



NARRATIVE AND MYTH IN BARTÓK'S SIXTH STRING QUARTET:  
A STUDY IN THE POETICS OF SPACE AND THE GROTESQUE

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Moores School of Music

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Music

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By

Eve Ruotsinoja

December, 2013



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## **ABSTRACT**

Bartók's Sixth String Quartet is known for its return to more conservative tonal, formal, and generic idioms. Setting it apart, however, is the pervasive role of the ritornello that precedes each movement and increases in size with each statement. Likewise, commonly acknowledged is the presence of the grotesque in the Quartet, though little attention has been given to its placement and salience in relation to the Quartet's existing formal properties, such as the ritornello and the conventional sonata and ternary forms. In this study, I employ the aesthetics of the grotesque as an interpretive window through which to view the interaction of the ritornello with the Quartet as a whole. I argue that the grotesque in Bartók's Sixth Quartet performs a mediating role between the opposition of exterior and interior musical spaces. The prevailing narrative event involves the transgression of exterior upon interior and the dissolution of formal boundaries.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **Chapter 1: Bartók's Sixth String Quartet – Historiographical and Methodological Contexts**

The most distinctive feature of Bartók's Sixth String Quartet (1939) is the slow ritornello, marked "Mesto," that opens each of the work's four movements. During the course of the work, the ritornello seems to acquire a character-like agency, which many scholars have noted governs the work.<sup>1</sup> The ritornello's most striking characteristic is its growth. Preceding the musical forms of the first three movements, it increases in both length and textural complexity, beginning the first movement as a single monologue in the viola, increasing to two parts to open the second movement,<sup>2</sup> and three parts in the third. The fourth movement retains this pattern of growth; however, rather than preceding a musical form, the ritornello encompasses the musical material of the movement and becomes the dominate theme rather than the patterned interlude.

In describing the Mesto, commentators often use language involving physical disease or emotional distress. David Schneider refers to the Mesto spreading cancerously over the work.<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Gillies observes that the Mesto seems to "infect" and eventually "consume"

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Tibor Tallián states that the "growth of the ritornello ... is the main event of the work." Likewise, Malcolm Gillies states that the work is "dominated from start to finish by [Bartók's] ritornello theme." Tibor Tallián, *Béla Bartók: The Man and His Work*, rev. trans. Paul Merrick (Budapest: Corvina, 1981), 207. Malcolm Gillies, "Violin Duos and Late String Quartets," in *The Bartók Companion*, ed. Malcolm Gillies (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1994), 298.

<sup>2</sup> The counterpoint in the first violin in the second ritornello is tripled at the octave with veiled tremolos in the second violin and viola.

<sup>3</sup> David E. Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary, and the Renewal of Tradition: Case Studies in the Intersection of Modernity and Nationality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 218.

the entire quartet.<sup>4</sup> By extension, the work as a whole suggests a quality that Halsey Stevens describes as “encompassing gloom,”<sup>5</sup> and that both Stephen Walsh and Gillies read as “resignation.”<sup>6</sup>

In the larger context of Bartók’s string quartets, many analysts have construed that the Sixth reflects the personal and political circumstances surrounding Bartók during the fall of 1939. George Perle asserts that during the five years that separate Bartók’s Fifth and Sixth String Quartets (1934-1939), the Sixth was “the only musical record of his spiritual anguish during this period.”<sup>7</sup> In referencing Kodály’s assessment of Bartók’s First and Second String Quartets, Tibor Tallián states that the Sixth is also a “single spiritual process,” but not the “return to life” of the First Quartet.<sup>8</sup> György Kroő goes so far as to imply that the Mesto is Bartók’s voice.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gillies, 297.

<sup>5</sup> Halsey Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 201.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Bartók Chamber Music*, BBC Music Guides (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1982), 87. Gillies, 297.

<sup>7</sup> George Perle, “The String Quartets of Béla Bartók,” in *A Musical Offering: Essays in Honor of Martin Bernstein*, ed. Edward H. Clinkscale and Claire Brook (New York: Pendragon Press, 1977), 208.

<sup>8</sup> Tallián, 207.

<sup>9</sup> György Kroő, *A Guide to Bartók* (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1974), 220.

The overwhelmingly bleak interpretation of the Sixth Quartet derives largely from the political context in Europe during the late thirties.<sup>10</sup> Bartók began composing the quartet in August 1939 while secluded in a Swiss chalet that was provided by the conductor Paul Sacher.<sup>11</sup> Bartók was able to draft much of the Sixth Quartet while in Switzerland, but upon hearing that Russia and Germany had signed a non-aggression treaty, he immediately returned to Budapest, fearing that Hungary, also, would soon align itself with Germany.<sup>12</sup>

The likelihood of emigrating had been on Bartók's mind for over a year. He expressed in a letter to Madame Müller-Widman both his anti-Nazi sentiments and his anxiety over inevitable departure:

There is one thing I want to add, concerning what is at this moment ... the most terrible prospect. That is the imminent danger that Hungary will surrender to this regime of thieves and murderers. The only question is – when and how? And how I can then go on living in such a country ... I would feel it my duty to emigrate, so long as that were possible. But ... to have to earn my living in some foreign country ... would be immensely difficult and would cause me such distress of mind that I can hardly bear to think of it ... And then I have my mother here: shall I abandon her altogether in her last years? – No, I cannot do that! So much for Hungary, where, unfortunately, nearly all of our 'educated' Christians are adherents of the Nazi regime; I feel quite ashamed of coming from this class.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Suchoff describes the final movement (which had replaced an initial “tempo giusto” dance movement) as a sort of prophetic “mourning song for the murder of Europe.” See Suchoff, *Béla Bartók* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 138.

<sup>11</sup> Suchoff, 137. Sacher provided the chalet so that Bartók could compose a piece for his orchestra, what became the Divertimento for string orchestra.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 138. While in Budapest, Bartók completed the Sixth Quartet and revised the original format of the fourth movement during November 1939.

<sup>13</sup> Bartók to Mme Müller-Widman, April 13, 1938, in *Béla Bartók Letters*, ed. János Demény, rev. trans. Elisabeth West and Colin Mason (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 267.

The ill-health of Bartók's mother adds a further personal layer to the context in which the Sixth Quartet was conceived—she, in fact, died a few weeks after its completion,<sup>14</sup> and Bartók emigrated to New York with his wife shortly afterward in 1940.

The Sixth Quartet, among other compositions from the late thirties, is also viewed as an example of Bartók looking back to the Romanticism of his youth.<sup>15</sup> Summarizing the Quartet, Perle describes its “restoration of triadic tonal functions ... [its] rhythmic character, motivic patterns, and formal relationships” as “conservative.”<sup>16</sup> Compared especially to its three predecessors, the Sixth seems “surprisingly retrogressive.”<sup>17</sup> Despite its conservative tonal and formal character, the Quartet is certainly modern if not progressive in terms of its technical and expressive demands on the performers. Some of these demands include the presence of quarter-tones, prominent *pizzicato*, and increased tremolos,<sup>18</sup> all of which appear

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<sup>14</sup> Due to ill health, Bartók was unable to attend his mother's funeral. During the months immediately following his mother's death, Bartók underwent considerable regret. In a letter addressed to Mme Müller-Widman, Bartók lamented that “it is the self-reproaches that are most difficult to endure – all the many things I should have done differently to make my mother's life easier.” Bartók to Mme Müller-Widman, April 2, 1940, in *Béla Bartók Letters*, ed. János Demény, rev. trans. Elisabeth West and Colin Mason (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 281. For this reason, Stephen Walsh reads regret throughout the quartet, stating that it “pervades the *mesto* theme on each occurrence” (Walsh, 81).

<sup>15</sup> Gillies, 296; János Kárpáti, *Bartók's Chamber Music* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1994), 464; Perle, 208; Schneider, 236; Walsh, 82. The other neo-conservative compositions of this time would include the Violin Concerto (1938), *Contrasts*, and the *Divertimento*.

<sup>16</sup> Perle, 208.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Robin Stowell, “Extending the Technical and Expressive Frontiers,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*, ed. Robin Stowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 159, 163-64, 167.



predominantly in the inner movements where, Gillies observes, “the technical and stylistic individuality of the work is more expressed.”<sup>19</sup>

Corresponding with Gillies’s observation, Benjamin Suchoff locates a process of discovery regarding the role of the ritornello within these inner movements. Suchoff’s analysis of the Sixth Quartet’s manuscript sources shows that the ritornello’s role as a recurring introductory theme most likely emerged sometime during the composition of the second movement, Marcia, and before that of the third movement, Burletta. As Suchoff suggests:

What we can see from the sketch full score of the quartet is that Bartók began at the 'Vivace' (though it is not so marked), and on completion of that, went on immediately to the 'Marcia' (again not so marked) of the second movement, without introductory material. The third movement however is preceded in the sketch by its introduction, and it therefore seems likely that it was during the composition of the 'Marcia' that Bartók either first thought of the prefatory subject, or first had the idea of using it to introduce each movement.<sup>20</sup>

From this observation on the compositional process, together with the factors outlined in the preceding survey, Bartók scholars have concluded that the ritornello took on a life of its own and developed an emotional hold on the composer. Indeed, most of the interpretive energy throughout the analytical literature derives from and remains preoccupied with this discovery. It does so, perhaps, at the expense of the originating context of the ritornello, which I will argue indicates that the inner movements bear hermeneutic significance that is not necessarily biographically determined. In light of the fact that Suchoff locates the

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<sup>19</sup> Gillies, 296.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Suchoff, “Structure and Concept in Bartók’s Sixth Quartet,” *Tempo* New Series, no. 83 (Winter 1967-68): 5. László Somfai concurs with Suchoff’s analysis, stating that “it seems to follow that Bartók sketched the ritornelli to Movements I and II while he was working on ‘Marcia.’” He also clarifies that “originally the ritornello theme was not planned to play a role before Movement I.” See Somfai, *Béla Bartók: Composition, Concepts, and Autograph Sources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 109.

conception of the ritornello as a cyclical introductory motto somewhere during the Marcia and before the Burletta, I accordingly devote my study to the interaction between the ritornello and these inner movements. I do so, in part, by examining the salience of the grotesque in the Marcia and Burletta character pieces.

Though the presence of the grotesque is generally acknowledged in Bartók's Sixth Quartet, no study has employed the aesthetics of the grotesque as an interpretive window through which to view the interaction of the ritornello with the existing formal properties of the Quartet. The grotesque has previously assumed a hermeneutic role in Julie Brown's analysis of Bartók's Third String Quartet and, comparably, Amanda Bayley has highlighted the interpretive weight that expressive markings bear on his Fourth Quartet.<sup>21</sup> As Bayley suggests, expressive content and expressive markings in Bartók's string writing are crucial determinants in shaping musical form, comprising a structural component rather than a superficial one. However, due to the amorphous qualities of style and the limitations of Western notation, the "expressive" has proven itself elusive subject matter for traditional analytical techniques that emphasize motivic development, tonality, and processes embodied in conventional forms.

Brown's analysis of Bartók's Third Quartet is part of a larger study that seeks to account for Bartók's desire to synthesize Western art music with Hungarian nationalism in

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<sup>21</sup> See for example, Julie Brown's "The Third String Quartet as Grotesque" in her monograph *Bartók and the Grotesque: Studies in Modernity, the Body and Contradiction in Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 132-63; and Amanda Bayley, "Bartók's String Quartet No. 4/III: A New Interpretive Approach," *Music Analysis* 19, no. 3 (October 2000): 353-82.

terms of the grotesque “discursive world.”<sup>22</sup> Brown locates Bartók’s position as an inheritor of the nineteenth-century grotesque and his contextualized attitudes towards the body as a locus of meaning. My study builds from the historical framework that Brown establishes and retains the body as an interpretive anchor for the grotesque. However, rather than focusing on a nineteenth-century paradigm for the grotesque, which frequently sought a synthesis by conceiving of the grotesque as a type of ugliness in opposition to the beautiful, my analysis of the grotesque limits itself to a paradigm in which the *ludicrous* and *horrifying* are conflated and experienced through the deformation of the human body.<sup>23</sup>

In this paradigm, the grotesque is located in the concrete body. The structural composite of the ludicrous (or the sense that what is encountered is in some way impossible or absurd) and horrifying triggers both sensations by way of its opposition to normative embodied experience. This definition of the grotesque is espoused by Lee Byron Jennings in his literary study of the grotesque in post-Romantic German literature.<sup>24</sup> Jennings’s theory gravitates toward the concrete and is limited by a system of prototypes (e.g., the gargoyle, the dancing skeleton) and family resemblances. Generally, the ludicrous—which may appear as absurd, comical, or hilarious—is, or becomes, the same thing as the horrifying. For example, the gargoyle bears enough resemblance to the human form such that its comical sneer is also disturbing.

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<sup>22</sup> Brown, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Brown acknowledges this definition, but it is not always clear when she is applying it. For instance, in her analysis of the Third Quartet, her organizing paradigm, what she calls a “play between opposites,” at times simply entails a juxtaposition, or at other times, the ludicrous and horrifying materialize from different sources, but do not truly conflate.

<sup>24</sup> Lee Byron Jennings, *The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

The particular expressive state resulting from this conflation is that of ambivalence, an aesthetic response in which one is uncertain whether to laugh or be afraid. Because of the ambivalence that the grotesque provokes, I have also chosen to draw from Mikhail Bakhtin's study of the grotesque in the writings of Rabelais.<sup>25</sup> Though Bakhtin does not use the terminology of "the ludicrous and horrifying," he does locate the grotesque in the deformation of the human body and emphasizes the ambivalence that ensues from such deformation. While I have found Bakhtin to be a valuable source for identifying the grotesque, I hesitate to adopt his optimistic hermeneutic of "grotesque realism," in which the ambivalence of the grotesque symbolizes cosmic unity and regeneration between life and death, individual and community.<sup>26</sup>

While the presence of the grotesque in the Sixth Quartet may appear less pervasive than in Bartók's previous quartets, due to the compelling role of the Mesto and the return of traditional forms and tonal allusions, it does not necessarily follow that its role is any less meaningful. I propose that because the grotesque is not embedded in a modernist context, its presence is in fact more concentrated and more salient. This concentration positions the grotesque to interact with the Mesto as an entity and as an agent during its development in the Quartet. In order to explore the relationship between these two features I have chosen to

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<sup>25</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1984.

<sup>26</sup> Here I agree with Geoffrey Harpham's critique of Bakhtin when he states that the "grotesque is actually the small end of alienation, a sign that though dualism may be temporarily abolished, it has invaded the structure of thought itself." Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 72.

analyze the Quartet through a type of bifocal lens, combining theories of the grotesque with a “poetics of space.”

My reason for approaching the Quartet from a “poetics of space” is twofold. First, the cyclic replications of the Mesto recur primarily outside of the musical forms of the Quartet’s movements (i.e. sonata form and ternary form), suggesting that though the Mesto may be influencing the motivic content within the forms, as a “theme-actor,”<sup>27</sup> it is not an active participant in those formal processes.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, the language used to describe the Mesto suggests almost unanimously that it is an agent, by which I mean that it seems to possess some level of active capacity. This occurs in part due to the Mesto’s external “growth” and also due to Mesto-like “intrusions” that occur in the inner movements. Indeed, by the final movement of the Quartet, the Mesto has in some sense supplanted the movement, giving the impression that all formal boundaries have dissolved.

In order to account for this narrative, I set up an opposition between the external position of the Mesto and the interior musical forms, which contain sections that are stylistically grotesque and not-grotesque. I have chosen to adopt Robert Hatten’s term “entity” to describe the ritornello, which he defines as “any process, event, or structure that can be defined oppositionally as a unit.”<sup>29</sup> From this standpoint, the narrative role that the Mesto performs is grounded in its opposition to that which is internal; it is able to interact

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<sup>27</sup> Eero Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 106.

<sup>28</sup> The Mesto’s organic influence in terms of motivic and pitch content on the rest of the Quartet is discussed in detail in Kárpáti (459-92).

<sup>29</sup> Robert S. Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 289.

with other entities in the Quartet, such as “the grotesque” and “the conventional.” At the same time, the term “entity” does not rule out the possibility that the ritornello possesses anthropomorphic features, a protagonistic type of prominence, or levels of agency.

My second reason for choosing a poetics of space is that it corresponds well with the discourse of the grotesque, in that both approaches perceive their content through the embodied notions of sight, touch, and kinesthesia. Just as the grotesque mingles our embodied notions of center and periphery, so too the ritornello interacts with the musical forms so as to confirm and resist our perceptions of musical boundary and surface. Indeed, I will argue that the grotesque in Bartók’s Sixth Quartet performs a mediating role between the opposition of exterior ritornello and interior form.

Though I adapt the phrase “poetics of space” from Gaston Bachelard’s seminal work on the phenomenology of places, I use it in homage to his study.<sup>30</sup> In addition to Bachelard, I draw from the spiritual geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, whose study of space and place adopts an anthropological perspective. Bachelard’s focus is on our contact with intimate places, while Tuan distinguishes between “space,” as an experience defined by motion and freedom, and “place,” as that of pause or rest. Tuan observes that musical forms “generate a reassuring sense of orientation” and quotes Roberto Gerhard, who notes, “form in music means knowing at every moment exactly where one is.”<sup>31</sup>

I supplement my analysis by drawing from cognitive linguistics and applying George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s orientational and ontological metaphors. By using the “container

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<sup>30</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (1964; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977), 15.

metaphor” and applying it to the metaphor “musical forms are buildings” (i.e., we think of them as having a structure and a framework), I work from the position that musical forms are both containers, with their own concepts of center and periphery, as well as places of rest.<sup>32</sup> Bachelard, Tuan, and Lakoff and Johnson all hold in common a phenomenological outlook that is concerned with how our embodied selves interact with what surrounds us.

