



# IRONIC NARRATIVE IN NIKOLAI MEDTNER'S SECOND PIANO CONCERTO

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By

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# IRONIC NARRATIVE IN NIKOLAI MEDTNER'S SECOND PIANO CONCERTO

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## Introduction

"No one tells such tales as Kolya [Medtner]" proclaimed Rachmaninoff after hearing his friend–Nikolai Medtner–present his Op 51 *Skazki*[Fairytale] at a private party.<sup>1</sup> Medtner was, along with his contemporaries Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, one of the great pianist/composers of the Russian Silver Age; in fact, the three together are sometimes referred to as the Triumvirate of the Silver Age.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the other two pianists, however, Medtner only concertized for financial reasons, preferring to spend his time composing. One of Medtner's unique qualities as a composer was his interest and ability in storytelling through music. While a lot of music illustrates a narrative (whether on purpose or not), Medtner usually set out to convey some sort of story in his pieces. This is evidenced throughout his oeuvre, but is most clearly seen in two sources. First, in his own writing when he expounds on his beliefs in *The Muse and the Fashion* that music, through melody and theme, should strive to convey an idea, tell a story, or capture an emotion. Second, in his *Skazki*, thirty-eight short character pieces for solo piano, most of which contain programmatic instructions of some variety. Op. 35, no. 4, for example, is inscribed with a quote from *King Lear*. These sources help to confirm that narrative is an important feature of Medtner's compositional style.

None of this interest with storytelling is surprising given Medtner's education and childhood interests. As a boy, his parents read all sorts of stories to him and his siblings.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Hamish Milne, forward to *Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano: Nikolai Medtner*, ed. Stanley Applebaum, Marc-André Hamelin, and Hamish Milne (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2001), vii.

2. The Russian Silver Age refers to the late nineteenth to early twentieth century in Russia, when the arts (especially literature, music, and poetry) saw an explosion of great artistic achievement and experimentation. It is similar to the European *Belle Époque*.

3. Barrie Martyn, *Nikolai Medtner: His Life and Music* (Farnham, United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing, 1995), 2-3.

Some of Medtner's favorites became Russian Fairy Tales, plays by Shakespeare, and the works of Pushkin and Goethe.<sup>4</sup> Medtner's interest in these texts manifested later in life, when he wrote over one hundred songs for soprano and piano, with twenty-nine being settings of Goethe poems, and thirty settings of Pushkin poems. Beyond literature, Medtner also loved Schumann's *Märchenbilder*, and sought to emulate it later in life with his own *Skazki*.<sup>5</sup> This love of literature, poetry, and storytelling carried through his entire compositional life.

Despite the admiration of his fellow musicians, and a comfortable income from composing, teaching, and performing, Medtner's music never received wide acclaim outside of Russia and (to a lesser extent) England.<sup>6</sup> In an interview in 1970, Vladimir Horowitz said, "Why nobody plays Medtner? He is [a] wonderful composer. *Piano* composer-in some ways deeper than Rachmaninoff...There are special colors-perfumes-complex rhythmic counterpoint."<sup>7</sup> Medtner, like Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, was also one of the mostly highly regarded pianist/composers of the early twentieth century, concertizing all over the world and writing music from his teens until close to his death in 1951. However, outside of the piano world and Russia, he never received much attention for his compositions.

Medtner's lack of widespread popularity as a composer is possibly due to his somewhat conservative nature, which showed itself in both his demeanor and his music. He disagreed so strongly with the "new music" being created by composers like Schoenberg that

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4. Barrie, 20.

5. In fact, he was originally going to call his pieces *Märchen*, and it was actually his wife that convinced him to use the Russian *Skazki* as the title.

6. Barrie, 35.

7. Geoffrey Tozer, biography to *The Complete Piano Sonatas, Series II: Nikolai Medtner*, ed. Marc-André Hamelin, Geoffrey Tozer, and Eugene Istomin, trans. Robert Rimm (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1998), xi.

he wrote his own treatise explaining and defending his aesthetic ideals. Geoffrey Tozer comments in his biography on Medtner

Faced with three decades of shifting style, compositional vogues, and musical fads, Medtner remained faithful to the standard of clarity of purpose he learned from a lifetime of classical performance. Above all, he considered himself Beethoven's student. Reflecting his approach "in defense of the fundamentals of musical art," the composer later wrote (in *Muse and Fashion*) of the essence of theme, melody, form and rhythm, and of the "principal meanings" and "unwritten laws that are the foundation of musical Language." In later years, Alexander Glazunov called Nikolai Medtner "an artist guarding the eternal laws of art."<sup>8</sup>

Medtner, regardless of what other composers were doing, consistently followed his own artistic beliefs.

Although Medtner's music has enjoyed somewhat of a resurgence in the last twenty-five years, it is still not widely known. Unpacking Medtner's compositional techniques can add a great deal to our understanding of how far classical forms can be stretched and, most important to Medtner, how to tell a story through music. The primary goal of this thesis will be to demonstrate how Medtner, through the manipulation and subversion of normative Concerto form, outlines an ironic narrative in the first movement of his second piano concerto.

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8. Tozer, ix.



### Narrative

In this paper, in order to demonstrate the narrative arc of Medtner's concerto, I rely on the work of Byron Almén, particularly his book *A Theory of Musical Narrative*. His theory draws on the works of literary criticism. In particular, he draws a great deal on the ideas put forth by James Jakób Liszka, especially his [Liszka's] definition of narrative as "...the transvaluation of culturally meaningful differences through a sequence of action."<sup>9</sup> With this definition, Liszka indicates that a narrative is outlined, not just by actors on a stage or by characters in a story, but by the interactions and relative values of different entities within a work. This conception opens the way for other, non-literary examinations of narrative. This is due to the fact that Liszka's definition focuses on the conflict which necessarily arises in both maintaining and overthrowing a hierarchy. Anything which is hierarchical in nature is open to challenge by a transgressive agent. The interactions of the hierarchy and that transgressive agent, and the way in which the conflict resolves (a re-affirmation and strengthening of the hierarchy, or its overthrow by the transgressor) are what outline a narrative arc. In short, narrative unfolds as a transvaluation.

Utilizing these ideas, Almén creates his own theory of musical narrative in which he posits that three different processes act upon music to produce said transvaluation: markedness, rank, and the observer's perception. The first process, markedness, can be defined as an asymmetrical opposition. According to Almén, markedness is "the asymmetrical valuation of an opposition (in musical structure, language, culture). For

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9. James Jakób Liszka. *The Semiotic of Myth: A Critical Study of the Symbol* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), 117. Quoted in:

Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative: Musical Meaning and Interpretation* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008), 230.

musical meaning, markedness of structural oppositions correlates with markedness of (expressive or other) oppositions among cultural units."<sup>10</sup> In music, some musical element will emerge that is in contrast with the established norm. The normative, or neutral, environment is established within the context of the piece itself (primarily Major or Minor? 3/4 or 4/4 time? Confirming or denying formal expectations?), and within the larger culture from which the piece originates. This opposition can manifest itself in myriad ways. These include pitch and register, adherence to/deviation from formal norms, conformance to/moves away from the prevailing tonality, etc.

Almén provides an excellent example of this principle in the markedness of night in contrast to day. He explains that day has a "wider distribution of meaning" since it denotes both a full twenty-four-hour period, and the part of that cycle during which the sun is shining. Night, by contrast, denotes only that time of day during which the sun is not visible. In this way, when compared to day, night is marked as an asymmetrical opposition to day. The same concept holds true in music. For example, in a set of theme and variations, if the prevailing tonality is major, but one of the variations is minor, that minor variation is marked in opposition to the rest of the piece. However, this brings up an interesting aspect of markedness, and relates it back to the culture that produced the piece. Over time, people, particularly musicians and well-informed listeners, came to expect the inclusion of the minor variation. In this way, it became part of the norm, so that a major theme and variations which excluded that modal shift would be marked against other theme and variations which did adhere to the convention.

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10. Almén, 23–27.

