to amass into forms with less clear delineation thus resulted in a different expression of subject matter. Yet the remnant of traditional form can still be perceived. Hence Tale, Op. 35, No. 4 (Lear) displays such clear use of sonata form, that the above analysis was conducted using terminology specific to the form. Yet many details from the instability of the second theme group to the constantly developing nature of material in the exposition show a form far more complex than the label on its own implies. In contrast, Tale, Op. 34, No. 3 (Forest Spirit) also appears linked at some genetic level to sonata form, yet features such as its irregular key structure, the omission of Theme 2 in the “recapitulation” render it a new individual form distinct from its heritage. Hence sonata form terminology was not used in the main body of the analysis. Although interest has therefore been taken in the proximity of these individual forms to their precursors, the outcome of closer analysis has been to evaluate the true individuality of form in each case as linked with subject matter. The dominance of subject matter is thus balanced by the perfect unity of contents – while in this way subject matter remains a subordinate force within the laws of musical creation, it is not consequently a subordinate part of the resulting musical expression and identity as it has been converted into the language of contents.

This intricate conversion guarded precisely for the purpose of preserving the vital sanctity of music gives rise to a larger point. Medtner railed against many modernist trends in music from an artistic standpoint perhaps not shared by many – that the composer’s responsibility to music as a whole and to the constantly growing history of music was more important than responsibility to his or her individual message. Moreover, it was true understanding of the evolution of music that would ultimately serve in illuminating the individuality of the composer:

For the contemporary majority the greatness of geniuses is measured by their revolutionism. This majority imagines that revolutionism lies in the destruction of the boundaries of art. In reality, however, geniuses appear to be revolutionary only because they have always possessed an infinitely greater insight into the deeper foundations of their art, than the majority. Penetrating to the very core of the fundamental senses and roots of their art, they thereby also acquired the capacity of a much wider development of it.³⁶

Subject matter that could erode the fundamental senses of music was to Medtner one of the many modernist disruptions to musical meaning and its historical genesis. Not only did he warn of the dangers of allowing subject matter the opportunity to dictate musical form and contents, but he emphasized how not all subject matter can aptly be converted into musical contents. This is to say that in Medtner's philosophy of creation, music can cease to be the high art expressing the inexpressible in words, when the wrong subject matter is forced upon it:

But there are also subjects that are so repulsive in themselves that their very presence (not to speak of their domination) renders the work of art valueless. . . .

However, there are certain subjects which in themselves have nothing repulsive, but which become so when used in art. For this reason music and poetry are particularly fastidious in their choice of subject matter. . . . The most respectable subject of a political

³⁶ Medtner, 108.

or scientific character may become a mere mockery when enclosed in the framework of a musical or poetic song.³⁷

As with many trends Medtner sought to repudiate, these particular warnings appear only too applicable towards many such contemporary compositions whose “ideas” seemingly supersede the music in its own terms, with little sense being absorbed from the music if not for the aid of extensive program notes. The routine insistence and enforcement by many music teachers of descriptions in words of musical expression, run counter to this notion that music expresses precisely what words fail to express. Implied in Medtner’s writing is that this ineffability was a central and imperative element of music safeguarded by prior generations of great composers only to be gradually eroded by future generations. In this manner he prophesized how the music of tomorrow would lose its direction, and ultimately its soul. It is thus for no less than our preservation of this expression of the inexpressible that Medtner left for all future generations the passionate entreaty that is *The Muse and Fashion*.

The over-simplification by means of categorizing form largely mirrors the process by which Medtner’s overall approach to composition was often crudely reduced to the one word of “classicism.” In an era in which the tide of musical interest had risen for Debussy, Bartok, Stravinsky and Schoenberg, the burning individuality of a composer concealed behind the label of classicism would have gone unnoticed to many a half-hearted listener. An article in the Musical Times by Leonid Sabaneev from 1928 speaks to this very point:

³⁷ Medtner, 123–124

I want to say a few words concerning one whose great and noble work is unjustly and strangely allowed to remain in obscurity. This composer, who began more than brilliantly, was at one time a candidate for the hegemony of Russian music in alternation with Scriabin, and then was somehow flung violently from those heights – not by the qualities of his talent, but, if I may thus express it, by the musical taste of the world dating from the period of the war. That period has proved to be really fatal for music: the impetuosity characteristic of our age has permeated musical creation and infected it with an insatiable desire for originality, for unlikeness to the past. Music and composition have become a sport, at which betting takes place as to who will write the most extraordinary stuff, as to who will subvert, en passant, most of the old laws of the musical profession. As it is usually not difficult to upset laws in music, the tempo of the achievements has become so rapid that no flying records can equal it. And there is nothing surprising in the fact that in the background of this mad chase into which the sphere of musico-creative work has been converted, a few big and deeply sincere musicians – who have been perplexed observers of what was going on, and who have had no desire to sacrifice their work to the headlong rush which is now the mode – have seemed amazingly old-fashioned and remote. The composer to whom I refer is Nikolai Medtner, the friend and companion of Rachmaninov, who likewise repudiated modernism.³⁸

³⁸ Leonid Sabaneev, "Nikolai Medtner," *The Musical Times* 69/1021, trans. S. W. Pring (March 1, 1928): 209.

Hand in hand with critics' growing indifference to the value of classicism was a refusal to infer from it meaning or originality. This attitude is perfectly apparent in the following damning review of a Medtner recital in 1913:

...True, Medtner's "identity" is defined more by the exclusiveness (to our way of thinking) of the classical *school* to which he belongs than by the originality and characteristic quality of his artistic *personality* in the proper sense of the word....

Medtner's music is a stony, sterile desert, in which by the labours of a remarkably clever and richly gifted architect a magnificent temple is erected – it is precisely with a temple that one feels like comparing Medtner's sonatas, so serious and reverential is the attitude to art felt in them – but one without icons or an altar. And there are no worshippers in this temple because all around is desert, sand and stone, and not a blade of living grass.³⁹

In no uncertain terms, the critic attributes the composer's identity more towards his adherence to classicism than to any originality in his artistic personality. In speaking of "artistic isolation" of Medtner's music, such writers seemingly contribute to the artistic isolation by means of limiting the reader's comprehension inside the words "classical school." Through their categorization and ultimate minimization of works of art, such critics immediately make themselves blind to all the above-analyzed intricacies of musical expression particular to Medtner. On the other hand, one sentence from this otherwise hostile review stands out prophetically: "...a composer occupying

³⁹ Vyacheslav G. Karatygin, "Tretiy kamerniy kontsert Ziloti," *Rech*, January 23 (1913), quoted in Martyn, 98-99. Italicized words by Karatygin.

an absolutely isolated position risks being entirely unnoticed for a long time...’’⁴⁰ On this much, both his critics and fans would have agreed:

Medtner’s genius, profound and meditative, essentially philosophical, deeply romantic in its trend, was always markedly behind the times. Had he appeared in the days of Schumann, or even of Brahms, this great and serious artist would undoubtedly have become a world composer. But the present has too little contact with such temperaments as his; it lives on the showy and sensational, and in Medtner’s work there is nothing of either. . . . His merits have always been entirely beyond the limits of the crude receptive faculty of the contemporary public and critic, and even of composers and musicians. He and his work belong to another sphere, to another age, when the perceptions were more subtle and the tastes more penetrating; when criticism was concerned with mastery and not merely with sensations.⁴¹

One may suppose that Medtner’s lack of success said less about his music than about the rapidly altering perception of musical value in the 20th century. Sabaneev continued to describe what must happen for such a hidden musical giant to be revealed for his true worth:

Medtner is estranged and isolated, not by deafness, but by a complete rupture with the contemporary musical outlook. And, like old Beethoven, he creates without regard to his surroundings, even in spite of them, evidently believing that the hour will come, the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Sabaneev, 209-210.

modern “gods” will be forgotten, and music will again worship at its old fountain-head.

Then his music may be resurrected and will find the way to comprehension.⁴²

Expressed here is the idea that only history can chisel away at the public’s consciousness until the true value of great music becomes brightly clear for all. More than 60 years after Medtner’s death, we live in a time arguably less shackled by restrictive musical affiliations. Thus we hold a golden opportunity to consider the value of all art free of the polarizing camps of “conservativism” and “modernism.” As scholarship and general interest in Medtner’s music has increased over the last two decades, it is my hope that the musical world at large may dispense with the introductions and antediluvian questions of his music’s merit, in favor of deep and honest probing. In a sea of modernism, Medtner made a case for classicism – not an archaically ossified classicism some would have shortsightedly attributed to his music; but rather, a case for continually rejuvenating individuality and inspiration that followed the path of previous classical masters. It is in this era, that we may endeavor to appraise genuinely and unrestrictedly the true originality and mastery of a composer whose place among the greats has been long overdue.

⁴² Ibid., 210.

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