In keeping with Suchoff’s analysis of Bartók’s manuscript sources, I begin my discussion in chapter two with the inner character pieces, Marcia and Burletta. After providing a brief historical survey of the grotesque, I examine the ambiguities of the *verbunkos* topic and Bartók’s intertextual use of the idiom in its resurrected form in the late thirties. I posit that the *verbunkos* topic, as a historical phenomenon and as it was used throughout Bartók’s career, accumulates meaning to the extent that its ambivalence lends itself to a grotesque conceptual framework for the Marcia. The topical associations with drunkenness and recruiting that the *verbunkos* carries also provide portals into the Marcia’s grotesque themes of violence, humor, and “crowding.” I then identify the grotesque features of the Marcia and examine how a poetics of space helps to account for our experience of the grotesque through the phenomenon of crowding. I end my discussion of the grotesque with the Burletta movement and draw from Bakhtin’s notion of the grotesque body as a means of understanding the Burletta’s hyperbolic gestures and animalistic timbre.

Chapter three examines the agency of the Mesto throughout the inner movements. After a discussion of the Mesto’s basic features, I return to the Marcia movement and consider the implications of what I call the Mesto’s “corner,” which links the ritornello to the Marcia. I then explore the Mesto’s increasing role in the Burletta by describing the Mesto’s

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<sup>32</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 29-30.

actions as “surfacing” and by examining how this gesture disrupts the spatial boundaries established by the ritornello. I also consider the notion of place in relation to both the pastoral topic of the trio section and the Mesto’s appearances.

The final chapter concludes the discussion of the grotesque and the Mesto as a narrative entity in light of the fourth movement’s conflation of ritornello and musical form. By locating the trope of abnegation, to use Hatten’s term, in place of a grotesque mediation that occurs in the previous three movements, I argue that the Mesto accrues a layer of subjectivity not previously detected in the ritornello statements. However, the final movement also exhibits a closing frame that evokes a mythic conflation of time and space, suggesting not only a linear narrative, but also a universal paradigm that continues to repeat itself indefinitely. By adopting a rhetorical mode that creates an arena of conflict between interior and exterior space, my analysis helps to provide a more secure conceptual basis for the prevailing sense of the Mesto as an agent, as well as a theoretical framework that accounts for the significance and salience of the grotesque.



## Chapter 2: The Salience of the Grotesque

Though any survey of the grotesque in a study of this size results in a gross oversimplification, it may nonetheless be helpful to provide a short overview of its development as an aesthetic category as well as its standing within recent musicological scholarship. The term “grotesque” derives from the Italian word *grotta* (“cave”) and originally referred to an ornamental style of painting unearthed during fifteenth-century excavations of Nero’s Domus Aurea in Rome. The unusual paintings were critiqued for their lack of verisimilitude, displaying instead an imaginative free-play of forms in which a mixture of plant-life, animal features, and human figures merged as though growing out of each other. Many Renaissance painters adopted this ornamental disregard for the laws of nature, most influentially in the paintings of Giovanni da Udine, who worked under the supervision of Raphael to decorate the pillars of the Papal loggias (c. 1515).<sup>1</sup>

Because “grotesque” is a term that refers more directly to a place of discovery than to the inherent features of the excavated paintings, an etymological history both coincides with and deviates from more categorical aesthetic definitions of the grotesque. Wolfgang Kayser offers one of the most complete accounts of the term as it appears in dictionaries, literary discourse, and philosophy.<sup>2</sup> He chronicles the early use of grotesque as it was applied to

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981 [1957]), 19-20. See also Harpham, 23-47.

<sup>2</sup> The term “arabesque” was often used interchangeably with grotesque up into the nineteenth century, further complicating etymological histories of the term. In addition to grotesque and arabesque, “moresque” was on occasion misapplied to the same ornamental style. However, it is possible, at least, to distinguish between moresque and the other two designations. As Kayser points out, in art history the moresque is two-dimensional and rigidly stylized against a uniform background, whereas the arabesque gains perspective and

various marginalia designs and the hallmark paintings of Hieronymus Bosch (1450?-1516), Peter Bruegel the Elder (1525/30-1569), and Jacques Callot (1592-1635). Further uses of the term extend to the visual antics of the *commedia dell'arte*, the literary *Sturm und Drang*, and early Romantic discourse concerning the grotesque among circles led especially by Friedrich Schlegel. Studies and essays devoted to the grotesque began to appear near the end of the Enlightenment, such as Justus Möser's "Harlequin: or, A Defense of Grotesque Comic Performances" (1766) and Karl Flogel's *History of the Grotesquely Comic* (1788). Nineteenth-century essays also contributed to the subject, including Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1818-21), Victor Hugo's famous "Preface to Cromwell" (1827), and John Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* (1851-53).

Kayser's account tracks the grotesque all the way through its twentieth-century appearances; however, as Jennings argues (contemporaneously with Kayser), an etymological history of the term is more likely to obscure the meaning of the concept than to clarify it.<sup>3</sup> The confusion is often owing to the dual nature of the grotesque as comprising both the comical and the fearsome, or, as already stated, the ludicrous and horrifying.<sup>4</sup> As a result of this contradiction, writers have for various reasons been inclined to stress one

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is considerably more profuse to the extent that the background nearly disappears. The more relevant point is that the arabesque and grotesque of visual art are considered to have developed alongside each other so that up until roughly 1800, the terms are interchangeable in discourse, though not necessarily in practice (Kayser, 23).

<sup>3</sup> Jennings, 2. Jennings follows this comment with an insightful and shrewd catalogue of the various ways in which the term is used, more often confusingly and allusively than in any meaningful aesthetic sense.

<sup>4</sup> Other synonymous combinations of this structure include terrifying, monstrous, or gruesome under "horrifying," and hilarious, fanciful, or bizarre under "ludicrous."

feature over the other, often obscuring the critical paralysis that results from their intersection.

Modern analyses of the grotesque have given more attention to the significance of the body as a conduit for the ambivalence conveyed through the simultaneous encounter with the ludicrous and horrifying. Thus, Jennings offers, as correctives, prototypes that concretely suggest human deformity, such as the ludicrous demon, the gargoyle, and the dancing skeleton. Bakhtin, in his analysis of the grotesque in Rabelais's writing, emphasizes the ambivalence located in the human body itself, which is self-contained in relation to, and simultaneously merges with, the outside world.

This more recent yoking of the grotesque with notions of embodiment has corresponded with trends in musicology that emphasize the body as a locus of meaning. Thus, Esti Sheinberg applies a semiotic approach to the grotesque in her study of irony, parody, satire, and the grotesque in the works of Shostakovich. Sheinberg offers a helpful framework for normative musical embodiment that a musical grotesque might deform:

In the musical grotesque, then, the exaggerations are often applied to anthropomorphic sound-analogies, in accordance with a possible conceptual projection of the human body on the soundscape. In such a projection, what is musically comfortable for the human body or voice – in terms of pitch, speed and density of sound – will be considered as its 'projection' on a soundscape. ... Therefore, the choice of a comfortable tempo, like *andante* or *moderato*, a register that accommodates the natural speaking voice and tempered dynamics of sound would most probably render a 'normal', comfortable kind of music.<sup>5</sup>

In a wide range of musical discourse, "grotesque" has often been reserved for timbral distortions or special effects, such as those that appear in Berlioz's *Witches' Sabbath* from

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<sup>5</sup> Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody, and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Musical Incongruities* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 211. Brown also quotes Sheinberg in this regard (Brown, 54-55).

the *Symphonie fantastique*,<sup>6</sup> or for incongruous rhythms and exaggerated dissonances that increasingly began to appear during the twentieth century. The theoretical framework for these applications of the grotesque in music has often been defined in terms of ugliness versus beauty, rather than embodiment. In her study of Bartók and the grotesque, Brown provides an overview of the instances in which the term grotesque has been applied in non-scholarly musical discourse generally in the sense of low comic or buffa expressions, formal hybridity (such as opera), and various incongruous juxtapositions.<sup>7</sup> Since the publication of Brown's monograph, more recent studies have explored less obvious incidents of the grotesque in the works of Haydn, Boccherini, and Mendelssohn that participate both in the aesthetic discourse of their time and in the less historically contingent definition of the grotesque derived from the body.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For an early musicological study of the grotesque that includes an analysis of Berlioz's *Witches' Sabbath*, see Patricia Testerman Pinson, "The Shattered Frame: A Study of the Grotesque in Nineteenth Literature and Music" (PhD diss., Ohio University, 1971). See also Francesca Brittan's later dissertation: "Berlioz, Hoffmann, and the Genre *fantastique* in French Romanticism" (PhD diss. Cornell University, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Brown, 132-9. Included in this overview is a concise survey of the major musicological studies that have engaged with the grotesque. Brown additionally engages with Kent Farbach's thesis on the grotesque in selected works by Bartók. However, Farbach, like Brown, retains a nineteenth-century paradigm that approaches the grotesque from a dialectical standpoint of thesis and antithesis, in which the grotesque seems to "stand for" the ugly and is opposed to the beautiful, or at least, an "established norm." While this approach overlaps significantly with approaches by Jennings and Bakhtin, it is my opinion that by framing the discussion in terms of "opposites" or "dialectic," one can too easily miss the crucial role of the body when identifying and describing the grotesque. Kent Farbach, "Grotesquerie in Selected Works by Béla Bartók" (master's thesis, Griffith University, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> See, respectively, Annette Richards, "Haydn's *London* Trios and the Rhetoric of the Grotesque," in *Haydn and the Performance of Rhetoric*, ed. Tom Beghin and Sander M. Goldberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 251-80; Elisabeth Le Guin, "'One Says that One Weeps, but One Does Not Weep': *Sensible*, Grotesque, and Mechanical Embodiments in Boccherini's Chamber Music," *Journal of the American Musicological*

Especially relevant to this study is the framework that Brown provides by examining Bartók's relationship with the body. Brown names five influences on Bartók's identification with the body, namely: Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics and turn towards the body; the early twentieth-century physical culture movement; Bartók's views on embodied performance versus mechanical instruments; human-to-animal metamorphosis as it appears in myth and folk culture; and the general modernist trope of the fragmented body as indicative of the fragmented subject.<sup>9</sup>

In studies that approach the grotesque as a category that is defined in opposition to the body or as an intersection of the ludicrous and horrifying, the grotesque has retained its original associations with ornamental framing to the extent that it represents the concrete mingling of center and periphery. Thus, the grotesque embodies the hybrid union of categories known to be distinct. It contradicts and assails our most reliable structures of thought, ridiculing metonymic devices and rendering absurd the assumption that parts can represent the whole. Most importantly, however, it is a category that manifests ambivalence through a deformation of the human body, either by joining it with foreign elements (such as human-to-animal or vegetal hybrids) or by emphasizing those features that extend beyond, or allow access into, the body. Proceeding from this ambivalence, then, is an aesthetic category that accrues and accepts meanings that are contradictory.

The following chapter locates the grotesque in the Sixth Quartet's middle movements, Marcia and Burletta, as it appears in the outer sections of ternary forms. While the grotesque

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*Society* 55, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 207-54; and Francesca Brittan, "On Microscopic Hearing: Fairy Magic, Natural Science, and the *Scherzo Fantastique*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 527-600.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, 54-85.

occupies analogous formal positions in both movements, it is manifested in different ways. The grotesque of the Marcia emerges from a somatic inversion of the march rhythms from symmetrical to asymmetrical and from the spatial phenomenon of crowding. In the grotesque discursive world, crowding becomes a common conduit through which the grotesque materializes. This phenomenon is evident not only in the cluttered and flourishing styles of the ornamental arabesques, but also in many of the depictions of crowds in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the Elder.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the grotesque of the Burletta presents itself more overtly as a musical analogue to a Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque body.

***Marcia: Verbunkos as a conceptual matrix for the grotesque***

In addition to restoring traditional forms and triadic harmonies, Bartók's Sixth String Quartet is one of a few works from the late thirties that reinstates the *verbunkos* topic that Bartók had cultivated more extensively during the early stages of his career. Schneider observes in his analysis of the Second Violin Concerto (1938) that Bartók's Concerto, Sixth Quartet (1939), and *Contrasts* (1938) all "contain explicit references to the gestures of the *verbunkos*."<sup>11</sup> He continues,

These are the first clear examples of *verbunkos* elements in Bartók's work since the Violin Rhapsodies of 1928. To find an unambiguous example of *verbunkos* in Bartók's oeuvre that is neither an actual folk-music arrangement (as are the Violin Rhapsodies) nor a parody (as in *The Wooden Prince*) we must go all the way back to works that preceded his discovery of peasant music and that employ the Hungarian national style that Bartók began to reject in 1907.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, Bosch's "The Millennium" and Bruegel's "Mad Meg," (Kayser, 32-35).

<sup>11</sup> Schneider, 236.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Prior to 1907, Bartók's engagement with the *verbunkos* topic corresponded with an exaggerated nationalistic style.<sup>13</sup> However, as a result of his research in folk music and discovery of what he believed to be an authentic "Old Style" peasant song, Bartók changed this approach by either abandoning *verbunkos* gestures altogether or placing them in direct opposition to folk music, to form a dichotomy between "corrupt" and "pure."<sup>14</sup> While the two approaches seem to contradict each other, the goal was always the same: to express in music a true Hungarian style. In light of the two diachronic postures towards the *verbunkos* and Bartók's synchronic return to its idioms in the late thirties, it is worth investigating some of the complexities of the *verbunkos* context, which I argue becomes an ambivalent signifier apposite for a grotesque treatment owing to its repeated, but different appropriations. The topical ambivalence is also built upon the differences between the treatment of the *verbunkos* topic in the Marcia movement of the Sixth Quartet and its contemporaries.

Chronicles of the *verbunkos* are complicated both for political and musical reasons, the latter usually resulting from overly liberal applications of the term.<sup>15</sup> Derived from the German word for recruitment (*Werbung*), *verbunkos* dances were used by the Habsburg army to recruit Hungarian peasants especially between 1715, when a permanent militia was established, and 1849, when universal conscription was mandated.<sup>16</sup> In this context, music

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<sup>13</sup> Schneider, 33-80.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>15</sup> My understanding of *verbunkos* is gleaned mostly from Schneider, whose presentation of musical hallmarks and form, historical functions, and applications of the term is the clearest and most concise, if not most comprehensive account I have found.

<sup>16</sup> Schneider, 17. Conscription began after the Hungarian War of Independence that took place during 1848-49.

and dancing were used as a smokescreen to “break down potential recruits’ resistance to joining the army with an abundance of wine and soldierly posturing designed to glorify military life.”<sup>17</sup>

The Habsburg army efficiently made use of local musicians and pre-existing folk music and dances, thereby winning over the peasants with familiarity and flattery. Consequently, an overlap of musical signifiers complicates any attempt to draw clear distinctions between the idioms of *verbunkos* recruiting music and those of peasant folk music. Rather, as Schneider suggests, “the traditional music of the Hungarian village and the popular commercial music of the Hungarian city are best conceived not as entirely separate categories, but as different points on a continuum.”<sup>18</sup>

During the nineteenth century, the *verbunkos* became a musical symbol that represented all things Hungarian. Judit Frigyesi relates how it was implicated in a particular national myth that identified the Hungarian nation exclusively in terms of an ideal Hungarian nobility. Within this origin account, strata of nobility stood for all classes, such that nobility became an entirely insular concept representing aristocracy, gentry, folk, nation, *populus*, and patriots to the exclusion of the real *Volk* (i.e., serfs and peasants).<sup>19</sup>

Because of various political maneuvers intended to preserve the nobility, by 1848 the economic feudal system had been replaced with a bourgeois economy.<sup>20</sup> Despite this shift,

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<sup>17</sup> Schneider, 18. See also Stephen Erdely, “Bartók and Folk Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, ed. Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24.

<sup>18</sup> Schneider, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Judit Frigyesi, “Béla Bartók and the Concept of Nation and ‘Volk’ in Modern Hungary,” *The Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (Summer 1994), 255-66.



feudal dispositions and habits persisted. Many from the middle and petty nobilities failed to modernize their estates and consequently lost their land and fell into economic poverty. As Frigyesi explains, this lowest stratum of nobility, now a landless “gentry,” transferred economic status to political status by occupying governmental positions, thus seizing a new ideological “privilege of genuine patriotism.”<sup>21</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, *verbunkos* and its urban variety, Gypsy music, were thoroughly associated with this particular Hungarian gentleman, who possessed no money yet considered himself, and was considered to be, entitled. It was partially as a reaction against this origin myth that many modernists, Bartók included, pursued alternative sources for national identity that could embody humanist ideals and social reform.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, though *verbunkos* began as a symbol of political manipulation against Hungarians, it easily morphed into a symbol of national pride (perhaps all the more easily because of the overlapping idioms between *verbunkos* and peasant music). Though many modernists during the first half of the twentieth century viewed *verbunkos* with contempt, they were a minority among Hungarians. It is all the more striking, then, that Bartók should return to the *verbunkos* gestures in the late thirties, but without implying a moral opposition, as in his works that posit a dichotomy between “corrupt” and “pure.” During the course of his research in folk music, Bartók became more aware of what he called the “crossing and recrossing” of genres, which had a particular counter-cultural significance during a time of

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<sup>20</sup> Frigyesi, 261.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 262-63.

<sup>22</sup> Frigyesi, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 61-88.

ultra-nationalism. In an essay from 1942, “Race Purity in Music,” Bartók asked whether “racial impurity [was] favorable to folk (peasant) music or not?” He concluded:

The situation of folk music in Eastern Europe may be summed up thus: as a result of uninterrupted reciprocal influence upon the folk music of these peoples there are an immense variety and a wealth of melodies ... The ‘racial impurity’ finally attained is definitely beneficial.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps, in light of the “crossing and recrossing” of genres that Bartók discovered in peasant music, he began to view *verbunkos* differently. Rather than considering *verbunkos* in terms of either/or—either *verbunkos* is a bastardization of authentic peasant music, or *verbunkos* is truly Hungarian—Bartók began exploiting the style for its multi-valence and its ability to accommodate rather than exclude. Indeed, Schneider notes that “even as Bartók was reacting against ultranationalism with a flexible notion of the productive intercourse between various folk cultures, by evoking the *verbunkos* he returned in part to the musical style that had represented a chauvinistic brand of Hungarian nationalism.”<sup>24</sup> – But also a style that had previously represented Habsburg domination. Viewed from this multivalent approach, *verbunkos* becomes the perfect matrix through which to embody the grotesque.