Once a musical element has been identified as marked, one may begin to ascertain its rank. Rank is the tool by which one indicates the value of a marked element of music, because relative value is assigned to the distinctive features of said element. To put it another way, each marked aspect of an element exists in a particular hierarchical position with respect to other features in that unit. The relative harmonic rhythm of different themes can serve as an example. Assume a piece in which most themes change harmonies every two beats, and generally follow a standard pre-dominant–dominant–tonic pattern, but then one theme sits on a single harmony for eight measures. This static-harmony theme would be marked in opposition to the other themes with more rapid harmonic rhythms. Then, depending on the effect of that static harmony, that theme would be valued either higher or lower than the other themes. For example, if the static-harmony theme creates a point of respite within a tumultuous piece, it may be valued higher than the others. However, if the static harmony leads to an important structural cadence, it may be valued lower, as it decreases the effectiveness of the cadence (and, depending on the harmony, may not even be considered a cadence). In other words, context matters in the valuation of element hierarchies.

That example begs the question, though, how does one distinguish what is important and of value? The perspective of the analyst, or the observer's perception, is the third process, and answers that question. Throughout his book Almén references Susan McClary's analysis, and her narrative interpretation, of Bach's Fifth Brandenburg Concerto.<sup>11</sup> Briefly, McClary finds that the expanded role of the solo-instrument throughout the work is indicative of the struggle of marginalized social groups against the dominant hierarchy. A great deal of

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11. A summary of the analysis can be found in Almén's book beginning on page 23.

McClary's work deals with the socio-political implications of the marginalized against the dominant hierarchy, particularly feminist issues.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in her analysis she is looking for and interested in the power dynamics between the transgressor and the hierarchy. As the harpsichord's part expands and displaces parts of the orchestra's role, McClary, in part, sees that as the individual's struggle against a dominant, more repressive order. Another analyst, with a different perspective, would likely come up with a different interpretation.

These three concepts—markedness, rank, and the analyst's perspective—work together to act upon the music itself, to creating the transvaluation that illustrates the narrative arc of a piece. With that, one needs a more detailed definition of transvaluation. It is a process in which the initial rank fluctuates, resulting in a revaluation of the markedness and rank. In essence, this means that the musical elements (themes, form, tonal areas, etc.) in a piece of music interact throughout the piece. These interactions alter the relative value of each element through time, and that change in value can be tracked as the piece progresses. These changes in value (transvaluation) can be tracked and described by their markedness and rank relations; and these relations, these values, are dictated by the cultural norms or hierarchies inherent within a given piece, artistic movement, and larger culture to which they belong. Thus, the process is as follows: the narrative arc begins with an initial hierarchy (the norm established by the piece and the culture in which it originates); a transgressive element

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12. For example, her book *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* is, from its own synopsis: [A] collection of essays in feminist music criticism, this book addresses problems of gender and sexuality in repertoires ranging from the early seventeenth century to rock and performance art... a provocative 'sexual politics' of Western classical or art music..." See: Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

arrives and challenges that order; the hierarchy will either be "restored" or "enhanced" (the unmarked condition survives); or "destroyed" (replaced by a new hierarchy).

How, then, does this hierarchy illustrate a narrative? The tensions that arise between the order-imposing hierarchy and a transgression of that hierarchy, and the resolution of that tension, can be expressed in terms of a combination of two binary oppositions: order/transgression and victory/defeat. In his book, Almén says: The four permutations of these oppositions collectively define the four narrative strategies as follows:

Romance: the victory of an order-imposing hierarchy over its transgressor  
(victory and order)

Tragedy: the defeat of a transgression by an order imposing hierarchy  
(defeat and transgression)

Irony: the defeat of an order imposing hierarchy by a transgression  
(defeat and order)

Comedy: the victory of a transgression over an order-imposing hierarchy  
(victory and transgression).<sup>13</sup>

The following examples from literature, (originated by Northrop Frye and reproduced in Almén's book), clarify the above definitions:

Romance–*Hercules*. The protagonist lives in an idealized world in which a quest is undertaken and successfully completed. There is no departure from the innocence of the original state, since the emphasis is on the idealization of the mythical hero.

Tragic–*Oedipus Rex*. The hero is at odds with divine law. This conflict leads to

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13. Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative*, 66.

catastrophe, for the individual and society.

*Ironic–Brave New World*. The Romantic mythical ideals are held up to ridicule or exposed as illusions and reality wins out over idealism.

*Comedy–Taming of the Shrew*. A blocking society gives way to a new social order formed around the protagonists that encompasses both the blocking characters and the protagonists.<sup>14</sup>

It is obviously a requirement that, in order to produce a sound narrative interpretation, one must determine the transgressive element in a piece, and then track how that element interacts with the hierarchy present in that piece. In my analysis, I use the concepts of markedness and rank to do just that; since, according to Almén: "[d]etermining markedness in the specific context of narrative interpretation is thus equivalent to determining what the narrative transgression is."<sup>15</sup> Additionally: "[d]etermining rank in the specific context of narrative interpretation is equivalent to determining the value of a musical event in relation to other events or to an external standard as established by the work's strategic designs."<sup>16</sup>

I would argue that the First Movement of Medtner's Second Piano Concerto is an ironic narrative, an assertion I will support in the analysis section of this paper. To conclude this section, I will more fully define the ironic narrative. Although the concise definition was given above "the defeat of an order imposing hierarchy by a transgression (defeat and order)," a bit more detail will be useful. An ironic archetype sheds light on some or all of the flaws inherent in a system. Sometimes this is done more lightly, with a more comedic bent;

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14. Almén, 65.

15. Almén, 53.

16. Almén, 53.

other times the goal is to expose the cracks in the foundation and push them so hard that the entire structure collapses. Sometimes the goal is to explore just how far a structure can be pushed, thus exploring and expanding its limits.<sup>17</sup> A few quotes from Almén's chapter on irony will help clarify:

Irony is a narrative of denial and subversion...it resists the comfortable convictions of the other archetypical forms

The ironic archetype portrays the defeat of an initial hierarchy by transgressive elements; indeed, it is the very integrity of that hierarchy that is the focus of attention in ironic narratives.

Irony can gently expose the limitations of a hierarchy; sharply indict it; show it to be ineffectual or meaningless; or completely demolish it.<sup>18</sup>

I will more fully defend an ironic interpretation in the analysis and conclusion sections, but briefly, I would argue that Medtner's concerto is an ironic archetype that sharply indicts concerto form.

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17. This idea of different degrees of irony comes from Chapter 8 of Almén's book, in which he discusses phases and subtypes of archetypes. Briefly, the premise is that any one archetype may have elements of another archetype. So, a romantic archetype tinged with tragedy would be a tragic-romantic archetype.

18. Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative*, 168.

### Form

The primary way in which this ironic narrative arc unfolds is through the manipulation and subversion of Concerto Form. In order to demonstrate this, we will require a clear definition of both normative form and an outline of the form of Medtner's concerto. Therefore, throughout this paper, I will apply the theory and terminology described by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy in *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata*.<sup>19</sup> Their book provides both an in-depth examination and a foundational theory of sonata form. After establishing the normative features of the form, the authors examine how individual movements by various composers from the common-practice era both adhere to and challenge those standards. Since its release, *Elements of Sonata Theory* has become central to the overall discussion of sonata form and has had a massive influence on how the world of music theory at large discusses, analyzes, and conceptualizes sonata form. For the purposes of this discussion, I will provide a brief overview of the formal aspects of Medtner's concerto that are in line with the ideas set forth by Hepokoski and Darcy. To that end, I will first discuss those concepts which will prove germane to this discussion.

Fundamental to Hepokoski and Darcy's Sonata Theory is the concept of rotation, which can be summarized as a large-scale recurrence of musical elements in a piece of music. "Rotational" refers to a formal layout in which an ordered series of musical events is recycled one or more times during the course of a piece. The reappearance of the first event in the series cues the onset of a new rotation. Figure 1 illustrates this concept as it relates to

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19. James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 235.



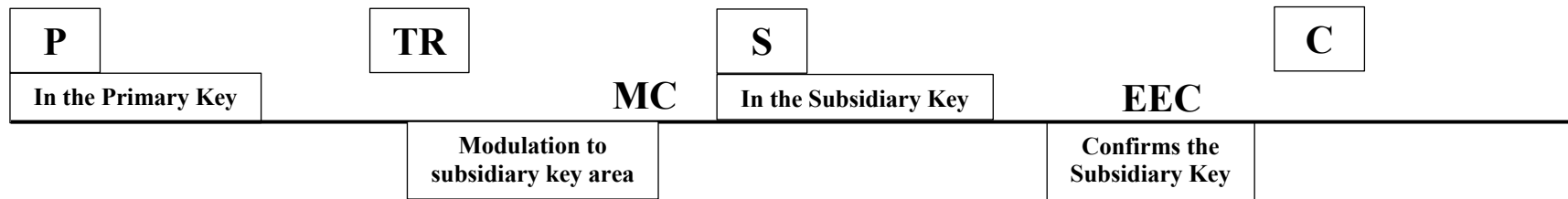
Sonata Theory. The expositional rotation sets out the order: Primary Theme (P), Transition (TR), Secondary Theme (S), Closing (C), and the subsequent recapitulatory rotation recycles that order, making each of these a complete rotation. If the development were rotational, it would also adhere to the order first expressed in the expositional rotation. In sonata form, the first rotation is the referential rotation, and serves as the yardstick against which all future rotations will be measured.

Hepokoski and Darcy distinguish among five different Types of sonata forms. The differences that delineate one Type from another are based on the number of, and specific layout of, the rotations. For example, a Type 3 is tri-rotational, while a Type 5 has four rotations, as illustrated in Examples 1 and 2. I will limit my discussion to these two Types, 3 and 5, as they are the only two germane to this movement. For the following portion of this section, I will briefly describe the similarities and differences between the two Types. Reference to Examples 1 and 2, the normative layouts for Types 3 and 5 respectively, will be of benefit during this discussion.

A Type 3 sonata is the standard, "textbook" formal schema most people think of when they hear the term "Sonata Form." It unfolds the three rotations, expositional, developmental, and recapitulatory, laid out in Example 1. Most often the exposition and development are "two-part" rather than "continuous," that is, they are partitioned into two segments by an important cadence that Hepokoski and Darcy have termed the "medial caesura" (MC). This term reflects the "medial" location of the cadence within these sections and the gap in the texture ("caesura"), usually occupied by rests, that separates it from the second section.

Example 1. Normative Type 3 timeline

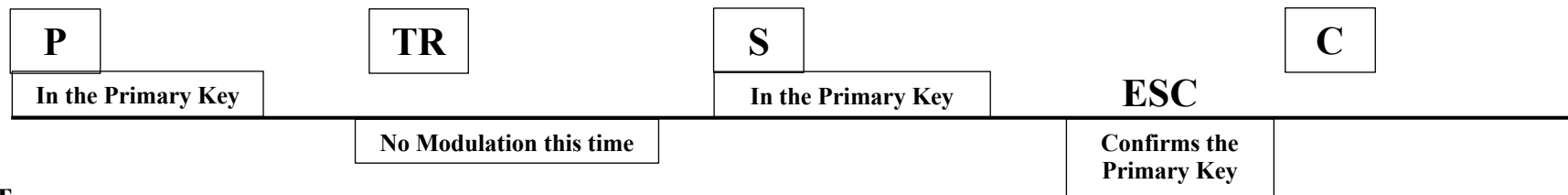
**Expositional Rotation** (referential rotation)



**Developmental Rotation** (moves through various key areas)

- Thematic material altered through a variety of techniques (tonal ambiguities, circle of fifths progressions, and other sequences).
- May or may not be rotational

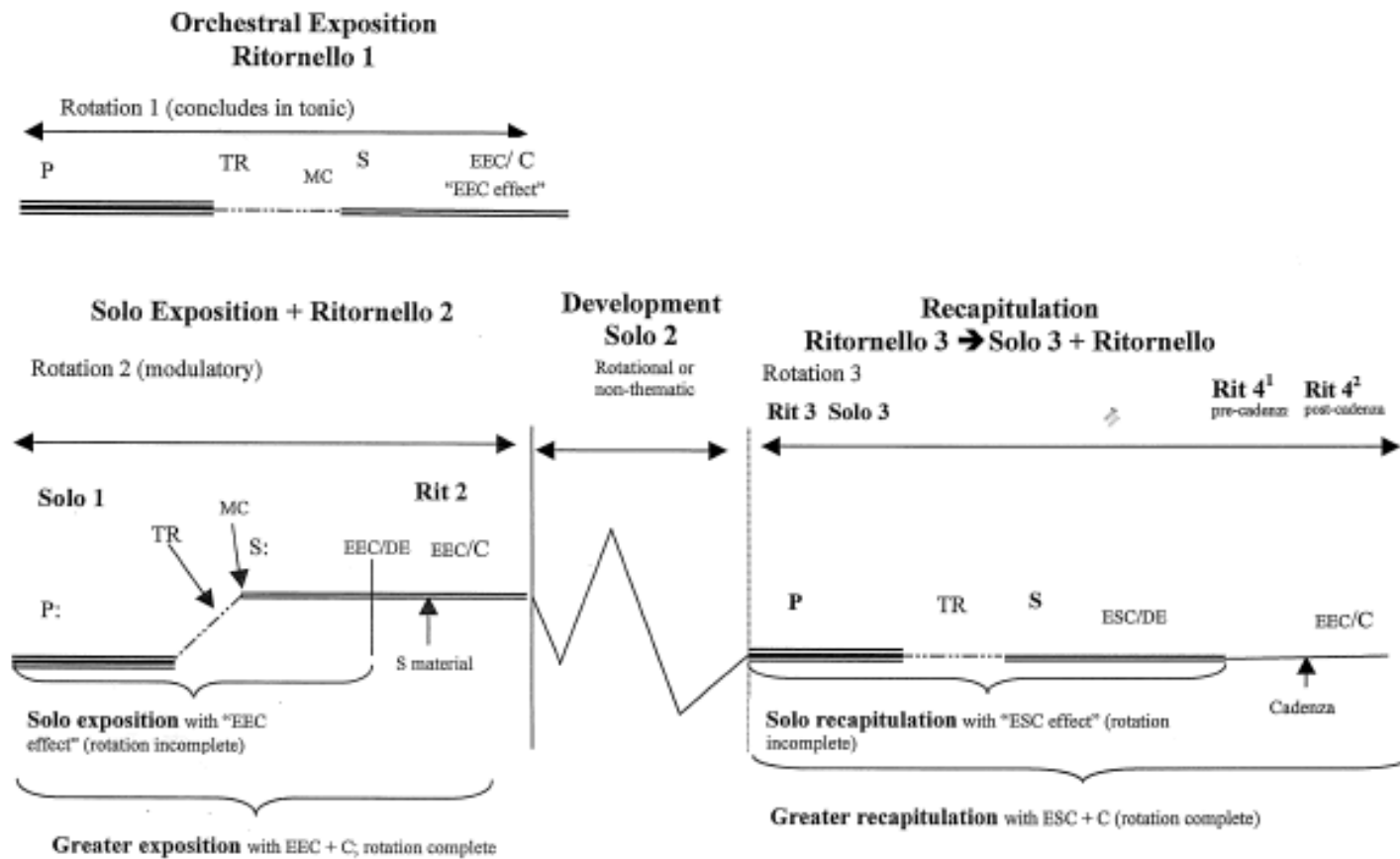
**Recapitulatory Rotation** (In the Tonic Key)



**Terms:**

- P (Primary Theme)**: Primary theme and key area. Establishes primary key. Usually tight-knit and stable.
- TR (Transition)**: A zone of energy gain that frequently modulates and leads to the MC
- MC (Medial Caesura)**: A caesura which segments the exposition into two parts. The cessation of sound/energy opens up space for S.
- S (Secondary Theme)**: Subsidiary theme and key area. Establishes the subsidiary key. Primary goal is to achieve the EEC/ESC
- EEC (Essential Expositional Closure)**: One of two obligatory cadences. Establishes the subsidiary key and sets up the primary tonal conflict.
- ESC (Essential Structural Closure)**: One of two obligatory cadences. Re-establishes the primary key and resolves the tonal conflict.
- C (Closing)**: Follows the EEC/ESC. Consists of closing material—coda, codetta, cadential extensions, etc.