Bartók’s multivalent approach is evident in his reinstatement of the *verbunkos* topic in the Second Violin Concerto, *Contrasts*, the Divertimento, and the Sixth String Quartet.<sup>25</sup> Schneider provides an inventory of *verbunkos* idioms commonly drawn upon, including:

- “Dotted rhythms, often presented in a series, embellished by grace notes and turns”

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<sup>23</sup> Béla Bartók, “Race Purity in Music,” in *Béla Bartók Essays*, edited by Benjamin Suchoff, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> Schneider, 247.

<sup>25</sup> Though Schneider does not mention it, Ujfalussy includes Bartók’s Divertimento among his works that reinstate *verbunkos* idioms. József Ujfalussy, *Béla Bartók*, rev. trans. Elisabeth West (Boston: Crescendo, 1972), 348.

- Augmented seconds between scale degrees 3 and 4 and 6 and 7<sup>26</sup>
- Regular four-bar phrases in duple meter
- “Decorative triplet figures”
- “Occasional pairs of accented quarter notes (long-long)”
- “Short-long rhythms in which the short first note comes on the metrically stronger part of the beat or bar.” Variants of this rhythm include the *alla zoppa* rhythm (short-long-short) and long-short-short-long.
- Presence of a drone, alluding to either the *dűvő* or the *esztam* folk idioms<sup>27</sup>
- “Hiccup,” or interrupted pick-up notes, preceding a downbeat<sup>28</sup>

Several of these hallmark features appear in the Violin Concerto either directly or obliquely,<sup>29</sup> particularly through allusions to the expanded *verbunkos* ensembles, which typically consist of violin, clarinet, a second violin or viola equivalent (*brácsa* and/or *kontra*), cimbalom, and bass.<sup>30</sup> For instance, the opening harp chords and the horn’s tonic pedal tone reference the *dűvő* rhythm and open string drone played by the middle and lower stringed instrument of the ensemble. The foregrounded entrance of the clarinet as countermelody alludes to a conventional expansion of the *verbunkos* string band. Also

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<sup>26</sup> Otherwise known as the Hungarian or Gypsy scale: an ascending harmonic minor form with a raised fourth.

<sup>27</sup> *Dűvő* and *esztam* refer to accompanimental figures, the first of which articulates two chords using one bow stroke often resulting in an accent on the second chord. *Esztam* is an “oompah” rhythm that alternates between the lower strings of the ensemble and is used during faster tempi.

<sup>28</sup> This list is provided in Schneider, 20-21. Schneider’s reference to the ‘hiccup,’ which he calls a *verbunkos* cliché, is found on 239.

<sup>29</sup> The first movement of the Violin Concerto was initially marked “tempo di verbunkos,” which Bartók later replaced with the more neutral Italian “Allegro non troppo.”

<sup>30</sup> Schneider, 239.

helping to solidify the topic are the presence of Hungarian rhythms, especially the accented short-long motive and interrupted pick-up notes.<sup>31</sup>

Out of these late works, Bartók's *Contrasts* for violin, clarinet, and piano contains the most transparent references to the *verbunkos* topic. Aside from the explicit title of its first movement, "Verbunkos," the instrumentation of the piece recalls the violin and clarinet instruments that are prominent in the *verbunkos* ensemble. The outer movements of the score as a whole represent the slow-fast formal scheme for which the genre is known. Plus the work's basic musical attributes include dotted rhythms presented in a series, triplet ornamental figures, Hungarian rhythms, and, in general, a strong ornamental presence.

Compared to the Violin Concerto and to *Contrasts*, however, the Sixth Quartet's Marcia seems extremely understated regarding the *verbunkos*. In fact, of Schneider's inventory, the Marcia's most obvious (and perhaps only) *verbunkos* trait is the dotted rhythms that open the movement and continue to play a pervasive role throughout (see Example 2.2). Though the dotted rhythms are prominent and ubiquitous, they are as much a cliché of the generic march as they are of *verbunkos*.<sup>32</sup> One could just as easily argue that the movement makes no reference to *verbunkos* at all and merely caricatures a military topic. János Kárpáti observes that the angular rhythms of the Marcia could be "traced back, without any sense of forcing the issue, to Beethoven's march music in the French style."<sup>33</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>31</sup> Schneider, 237-9.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 242. Schneider clarifies that dotted rhythms are a cliché of Gypsy music, but not of Hungarian folk song.

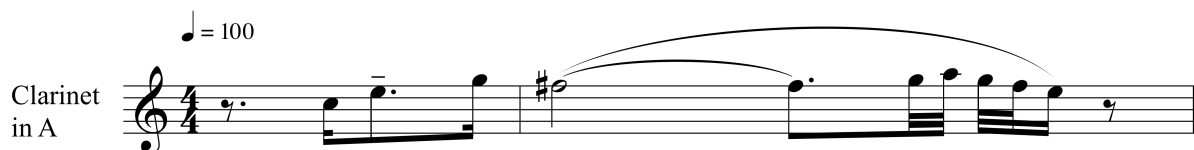
<sup>33</sup> Kárpáti, 482.

Perle states that the “obsessive dotted-rhythm pattern and polyphonic texture recall the *Vivace alla Marcia* of the Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in A Major, Op. 101.”<sup>34</sup>

Despite the ambiguity of musical signifiers, many commentators have observed that *verbunkos* participates in the semiotic network of the movement.<sup>35</sup> The Marcia’s strong link to the topic occurs as a result of a compositional metonymic device. The dotted upbeat figure that outlines a dominant triad at the outset of the Marcia is the same gesture that the clarinet introduces to open *Contrasts* (Example 2.1). Because *Contrasts* so unequivocally embodies the *verbunkos* topic, the opening gesture of the Marcia is strong enough to refer to the topic as a whole. The movement proceeds to obsess over this particular dotted feature of *verbunkos*, implying that we should not only consider the whole of the topic, but also focus on the part that is being highlighted. As Lakoff and Johnson point out,

Metonymy is not merely a referential device. It also serves the function of providing understanding. ... There are many parts that can stand for the whole. Which part we pick out determines which aspect of the whole we are focusing on.<sup>36</sup>

**Example 2.1 Bartók, *Contrasts* for violin, clarinet, and piano, mm. 3-4**



*Contrasts*, SZ111 by Béla Bartók, © Copyright 1942 by Hawkes & Son (London) Ltd. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

<sup>34</sup> Perle, 208.

<sup>35</sup> Ferenc Bonis, “Quotations in Bartók’s Music: A Contribution to Bartók’s Psychology of Composition,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 5, no. 1 (1963): 369; Frigyesi, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest*, 316; Kárpáti, 481-82; Schneider, 281, n. 53; Stevens, 200.

<sup>36</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, 36.

With respect to this part, one might posit that because the opening motive alludes directly to dotted rhythms and obliquely, via *Contrasts*, to the clarinet—both of which Schneider mentions are clichés of Gypsy music—that the movement alludes to a satire on urban commercialism in which of the Roma participated.<sup>37</sup> However, several factors suggest that the reference is not quite so narrow. First, though the Marcia does obliquely reference the clarinet by way of *Contrasts*, the presentation of both clarinet and *verbunkos* in the “Verbunkos” movement of *Contrasts* is not remarkably sarcastic.<sup>38</sup> Second, the dotted rhythms place an emphasis on marching (and hence martial attributes) that links to *verbunkos* recruiting references more strongly than to Gypsy corruption.<sup>39</sup> As explored below, these recruiting references in turn correspond more accurately with the significance and salience of the grotesque, which is achieved by means of the “crowding” that appears in the Marcia movement, than with Gypsy commodification.<sup>40</sup> Though there is certainly the possibility of musical satire directed towards militarism of the late thirties, the strong metonymic

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<sup>37</sup> Schneider, 26.

<sup>38</sup> One may point to moments in the third “Sebes” movement of *Contrasts* that are sarcastic, such as large leaps (mm. 53-58) and repeated down-bow articulations preceded by grace notes in the violin (mm. 190); however, as Kárpáti observes, these motifs share features with the Burletta movement of the Sixth Quartet, which is not typically identified as *verbunkos* inspired. Aside from the fact that these “sarcastic” motifs appear in a large formal scheme of the *verbunkos* (i.e. the fast dance that follows the recruiting dance), they are not the musical features that distinguish the *sebes* or *friss* character, the role of which belongs to the *perpetuum mobile* or motoric scale passages (Kárpáti, 444-47).

<sup>39</sup> The opening triad may also overlap with the military signifier of a trumpet fanfare.

<sup>40</sup> As a sidenote, the *verbunkos* treatment in the Violin Concerto, as Schneider shows, is a sincere synthesis of modernist and traditional features. It would be strange for Bartók to focus his attention in the Marcia on an implied opposition between Gypsy corruption and authenticity, since he shows no signs of doing so intertextually at the time. If he had truly wanted the reference to be Gypsy, he might have chosen to highlight the more conspicuous augmented second and/or Gypsy scale.

relationship that the dotted rhythm has with the *verbunkos* treatment in *Contrasts* suggests to me that the topic is being exploited also for its ambivalent characteristics and not only as a moral critique, regardless of whether the critique is interpreted as Bartók's criticism of the Nazis or of Hungarian collaboration with them.

***Marcia and Crowding: The grotesque seen through the poetics of space***

“Ample space is not always experienced as spaciousness.”<sup>41</sup>  
— Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*

Throughout the *Marcia*'s outer sections, there occurs a process that might be read as a musical translation of crowding, which is realized by means of texture, harmony, topical allusions, and rhythm. In addition to the dotted rhythmic gesture, the *Marcia* opens with a striking combination of texture and harmony in which the opening B-major figure of the two outer voices is imitated by the inner voices in the relative key, G-sharp minor (Example 2.2). As Kárpáti observes, “the parallel use of B major and G-sharp minor is a characteristic combination of bitonality and bimodality” that appears throughout Bartók's chamber music. Kárpáti aptly describes the minor variant effect as that of a “shadow.”<sup>42</sup> The co-presence of two tonalities and modalities, though they are related, contributes to a sense of sonic cluttering that reinforces the linear closeness implied by the imitative texture.

Additionally, the juxtaposition of major and minor suggests a correlational crowding beyond that conceivably inferred from the march and *verbunkos* topics. Marches frequently appear in major keys, whereas minor presentations are generally “marked,” owing to the

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<sup>41</sup> Tuan, 51.

<sup>42</sup> Kárpáti, 480-81.

minor mode's asymmetrical opposition to major.<sup>43</sup> In the Marcia, the traditional correlations of tragic and non-tragic that correspond to minor and major are juxtaposed so as to frustrate the clarity of this opposition. Thus, the presence of the minor mode immediately following “on the heels” of the major mode in the Marcia conveys with it a dysphoric nuance that correlates well with Kárpáti's term “shadow.” This nuance, however, is not enough to override the presence of the major mode. Instead, the simultaneous presence of both modes disrupts the opposition of minor to major that is characteristic of marches, thereby replacing the distinction between normal and abnormal with an ambivalence that accepts both.<sup>44</sup>

The opening imitative texture also resembles a canonic imitation or mimicry, which overlaps with the shadow metaphor to suggest a sort of disquieting parroting. That is, mimicry and parroting imply both an agent who performs an action and a respondent who first observes and then imitates or repeats this action. Presumably, the performing agent, in turn, becomes aware that he is being observed. The “awareness of being observed” is one way in which Tuan defines our experience of crowding in his chapter entitled “Spaciousness and Crowding.”<sup>45</sup> As an extreme example, he offers a scenario in which a shy person sits down at a piano in a spacious room. This shy person, believing herself to be alone, experiences the room as spacious; however, as soon as someone enters to listen, instantly, for

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<sup>43</sup> Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 11-15. Likewise, the minor mode itself is marked with respect to major and carries with it a generally dysphoric affect. That said, minor mode marches occur frequently enough so that the “token,” funeral march, has attained its own “type,” to use Hatten's terminology.

<sup>44</sup> I.e., either a march is presented as major, or a march is presented as minor, but a march is not usually presented as both simultaneously.

<sup>45</sup> Tuan, 60.



her, the room becomes crowded despite the ample space.<sup>46</sup> In the opening measures of the Marcia, a musical analogue to this uneasy sense of being observed occurs by means of the pairing of harmony, which comprises the minor variant or “shadow” of B major, with the pseudo-canonic textural procedure that calls to mind strict imitation.

The allusion to canonic procedures presents a multivalent segue to the phenomenon of crowding.<sup>47</sup> Crowding opposes spaciousness, which Tuan identifies as “closely associated with the sense of being free. Freedom implies space,” he continues, “it means having the power and enough room in which to act.”<sup>48</sup> By contrast, the canon is the “strictest form of contrapuntal imitation” and connotes, through the meaning of its term (“rule”), that to some extent it opposes notions of independence and freedom.<sup>49</sup> One of the attributes of canons is that of being “locked in” and constricted by the rule. Hence, the canon topic of the Marcia connotes crowding, not only by its imitative texture, but also by the compositional exercise of limitations and restrictions.

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<sup>46</sup> Tuan, 59.

<sup>47</sup> For a different grotesque treatment of canonic and fugato writing, see Brown’s analysis of Bartók’s Third String Quartet (Brown, 141-47). In the Third Quartet, Bartók employs a grotesque parody of canonic procedures, whereas in his Sixth, the canonic procedures are alluded to more than performed in order to contribute to a textural crowding.

<sup>48</sup> Tuan, 52.

<sup>49</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, s.v. “Canon,” <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/> (accessed November 15, 2013).

**Example 2.2 Bartók Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, mm. 18-21, “opening of the Marcia”**

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello

♩ = 116  
senza sord.  
*f* risoluto, ben marcato  
senza sord.  
*f* risoluto, ben marcato  
senza sord.  
*f* risoluto, ben marcato  
*f* risoluto, ben marcato

20  
Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.

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These implications, however, are not entirely ominous. Leonard Ratner mentions that canons can convey both high and low styles, stretching from *stile antico* procedures to choral rounds with bawdy subject matter.<sup>50</sup> Many such rounds, also referred to as “catches,” exploited the tendency for canons to suggest different, even smutty lyrics as a product of

<sup>50</sup> Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 261.

superimposing lines of the original text. Through their association with choruses, canons suggest a crowd that is not simply restricting, but also raucous and juvenile.

The canonic style alluded to at the opening of the Marcia may suggest this type of juvenile crowd, both in the sense of young and immature. In other words, the topical allusion to *verbunkos* refers to young male recruits participating in (somewhat ritualized) drunken revelries.<sup>51</sup> Musically, the Marcia's caricature of dotted rhythms also connotes a type of immature humor by means of exaggeration. Indeed, the somatic empathy that we have for marches in general contributes to the sense that the Marcia alludes to a low comic canon, as opposed to one in high style.

The tendency towards "body" or obscene humor corresponds with the quality of humor often generated in the grotesque.<sup>52</sup> Jennings confirms that this comic urge tends toward the vulgar, bestial, cruel, morbid, and obscene, but has little to do with wit.<sup>53</sup> The avoidance of wit in the grotesque results from the crucial role that the body performs. In contrast to crude humor, wit is an intellectual activity associated with complex relationships between ideas or language. It symbolizes what is elevated and reinforces Western dichotomies between mind and body. Consequently, wit can do little to produce the grotesque, which, as a phenomenon, would rather accumulate meanings than exclude them.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Schneider, 20.

<sup>52</sup> Bartók, in fact, frequently displayed an obscene or bawdy sense of humor as Klára Móricz points out in "The Untouchable: Bartók and the Scatological," *Studio Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 47, no. 3/4 (September 2006): 321-36.

<sup>53</sup> Jennings, 11. See also 15 and 161, n. 48.

<sup>54</sup> Sheinberg, 209.

Like wit, both the military and the *verbunkos* topics may be affiliated with elevated principles, in contrast to the raucous, juvenile associations that derive from traditional recruiting ceremonies. But rather than referring to wit's intellectual abstraction and complex web of ideas, the military and *verbunkos* idioms connote heroism, authority, nationalism, patriotism, nobility, and honor.<sup>55</sup> The caricature of the dotted rhythm demeans these ideals by focusing on the marching pattern, thereby drawing our attention to the legs and feet. This denigration of high to low recalls Bakhtin's observation that the grotesque is a topographical inversion of the bodily hierarchy, in which the lower stratum replaces the upper.<sup>56</sup> However, in Jennings's discussion of the role that distortion plays in the grotesque, he maintains that

the grotesque displays something more than the superficial distortion of most caricature, which alters the outlines of a given original and gains its effect by exaggerating a part with respect to the whole. ... It is significant that the grotesque figure commonly displays a union of disparate parts from the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms ... The 'original' (the human form in general) is not so much distorted in the strict sense as it is destroyed and rebuilt along new lines.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Though we might consider such ideals as especially fraught during the interwar period, composers were still working within and against a musical system that had historically idealized military topics even in the midst of military oppression. The manner in which Bartók portrays *verbunkos* idioms in the Violin Concerto and in *Contrasts* suggests at least a softening towards the topic that in his youth had been an object of contempt. Though the setting of the Marcia seems less accepting, intertextually it grows somewhat ambiguous. For a discussion of the relationship between military signifiers and actual historical stances towards the military, see Raymond Monelle, "Mahler's Military Gesture: Musical Quotation as Proto-Topic," in *Music and Gesture*, ed. Anthony Gritten and Elaine King (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 96-7.

<sup>56</sup> Bakhtin, 309.

<sup>57</sup> Jennings, 9. A comparison could be made between methods of caricature in Bartók's Marcia and Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat*. Nicholas McKay locates dysphoric caricature in Stravinsky "Soldier's March" based on "quantitative exaggeration," a phrase he borrows from Sheinberg (Sheinberg, 120). In this instance, caricature is accomplished by an oversaturation of musical signifiers. For example, in the "Soldier's March," the musical military topic is referred to by using a "left-right" pattern, a ritirito rhythm, a fanfare, and a marching melody all within a condensed musical soundscape. By contrast, Bartók limits his caricature primarily to one military gesture, emphasizing one part with respect to the whole.