Example 2. Normative Type 5 timeline.<sup>20</sup>



20. Aaminah Durrani, "Form and Analysis Basics," Form and Analysis, (class lecture, University of Houston, Houston, TX, Spring 2017).

The first part of the exposition, then, consists of a primary theme and key-area (P), and a transition (TR), and the medial caesura (MC). P sets out the primary key and sounds the “main” theme of the piece, while the primary purpose of TR is energy-gain, which is then expended at the MC. This caesura at the cadence opens up space for the second part of the exposition, which consists of the secondary theme and key-area (S), the essential expositional closure (EEC), and the closing (C) section. Note that, in order to adhere to sonata form, S must be in a different key than that of P.<sup>21</sup> The primary purpose of S is to reach the EEC, which is the first satisfactory perfect authentic cadence (PAC)<sup>22</sup> that proceeds on to differing material, and is one of the two obligatory cadences within sonata form. This cadence, which solidifies the subsidiary key, serves to set up an opposition of keys, the primary tonal conflict of the sonata. The EEC has a counterpart in the recapitulatory rotation, the essential structural closure (ESC). The ESC serves as the parallel to the EEC in that it solidifies the return of the primary key, and in doing so, resolves the tonal conflict of the sonata. The development and recapitulation will generally follow the thematic outline set forth by the exposition. Once the EEC or ESC has been achieved, the music moves on to the remaining module of this second segment. the Closing (C). The C section consists of "accessory ideas" that confirm the subsidiary key.<sup>23</sup>

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21. Most frequently, TR will modulate, and S will begin in the new key. However, sometimes the modulation will be left up to S and the subsidiary key will not be firmly establish until the onset of S.

22. PAC: Perfect Authentic Cadence. A cadence is a musical punctuation mark, and an authentic cadence resembles a period as an indication of an ending point. The "perfect" part of the terminology indicates both harmonic and melodic closure, as opposed to the "imperfect" authentic cadence, which features only harmonic closure. See Stephen G. Laitz, *The Complete Musician: An Integrated Approach to Tonal Theory, Analysis, and Listening*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 106–108.

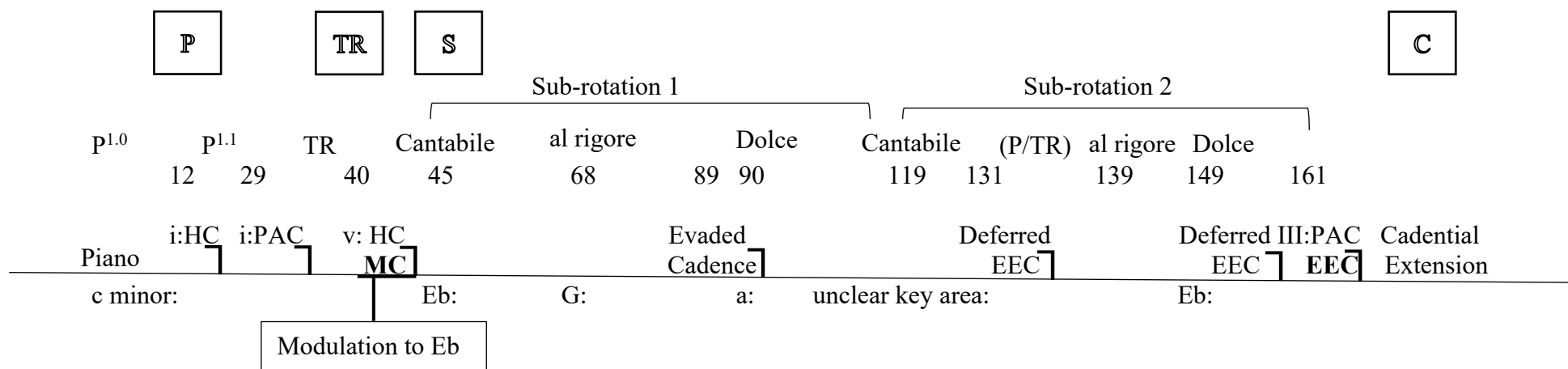
23 Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 123.

The Type 5, or "first-movement concerto form," shares many similarities with the Type 3, as indicated by a comparison of Figures 1 and 2. The primary differences between the two sonata Types arise from the interplay between the soloist and the orchestra in the Type 5. The most significant of those differences are the inclusion of a second exposition, and a cadenza. In a normative Type 5 sonata, the first exposition—the orchestral exposition—does not modulate, and is reserved for an orchestral tutti, or "ritornello," which generally excludes the solo instrument. Since this section does not modulate, there is no true EEC. The EEC, and the necessary modulation, occur in the second exposition: the solo exposition. The cadenza occurs near the very end of the final rotation and is a time for the soloist to display their virtuosic capabilities. There are other differences, such as a smaller solo-exposition nested within the larger second-exposition, and although they are marked in Figure 2, I shall not address them here since they are not pertinent to the discussion of Medtner's concerto.

Example 3 lays out the formal plan of the first movement of Medtner's concerto. After a comparison of Example 3 with Examples 1 and 2, it becomes clear that Medtner's concerto does not strictly adhere to either a Type 3 or a Type 5, but shares elements of both. Hepokoski and Darcy refer to this as "dialogic form," meaning the piece shares aspects from, and is therefore in dialogue with, both sonata Types. Examples 1 through 3 illustrate that Medtner's concerto shares much in common with both Type 3 than Type 5 sonata forms. This includes a single modulatory exposition, and a less complex rotation in both the exposition and the recapitulation than the Type 5. In both, the layout consists of P, TR, S, C, and neither includes a nested solo rotation within the larger rotational scheme.

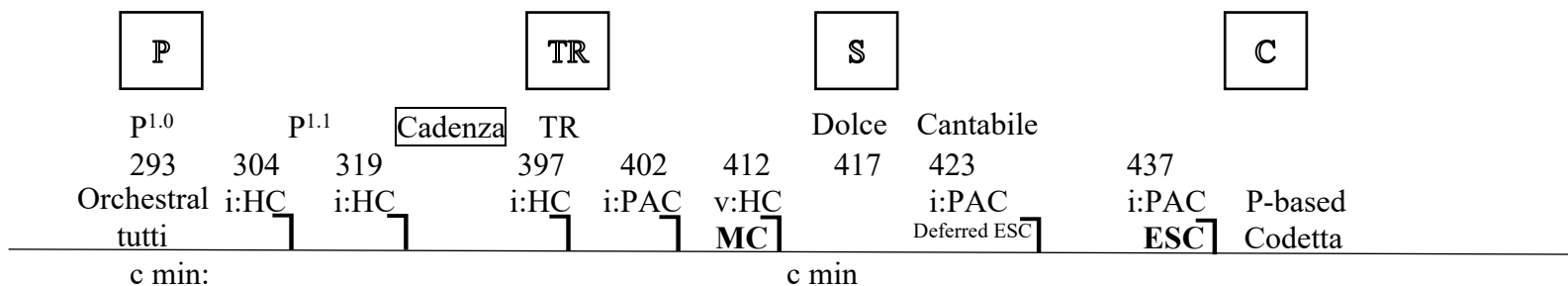
Example 3. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50, first movement. Timeline

**Exposition:**



**Development:** Non-rotational

**Recapitulation:**



Since the formal deviations exhibited by the first-movement of Medtner's concerto will play a large role in my narrative interpretation of Medtner's concerto, a brief overview of some key formal features in its first movement will be helpful. Please refer to Example 3 throughout this overview. I have bracketed and labeled the exposition's two sub-rotations in S-space. Sub-rotations are straightforward and follow the same premise as regular rotations.