In this regard, the obsessive dotted rhythms of the Marcia that overlap with both march and *verbunkos* comprise nothing more than a caricature, though they do supply the necessary embodied conditions from which the grotesque can emerge. The predictable patterns of the dotted rhythms exemplify what Steve Larson speaks of in terms of embodied “musical forces,” particularly, in this case, the force of rhythmic inertia and metric gravity.<sup>58</sup> Though the dotted rhythms are an exaggeration of a part with respect to the whole (the gestalt of signifiers encompassing marches and *verbunkos*), they maintain the basic human form: the dotted-rhythm, when viewed as a slightly filled-in version of the “left-right” march pattern, is grounded in the bodily symmetry that enables us to march in a consistent pattern.<sup>59</sup>

It is then important that while the caricature of the Marcia implies the inversion of high and low intellectually, it begins to incarnate this inversion through a series of jutting variants of the cadence in m. 25 (Example 2.3). Several features combine at m. 25 to create a musical analogue to the grotesque object, either conceived as an inversion of high and low or

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Bartók’s method may in part impel the movement to become grotesque. If one were to imagine a visual analogue of a body, the caricature might be represented as extremely large feet stretching for miles while the remainder of the body appears normal. By contrast, Stravinsky’s caricature might appear more cartoonish by including as many stereotyped features as possible (i.e. big nose, big ears, angular legs, etc.). Nicholas McKay, “Dyshporic States: Stravinsky’s Topics – Huntsmen, Soldiers and Shepherds” in *Music Semiotics: A Network of Significations in Honor of Raymond Monelle*, ed. Esti Sheinberg (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 254-58.

<sup>58</sup> Steve Larson, *Musical Forces: Motion, Metaphor, and Meaning in Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 143-49. ‘Musical inertia’ is defined as the “tendency of a pattern to continue in the same fashion.” ‘Metric gravity’ has to do with the tendency for a metric hierarchy to descend into a state of rest or stability. This force corresponds with many physical gestures in dancing and conducting.

<sup>59</sup> Sheinberg notes that it is precisely these musical forces that provide the conditions out of which the grotesque can emerge: “The grotesque is primarily sensual and physical ... It coincides with one of the most important sources of musical pleasure: the almost automatic physical empathy with the lively rhythmic pulse of a scherzo or march” (215).

of center and periphery.<sup>60</sup> For instance, after the cadence, the fundamental symmetry established in the somatic march rhythms turns “inside-out.”<sup>61</sup> That is, the play-in-pairs, back-and-forth interaction that began the movement converges into a homophonic texture. Coinciding with this convergence of texture, the opening passage’s dotted rhythmic pattern and half-note metric hierarchy are destroyed and replaced with gaping, irregular rests, displaced accents on weak beats, and incongruous dynamic markings that demand quick crescendos and diminuendos in the space of one sixteenth note. While many of the slurred, two-note gestures retain the opening passage’s iambic sensation of upbeat to downbeat, several of them do not, creating permutations of the implied “short-long” rhythm that instead fall on metrically weak downbeats, such as beats two and four. The dynamics and expressive hairpins highlight this fact, which one could say (recalling Jennings’s statement) “destroys” the natural laws manifested as embodied musical forces and “rebuilds them along new lines.”<sup>62</sup>

The resulting inversion of symmetry to asymmetry produces an awkward limping or hopping gesture, suggesting a human deformity:<sup>63</sup> possibly a club foot, or—in keeping with

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<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the grotesque denigration of high to low occurs in Bakhtin’s account *by means of* the inversion of embodied notions of center and periphery.

<sup>61</sup> It is not irrelevant that “inside-out” mapped onto the human body is literally a partial inversion of symmetry and asymmetry. Many of the body’s asymmetrical features are the internal organs.

<sup>62</sup> Jennings, 9.

<sup>63</sup> An alternative and perhaps equally illuminating way of speaking about this passage is in terms of “disability,” as it is developed most recently by Joseph Straus. Under Straus’s definition, “disability” remains a deliberately fluid category that may apply not only to bodily and mental incapacities, but also to stigmatized Others who are culturally determined. Though discourse on the grotesque and disability inevitably intersect, I have chosen to limit my terminology predominantly to embodied norms and their deformations, emphasizing

the grotesque propensity for hybridity—conceivably, one leg instead of two.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, bearing in mind that the *verbunkos* lurks in the background, the clumsy gestures might also be a contorted mimetic representation of the *verbunkos* male dance with its intricate footwork and stomping. Nevertheless, the homorhythmic contortions of the dotted rhythms correspond cogently with the drunken revelry associated with the recruiting dance, notwithstanding its choreographic complexities.

A third possibility, that of a human-machine hybrid, develops as the irregular hops begin to resemble a pattern in mm. 30 and 31, perhaps analogous to a mechanical soldier that, halted by some obstacle, nonetheless continues to march in place. The mechanical resemblance increases at the *poco a poco più animato* in m. 38, where a “winding-up” gesture surges forward through a combination of *accelerando*, *stretto*, and slurred articulation. This gesture propels the motion into a more violent variant of the opening canonic texture that repeats many of the grotesque gesticulations (Example 2.4).<sup>65</sup>

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“form” over “capacity,” in order to focus on the visual and kinetic elements vital to the grotesque. Joseph N. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> The reprise of this material (mm. 130–37) appears in a mirror inversion (i.e. the thirds move down rather than up) and accentuates the heaviness by featuring the lower strings first (m. 133) and altering the rhythm slightly. The effect is an even greater loss of momentum and exaggerated clumsiness.

<sup>65</sup> “Winding up” gestures frequently occur in Beethoven’s music. For instance, Janet Levy points out the mechanical play in Beethoven’s Bagatelle in E-flat Major, Op. 33, No. 1 in which an extended dominant prolongation “revs up the motor,” “winds it all the more tightly,” and then releases the gesture, “spin[ning] back to the right place.” See Janet Levy, “‘Something Mechanical Encrusted on the Living’: A Source of Musical Wit and Humor,” in *Convention in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music: Essays in Honor of Leonard G. Ratner*, eds. Wye J. Allanbrook, Janet M. Levy, and William P. Mahrt (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992), 229. Other instances occur in the “Diabelli” Variations, Var. 22 (Levy, 250), String Quartet Op. 135, (i), and also in Op. 133, which may be the most direct model for Bartók’s Sixth Quartet. For another example of the mechanical as grotesque in

Example 2.3 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, mm. 24-33

$\text{♩} = 116$

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

27

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f* *meno f* *mp*

*f* *meno f* *mp*

*f* *meno f* *mp*

*f* *meno f* *mp*

*f* *mf* *mp*

*f* *mf* *mp*

*f* *mf* *mp*

*f* *mf* *mp*

Bartók's works, see Brown's discussion of the mechanical troped with the primitive in *The Miraculous Mandarin* (Brown, 130-31).



Example 2.3 continued

30

Vln. I

dim.

p

pp

Vln. II

dim.

p

Vla.

dim.

p

Vc.

dim.

p

Each of these images corresponds with Jennings's remark that the grotesque object in motion produces a "spectacle" and "parades itself before us" in a dance "characterized by awkward, hopping, mechanical movements and strange contortions."<sup>66</sup> That all three images could be equally compelling spectacles accords with the grotesque image, whose nature it is to accept and accrue meanings.

Before the grotesque can be encountered in the form of a crowd, it must solidify into something more concrete, even though one can deduce a theme of crowding in the opening of the Marcia. What we have established so far is that the conditions are favorable for the grotesque (i.e., a slightly unsettling imitative texture and poly-harmony in the form of a shadow; obsessive dotted rhythms suggesting hyperbole or exaggeration; bawdy or juvenile humor as found in the mimicking texture and reinforced somatically in the march; as well as topical allusions to crowds, such as the drunken crowds evoked in the *verbunkos* and canon

<sup>66</sup> Jennings, 19-20.

**Example 2.4 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, mm. 38-42, “winding-up motion”**

poco a poco più animato - - - - -

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello

38  
41

*f*  
*f*  
*f*  
*f*

*molto*  
*molto*  
*molto*  
*molto*

♩ = 136

topics). Like the caricatured rhythm, a crowd, which as a concept is not necessarily ludicrous or horrifying,<sup>67</sup> must go through a process of transformation that assails our senses and to some extent threatens our bodies before it is experienced as grotesque.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> For instance, it is possible to have an organized crowd, which is usually how a military march is intended to be.

<sup>68</sup> Concerning linear media and the theme of process in the grotesque, Sheinberg notes that “a grotesque distortion is a gradual transformation of a physical human norm towards

The process of transformation from intellectualized to visceral crowd becomes most noticeable beginning at the reprise of the A material. For instance, in m. 122 the sense of crowding intensifies as the number of sounding strings doubles from four to eight. Indeed, one could view the added voices as indexical of the *verbunkos* recruiting function, whereby more and more recruits joined the dance as it unfolded (Example 2.5). It is also possible to draw a parallel between the accruing voices in the *verbunkos* dance and the trope of crowding in Russian thought, which, according to Sheinberg, associates “dance and the feeling of overcrowding.” Sheinberg observes that this combination embodies the grotesque structure by merging “the amusing aspects of dance with the chilling fear that is connected with an *accumulating* crowd.”<sup>69</sup>

Sheinberg’s analysis of Shostakovich’s orchestral and stage works provides a point of departure against which to compare and contrast the procedures that Bartók used to achieve a grotesque crowd in the Sixth Quartet.<sup>70</sup> Frequently, Shostakovich depicted crowds as a growing violent mob. Through his orchestration, he conveyed individual persons with contrapuntal writing, timbral idiosyncrasies such as glissandi, incongruous trills, and noisy outbursts from conspicuous instruments. Through a process of layering, crescendo, and

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whatever is non-human, either in its shape or in its motion. However, while in pictorial art the very superimposition of two incongruent entities may result in a grotesque (as long as at least one of them can be related to some human physical norm), literature and music need the presentation of a norm first, thus requiring time for the process of distortion” (Sheinberg, 222).

<sup>69</sup> Sheinberg, 291. Emphasis mine. Recall that *verbunkos* is essentially a dance.

<sup>70</sup> It is noted though that a comparative approach to crowding processes in different genres may be only partially beneficial.

frenzied scherzo tempi, what initially appears innocuous in the music grows into a chaotic mob in the form of a sound mass.<sup>71</sup> The absurd chaos implied in Russian literature and Shostakovich's mob scenes often abandons the intersection of the ludicrous and horrifying for the completely horrifying. However, during moments when the grotesque surfaces, its structure is maintained by combining the feelings of violence and chaos (i.e., the horrifying) with the heteroglossia of individual voices (i.e., the ludicrous).<sup>72</sup>

**Example 2.5 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, mm. 122-25**

The musical score for Bartók's Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, measures 122-25, is presented for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The tempo is marked as 116. The music is in 4/4 time. The score shows a dense, chaotic texture with overlapping lines and chromaticism. The dynamic marking is *p, ma ben marc.* The score includes a rehearsal mark at measure 122. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

<sup>71</sup> Kent Farbach describes a similar process of overcrowding to account for the grotesque effects in Bartók's *Kossuth*. Farbach's overcrowding, what he calls "an increased coagulation of the soundworld," occurs as a process of gradually increasing orchestral texture combined with various layers of chromaticism (Farbach, 39, 42, 51).

<sup>72</sup> Sheinberg, 276-78. Here, Sheinberg is equating ludicrous with the idiosyncratic or the comical individual. In essence, this feature of the individual is what every good caricaturist sees in his subjects. Sheinberg also notes the especially horrifying version of a mechanized mob, which in addition to extremely loud dynamics, becomes homorhythmic and monotone.

Bartók's crowding in the Marcia does not convey Shostakovich's frenzied mob such that it abandons the intersection of the ludicrous and horrifying. Nonetheless, there is an underlying violence implicit in the drunkenness alluded to in the *verbunkos* topic and bawdy type of canon and conveyed through the grotesque limping gestures.<sup>73</sup> Bartók's concealed violence also overlaps with features of Shostakovich's faceless or mechanized mob. For example, the paired canonic texture that becomes increasingly homophonic and at times entirely homorhythmic resembles Shostakovich's assemblage of a crowd. Also like Shostakovich, Bartók amplifies a sense of violence by employing techniques such as loud dynamics, heavy stomping gestures, and short repetitive patterns.<sup>74</sup>

While both composers evoke varying degrees of violence, Bartók also employs a different set of means in order to create a sense of crowding by magnifying the shadow effect that opened the movement. This is ironically achieved by expanding the total range of the original material, thereby increasing the musical sound-space through the addition of harmonics and extreme register doublings. In addition to increasing the number of sounding strings, Bartók includes among these a voice of harmonics in the first violin from mm. 122 to 127. The harmonics not only duplicate the shadow effect, but also lend a sort of ludicrous irony to the crowding. Harmonics, in that they refer to the overtone series, symbolize a universal harmony of nature. Their sympathetic reverberations are supposed to represent a cosmic sense of spaciousness—freedom and movement within order.<sup>75</sup> Yet, producing a

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<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Sheinberg notes that in Shostakovich's song, "The Love of Captain Lebyadkin," "Lebyadkin's ludicrous clumsiness bears a concealed threat" (Sheinberg, 288).

<sup>74</sup> Sheinberg, 278.

<sup>75</sup> Hence, the many allusions to the overtone series as a metaphor for creation.

harmonic on any instrument requires exact precision, restricting movement. The performer's body must focus, and her muscles perhaps contract in order to "lock in to" the correct position. The difficulty of the task contradicts the spaciousness implied. Instead, the extreme register and difficulty point toward what is musically unnatural and uncomfortable.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, the reprise continues to crowd in spite of and because of increasing space at mm. 153 and 174, in which the themes are doubled at the octave in extreme registers (see Examples 2.6 and 2.7) Here, an observation by Jennings may throw light on some of the grotesque quality of Bartók's crowding:

The development of the grotesque situation may be favored not only by the setting in motion of the grotesque object, but also by its duplication. The appearance of the grotesque monstrosity alongside others of its kind removes its accidental quality and lends it an air of the cosmic. ... Our impression is that nature has not only shown a random deviation from its customary norms but has actually begun to abandon them and to bring forth, instead, a succession of monstrosities.<sup>77</sup>

While it may prove difficult to show a one-to-one correlation between Jennings's statement and Bartók's crowding, partially because the octave doubling or "duplication" is itself what seems to create the "grotesque object," there is nonetheless a sense that we encounter the successive extreme register doublings as duplications of monstrosities due to the linear (musical) as opposed to static (visual) presentation.

Moreover, the glissandi in m. 174 no longer alternate as they did in their first presentation (see m. 67), but instead glide simultaneously, prolonging the dissonant ninths and replicating the gesture four times rather than three (Example 2.7).<sup>78</sup> Notably, these

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<sup>76</sup> Sheinberg, 211-13.

<sup>77</sup> Jennings, 20.

<sup>78</sup> Brown observes the grotesque significance of glissandi, among other timbral grotesqueries, in Bartók's Third String Quartet as an instance of high-low inversion, in which

glissandi furnish another instance of a specific instrumental effect's impact on the player's or listener's body. Brown notes that Bartók consciously categorized musical instruments as greater or lesser extensions of the human body. While some instruments appear artificial (and

**Example 2.6 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, mm. 153-57**

The musical score for Bartók's Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, measures 153-57, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 153-155, and the second system covers measures 156-157. The tempo is marked as 126. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The notation includes various musical symbols such as glissandi, accents, and dynamic markings like 'marcatissimo'. The first system shows measures 153-155, and the second system shows measures 156-157. The score is in 4/4 time.

the artifice of a polished and classically trained string quartet is exposed and replaced with “folk” idioms. As such, the string quartet genre becomes analogous to the human body, which we clothe in order to hide our faults and our most intimate functions (Brown, 140, 145, 154-57).

Example 2.7 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, mm. 174-78

♩ = 104

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

174

*mf*

*mf*

*p*

*mf*

*p*

*cresc.*

176

*cresc.*

*f*

*cresc.*

*f*

*p*

*f*

*p*

*f*

*f*

removed) due to their mechanized modes of producing sound (e.g., the piano), for Bartók, stringed instruments approach closer to an embodied ideal.<sup>79</sup> The performative postures involved in playing the physical instrument (often, in the case of stringed instruments, described as a type of “embrace”) as well as the extent to which shape and other physical

<sup>79</sup> Brown, 71.



properties are anthropomorphized, affect the degree to which we identify with the sound produced.<sup>80</sup> Thus, in the Marcia reprise, there is a sense in which the dissonant, synchronized glissandi at m. 174 suggest a literal and painful process of bodily deformation by way of twisting, bending, or stretching.

In summary, the Marcia's crowding achieves the grotesque structure through an accumulation of voices whose extreme registers stretch and bend the musical soundscape beyond what is humanly comfortable and what the opening of the Marcia had established as normative.<sup>81</sup> This deformation of the human body as it is projected onto the soundscape contributes to both the ludicrous and the horrifying aspects of the grotesque structure: its presence appears absurd, yet since it is encountered, demands to be acknowledged.

***Burletta: The Bakhtinian grotesque and the "bodily lower stratum"***

While the Marcia movement displays the grotesque through a combination of awkward rhythms and an accumulative process of crowding, the Burletta exhibits more typical timbral grotesqueries that could be described as animalistic. These exaggerated gestures, assuming thematic significance in the movement's outer sections, resonate well with many descriptions of the grotesque body that Bakhtin provides. In Bakhtin's terms, the grotesque "is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines."<sup>82</sup> Similarly, in the Burletta, the accented off-beats and syncopations of the opening three measures protrude from and disrupt the hierarchy of the meter as if bulging out. Rather than conforming to places of "greater metric stability," such as downbeats or

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<sup>80</sup> Brown, 72.

<sup>81</sup> Sheinberg, 54-55.

<sup>82</sup> Bakhtin, 316.

beats one and three, the accents of the first and third measures emphasize instability while the second measure flattens metric hierarchy altogether by equalizing each eighth-note with repeated down bows (Example 2.8).<sup>83</sup>

**Example 2.8 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement iii, mm. 21-32**

Moderato  
♩ = 90

21

Violin I  
*f* *au talon* *ff* *f* *sf*

Violin II  
*f* *au talon* *ff* *f*

Viola  
*f* *au talon* *ff* *f*

Cello  
*f* *au talon* *ff* *f*

24

Vln. I  
*come sopra*

Vln. II  
*ff* *IV* *mf* (au talon)

Vla.  
*sf* *mf* (au talon)

Vc.  
*sf* *mf*

<sup>83</sup> Refer to Larson (148-49) for a review of “metric stability” or “rhythmic gravity.”

**Example 2.8 continued**

(au talon)  
 27  
 Vln. I  
 Vln. II  
 Vla.  
 Vc.  
 sf  
 sf  
 30  
 Vln. I  
 Vln. II  
 Vla.  
 Vc.  
 sf

For Bakhtin, the grotesque body is interested in exit and entry points, orifices and “convexities” that demonstrate the body in a process of dissolving boundaries between itself and the rest of the world.<sup>84</sup> One of the most significant entry points symbolizing this dissolution is any feature connected to the mouth. The mouth leads to the bodily lower stratum where the cyclical processes of reproduction and digestion occur.<sup>85</sup> As a musical

<sup>84</sup> Bakhtin, 317.

analog, the hyperbolic leaps that accentuate the protruding off-beats of the opening measure might also be viewed as a “gaping mouth.”<sup>86</sup> Because the protrusions interrupt the gravity and magnetism of the line’s alternating half steps—those features that suggest a surface continuity—there is a sense that a gape or hole is created. Additionally, the following bi-toned “squawking,” which occurs as a result of the repeated down-bow major seconds replete with lower grace notes, indicates not only human-animal hybridity, but also, by means of imagined subvocalization, directs our attention to the “gullet.”<sup>87</sup> In other words, the imagined or imitated sound that we might use to reproduce the second measure of the Burletta resembles a guttural squawking that “sticks” in the throat, in contrast to, for example, a *bel canto* singing style.<sup>88</sup>

These features are significant because Bakhtin’s grotesque body is a cosmic body symbolizing the fertility, energy, and regenerative production of the material world.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the bodily lower stratum corresponds with everything underground, where the natural cycles of death and renewal occur. Along these lines, the heavy frog bowing prescribed at the opening of the Burletta is not simply visceral, but immediately pulls the attention downward

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<sup>85</sup> Bakhtin, 317.

<sup>86</sup> These leaps are even more exaggerated at the Tempo I in m. 69.

<sup>87</sup> Bakhtin, 325. The squawking sounds intensify in a variant of the opening theme in measure 61. Later in the movement, this gesture turns into a “chomping” motion after it loses the grace note.

<sup>88</sup> Arnie Cox states that subvocalization includes “both silent vocal imagery and *sotto voce* rehearsal and imitation.” See Arnie Cox, “Hearing, Feeling, Grasping Gestures,” *Music and Gesture*, eds. Anthony Gritten and Elaine King (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 58, n. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Bakhtin, 318.

by way of its earthy or gritty timbre. The repeated down-bows of m. 22 do so as well, but might also suggest a maladroitness similar to the limping rhythms in the Marcia.

Bakhtin's view of the grotesque as a cosmic and universal body overlaps with observations about the grotesque put forward by Geoffrey Harpham and Jennings and with parts of Tuan's analysis of space. Harpham's theory that the grotesque is myth condensed into a modern manifestation<sup>90</sup> reconciles well with the fact that cosmologies are often constructed in bodily terms. For instance, Tuan's discussion of mythical space and place considers the importance of the human body as an image schema through which to construct a cosmic worldview. The body thus becomes a locus of explanation. By mapping the cosmos onto the human body, "the universe is not [as] alien"<sup>91</sup> and becomes a means of coping with the unknown and the fearsome. Similarly, Jennings reads the grotesque as a "disarming mechanism" that makes the demonic trivial.<sup>92</sup>

This cosmological path that attempts to disarm the fearsome or make sense of the unknown is further evoked as the Burletta unfolds. Indeed, Jennings's ludicrous demon is in some sense conveyed in mm. 26-30 in the scordatura effect of the violins. While the solo violin has had diabolical associations since the Middle Ages, scordatura tuning refers to the devil through the use of a mistuned fifth, evoking the tritone, known likewise since the Middle Ages as the *diabolus in musica*. The mistuning of a quarter tone lower (notated in the score by downward arrows) obliquely points to this association with devilry, while the

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<sup>90</sup> Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 48-76.

<sup>91</sup> Tuan, 88.

<sup>92</sup> Jennings, 14-17.

concurrent *sforzandi* grunting sounds in the cello impart the ludicrous aspect of Jennings's demon (Example 2.8).

References to the diabolical and to death continue into a variant of the Dance of Death after a transition, which begins in m. 33, morphs the duple meter into a triple meter established in the lower strings (m. 46). Musical Dances of Death often appear in scherzo settings. The scherzo's fast, triple meter lends itself well to correlatives of Death such as circularity, eternity, uncontrollability, and the continuity conveyed in the *danse macabre*'s conflation of life and death.<sup>93</sup> While the designation "Burletta" might call to mind "burlesque," it also shares with the scherzo the premise of a joke and grotesque or exaggerated connotations. It is significant, then, that the Burletta progresses from the opening ungainly leaps and hops, which bring to mind the stiff-limbed bear dance of the early twentieth century, to the triple meter associated with a *danse macabre*.

For Jennings, the *danse macabre* is a prototypical example of the grotesque in motion. Part of what makes the Dance of Death so disposed towards the grotesque is the role that asymmetrical dance meters contribute. For instance, Jennings observes that dancing "is the activity most calculated to call forth fear alongside amusement. The nightmare bogey seems to run in pursuit of the observer; but the cyclical form of the dance turns the motion back upon itself."<sup>94</sup> However, as Sheinberg admits, triple meter has many other associations that are determined by different musical factors such as topic, function, style, and affect. Identifying a musical *danse macabre*, then, unless noted in the score, is always an interpretive process based on context.

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<sup>93</sup> Sheinberg, 22.

<sup>94</sup> Jennings, 19.

Perhaps due to music's referential ambiguity, musical *danses macabres* have had a tendency to conflate Death with Devil more so than their visual counterparts in which the Dance of Death appears as a skeleton's dance. The Burletta's *danse macabre* does so by evoking the long-standing conflation of violin with Devil and by employing rhythmic asymmetries indexical of Satanic equivocations, such as the Devil's propensity for "going to and fro" and "being neither here nor there."

At m. 46 in the Burletta, it is possible to read the dissonant circling figure in the solo second violin as both alluding to the Devil and to a skeleton.<sup>95</sup> Kárpáti observes that the violin's double stops and asymmetrical rhythmic relationships bear similarities with the violin solos in Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*.<sup>96</sup> Presumably, Kárpáti means Stravinsky's depictions of the Devil in "The Devil's Dance" and "The Devil's Triumphant March" of *Soldier's Tale*. Walsh also points directly to this passage of the Burletta as bearing a resemblance to *Soldier's Tale*, noting a similar "'thrown' rhythmic stress."<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the entrance of the first violin at m. 50, which creates a mirroring dissonant cluster to the second violin, calls to mind not only Jennings's description of the "duplication of the grotesque object," but also the Medieval and Renaissance visual depictions of multiple marching skeletons.

The rhythmic asymmetries that Kárpáti and Walsh identify in Bartók's Burletta and Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale* participate in perceptions of the Devil as both foreign and familiar.

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<sup>95</sup> Sheinberg, 125.

<sup>96</sup> Kárpáti, 486.

<sup>97</sup> Walsh, 85.

Indeed, the triple meter at m. 46 that initially evokes the Dance of Death alludes to this quality of being neither here nor there by means of a hemiola, rather than an actual meter change. Along these lines, McKay describes the effect that the Devil has on Stravinsky's "Soldier's March" as rhythmically falling "in and out of step," what he idiosyncratically calls an example of the *diabolus in musica*.<sup>98</sup> A similar effect occurs at m. 48 in the Burletta, when the lower strings reverse their triple rhythm at the very moment when they would have fallen in line with the irregular syncopations of the second violin (see Example 2.9).

The theme of downward topography depicted through Bakhtinian notions of a lower stratum and through associations with devilry and death is naturally retained in the movement's third formal section, even though the musical material is varied. Almost the entire reprise appears *pizzicati*, an adjustment that accords with connotations of death, owing to its "de-fleshed" sound. The timbral veiling that results from the *pizzicati* helps to evoke Bartók's "Night Music," which Bartók foregrounds by interjecting rapid triplet figures played *arco*, perhaps alluding to the miniature sounds of insects and the particular aural-spatial disorientation that can occur under darkness.

Both the Marcia and Burletta movements display features of the grotesque, particularly in the outer sections of their ternary forms. The grotesque of the Marcia materializes in two prominent ways. The first occurs through a process that inverts our physical empathy for the rhythmic pulse of the march into a series of asymmetrical hopping gestures analogous to a human deformity or hybridity. The second occurs through a process of crowding that accumulates parts and exaggerates the unsettling shadow effect by means of register and timbral distortion.

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<sup>98</sup> McKay, 258.



Example 2.9 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement iii, mm. 46-55, “*diabolus in musica*”

$\text{♩} = 100$

46

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

au talon

*p*

punta d'arco

*p*

punta d'arco

*p*

↓ rhythmic reversal (!)

49

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*mp*

51

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

IV

The Burletta movement amplifies the timbral grotesqueries to convey more static, visual depictions of human-animal hybridity and the Bakhtinian grotesque body. Rather than using processes of accumulation and crowding, the Burletta directs our attention downward, which in terms of Bakhtin's bodily lower stratum, conflates death, devilry, and night as symbolic of the mythical concept of the unknown. In both movements, attempts to identify the grotesque have focused on the ambivalence of the grotesque, particularly as it is conveyed through the body or through the composite of the ludicrous and horrifying.

In contrast to the grotesque outer sections, the core of each movement is presented in more conventional idioms: respectively, a lament and a pastoral. Mircea Eliade remarks that in mythic concepts of space, sacred (and cosmic) space is central and that which extends beyond the center represents chaos, darkness, and death.<sup>99</sup> In the following chapter, I will examine in more detail the position of the Mesto ritornello as exterior to these musical centers and argue that the ambivalent significance of the grotesque of the inner movements functions as a buffer between their respective cores and the Mesto. Indeed, a parallel could be drawn between this formal relationship and Jennings's observation that "grotesque figures tend to appear at the boundaries between worlds or realms" where chaos and cosmos come together.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), 47-49.

<sup>100</sup> Jennings, 162, n. 51. "From chaos to cosmos" is a common summation of mythic narrative and is used in an early musicological essay on myth in non-programmatic music by Leo Normet, "The Mythical in Non-Programmatic Music," in *Musical Signification: Essays in the Semiotic Theory and Analysis of Music*, ed. Eero Tarasti (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), 559-64.

### Chapter 3: The Mesto as Entity, Agent, and Symbol

#### *Introducing an Opposition between Exterior and Interior*

During the course of the Sixth Quartet, the actions of the Mesto establish an opposition between the space that it inhabits—that is, a ritornello exterior to the musical forms of the three movements it precedes—and the interior space represented by the musical forms themselves. This opposition is not as apparent in the first movement’s sonata form as it is in the inner movements for two reasons. (1a) The *più mosso, pesante* bridge between the ritornello and sonata form proper (see Example 3.1) suggests a more modest or restrained presence of grotesque features compared to the outer sections of the Marcia and Burletta pieces. While the *pesante* bridge resembles these subsequent grotesque sections in that it exhibits large leaps, gaping rests, and a homophonic texture, it lacks the kinetic rhythmic disruptions that contribute especially to a sense of bodily deformation.<sup>1</sup> (1b) Furthermore, the *pesante* bridge is more abbreviated, and thus less prominent, in comparison to the grotesque sections of the inner movements, in part, due to its function as a slow introduction to the following sonata form. (2) Moreover, the opposition between exterior ritornello and interior form does not register as strongly as the sonata-form opposition inherent between the primary and secondary themes.

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<sup>1</sup> This reading of the *pesante* bridge as grotesque reconciles well with its intertextual allusion to Beethoven’s *Grosse fuge*, which one could also read as possessing grotesque features, such as large leaps, gaps, and hyperbole. For the similarities between Bartók’s Sixth Quartet and the *Grosse fuge*, see Mark A. Radice, “Bartók’s Parodies of Beethoven: The Relationship between Opp. 131, 132, and 133 and Bartók’s Sixth String Quartet and Third Piano Concerto,” *Music Review* 42, no. 1 (February 1981): 255-8.

**Example 3.1 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement i, mm. 14-23, *pesante* bridge**

Più mosso, *pesante* (*lunga*)

♩. = ca. 70

The musical score is for the 'pesante' bridge of Bartók's Sixth String Quartet, measures 14-23. It is written for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The time signature is 8/8, and the key signature is D major. The tempo is 'Più mosso, pesante' with a note equal to approximately 70 beats per minute. The bridge is marked '(lunga)'. The dynamics are f, ff, f, cresc., and ff. The score shows a crescendo from measure 14 to 23, with a final fortissimo (ff) in measure 23.

Both of the inner movements differ notably in this respect: the positions of exterior and interior are more clearly established as “norms of location”<sup>2</sup> because, in both cases, the ternary forms automatically imply a central core. This process is highlighted through the contrasts between the exterior ritornello and the grotesque outer sections of the Marcia and Burletta, in conjunction with the “not-grotesque” idioms of the inner core sections, appearing, respectively, as a lament and a pastoral.

The lament and pastoral topics are both presented using more conventional idioms than those of their grotesque bookends. The lament opens with a recitative in the cello that becomes an impassioned solo accompanied by tremolos in the upper strings and balladic guitar strumming in the viola. While the cello line does feature some *glissandi* (timbral effects that might be mistaken for grotesque), its presentation seems iconic of weeping and is

<sup>2</sup> I use this phrase in the sense that Byron Almén uses it to convey a central paradigm. Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 62.

likely derived from the styles of *parlando-rubato* peasant singing that Bartók discovered during his research.<sup>3</sup> The pastoral features of the Burletta consist of a compound triple meter, soft *dolce* dynamics, and the presence of a drone. The pastoral section also recalls the long-short-short-long rhythmic variations of the first movement's second theme (m. 81), which one might describe as sharing some affinities with the pastoral topic in that it possesses a rustic gigue character. The transparently conventional lament and pastoral idioms help to "place" the listener by means of familiarity, in a sense, enabling her to pause or rest.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the grotesque features of the character pieces that comprise the second and third movements have an alienating or destabilizing effect due to the ambivalence of the grotesque.

The location of the grotesque in the musical forms and in relation to the ritornello befits the grotesque as a category that exists on the margins, either overlapping between chaos and cosmos (Jennings) or between art and non-art (Harpham).<sup>5</sup> The bridge occupies a marginal position *in relation to* the sonata form: as a slow introduction, it precedes the sonata form proper, but is later marked as formally interior when it returns at the opening of the development section (m. 158). Similarly, the framing role of the grotesque sections in the Marcia and Burletta is compatible with the historical position of the grotesque as an

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<sup>3</sup> Kárpáti, 484; Walsh, 84.

<sup>4</sup> Tuan, 6. Tuan also observes that place is a "concretion of value," meaning that places are filled with familiar or meaningful objects or that places occupy space, which for some reason has become meaningful (12). In musical terms, the fact that the inner core formal sections allude so strongly to topics, which are value-laden, reinforces the sense that they are placed. By contrast, the Mesto appears as the most topically neutral musical idea of the Quartet, which also sets it apart from this notion of place. The grotesque features of the Quartet, as we'll see, occupy both positions simultaneously.

<sup>5</sup> Jennings 162, n. 51; Harpham, xxii.

ornament. Moreover, the marginal location of the grotesque in the Quartet becomes a porous or liminal boundary by means of organic relationships that exist between the ritornello theme and the themes presented as grotesque, as later analysis will demonstrate. These relationships imply that the grotesque mediates or serves as a buffer between the opposition of exterior and interior space, so as to suggest a plausible analogy to mythic structures in which dichotomies demand mediators.<sup>6</sup>

Significant implications for our understanding of the Quartet as a whole derive from the recognition of the Mesto's innate characteristic of separateness as a ritornello that precedes the forms of the first three movements. Because its successive statements change in terms of length and the number of sounding parts while its style and thematic content remain consistent, it exhibits a type of narrative progression in relation to itself that reveals over time a prevailing attribute of growth or increase. The agency that ensues from this gesture of growth over time coincides with the ritornello's external position, such that it resembles the mythic concept of autochthony, which accounts for origin and reproduction in terms of place rather than bisexual reproduction.<sup>7</sup> In other words, autochthony, in this sense, suggests that which is formed or originating in the place where it is found and generally understood to be born out of the earth, carrying with it a connotation of being self-generating.

In narrative terms, the ritornello comprises a set of features that can function as a paradigm or unit, which may or may not interact with other features of the Quartet. In order

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<sup>6</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270, Myth: A Symposium (1955): 440. According to Lévi-Strauss, "mythical thought always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation."

<sup>7</sup> Harpham, 53, 93.

to describe the ritornello as a whole, I have chosen to adopt Hatten's term "entity," which he defines as "any process, event, or structure that can be defined oppositionally as a unit."<sup>8</sup> As discussed above, an opposition already exists between the interior and exterior spaces of the Quartet, the latter of which, the ritornello occupies. From this exterior location, a paradigmatic approach takes into consideration the particular features of the ritornello and examines the possible connotations resulting from these choices.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, "paradigmatic" is contrasted with "syntagmatic," which tracks a set of features (paradigm) over time and in relation to other features. For example, the Sixth Quartet's underlying spatial, or formal, opposition between exterior and interior is foregrounded when parts of the ritornello transgress its exterior norm of location and materialize around the "cores," or inner formal sections of the inner movements. This syntagmatic process suggests perhaps the dissolution of spatial boundaries, or even an intrusion of chaos upon cosmos. These particular actions of the Mesto during the Marcia and Burletta contribute to the prevailing sense of the Mesto as an entity that develops agency.<sup>10</sup>

The progressive surfacing of the ritornello—which has presented itself as exterior—within the musical forms threatens our concepts of internal and external, such that the Mesto entity accrues characteristics compatible with those of mythic representations of evil. Notably, these characteristics intensify concurrently with the Burletta's allusions to death and devilry. In the following chapter, I examine the characteristics of the Mesto theme and its

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<sup>8</sup> Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 289. Hatten refers to entities as being paradigmatic, in contrast to syntagmatic, which entails an interaction with other units or entities over time.