Sometimes a composer recycles material one or more times within an action-space of the larger rotation, and that is the case here. Within S-space, Medtner recycles the S-modules *Cantabile*, *Al Rigore*, and *Dolce*, thereby creating sub-rotations nested within the larger expositional rotation. Note that within the sub-rotations there are different descriptive labels, I will use these to refer to the three distinct S-modules in the movement. These are three distinct themes, and each is still within S-space since the EEC is not achieved before any of these themes begin. These sub-rotations are inexorably linked to the evaded and deferred cadences labeled in the timeline because the primary purpose of S is to achieve the EEC, and S must continue, in this case through more multiple rotations, since it fails to do successfully cadence on its first attempt. Essentially, these are points at which it appears a cadence will occur, but then, at the last moment, something occurs to thwart the attempt. This is similar to a run-on sentence in prose, where many good stopping points are passed by, extending the sentence and blurring the structure and meaning.

Example 3 shows the rotational layout of the recapitulation, and the manner in which it is most in-line with the Type 5 arrangement. It is important to note that it is not necessary for each action space (P, TR, S, C) in subsequent rotations to adhere to the same lay-out in order for the recapitulation itself to be rotational. Therefore, not all S-modules need to be present (or even in order) in S-space for the recapitulation itself to be rotational, so long as P,

TR, S, and C are presented in the same order they were in the exposition. Example 3 shows that the recapitulation is rotational–P, TR, S, and C are sounded in the same order. However, the second sub-rotation is missing in S-space, and Medtner omits the *Al Rigore* theme entirely.

Despite these alterations to the form, Medtner’s concerto still seems to be in dialogue with both Type 3 and Type 5 sonata forms, and I would argue it is closer to a Type 5. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the Type 5 sonata form can serve as the order-imposing hierarchy in the piece. However, that assertion requires a bit of context before moving forward. *Elements of Sonata Theory* focuses on Classical Era works, but there is over a century of musical innovation between the works highlighted in that book and Medtner’s concerto. Medtner would have been influenced by Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, and myriad other composers. Given this, we cannot simply place his concerto into the Type 5 mold. However, throughout the concerto, a more normative Type 5 schema emerges over time. This is not surprising as, compared to other composers of his time, Medtner was a relatively conservative composer. Similar to Brahms in this regard, Medtner frequently adhered to more traditional formal schema. In fact, one of his nicknames was “The Russian Brahms.”<sup>24</sup> Given his conservative nature, we can expect to see more traditional, normative formal conceptions in his works.<sup>25</sup>

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24. Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (Farnham, United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing, 1995), xi.

25. It is also important to understand that in Darcy and Hepokoski’s conception, the normative formal maps they lay out are statistical norms; meaning that these features occur frequently enough in the literature that they can be considered the standard. In actual fact, most pieces deviate from the normative formal schema in some way. Therefore, we must determine which normative type is most applicable to a piece by examining to which formal schema it most closely adheres.



This more traditional tendency is evidenced throughout the concerto. Medtner's exposition follows the timeline of Rotation 2 almost perfectly, with the failed EEC's taking the place of the EEC/Display Episode (DE) effect.<sup>26</sup> The Development consists of a great deal of DE rhetoric and moves through many different key areas. It is only once we reach the recapitulation that things become a bit less clear. On closer examination, though, I argue that Medtner's piece unfolds in an altered (or subverted) Type 5 schema.

Looking at the orchestral ritornello that begins the recapitulation, the orchestra is sounding material from the solo exposition. In normative Type 5 form there are two P-sections in the exposition, one in the orchestral ritornello, and one in the solo exposition. Frequently, the orchestra does not play the solo P-theme until ritornello 3 at the start of the recapitulation. If, in Medtner's concerto, we consider P to be the P-theme from the solo exposition (the piano's early entrance having suppressed the first orchestral ritornello), then its repetition by the orchestra at m. 293 fits the expected formal convention.

Of course, Medtner alters the form when he places the cadenza immediately after this ritornello. But even this alteration is in dialogue with normative Type 5 form. The fourth and final ritornello is usually separated into two parts by the cadenza, and something similar occurs here. After the cadenza ends, there is another, shorter orchestral ritornello at m. 398. In this case, the orchestra repeats TR from the exposition, with the piano only adding DE material until m. 410. Essentially, the cadenza's early placement has combined the last two ritornelli. The orchestra plays solo exposition material as a ritornello 3 would, but also continues where it left off after the cadenza, just as a ritornello 4 would. Although there are additional, smaller treatments in the piece which aid in establishing a Type 5 interpretation

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26. A Display Episode refers to moments in a concerto when the solo instrument plays some virtuosic material. It is most common throughout the development section, but can occur anywhere.

(the failed ESC at m. 423 is analogous with the ESC effect that ends the solo recapitulation, for example), I argue that the preceding serves to justify the normative Type 5 sonata as the order-imposing hierarchy in this piece.

As I will examine more closely in the analysis, the transgressive element emerges to push against the normative formal expectations. In other words, over the course of the movement, this tendency towards normative formal treatments is resisted by a transgressive force. Take the multiple failed EEC's as an example. The EEC (Essential Expositional Closure) is one of the two obligatory cadences in concerto form, and throughout S-space, there are many attempts to move towards this structural cadence. But, every time there is an attempt to reach one, it is either thwarted, or its efficacy is undercut. (This is also one reason I think that P can be considered a proxy for the transgressive agent, as it is the theme-actor most frequently present at these moments of subversion). The conflict throughout this piece is created as the transgressive agent pushes against or alters the more normative formal treatments. It is this conflict that helps outline the narrative arc of the piece.

### Formal Function and Normative Unit Length

In order to establish P, the Primary Theme of the concerto, as the proxy of the transgressive agent, it is important to first analyze and understand how the theme itself is constructed, and how its structure, even on the small scale, pushes the boundaries of form. Clear formal-functional rhetoric and alignment with normative 4-bar hypermetric units both mark and elevate P<sup>1.1</sup> in contrast to the S-modules in the concerto.<sup>27</sup> This is due to the fact that P<sup>1.1</sup>, even while expanding the normative boundaries of sentence structure, still retains clear formal-functional rhetoric within each module and those modules align with the underlying 4-bar hypermetric units. The S-modules, by contrast, have obscured formal-functional rhetoric and align with normative hypermetric units. This becomes important since it provides further evidence for one of the central contentions of this paper: that P is the transgressive agent in the concerto. In order to utilize these compositional devices as evidence in the analysis, we must first define them, and also demonstrate what is normative for Medtner. The first part of this section will define formal-functional rhetoric by examining the structure of P<sup>1.1</sup> and comparing it to a normative 8-bar sentence. Following this I will provide a brief definition of hypermeter that can be used my analysis of Medtner's work.

To begin, it is important to establish that expected formal schema and 4-bar hypermetric units are both normative for Medtner. The clearest source for 4-bar hypermetric norms and the expectation of normative formal schema is Medtner's well-documented interest in Classical period composers—particularly Mozart, Chopin, and especially

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27. The concept of Hypermeter is derived from two concepts: 1. Rhythm: the patterns of duration that are phenomenally present in music. 2. Meter: the grouping of rhythms into a hierarchy of strong and weak beats. According to William Rothstein on page 12 of his book *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* "Hypermeter refers to the combination of measures on a metrical basis...including both the recurrence of equal-sized measure groups and a definite pattern of alternation between strong and weak measures." Given the preceding, Hypermeter can be defined as a pattern of strong and weak units at a level of metric structure larger than that of the notated meter.

Beethoven. Geoffrey Tozer, in his biography of Medtner says: "Faced with three decades of shifting style, compositional vogues and musical fads, Medtner remained faithful to the standard of clarity of purpose he learned from a lifetime of classical performance. Above all, he considered himself Beethoven's student."<sup>28</sup> Medtner himself wrote that he was composing "in defense of the fundamentals of musical art...the essence of theme, melody, form and rhythm..." and the "principal meanings" and "unwritten laws that are the foundation of musical language."<sup>29</sup> In addition to his own thoughts, his composition teacher at the Moscow Conservatory—Sergei Tanayev—said "he was born with an understanding of sonata form"<sup>30</sup> and the Medtner Society's biography states that he "...took up the musical challenge laid down by Beethoven in his late piano sonatas and string quartets, which served as the starting point for Medtner's own works."<sup>31</sup> Given this well-documented interest in, and conscious defense of, the precepts of Classical music, I would argue that 4-bar hypermetric units can reasonably be considered normative, along with expected formal schema.