<sup>9</sup> Almén, 46.

<sup>10</sup> See the historiography presented in the introduction.

relationship with the grotesque features of the Marcia and Burletta. By adopting a “rhetorical mode” that sets up an opposition between exterior and interior (or space and place), I am able to track a type of narrative that accounts for the agency of the Mesto as well as the role of the grotesque, as it is played out in the Quartet.<sup>11</sup> I also account for the Mesto’s increasing presence in the musical forms by exploring how its features and actions resonate with perceptions of evil.

***Out of the Corner of the Mesto: A re-examination of the Marcia***

*Mais il y a des angles d'où l'on ne peut plus sortir.*

“But there are angles from which one cannot escape.”  
—Albert-Birot, *Poems to My Other Self*

In each of the Mesto’s successive statements prior to the onset of the attendant movement’s musical form, both the number of measures and the number of voices increase. Introducing the Quartet, its first presentation is played by a solo viola. Its second appearance uses all four instruments, but contains only two voices (a subject in the cello and a countermelody tripled in the first violin, second violin, and viola), while the number of voices in its third and fourth recurrences increases respectively to three and four. Similarly, the number of measures in each statement begins at 13 and increases to 16, 20, and 45.

The double emphasis on growth in each presentation of the Mesto imbues it with an autochthonous character in that the Mesto appears to be self-generating or originating out of its own space. This character is evident not only in the Mesto’s growth as a whole, but also in the expansion of its constituent portions: it expands from its “tail” in the statement prior to the Marcia, and later, from its “middle” prior to the Burletta. Finally, the attribute of self-

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<sup>11</sup> Almén defines a rhetorical mode as an “arena of conflict within which a narrative is articulated by an interpreter” (Almén, 225).



generation can also be observed in the intervallic expansion from minor thirds, to major thirds, to augmented fourths that occurs during the original ritornello. In other words, the diminished seventh chord outlined by the long or emphasized pitches of mm. 1-3 expands to outline augmented triads and augmented fourths in mm. 8-10 (Example 3.2).

**Example 3.2 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement i, mm. 1-13, “ritornello”**

The image shows a musical score for two staves: Viola and Vla. (Violoncello). The Viola staff is in 6/8 time, marked 'Mesto, ♩ = 96'. It features a 'Diminished 7th' chord. The Vla. staff is in 6/8 time, marked 'f'. It features 'Augmented Triads' and 'Augmented 4ths'. Dynamics include *mf*, *f*, *mf*, *p*, and *pp*.

In addition to being self-generating, the Mesto theme has qualities that suggest a chthonic character, which, as a complement to autochthony, refers to beings that dwell beneath the surface of the earth, the paragon of which is the serpent. The Mesto’s melodic contour is highly chromatic, step-wise, and winding. These features—at least within a tonal tradition—may conceivably draw upon Baroque *Affektenlehre* representations of the serpent as a symbol of evil or Satan (see Example 3.2).<sup>12</sup>

One might also perceive the Mesto theme as chthonic by means of embodied notions of vertical and horizontal. In contrast to the vertical positions induced by the march and dance rhythms of the grotesque character pieces, the Mesto’s theme suggests a horizontal, or

<sup>12</sup> Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures*, 195-96. Hatten identifies a “serpentine shape” in Schubert’s Piano Sonata in A Minor, D. 784, second movement, characterized by a winding or twisting gesture made more explicit through upper and lower chromatic neighbors. At this point in my analysis, chthonic does not equate with evil, but merely with those attributes of creatures that dwell below the surface.

at least “non-vertical,” posture. Its slow and legato presentation and winding contour combine with rhythmic features that downplay pulse and pattern. For example, the frequent ties into the next beat and irregular long or emphasized notes foreground linearity over and above the rhythmic repetition that our bodies so easily reciprocate.

Furthermore, the overall gesture of the Mesto’s phrasing indicates a motion that is surfacing from below. The opening ritornello theme comprises a tripartite phrase structure, which corresponds with mm. 1-3, 4-7, and 8-13. The winding contour mentioned above is reinforced at the phrase level, which at m. 4 inverts the initial direction presented in mm. 1-3. The entire theme, however, intensifies with a rising motion during a modulation from the initial G-sharp to its dominant, the crux of which occurs over the bar line between m. 7 and m. 8 on a C double sharp. Though the double sharp resolves to D-sharp, this apex is the beginning of a descent that outlines augmented triads and tritones, the effect of which abandons any strong sense of arrival. The combined gesture that climaxes over the bar line, resolves on a weak beat, and immediately retreats from the apex suggests an action more akin to “surfacing” or “just barely pushing through” than an extroverted alternative such as “climbing,” “conquering,” or “mounting.”

In light of the Mesto’s autochthonous and chthonic traits, it is curious that the principal motive of the Marcia actually emerges from the “corner” of the ritornello as a type of foreshadowing that preserves the character of the Mesto, but directly points to the Marcia (Example 3.3). Similar organic connections between the Mesto and the grotesque appear in the first and third movements as well, though not as transparently. For instance, Kárpáti observes that the final three measures of the Mesto become the material from which the

*pesante* bridge emerges in m. 14 of the first movement (Example 3.4).<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the Mesto's descending sequence prior to the Burletta is slightly modified so as to anticipate the theme from m. 25 of the Burletta (Example 3.5).<sup>14</sup>

These organic links yoke the Mesto and the grotesque idioms together such that we might reconsider the significance of the grotesque from the spatial category of "boundaries." Using the Marcia as a model, I would like to consider this category as it is manifested in the concept of "corners" and how the spatial features of corners contribute to different expressive states. By doing so, I hope to show that the grotesque is in fact functioning as a spatial buffer by sharing in both the external and internal spaces of the Quartet.

**Example 3.3 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, mm. 14-17, "fore-shadow"**

The musical score for Example 3.3 shows measures 14-17 of the second movement of Bartók's Sixth String Quartet. The tempo is marked as 96. The score is for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. In measures 14-15, all instruments play a descending sequence of notes, marked *dim.* and *p*. In measures 16-17, the Violin II part plays a descending sequence of notes, marked *più p*, while the other instruments play whole notes. The phrase "fore-shadow" is written above the Violin II part in measure 16.

<sup>13</sup> Kárpáti, 472.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 470.

**Example 3.4 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement i, “organic links”**

a. mm. 10-13

b. mm. 14-16

Viola

a.

b.

**Example 3.5 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement iii, “organic links”**

a. mm. 13-17

b. mm. 25-26

a.

b.

As a segue, Lakoff and Johnson's analysis of "container metaphors"<sup>15</sup> helps to establish a framework in which to think about "corners" and how they might possibly be applied to music. Lakoff and Johnson remark that by virtue of our physical bodies, which we experience as contained with respect to the rest of the world, "we project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces." Thus, we think of rooms, objects, and environments as containers. However, we extend this metaphor to indefinite concepts as well: "[E]ven where there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as defining a container, we impose boundaries—marking off territory so that it has an inside and a bounding surface."<sup>16</sup> By extension, the ritornello can be viewed as its own container that exists separately from the containers "sonata form" and "ternary form."

When corners are thought of in relation to the metaphor "rooms are containers," they inhabit a unique boundary location. Bachelard describes the corner as "a sort of half-box, part walls, part door."<sup>17</sup> Corners are also conceived as the most distant places of a room in that they represent the farthest limits of the container. For instance, one hides *in* a corner in order to get *away*. Similarly, as a form of punishment, we might dismiss a child *to* the corner.

The four-note link of the Mesto suggests similar qualities of distance or limits. First, the link is automatically marked as an outer limit, considering that it is the last thing heard in the style of the Mesto prior to the Marcia. Additionally, in contrast to the four-voiced texture preceding it, the link appears as a solo, making it sound smaller by comparison; it is also set

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<sup>15</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, 29-32.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>17</sup> Bachelard, 137.

apart from the previous cadence with the marking *più piano*.<sup>18</sup> Though its ascending contour predicts the opening triad of the Marcia, the link points directly to the G-sharp minor variant of the Marcia's opening *verbunkos* figure rather than B major. Consequently, the link identifies itself with the voice of the Marcia that is "removed." In other words, the "shadow," or variant, not only comes after, but also, due to its canonic texture, pursues the B major opening. Moreover, by way of its position as the relative minor to B major, the shadow may be thought of as derivative or an imitation of the "real thing." Finally, because the link is a distorted triad, outlining a diminished fifth rather than a perfect fifth, the triad is in some sense "flattened out," as if heard from a distance or viewed upon a horizon.

Besides representing outer or distant limits, corners are places of inactivity that can symbolize feelings of intimacy and repose or fear and anxiety. We frequently place an object in a corner to fill its space, such as a chair in which to read a book. In such a scenario, the corner becomes a place of rest and intimacy, since the object *chair* is one in which a person typically sits alone, engaging in the often-solitary pastimes of reading and daydreaming. It may be significant that the link between the Mesto and Marcia occurs after the cadence of the Mesto—a musical gesture that we typically designate as a place of pause or rest—suggesting perhaps that the "corner" in which the link appears is not one of repose, but rather one that serves a different purpose.

In contrast to intimacy and repose, corners may become sources of fear and anxiety. When left on their own, they are places of darkness and dust, of insects, both dead and alive,

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<sup>18</sup> The *con sordino* expressive marking that begins the countermelody of the Mesto contributes to a sense of being timbrally removed in that the bow literally is making less contact with the string. The *con sordino* timbre gives the entire countermelody a quality of being veiled or hidden. However, it is unclear from the score whether the foreshadow is also meant to be played in this manner or with a normal bowing.

and of lost or forgotten objects. Thus, the fact that the Mesto's link refers to the "shadow" in the Marcia is significant. Curiously, the Mesto's link is a literal "fore-shadow," which, if we recall the allusion to canonic procedures in the Marcia's B major and G-sharp minor imitative texture, suggests the slightly unsettling possibility that the parts of *dux* and *comes* are reversed or that perhaps something external to the "rule" is shaping events.<sup>19</sup>

If we ponder yet a little longer on the implications of the link as a corner, further features of the fore-shadow and the grotesque emerge as complementary. For instance, the fact that corners are places of inactivity resonates with the Marcia's theme of crowding. Again, Bachelard's observations provide a useful guideline when he remarks that corners are havens for immobility.<sup>20</sup> To choose immobility is to rest in comfort, yet to be immobile can be as frightening as it is assuring, most obviously when one is immobilized against one's will, as when crowds close in on, or "corner," us. In light of the Marcia's crowding, then, we might plausibly regard the Mesto's concluding link as a corner that issues unwanted immobility.

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<sup>19</sup> A noteworthy parallel signifying corners of darkness and dust is T. S. Eliot's polluted fog that helps to set the stage for the love song of J. Alfred Prufrock. Itself a symbol of moral decay—developed further in *The Waste Land*—Eliot's yellow fog "licked its tongue into the corners of the evening." Indeed, similar to the Mesto's exterior intrusion upon the interior in Bartók's Quartet, Eliot's fog hovers ominously around the security and intimacy that a house *should* represent (but in this case, does not), "rubbing its back upon window panes," "lingering," and finally "curling about the house," almost as if looking for a way in. Eliot's poem considerably predates Bartók's Quartet, having been completed around 1911. T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in *Modern Poems: A Norton Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 273.

<sup>20</sup> Bachelard, 137.

Finally, Bachelard observes that there are times in which “being becomes manifest at the very moment when it comes forth from its corner,”<sup>21</sup> an apt description of what appears to be the boundary from which the grotesque emerges. Similar to this notion of “being become manifest,” the grotesque hopping or limping gestures of the Marcia resonate with features of chthonic beings represented in myths of origin. Claude Lévi-Strauss observes that chthonic beings—that is, those born from the earth—are born either unable to walk or walking clumsily.<sup>22</sup> Notably, the former description could apply to the horizontal or linear features of the Mesto and the latter to the grotesque limping of the Marcia (see Example 2.3). Indeed, the performative difficulty in the Marcia’s rhythmic passages reinforces this inability to walk correctly.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that the grotesque hops of the Marcia share features with both the horizontal ritornello and the vertical march brings to mind Jennings’s remark that grotesque figures straddle the boundaries between worlds or realms.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Jennings states elsewhere that such grotesque creatures “seem to issue from their own chaos world, where our standards do not apply.”<sup>25</sup> As if acting out this apprehension, the final measures of the Marcia, through

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<sup>21</sup> Bachelard, 138.

<sup>22</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, 434.

<sup>23</sup> I have in mind here Tarasti’s secondary modality ‘can,’ which seems to be a very useful tool when analyzing features of the grotesque in music. ‘Can’ could also be applied in the previous chapter’s discussion of harmonics (Tarasti, 90 and 169-70). See also Almén’s explanation of Tarasti’s modalities (Almén, 61).

<sup>24</sup> Jennings, 162, n. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 10.



their soft dynamics, harmonics, and the *pizzicati* chords that fade out the movement, seem to retreat back into a corner, as if returning to their “chaos world” (Example 3.6).

**Example 3.6 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, mm. 187-91**

The musical score for Example 3.6, Bartók's Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, measures 187-91, is presented for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The tempo is marked as 104 (♩ = 104). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score includes a 'poco rall.' marking. The dynamics are marked as *p* (piano) and *pizz.* (pizzicato). The Cello part includes a *p* (arco) marking. The score shows a complex interplay of melodic lines and harmonic textures, with a focus on soft dynamics and pizzicato chords.

In summary, the organic relationship between the fore-shadow and the Marcia’s shadow, as well as the correlations that emerge by reflecting on the spatial categories of corners and boundaries, position the grotesque features of the Marcia on the margins between exterior ritornello and interior lament (section B). Consequently, the grotesque is no longer solely a part of the ternary form, which we might have considered entirely contained, but is in some sense implicated in what extends beyond the limits of form. That the grotesque might function as a spatial barrier or buffer between the interior topics and the exterior ritornello becomes more pronounced as the Mesto more conspicuously materializes around the interior formal sections. Eventually, the Mesto-like appearances work upon the interior spaces so as to break down the grotesque barrier, beginning a process that dissolves the boundaries between internal and external.

### *The Mesto as Agent and Symbol*

In conjunction with adopting an “arena of conflict” between exterior and interior space, one way of narrating the events of the Quartet is by tracking the increasing presence of the Mesto within the musical forms. By this, I do not simply mean the organic development of themes and pitch content that many have observed flows naturally in the first movement from the Mesto to the *pesante* bridge to the primary theme.<sup>26</sup> Rather, I am more interested in the interior appearances of the Mesto entity that is developed in the paradigmatic ritornello.

The ritornello’s established paradigm consists of features such as the Mesto’s slow tempo, chromatic and winding contours, predominantly slurred articulations, and horizontal rhythmic character. The melodic theme also contains a gesture that “surfaces,” imbuing it with what I have called a chthonic attribute. Moreover, with each repetition, the ritornello displays a self-generating feature, what I have correspondingly termed “autochthonous.” Placed within a narrative grammar, the features that comprise the Mesto entity exemplify what Eero Tarasti identifies as an “isotopy” or “a set of semantic categories whose redundancy guarantees the coherence of a sign-complex and makes possible the uniform reading of a text.”<sup>27</sup>

Significantly, then, aspects of the ritornello’s set of features, which we can reliably recognize as Mesto in character, materialize in the Marcia and Burletta movements, suggesting a level of agency and narrative engagement not otherwise present in the ritornello. Almén argues that such activity “is imbued with meaning by interpreting that activity in

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<sup>26</sup> Bayley, 167; Kárpáti, 472; Stevens, 198; Walsh, 83.

<sup>27</sup> Tarasti, 304. See also Almén, 62.

relation to an environment” and in relation to the isotopy’s “norms of location.”<sup>28</sup> As already shown, the normative location for the Mesto is its external position as a ritornello. Though all the features of a paradigm may be considered an isotopy’s norms of location, it is specifically the spatial norm of the Mesto that is modified through these events in the middle movements, the effect of which reinforces the opposition between interior and exterior.<sup>29</sup>

The preservation of spatial opposition retains the mythic concept of chaos and cosmos already encountered in our discussions of the grotesque, aligning the Mesto with representations of chaos, and the interior forms with cosmos. In mythic thought, cosmic space is often symbolized through vertical or central poles,<sup>30</sup> in contrast to everything that is outside our world, which, according to Eliade, “is no longer a cosmos but a sort of ‘other world,’ a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, ‘foreigners.’”<sup>31</sup> Likewise, Victoria Adamenko argues that the large-scale arch forms and symmetrical harmonic structuring in many of Bartók’s works, including his Fourth and Fifth Quartets, resemble the mythological World Tree or *Axis Mundi*, which structures the universe in mythical thought.<sup>32</sup> Though Bartók’s Sixth Quartet abandons this large-scale arch form, it nevertheless preserves

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<sup>28</sup> Almén, 74, 62.

<sup>29</sup> My use of the term “spatial,” at this point, should not be confused with Tarasti’s primary modality of spatial articulation, which he uses to convey register and harmony (Tarasti, 158-61).

<sup>30</sup> Eliade, 24-47. Such as alters, the Cross, a tree or some other sacred pole, or the cosmic mountain. Part of Eliade’s argument is that even non-religious, or “profane” man retains this habit of marking his lived space with privatized “holy places.”

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>32</sup> Victoria Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music: From Scriabin and Schoenberg to Schnittke and Crumb* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2007), 22 and 46.

and conveys perhaps even more profoundly a sense of central space, especially by way of the inner two movements, which individually comprise ternary forms and as a pair are centrally positioned in relation to the outer movements.<sup>33</sup> While the increased activity of the Mesto in the form of Mesto-like appearances suggests a type of narrative, these events are also removed enough from their environments so as to accumulate for the Mesto entity a more static, symbolic significance always in relation to the Mesto's exterior spatial norm. Thus, the Mesto-like appearances accrue a symbolism that can be equated with Eliade's foreign and chaotic space, and which, by extension, will be shown to resemble our perceptions of evil.

These appearances of the Mesto materialize at three different places throughout the Marcia and Burletta. The first occurs in the Marcia, emerging out of the transition from the central lament (B) to the reprise of the march (A); it comprises an augmented version of the original fore-shadow (Example 3.7, mm. 120-21). The second appearance occurs in the Burletta just prior to the central pastoral section (B), quite suddenly and in an extremely exposed setting (Example 3.8, mm. 67-68). Similarly, the final appearance occurs in the Burletta following the pastoral section (Example 3.9, m. 96). All of these statements share in common with the Mesto those features that mark it as slow, slurred, linear, chromatic, and surfacing. Most importantly, the most marked of these features is the Mesto's surfacing gesture. This motion is especially highlighted by the brevity of the three statements and by the extent to which they are exposed in comparison to their surrounding textures.

Though the augmented version of the fore-shadow is certainly the most veiled of the three, (due to its rhythmically altered appearance and indefinite unfolding from the sixteenth-

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<sup>33</sup> The last movement of the Sixth may be best described as the first movement's sonata form recalled, but not in any meaningful sense of the term formulated. To even discuss the final movement as a form seems to miss the point that the Mesto by that time has completely surrounded and penetrated the movement.

note patterns of the transition), it nonetheless goes through a process of exposure as two of the four voices gradually drop out. The appearance prior to the pastoral, (shown in Example 3.8), is even more exposed, since it is the only voice after a full-ensemble cadence. The descending half-step, in addition to the fact that it appears in the viola, links it especially to the opening of the Mesto theme. Indeed, its sudden *mezzo forte* appearance on the weak part of the first beat of the measure may indicate that the Mesto has been “playing” in the background the whole time, and was only heard by chance. Its hasty diminuendo, underscored by the ascending interval, somewhat counter-intuitively suggests a retreat similar to the Mesto’s descent that occurred after its initial surfacing gesture. The final Mesto-like appearance is especially brief (Example 3.9), consisting of only three audible notes (the fourth note is engulfed in a violent, full-textured and *forte pizzicato*) and is similarly exposed both by the gaping rest preceding it and the solo setting.<sup>34</sup>

While it is important that the three iterations of the Mesto share in common reduced textures, linear and chromatic inflections, and/or direct references to portions of the Mesto ritornello, of equal importance is the fact that these features share little in common with the musical environments surrounding them, either topically or stylistically.<sup>35</sup> Though one may discuss these appearances in terms of transition, they present themselves as somewhat incongruous interruptions (particularly the two belonging to the Burletta), rather than as a means of transferal from point A to point B. This quality of interruption retains and

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<sup>34</sup> This may be a good example of what Tarasti calls “*horror vacui*, or the fear of any gap or place of ‘non-being’ in the music” (Tarasti, 88).

<sup>35</sup> With the possible exception of the third gesture following the pastoral. Its pianissimo dynamic and triple grouping is similar to the preceding pastoral; however, the large rest prior the gesture and following in place of a strong resolution for the pastoral section (m. 96) suggests a different musical entity. See preceding note.

contributes to the feature of the Mesto as external, such that even though it appears within the musical form, it nonetheless preserves an identity as foreign.

**Example 3.7** Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, mm. 117-21

The musical score for Bartók's Sixth String Quartet, movement ii, measures 117-21, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 117-118) shows a crescendo from piano (*p*) to forte (*f*) across all four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello). The second system (measures 119-121) shows a decrescendo from piano (*p*) to pianissimo (*pp*). The Violin I part in measure 119 is marked with a decrescendo hairpin and ends in a measure of rest labeled "Augmented 'fore-shadow'". The Viola and Cello parts continue with rapid sixteenth-note patterns, while the Violin II part has a more melodic line. The score is in 5/4 time and features a variety of dynamic markings and articulations.

Example 3.8 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement iii, mm. 66-69

♩ = 90

rallent. - - -

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

*mp* *p* *mf* *p*

Example 3.9 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement iii, mm. 94-97

♩ = 70

rallent. - - - - ♩ = 100

pizz.

Violin I

Violin II

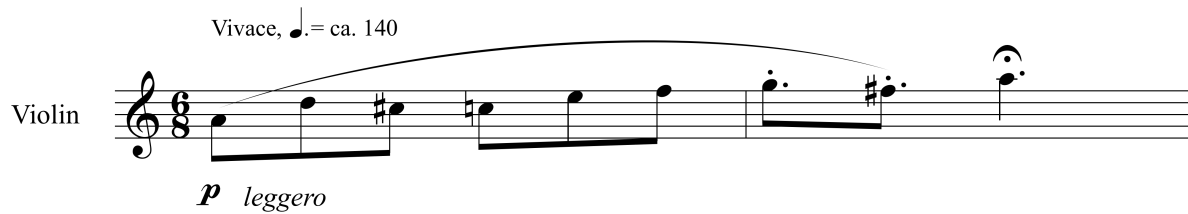
Viola

Cello

*pp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

Despite retaining this quality of otherness, however, there is paradoxically some sense that the Mesto has either always been present (whether we conceive of this presence as “within” or “beneath” is irrelevant) or that the Mesto is coming *in*. This is perhaps most visible in the third surfacing gesture (shown in Example 3.9), which, rather than referencing the Mesto directly, quotes the opening intervals of the first movement’s primary theme, a theme that by virtue of its formal function is rooted and placed interiorly (Example 3.10).<sup>36</sup>

**Example 3.10** Bartók, *Sixth String Quartet*, movement i, mm. 24-25



In light of these three interruptions, a remarkable parallel can be drawn between the Mesto as an entity and the representation of evil symbolized in the serpent’s role in the Adamic myth. While the serpent in many mythologies symbolizes fertility and rebirth by virtue of its ability to slough its skin, suggesting a sort of unified cosmic cycle of death and rebirth, it can also, somewhat paradoxically, due to its coiling aspect, connote the mythic equivalent to evil (i.e., chaos) as a symbol of the primordial waters that surround, but also permeate the Earth.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> It is also the theme that is most frequently observed as an organic development out of the ritornello, a fact that increases the sense that the Mesto has always been present.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (1964; repr. New York: Penguin Compass, 1991), 9-10.



In the Adamic myth, this dual aspect of autochthony and externality is concentrated to symbolize what Paul Ricoeur identifies as the “already there-ness” and the “quasi-externality” of evil as we encounter it both outside of and within ourselves. In other words, as Ricoeur explains,

The serpent represents the following situation: in the historical experience of man, every individual finds evil *already there*; nobody begins it absolutely. ... Evil is part of the interhuman relationship, like language, tools, institutions; it is transmitted; it is tradition, and not only something that happens. There is thus an anteriority of evil to itself, as if evil were that which always precedes itself. ... That is why, in the Garden of Eden, the serpent is already there; he is the other side of that which begins. ... There is thus a side of our world that confronts us as chaos and that is symbolized by the chthonic animal.<sup>38</sup>

The placement of the three surfacing gestures as equivocal transitions that occupy a liminal space between the grotesque and the core formal sections significantly contributes to our perception of the Mesto: that is, as an agent, it presents itself not only as external, self-generating, and surfacing, but also as both *in* and *out*. Ricoeur observes that in the Adamic myth’s account of the Fall, the serpent is a “figure of transition,” which prompts a meditation on evil’s propensity to “hover on the border between the outer and inner.”<sup>39</sup> In view of Ricoeur’s identification of evil’s “quasi-external” characteristics, it is especially significant that the Mesto reveals these traits immediately following and preceding the diabolical

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, Religious Perspectives 17 (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 257-58.

<sup>39</sup> Ricoeur, 252, 256. It is interesting that Hatten’s identification of a “serpentine shape” in Schubert’s Piano Sonata in A Minor, D. 784 exhibits a similarly independent and intruding presence (extremely soft, muted timbre and unison octaves). Hatten uses words such as “uncanny,” “parenthetical,” “haunting,” “intrusion of negative agency,” “otherworldly,” and “lurking” to describe this short, one-measure gesture (Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures*, 194-96).

references in the Burletta, which, we recall, emphasized Satanic equivocations that manifest themselves as “being neither here nor there” or “in and out of step.”

Befitting the confusion that often attends evil’s intrusion, the prominent Mesto incursions in the Burletta seem to disrupt the formal organization of the following material. In m. 135, an unprecedented re-appearance of the core pastoral topic emerges in the reprise only to be violently cut off by a grotesque chomping gesture, portrayed by *forte* dynamics, homophonic texture, duple grouping, and displaced accents on weak beats (Example 3.11). This event occurs three times in succession, suggesting a sort of spatial *displacement* and dismemberment that corresponds with the spatial interruptions of the Mesto. Eliade’s comments again prove insightful: “Since ‘our world’ is a cosmos, any attack from without threatens to turn it into chaos.” Those attacking our cosmos are represented as demons and ultimately as the arch-demon or primordial dragon, which is “the paradigmatic figure of the marine monster, of the primordial snake, symbol of the cosmic waters, of darkness, night, and death—in short, of the amorphous and virtual, of everything that has not yet acquired a ‘form.’”<sup>40</sup>

Notably, the portion of the pastoral that emerges is a recollection of the secondary theme in the first movement, perhaps the most locally (i.e., Hungarian) inspired of all the topics in the Quartet. The long-short-short-long pattern and its variations are characteristic of Hungarian rhythms and have been regarded by Bartók, among others, as derivatives of the stresses in the Hungarian language that tend to fall on the first syllable.<sup>41</sup> Bartók frequently

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<sup>40</sup> Eliade, 47-48.

<sup>41</sup> Schneider, 21. Kárpáti identifies this rhythm specifically with Máramaros Rumanian folk music, again, a reminder of the cross-pollination of folk genres (Kárpáti, 474).

identified these rhythmic patterns among what he called the “Old Style” peasant songs collected in his research.<sup>42</sup> In light of the national, local, and personal values attached to the rhythm, it is all the more distressing that the simple, almost delicate presentation should appear so out of place and violently dismembered in the reprise of the Burletta. Indeed, considering the intrusion of chaos upon cosmos during the Burletta, the aforementioned spatial buffer that the grotesque previously inhabited seems to have been broken through by the Mesto, suggesting the dissolution of spatial boundaries between interior and exterior.

**Example 3.11** Bartók, *Sixth String Quartet*, movement iii, mm. 135-37

Andantino ♩. = 70

The musical score for Example 3.11 is for the third movement of Béla Bartók's Sixth String Quartet, measures 135-37. The tempo is marked 'Andantino' with a quarter note equal to 70 beats per minute. The score is written for four parts: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature changes from 3/8 to 6/8 between measures 135 and 136. In measure 135, Violin I and II play a half note (F#), while Viola and Cello play a half note (F#). In measure 136, Violin I and II play a half note (F#), while Viola and Cello play a half note (F#). In measure 137, Violin I and II play a half note (F#), while Viola and Cello play a half note (F#). The dynamics are marked *p* (piano) for Violin I and II, and *f* (forte) for Viola and Cello.

As the above analysis indicates, the role of the ritornello extends beyond its function as external cyclical theme to become a narrative agent responsible for the intrusion of the exterior upon the interior. Its self-generating and chthonic attributes contribute to a symbolic

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Béla Bartók, “Hungarian Peasant Music [1933],” in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), 86-88.

significance that prompts a meditation on evil. While the Mesto is not itself grotesque, it is in some sense set apart by the grotesque's marginal position and ambivalent aesthetics. As such, the grotesque becomes a boundary that the Mesto "breaks through," the effects of which become evident in the displaced pastoral of the Burletta reprise.

This narrative trajectory could certainly correspond with Bartók's widely-shared impression of the encroachment by the Nazi regime (in Bartók's words, a gang of "thieves and murderers"<sup>43</sup>) upon one's home and country. However, the "response" given in the Quartet's final movement suggests perhaps a less allegorical approach towards evil and good, one that indicates a process of contemplation on the universal encounter with evil.

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<sup>43</sup> Bartók to Mme Müller-Widman, April 13, 1938, *Béla Bartók Letters*, 267.

## Chapter 4: Narrative and Myth in the Fourth Movement

The preceding analysis of the exterior ritornello's intrusions around the interior formal sections of the Marcia and Burletta describes a narrative that tracks a temporal *transvaluation* between the spatial categories of exterior and interior. In Almén's narrative theory, a transvaluation occurs as a crossing from one hierarchy to another, often described in terms of "conflict" or "crisis," but which may be discussed more neutrally as the reordering of an existing order. In the case of Bartók's Sixth String Quartet, this existing spatial order is articulated from a "bird's eye view" as exterior and interior: this is due to the ritornello theme's separateness from the musical forms themselves and due to the prominent existence of the grotesque on the margins between the exterior ritornello and the interior formal sections. The spatial reordering that results in the Sixth Quartet is not so much an inversion, but a dissolution of the boundaries marking exterior and interior spaces.

This particular narrative conflict is an outgrowth of, and continues to be grounded in, a desire to account for the role of the grotesque in this specific Quartet. The grotesque, at its most meaningful—even if such meaning emerges as ambivalence—is unavoidably a category of embodiment. Consequently, the grotesque encourages a discourse that intersects with its embodied locus and that uses the vocabularies of spatial and formal norms, such as center/periphery, internal/external, margins, borders, and frames.<sup>1</sup> My application of Lakoff and Johnson's "container metaphors" is, likewise, motivated by this desire to account for the placement of the grotesque in the Sixth Quartet in terms that are compatible with the aesthetics of the grotesque.

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<sup>1</sup> Harpham, 23-47.

Subsidiary to this narrative account, I have pointed to certain correspondences between Bartók's Sixth Quartet and mythic structures, such as the opposition between chaos and cosmos as it is represented in symmetrical forms. These resemblances have also emerged from my examination of the grotesque, although one could certainly explore other sources for similar interpretations. For instance, Adamenko argues that the absence of traditional organizing principles such as tonality in twentieth-century music have led to an intensification of mythic structures in music, including binary oppositions, symmetrical relationships, ritualistic repetition, and unification through circularity.<sup>2</sup> Adamenko uses the term "neo-mythologism" to contextualize these mythic re-manifestations as "the search for an individual language and individual myths" of a composer.<sup>3</sup>

Because Bartók's Sixth Quartet is a partial return to traditional organizing principles, it falls outside the parameters of Adamenko's study, which focuses on large compositional paradigms of the twentieth century, such as the ritualistic repetition of minimalism or the circularly notated scores of George Crumb.<sup>4</sup> However, it could be argued that the increased presence of the grotesque in twentieth-century music is itself a type of neo-mythologism. In Harpham's literary study of the grotesque, he argues comparably that the grotesque represents a "split between mythological and historical ways of thinking" that has developed since the early Modern era. Like Adamenko's application of neo-mythologism, Harpham

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<sup>2</sup> Adamenko, xii; see also Robert S. Hatten and Byron Almén, "Narrative Engagement with Twentieth-Century Music," in *Music and Narrative since 1900*, ed. Michael L. Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 73-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>4</sup> Adamenko, however, does not exclude Bartók's involvement in these neo-mythological tendencies. She restricts her study by stating that her goal is "not to provide a balanced, comprehensive overview of the phenomenon, but rather, to point to its mere presence in the music of the twentieth century" (xiii).

hypothesizes that “the grotesque consists of the manifest, visible, or unmediated presence of mythic or primitive elements *in* a nonmythic or modern context.”<sup>5</sup>

While there must remain a distinction between myth and the grotesque, it is often the case that the presence of one gives rise to the other. In Brown’s study of Bartók and the grotesque, she also calls attention to the influence of mythology and its structures on Bartók’s compositions, particularly with regard to bodily metamorphosis, as seen in *The Wooden Prince*, *Duke Bluebeard’s Castle*, and *Cantata profana*.<sup>6</sup> Brown observes that a “basic feature of mythology is its determination to explore the flexibility of boundaries, whether social, cultural or species, in the creation of stories about our being in the world.”<sup>7</sup> This similar goal of myth and the grotesque to explore boundaries as a means of making sense of our experiences has, in this study, formed an underlying trajectory from the grotesque to myth, and then to the “appropriation of myth to support a narrative interpretation.”<sup>8</sup>

By way of concluding this study, then, this final chapter considers the narrative ramifications resulting from the dissolution of spatial boundaries and the means by which the final movement of the Quartet “responds to” this transvaluation of spatial norms. I explore how this is conveyed within the context of the fourth movement through the trope of abnegation, a concept that Hatten develops and defines as “transcendence through a

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<sup>5</sup> Harpham, 51.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, 76-80.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>8</sup> Hatten and Almén, 73.

positively resigned acceptance.”<sup>9</sup> I also examine how the emergence of a mythic spatial-temporal paradigm conflates spatial and temporal dimensions to suggest a narrative that is not only linear, but also circular.

The fourth movement of Bartók’s Quartet sustains the expected course of the ritornello by increasing to more than twice its length than in the previous movement (forty-five measures compared to twenty). A reading of the entire movement, however, reveals that it differs from its predecessors in several ways. Firstly, no clear musical form is articulated following the ritornello. Rather, the sonata form of the first movement is recycled and stripped of any thematic development, and replaced instead with episodic recollections of the most prominent themes of the movement in a style closely related to that of the ritornello. Secondly, the marginal placement that the grotesque held in the previous three movements is conspicuously absent and succeeded by an unexpected hymn topic. Finally, the ritornello assumes an unprecedented placement within the Quartet when it returns and finishes the finale after the cyclic recollections of the first movement.