Throughout the first movement of this concerto Medtner subverts the expectations of concerto form while still working within the overall formal structure. For example, he includes multiple failed EEC's in the exposition, which greatly expands that section of the piece. P<sup>1.1</sup> foreshadows these subversions by executing them on a smaller scale: Medtner expands the proportions of sentence structures while retaining the formal-functional rhetoric within each module.

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28. Tozer, *The Complete Piano Sonatas, Series II: Nikolai Medtner*, xi.

29. Nikolai Medtner, *The Muse and the Fashion*, trans. Alfred J. Swan (Haverford, Pennsylvania: Haverford College Bookstore, 1951), 2-4; 8-9.

30. Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music*, 6.

31. Martyn, 207.

Formal function is simply the primary function a section or module of music serves within the formal structure of a piece or phrase. Take the antecedent of a phrase as an example. The function of the antecedent is to “open up” the music, to start an idea. This is frequently accomplished via a half-cadence at the end of this formal unit. By contrast, the ensuing consequent that follows serves to finish the idea, or “close down” the music. Another example, on a larger scale, are the sections of a sonata exposition. Within the exposition P serves to present both the primary melodic/thematic material and to affirm the first key area. S, meanwhile, presents the secondary melodic/thematic material and affirms the secondary key area (via the EEC), thereby setting up the primary conflict for the rest of the sonata. Each of these sections: antecedent, consequent, P-space, S-space, each have a specific function within their overall structure.

The same is true for P<sup>1.1</sup> in Medtner’s concerto. Both P<sup>1.1</sup> as a whole, and each of the modules within its sentence structure serve a specific functional purpose. At first, the form of P<sup>1.1</sup> is difficult to discern; however, upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that it is a sentence with expanded proportions. Medtner has blown up the proportions and doubled the normative length of a sentence. In order to understand the structure and implications of P<sup>1.1</sup> in Medtner’s concerto, it will be beneficial to outline a normative sentence structure, and then compare P<sup>1.1</sup> to that.

One of the most widely accepted definitions of a sentence can be found in *Classical Form* by William Caplin. In his book, Caplin states that a sentence is “an eight-measure theme built out of two four measure phrases. In this grouping structure...[which is] (2 x 2) + 4, the theme expresses three formal functions—presentation, continuation, and cadential.”<sup>32</sup>

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32. William Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 35.

This structure  $[(2 \times 2) + 4]$  contains three functions: the presentation phrase, the continuation, and the cadence (Example 4). The first function makes up the first four measures of the sentence, while the remaining two functions make up the latter half.

fragmentation

Example 4. Normative 8-bar sentence

basic idea (bi)		bi-response		fragmentation		cadence	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
				frag. 1	frag. 2		
Presentation Phrase				Continuation Phrase			
(2+2)				+	(4)		

The first four measures of a sentence constitute the presentation phrase. This section begins with a two-measure basic idea (bi), followed immediately by a repetition of the basic idea (bi-response). The first iteration of the basic idea sets forth the fundamental material of the theme, while the immediate repetition of that idea fully presents it.<sup>33</sup> This is illustrated in Example 5, which reproduces Example 3.5 from *Classical Forms*. One of the characteristics of the presentation phrase is that it serves to prolong the tonic harmony. This does not mean that there is no harmonic motion, or that the presentation phrase is harmonically static (although that is the case in  $P^{1.1}$ ), but it does mean that there is no cadence or cadential function during this section. This would defeat the purpose of the presentation phrase, as it is meant to be the opening gesture of the sentence. Any cadential rhetoric would negate that function. The Mozart example demonstrates this, as well. Notice that, even though there are slight allusions to the dominant, there is no cadential rhetoric.

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33. Caplin, 37

Example 5. Mozart, Piano Sonata in C, K. 330/300h, I, 1-8<sup>34</sup>

Allegro moderato

presentation b.i. continuation frag. cad.

C: I ped. (V<sup>7</sup>) I (V<sup>7</sup>) I (IV) I V (4 7) I IAC

The first four measures of P<sup>1.1</sup> adhere to this formal schema. You can see in Example 6 that mm. 15–16 are an exact repeat (melodically and harmonically) of mm. 12–13. Additionally, these four measures are harmonically static, prolonging the tonic throughout. This is a normative presentation phrase. However, it is after this that Medtner begins to expand the normative form. At this point one would expect the continuation phrase to begin via fragmentation (discussed later). Instead, Medtner includes a second, four-measure presentation phrase: mm. 17–20. Measures 17–18 repeat the basic idea for a third time, only with the melody transposed up by a step and sounded over the Minor-Dominant.

Following this, Medtner further blurs the normative form of the phrase by writing what could be termed a “dissolving basic idea.” In mm. 18–19 the piano enters and begins to repeat the basic idea, but by m. 19 it abandons the melody for an embellished scalar pattern. While the first violins do continue the basic idea (mm. 19 and 20 are a transposition of m. 14), this response basically “dissolves” into fragmentation at m. 21, where the continuation phrase begins. It is worth noting that this “dissolving basic idea” blurs the boundaries between the presentation(s) and the continuation.

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34. Caplin, 38

Example 6. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50. 1<sup>st</sup> movement. Primary Theme (P<sup>1.1</sup>)

bi

1 energico a tempo

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Fag.

Cor.

Tr.b.

Tr.n.

Tuba

Timp.

(poco)

1 energico a tempo

Pao

p1.1

Archi

12

c minor:  $i^6_4$  (add 6)

V i

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bag.

Cor.

Tr-b

Tr-al & Tuba

Timp.

P-no

Theme continues (m. 14)

P.I. incipit

Archl

16

4

v<sup>2</sup>

1

2

3

Passing Chords



**Fragmentation**

“dissolving”  
response)
**Frag. 1**
**Frag. 2**
**Cadence**

New hocketing gesture.

rhythmic cadence

incipit

dim<sup>7</sup>

i<sup>6</sup> 1 iv

Passing Chords    e<sup>o</sup>6<sub>4</sub> → f<sup>6</sup><sub>4</sub>    Ascending Bass Line

(Cadence)

26 2 3 4

$i^6_4$   $\dim^7$   $i^9_6$   $V^{b9}$   
[n.c.] 4

2 TR

5 1

PAC

In fact, it is only through a retrospective interpretation after multiple listenings that this blurred boundary can be discerned. However, after careful analysis, one can discern the boundary and see that it aligns with a 4-bar hypermetric unit (discussed later).

According to Caplin, the continuation function takes up the first two measures of the latter-half of the period and is characterized by four compositional devices (although we will only discuss the first two here).<sup>35</sup> The first is phrase-structural fragmentation, about which Caplin says “The most common characteristic of continuation function is the immediate breaking down of the two-measure unit size (established in the presentation) into smaller segments. This process of shortening the units is termed *fragmentation*.”<sup>36</sup> Using the same example from Caplin’s book as before—Example 2—you can see that the fifth and sixth measures of the Mozart Sonata are each one-measure units. Although material from the presentation phrase may sometimes be used in fragments, this smaller unit size is what actually constitutes a “fragment”, rather than the fragmentation of any preceding melodic or thematic material. Also notice the increased rate of harmonic change in m. 5 and m. 6. This is indicative of the second compositional device: an acceleration in the rate of harmonic change.

Although he has expanded the proportions of P<sup>1.1</sup>, Medtner still adheres to this normative fragmentation rhetoric. Two-bar fragments can be discerned because they adhere to the compositional devices laid out by Caplin. First, there is an “acceleration in the rate of harmonic change.”<sup>37</sup> Medtner moves from a harmonic shift every four measures in the

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35. The third and fourth devices (increase in surface rhythmic activity and sequential harmonies) are not pertinent to this discussion. For the full discussion on this topic, see Caplin, 41-42.