The generating outcome of these modifications is a more acute mingling of what had previously been distinct: external ritornello, marginal grotesque, and internal musical formal processes and formal sections. As a result, the nature of the ritornello is somewhat obscured: is it still an external entity, as it appeared in the Burletta’s surfacing gestures, or has it now assumed a new narrative role? As the following analysis will argue, one may detect in the fourth movement a change in the ritornello’s role that suggests a shift in narrative point of view, indicating a layer of subjectivity with which one might identify.

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<sup>9</sup> Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 20.



Even if one does not grant Kroō's rather mawkish implication that the movement is Bartók's voice,<sup>10</sup> it is possible to detect a certain degree of frustrated teleology in the ritornello's treatment during the finale. One might presume from the ritornello's patterned expansion that the development of the Mesto will dominate the entire finale. However, though the Mesto certainly expands, its development is problematized through a relentless circling that is at odds with a linear narrative.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the continued and unfruitful sequencing of the first phrase of the original Mesto (mm. 1-12, 17-21) suggests a dysphoric placement characteristic of Tarasti's spatial modality that does not *want* to be where it is (Example 4.1).<sup>12</sup> In his taxonomy of different expressive states, Tarasti reflects on how linear motion can depict a particular static quality, or *being*, and observes that in the case of sequencing, the challenge is always to escape the sequence, thereby avoiding a musical merry-go-round: "If the composer does not know how to end a sequence early enough it

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<sup>10</sup> Kroō, 220. Kroō focuses on the correspondence between the Mesto's literal meaning (sad) and the impending political turmoil that would compel Bartók to leave Europe. He also points out that the year 1939 was the first time in thirty-five years that Bartók had used the inscription "mesto" in his music, from which Kroō construes that the Mesto is a type of "self-portrait." While I am not willing to read the Mesto as a literal mask for Bartók, I am willing to grant that the listener (Bartók included) may begin to identify with the Mesto theme by the fourth movement of the Quartet.

<sup>11</sup> Somfai observes that Bartók was frequently "haunted by finales too long in proportion to the work." Though the fourth movement of the Sixth Quartet is certainly not too long, it is noteworthy that the Mesto seems to personify this particular compositional "flaw" and that its increasing growth is, in fact, the feature that largely shapes the narrative. László Somfai, "'Per finire': Some Aspects of the Finale in Bartók's Cyclic Form," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 11, no. 1 (1969): 399.

<sup>12</sup> For Tarasti, a modality is an expressive or emotional state modeled after grammatical modes that carry with them different states of being and desires (Tarasti, 304). Tarasti's "spatial mode" corresponds with the verb "be," in contrast to the temporal mode, which he equates with "do."

becomes a place of ‘not-will be’ (*non-vouloir être*), where one no longer wants to dwell.”<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, the unfulfilled climax at mm. 34-39, which references the third and final phrase of the original ritornello statement, suggests some desire to *be* some place else, since it is unable to break forth from its repetitions (Example 4.2).

Added to these dysphoric spatial qualities of the Mesto is the dismembered second phrase (mm. 22-26), which is presented as spatially “disengaged” from its normal contour.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, one might say that the gaping leaps of the line suggest another attempt to escape itself or, perhaps, to merge the Mesto’s linear temporal qualities with the spatial. Both of these gestures seem to approach the aesthetics of the Bakhtinian grotesque body that seeks to protrude beyond its confines, but without successfully doing so.<sup>15</sup>

It is possible, then, as a consequence of the ritornello’s impingement upon the internal formal sections, especially in the Burletta, to read this final Mesto as a type of dual habitation of, or shared identity with, what was initially distinct: exterior/interior, space/place, and chaos/cosmos. That we should start to think of the Mesto as partially a “subject” is transmitted through its conflation with a cosmos, symbolic of places most receptive to human

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<sup>13</sup> Tarasti, 88.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 158. “Disengaged” refers to a spatial movement—whether conveyed through register or harmony—away from the established, or presumed, normative location of a style or work.

<sup>15</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, large leaps suggest the Bakhtinian concept of the “gaping mouth” leading to the lower stratum. “Dismemberment” is also a grotesque concept, which Bakhtin describes as “separate areas of the body enlarged to gigantic dimensions” (Bakhtin, 328). It should be noted, however, that for Bakhtin, the merging of the body with the processes of both death and life is ultimately a life-generating and thus, positive, motion. In this instance of the Mesto, however, the context suggests a more dysphoric intent, though any movement towards the grotesque will qualify the negative with some degree of ambivalence.

### Example 4.1 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement iv, mm. 18-30

The image displays two sections of a musical score for a string quartet, featuring Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Vibraphone (Vc.).

**Section 1: "Sequencing Mesto"**  
 This section begins at measure 88. The tempo is marked "Mesto". The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 6/8. The score shows a crescendo from *cresc.* to *mf*, then *pp*, and finally *f*. The tempo changes to 96 at the end of the section.

**Section 2: "Dismembered Mesto"**  
 This section begins at measure 23. The tempo is marked "Mesto". The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 6/8. The score shows a crescendo from *cresc.* to *mf*, then *pp*, and finally *f*. The tempo changes to 96 at the end of the section.

habitation, and, in part, through our empathy for the Mesto's linear frustration.<sup>16</sup> If we recall the similarities between the Mesto's surfacing and Ricoeur's remark that there is a "side of our world that confronts us as chaos" found both within and outside of ourselves, the unexpected hymn topic that immediately follows mm. 34-39 (see Example 4.2) might also be viewed as a kind of subjective gesture of abnegation in response to this potentially tragic conflation.

In order for Hatten's definition of abnegation as "transcendence through a positively resigned acceptance"<sup>17</sup> to be fulfilled, a struggle or "'working out' of oppositional forces" is prerequisite.<sup>18</sup> Prior to the hymn, the thrice-repeated phrase that references the "surfacing" gesture of the original ritornello exhibits, by means of its repetition, a strong desire to climb higher. However, its attempts to ascend are opposed by a downward pull that is underscored in the chromatic descending bass line and by the *in rilievo* descending arpeggios that work against the Mesto as it cycles up again (see Example 4.2, mm. 34-39). Rather than delivering a renewed synthesis, however, it is significant that the rising gesture merely yields at m. 39 by dropping down an octave and fading out with the rest of the voices.

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<sup>16</sup> Tuan, 128-29. Tuan observes that to some extent, human time and space are biased toward the linear and goal-oriented, stating that "normally a person feels comfortable and natural only when he steps forward. Stepping back feels awkward, and one remains apprehensive even when assured that nothing lies behind to cause a stumble." It is usually when we are aided by other cyclical structures, such as musical rhythms and repetitions manifested through dance, that we are free "from the demands of purposeful goal-directed life."

<sup>17</sup> Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

The ensuing abnegation occurs partially as a result of the enharmonic yielding in the lower octave, which changes from C-sharp to D-flat. This enharmonic change fulfills Hatten's requisite that abnegation involves a reversal from what is desired—in this case, the desire to climb higher, as is implied by the repeated C-sharps, presumably with the end goal of developing the third phrase of the Mesto and completing the ritornello statement. Notably, the enharmonic D-flat indicates only a partial reversal, the incompleteness of which is foregrounded by the tutti caesura that detaches the D-flat's chromatic descent to C-natural (mm. 39-40).

The Mesto's descent to C-natural imitates the downward pull of the lower strings that had previously opposed the "surfacing" gesture, suggesting that the Mesto has now not merely yielded, but also accepted the motion. However, the tutti caesura separating D-flat from C-natural implies that the Mesto's acceptance is in some way externally bestowed.<sup>19</sup> Hatten assigns to abnegation a second attribute that involves "a sense of either willing that reversal or accepting it as if from an external source."<sup>20</sup> Likewise, contributing to this impression is the marked stylistic shift from a contrapuntal to a homophonic texture that occurs precisely at this juncture. Indeed, Somfai observes that in many of Bartók's cyclic finales, Bartók interpolates into his penultimate sections certain "'ideologist' moments," which appear suddenly and tend "either toward the ironically- grotesque or the hymnic."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> It is perhaps largely due to this interpolation that Walsh, Gillies, and Kroō all hear "resignation" as a prominent expressive state by the end of the Quartet. Walsh, 87; Gillies, 297; Kroō, 220.

<sup>20</sup> Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 281.

<sup>21</sup> Somfai, "'*Per finire*,'" 401. The hymn interpolation in the Sixth Quartet would not be considered penultimate; however, given the indefinite formal properties of the movement, the more apposite comparison is the fact that a sudden hymnic interpolation appears.

Example 4.2 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement iv, mm. 31-45

$\text{♩} = 88$

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

*p*

35

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*in rilievo*

*in rilievo*

Più andante

$\text{♩} = 116$

40

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*pp senza colore*

*ppp*

*pp*

*ppp*

*pp*

*ppp*

*pp*

*ppp*

While the enharmonic D-flat suggests a partial willing of the reversal, the caesura and hymn topic imply a necessary “external source” or aid in order to complete the motion.

Integral to this concept of abnegation as an expressive state or genre is its structure as a trope in the rhetorical sense, which merges the “negative and positive aspects of resignation.”<sup>22</sup> The critical distinction is that the resignation is not experienced as defeat, but rather as a process of spiritual growth through suffering. In the resigning gesture in mm. 39-45, the negative aspects discussed above are accepted (i.e., those features that frustrate the linear teleology of the phrase, particularly via circular sequencing and repetition): the phrase presented after the caesura is the opening of the Mesto theme, suggesting not an end, but a renewed beginning. Thus, the circularity, which had previously conveyed a dysphoric state, is retained, rather than avoided or overcome.

Equally important, the negative circularity is in some sense transcended. The spiritual connotations of the hymn topic endorse this interpretation, as well as the heightened sense of place displayed in the contrasting stillness, which the augmented theme, *pianissimo* dynamics, and *senza colore* expressive marking convey. The homophonic texture of the hymn topic is also marked with respect to the previous polyphonic texture associated with the sequencing and frustrated repetitions, relieving the dysphoric state “where one no longer wants to dwell” and replacing it with a state of rest.<sup>23</sup>

While one can detect a posture of positive resignation at the local level, it is also possible to read a willed acceptance at the larger narrative level of the work. Given that the

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<sup>22</sup> Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 74.

<sup>23</sup> Tarasti observes in Chopin’s F minor Ballade a similar re-placement from being in a state where one does not want to dwell to a place of relief depicted “when the homophonic texture returns after a polyphonic sequence” (Tarasti, 88).

musical material following the hymn is a recollection of the opening sonata form, one can infer that the hymn replaces the grotesque *pesante* bridge, which had formally (as a slow introduction) and stylistically separated the external ritornello from the primary theme space. The absence of any grotesque mediator, which is replaced by an abnegational trope, suggests a type of subjective maturation that might be articulated as the admission of “chaos within cosmos,” “evil within oneself,” or more neutrally as “personal responsibility for one’s actions.”

A third stipulation for the presence of abnegation is “a positive (higher) outcome of what otherwise would have been a tragic situation resulting from the reversal.”<sup>24</sup> One could presume that the otherwise tragic outcome of the Quartet would be an eternally circling and frustrated Mesto. In this regard, the recollected sonata form is in some sense a motion “forward” even though it betrays a backward-looking, nostalgic sentiment. However, the return of the Mesto and the implication that it continues indefinitely to some extent foils a truly positive reading.<sup>25</sup>

As an alternative, I offer a reading that foregrounds a mythic paradigm over a narrative *telos*. This paradigm is conveyed especially through the mythologem of the circle in conjunction with a mythic conception of time, which is played out as the Mesto’s linear time merges into a vertical spatial-temporal dimension. The circle mythologem represents the

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<sup>24</sup> Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 281.

<sup>25</sup> That said, it is a little unclear how one can distinguish in musical terms between the act of abnegation and a “positive (higher) outcome,” which would presumably follow in the narrative, since the former seems to significantly color the latter. Indeed, Hatten goes on to say that in the abnegational genre “the tragic is not dismissed (as in comedy), or allowed to overwhelm (as in tragedy), or added in judicious doses (as in tragicomedy), but rather transcended.” Even in light of this “transcendence,” the interpreter must reevaluate how she perceives and defines a positive outcome.



mythic motivation that seeks to unify all things. In contrast to linear movements, which are always creating distinctions between beginning, middle, and end, circular movements break down distinctions, unifying dichotomies such as time/space, eternity/time, and vertical/linear.<sup>26</sup>

As the fourth movement progresses, the prominent circling, attended by its mythic unifying function, begins to emerge as a paradigm for the Quartet as a whole. In addition to the emphasis placed on circularity by way of sequencing and frustrated repetitions, the *Mesto* focuses our attention on circling by means of its canonic counterpoint. Indeed, like the *Marcia*, the fourth movement takes as its fundamental premise a strict canon in the first violin and cello. To return to Adamenko's concept of neo-mythologism as a modern manifestation of mythic structures, the mythologem of the circle is often represented in music through canon forms, a paradigm that can be seen not only in twentieth-century score notations, but also in circularly notated canons of the Renaissance and Baroque periods.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the use of canonic counterpoint, circling achieves prominence through two different ways of using symmetrical intervals. In the fourth movement, the canon occurs at the interval of a tritone, with the first violin beginning on C and the cello beginning on F-sharp. Symmetrical intervals also contribute to the harmonic structure of the work as a whole. Perle observes that the focal pitches in the first phrase of the opening *Mesto* comprise a diminished seventh chord (G-sharp, B, F, D), the pitches of which in turn become the respective key centers of the four movements.<sup>28</sup> While symmetrical musical forms might

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<sup>26</sup> Adamenko, 201-40; Harpham, 90-3.

<sup>27</sup> Adamenko, 221.

suggest a central organizing structure, such as the World Tree or *Axis Mundi*, symmetrical harmonies and intervals resemble the mythologem of the circle due to the absence of any integrated hierarchy that can dictate a *telos*. The even divisions of the octave by both the tritone and the diminished seventh chord involve no inner logic that prevents the cycles of pitches from being repeated indefinitely.

When the Mesto returns in m. 72, it resumes the sequencing motion from m. 17, but instead of the frustration conveyed at the opening, it begins a framing process that transfers the Mesto's linear features into a vertical plane (Example 4.3). This occurs primarily by means of a spatial disengagement that begins in m. 75 as the tail of the opening phrase increasingly climbs higher in register. The repeated alternation between middle register chords and ascending theme creates a sonic sense of distance that reinforces the spatial-temporal conflation. The dimensional fusion, moreover, is encapsulated in mm. 78-81 when the Mesto's linear succession of pitches becomes a vertical sonority. As John Vinton observes, here the chromatic contour of the original opening phrase is rotated and compressed into its chordal equivalents, whose pitches alternate between the black and white keys of the piano.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, the Mesto is not simply made chordal, but also split by an extreme disengagement of register and dynamics, in effect, retaining the sense of distance that implies both time and space.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Perle, 209-10. These key centers are, respectively, D, B (with G-sharp as the subsidiary key center of the Marcia), F, and D.

<sup>29</sup> John Vinton, "New Light on Bartók's Sixth Quartet," *The Music Review* 25 (1964): 237.

<sup>30</sup> Tuan observes that "distance, unlike length, is not a pure spatial concept; it implies time" (Tuan, 119).

The resulting spatial-temporal conflation corresponds with mythic conceptions of unified dimensions as well as the ways in which myths are presented and remembered, such as the dimensional fusion that characterizes the opening of legends and fairy tales—“long ago and far away”—associating, as Tuan observes, “a remote place with a remote past.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the combination of extreme register space with the vertical transformation of the Mesto (i.e., the Mesto made “timeless”) calls to mind the timelessness of distant places, such as a Golden Age or the Garden of Eden, resulting in the mythical paradox of a “timeless past,” or of a time before time.<sup>32</sup>

It is out of this frame that the initial ritornello theme returns at the original pitch and in the original viola voice, once again suggesting not only a linear narrative, but also a mythic paradigm that may repeat itself indefinitely. Thus, while we might interpret the narrative intrusion of exterior upon interior in the Quartet as biographically inspired (whether that corresponds with Bartók’s anxiety over Nazi invasions, or more generally with Hungary’s subordination within the Habsburg Empire), the Quartet’s final movement implies a more nuanced awareness that these particular instances are extreme examples of universal and ubiquitous encounters with what is foreign, chaotic, and evil. The subjectivity, which “awareness” implies, is reinforced by the abnegational trope conveyed through the hymn interpolation of the Mesto. The resignation or acceptance expressed through this gesture additionally suggests that this universal encounter with chaos is not only perceived as external, but also, as Ricoeur observed, encountered within.

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<sup>31</sup> Tuan, 122.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Example 4.3 Bartók, Sixth String Quartet, movement iv, mm. 72-81

*♩* = 88

72

Violin I *pp*

Violin II *pp* sul tasto

Viola *pp*

Cello *pp*

75

Vln. I sul pont. *pp* ord. *mp* sul pont. *pp* stringendo *p*

Vln. II *pp* sul pont. *pp* ord. *mp* sul pont. *pp* ord. *mp*

Vla. *pp* sul pont. *pp* ord. *mp* sul pont. *pp* ord. *p* *mp*

Vc. *pp* sul pont. *pp* ord. *mp* sul pont. *pp* ord. *p* *mf*

### Example 4.3 continued

Più andante  
♩ = 116

Disengagement of register and dynamics  
Alternating between "black and white keys" of the Mesto

To conclude, this study began as a desire to account for the salience of the grotesque in the Sixth Quartet despite the Quartet's return to more conservative tonal and formal idioms. Though the presence of the grotesque had previously been acknowledged, its function and role had not been closely examined. Complementing this focus on the grotesque was a desire to account for the intense emotive reactions toward the ritornello. Out of this twofold analysis emerged a symbiotic relationship between the grotesque and the ritornello, in which the former establishes a boundary or buffer through which the latter crosses in order to intrude upon the interior. The ensuing transgression and dissolution of the grotesque margin becomes the prevailing narrative event of the Quartet, a reading that accounts for the ritornello's role and agency as well as the structural significance of the otherwise merely stylistic features of the grotesque.

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