36. Caplin, page 41

37. Caplin, page 41

presentation phrase(s), to a change in harmony every two measures beginning at mm. 21. Second, due to the additional presentation phrase doubling the proportions of this sentence, the fragments have also been increased in size. However, they are still consistent in size proportionally to the increased length of  $P^{1.1}$ , meaning that both fragments are two measures in length (mm. 21–22 and mm. 23–24), rather than the normative one measure.

Notice throughout mm. 21–22 (the first fragment) the piano executes a hocketing gesture. Additionally, the strings and woodwinds continue their new gestures, and a new bass-line fills the entire two-measure span. The second fragment, in mm. 22–23, is slightly more difficult to see. The piano plays two different gestures in mm. 23 and 24, the woodwinds and strings finish their ascending lines on the downbeat of m. 24, and the brass enters and supports a rhythmic-cadential gesture at the end of m. 24. It almost appears as if this section somehow slipped into the cadential function of the phrase. However, that this all occurs over the same diminished-seventh chord outlined by the descending bass-line supports a reading of it as a two-bar unit. Additionally, the downbeat of m. 25 is a false cadence, since it happens in first inversion. This actually foreshadows the multiple failed cadences that will occur later in the movement. I would argue that due to the single prevailing harmony and the false cadence, mm. 23–24 are actually one fragment, and open the door to the final part of the sentence: the cadential phrase.

The cadential function of the sentence encompasses the final two measures of the phrase and includes both cadential rhetoric (the goal-directed motion towards the final chord), and the actual cadence itself (the moment of arrival).<sup>38</sup> Essentially, the cadential

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38. Caplin, 42–43

portion of the sentence brings the phrase to a close. According to Caplin, "...cadential function begins with the onset of the cadential progression, which, in the case of the sentence form, usually occurs around the middle of the continuation phrase..."<sup>39</sup> Looking at the Mozart excerpt from Example 5 again, it is clear that the last two measures bring this sentence to a conclusion via a normative harmonic movement from V to I. This occurs, as one would expect, during the last two measures of the sentence, halfway through the continuation phrase.

Other than its four-measure length, the cadential section of P<sup>1.1</sup> is actually quite normative. Starting at m. 25 it occurs (proportionally) exactly where we would expect it to begin—halfway through the continuation phrase. Additionally, it consists of normative cadential rhetoric, particularly the i<sup>6</sup><sub>4</sub> followed by the V<sup>b</sup><sub>9</sub> leading to the PAC at the downbeat of m. 29. This cadence gives a very strong harmonic conclusion to P<sup>1.1</sup> and leads directly into the TR section of the movement.

Given the preceding, then, I would argue that P<sup>1.1</sup> can be broken down into the following 4-bar units:

mm. 13–16: Presentation Phrase 1:  
 mm. 17–20: Presentation Phrase 2 ("dissolving" presentation)  
 mm. 21–24: Fragmentation    -Fragment 1: mm. 21–22  
    -Fragment 2: mm. 23–24  
 mm. 25–29: Cadence

Similar to Medtner's concerto form, even though the form of P<sup>1.1</sup> as a whole has had its boundaries pushed and expanded, it still retains the fundamental make-up of the normative form from which it stemmed. This can be seen via the clear formal-functional rhetoric within each module. In the presentation module(s), for example, there is very clearly presentation

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39. Caplin, 45

material at work. Notice that mm. 13–14 are immediately repeated in mm. 15–16, giving us a basic idea (bi) and bi-response, which together outline a normative presentation phrase. The same is true for the fragmentation and cadential modules. Once the boundaries have been established, the actual formal-functional rhetoric within is clear, helping ground the listener in the expected form, even while expanding it beyond normative expectations. Further support for P<sup>1.1</sup> being marked and elevated comes from said formal-functional rhetoric aligning with a normative 4-bar hypermeter. If you look at the sentence with the boundaries described here, it divides into 4-bar hypermetric units where each new functional module aligns with a new hypermetric unit.

As stated earlier, P is associated with the primary transgressive agent in this movement, and that agent will seem to resist and expand the anticipated boundaries of concerto form in a similar way to how normative sentence structure has been expanded here. Notice that, although proportions have been doubled, and it becomes more difficult to discern at points, the overall structure of the sentence is never broken. To tie this back with the first section on narrative, this is one of the possible outcomes of an ironic narrative. The transgressor ends up pointing out the “flaws in the system”, as it were, and in doing so strengthens the form as a whole.

### Analysis

The central premise of this paper is that Medtner, by manipulating form and subverting expectations, has created an ironic narrative in his second piano concerto. With a theoretical basis established, I will next endeavor to support that assertion in the following analysis. Insofar as transvaluation is "...the change in markedness and rank within a cultural hierarchy over time..."<sup>40</sup> I will track each important theme-actor across their most prominent appearances throughout the concerto, measuring their relative value via markedness and rank, with special attention to adherence to or deviation from the expected form. This process will begin with identifying P as the proxy, or emissary, of the transgressive agent; throughout the rest of the analysis I will demonstrate how P, via its initial entrance and through its inclusion in (or interruption of) key structural moments, undercuts form by thwarting the attempts of S to achieve its formal goals. In addition, I will track P's markedness and relative rank. In this way, I will demonstrate P's strength in relation to S, thereby providing support for the strength of the transgressive element in contrast to that of the order-imposing hierarchy.

As I illustrated in the section on form, Medtner's concerto does not align entirely with standard concerto or standard sonata form, and this non-adherence turns out to be the primary transgressive element of the piece. Concerto form is the order-imposing hierarchy, which carries with it myriad formal expectations. The transgressive element, nonadherence to/subversion of form, can be tracked across the piece and placed into contrast with the expected form. Then, using the tools of markedness and rank discussed earlier, the

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40. Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative*, ix.

transvaluation of these elements can be ascertained, which will, in turn, outline the narrative arc of the concerto.

In addition to large-scale formal considerations, formal function and normative unit length (discussed in the previous section) will help establish the relative markedness and rank of the theme-actors. The varying levels of formal-functional rhetoric within each theme help determine how well they fit into the expected small-scale phrase structure. For example, although it has been expanded beyond the normative boundaries of a sentence, each module of P<sup>1.1</sup> shows clear formal-functional rhetoric, with each module achieving its expected goal. Alignment of each half of the 8-bar sentence with normative 4-bar hypermetric units will be the second tool to consider. Although P<sup>1.1</sup> expands beyond the normative boundaries of a sentence, each module aligns with underlying 4-bar hypermeasures. This means that, if a key structural moment (on both the larger and small scale) aligns with the normative 4-bar hypermeter, both the cadence/boundary and the hypermeter are strengthened and reinforced by one another. As William Rothstein says in his book *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* “When a cadence—the end of a tonal motion—marks the end of a rhythmic segment, the two analogous feelings of completion reinforce each other...”<sup>41</sup>

In relation to the narrative arc of Medtner's concerto, P, and its various iterations throughout the movement, might be regarded as the emissary, or proxy, of the transgressive element. Insofar as nearly every appearance of P (frequently written in the piano part) occurs concomitantly with a formal disruption, it, P, can be viewed as the proxy for the transgressive agent. This can be seen in the EEC at m. 161 (Example 7) and the ESC at m. 437 (Example 8) when P interrupts the cadences, subverting their strength.

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41. William Nathan Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989), 7-8.



Example 7. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50, first movement. mm. 156–162. EEC

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 156-159) includes a piano part and a string quartet. The piano part is marked *Cantabile* and *p*. The string quartet is marked *f*. The piano part has a blue oval around its melodic line. The string quartet has a red oval around its entry. A red line connects the two. The second system (mm. 160-162) continues the piano and string quartet parts. The piano part has a blue oval around its melodic line. The string quartet has a red oval around its entry. A red line connects the two. The score includes various annotations: a blue oval around the piano's melodic line, a red oval around the string quartet's entry, and a red line connecting the two. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending at measure 159 and the second system starting at measure 160.

156  $D^6_4$   $a^{o7}$   $E^6_4$  Aug.<sup>6</sup>/Eb

159 Eb:  $I^6_4$  V<sup>7</sup> I

EEC

P overlaps with the EEC

Cantabile— modified

13

*trioso*

Example 8. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50, first movement. mm. 434–440. ESC

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Fag.

Cor.

Tr. ba.

Tr. ni.

Tuba.

Timp.

P. no.

Archi.

ESC

TR Fanfare

P overlaps with the ESC

End of Cantabile

Reference to Al Rigore

Ostinato bass (started at ms. 423, after failed ESC)

Cantabile tail

PAC

434

C Minor: i (passing chords over ostinato) V<sup>7</sup>

437

1

PAC

calando mancando

a tempo

434

V<sup>7</sup>

i

PAC

Or at the very beginning of the piece, when P "jumps in" and subjugates the orchestra's opening ritornello. In contrast to P, S might be seen as the proxy for the order-imposing hierarchy due to its general adherence to formal conventions. For example, when S makes its first appearance at ms. 46, it is not only in an expected key, but in the key most common to a minor-key concerto. S-modules also lead to both the EEC and the ESC (Examples 7 and 8)—the two obligatory cadences necessary for sonata (and concerto) form. In short, P can be seen pushing the boundaries of the formal schema while S attempts to maintain the status quo.

Additionally, the solo piano and the orchestra may also be regarded as proxies for the transgressive element and the order-imposing hierarchies, respectively. This is due to the fact that, at places of formal disruption, it is frequently the orchestra which is thwarted in its attempts to adhere to form, while the piano interrupts and undercuts the attempt. Examples 11 and 16 include the EEC and ESC deferrals at mm. 149 and 423. In both instances the orchestra, briefly sans piano, sets up and attempts to cadence. However, the piano returns both times and thwarts the attempt, deferring the structural cadence.

## P

I will begin by discussing P generally, and by establishing it as the emissary of the transgressive agent. I will then briefly discuss P<sup>1.0</sup> and P<sup>1.1</sup> individually, after which I will provide evidence for P as the transgressor by tracking it across key structural points in the concerto.

The primary piece of evidence for P serving as the proxy of the transgressive agent is that it is consistently present at, and frequently the cause of, moments of formal subversions

and interruptions. According to Almén, formal conformance versus nonconformance is a category for consideration when analyzing the narrative of a piece.

He states that “In interpretations of this type, a formal paradigm itself represents the initial cultural hierarchy, and our expectations of its conventional unfolding become the measure for the narrative trajectory.”<sup>42</sup> Although going against formal norms once is not a reason to mark an agent as transgressive in and of itself, I would argue that the degree to which Medtner cuts against the formal conventions does merit examination. At key structural moments throughout the movement there are subversions of formal expectations which thwart the attempts of S-space theme-actors to achieve their structural/formal goals, and P, as emissary of the transgressive agent, is present at nearly all of these events. For example, P frequently causes these subversions by interrupting, preventing, or overlapping structural cadences.

#### p<sup>1.0</sup>

The very first note of the concerto subverts expected form. Most concertos (in the classical tradition) begin with a non-modulating orchestral ritornello. However, in Medtner's piece P, realized by the solo piano, appears over-eager and "dives right in", as it were, unable or unwilling to wait for the proper entrance point. This immediately undercuts the expectations of the listener and demonstrates that something has gone wrong with the normal arrangement. Notice the orchestra immediately enters and attempts to wrest control back from the piano, repeating the theme's incipit just one beat after the piano. This results in an antiphonal opening that presages the struggle between soloist and orchestra that is to come.

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42. Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative*, 164.

However, it is only the striking solo entrance that marks  $P^{1.0}$ . As an introductory/zero-module, it is normative.  $P^{1.0}$  introduces the key and some thematic material, it is harmonically static, has a loose-knit structure, and its primary function is to open up space for the entrance of P-proper [ $P^{1.1}$ ]. Notice in Example 9 the first five measures of  $P^{1.0}$  are harmonically static (a C Minor pedal), there is no established harmonic rhythm to which the listener may entrain. Rather, it feels preparatory/introductory during this time. Then, when harmonic motion does begin at mm. 6-7, it leads towards a half cadence, which serves to open up space for the entrance of  $P^{1.0}$ , it is relatively normative.

### $P^{1.1}$

After  $P^{1.0}$  introduces the primary thematic material,  $P^{1.1}$  packages that material into a relatively tight-knit sentence consisting of four modules with clear formal-functional rhetoric, all of which align with the underlying 4-bar hypermetric units (see Example 6). This has been discussed in the section on formal function and normative unit length, so here I will just briefly mention that this marks and elevates  $P^{1.1}$ . It marks  $P^{1.1}$  as it is the only theme-actor with clear formal-functional rhetoric. As you will see when I discuss the S-modules, the function of the modules within the S-themes do not always clearly sound the expected rhetoric.  $P^{1.1}$  is elevated due to Medtner's interest in, and general adherence to, classical form. Since formal functions are normative and expected,  $P^{1.1}$  is elevated in relation to the S-themes as the only theme-actor to adhere to those expectations. That the formal-functional modules of  $P^{1.1}$  align with the underlying 4-bar hypermetric units further marks and elevates this theme, for the same reasons given above (i.e.— $P^{1.1}$  is the only theme-actor with this normative distinction).



Example 9. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50, first movement. mm. 1–11. P<sup>1.0</sup>

riten.

P1.0

Allegro risoluto\*) poco riten. a tempo sostenuto poco riten.

Orchestra immediately imitates piano's entrance.

Archi

P.no

Ob.

Cl.

Cor.

Timp.

energico strepitoso

Archi

P.no

V<sup>6</sup>/<sub>4</sub> VI<sup>7</sup>

V<sup>7</sup>/<sub>4</sub> V i V i V

C Minor: i

The expansion of the normative sentence structure, which I outlined in the section of Formal Functions, can arguably be viewed as evidence for P's association with the transgressive agent, as well. Here we see P<sup>1.1</sup> push against the limits of the sentence structure and, rather than breaking, P<sup>1.1</sup> doubles the proportions of a normative sentence. This is accomplished by adding a second presentation phrase, which ends up doubling the size of each module. In its first non-introductory iteration, P is pushing against the established norms, attempting to expand the possibilities of a given structure. Not only does this foreshadow what will happen in the movement at large, but it is also a nearly textbook example of an ironic narrative (see the section on narrative) albeit on a small scale.

The preceding examined what marks P<sup>1.1</sup> in contrast to the S-modules (this difference will become even more apparent when the S-modules are examined later). Now, let us move on to how P helps to subvert formal expectations, and raises its rank in relation to S. There are four key areas that provide this evidence: the EEC proper at ms. 161; the location of the cadenza (especially when considered in connection with the retransition to the recapitulation); the ESC at ms. 437; and the brief closing section which follows.<sup>43</sup>

As discussed earlier, the EEC (Essential Expositional Closure) is one of two obligatory cadences in concerto form. Its purpose is to affirm the secondary key, thereby establishing the conflict that will unfold throughout the rest of the movement. This exposition contains multiple deferred/failed EEC's and one true EEC which is undercut by P. The first failed EEC occurs at ms. 131. In Example 10 you can see all the rhetoric for a cadence leading to an affirmation of E-flat Major, but there are two problems.

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43. To be clear, the opening of the concerto, in which P suppresses the orchestral ritornello, is also a key piece of evidence. However, since that was used to establish P as the proxy for the primary transgressive element, there is no need to repeat that here.

### 1<sup>st</sup> EEC Effect (evaded cadence)

Eb Major:  $V^7/V$  Dominant Lock (on the Secondary Dominant)

(Rhetorical moment of cadence lands  
on a tonic  ${}^6_4$ , negating the cadence)



First, the dominant lock occurs on the secondary dominant. This would be fine, except there is never a resolution to the dominant before the moment of cadence, which leads to the second problem. A second-inversion tonic chord is sounded at the moment of cadence, deferring the EEC to a later point in the Exposition.

The second failed EEC (Example 11 ) occurs at ms. 149. Again there is clear cadential rhetoric: a I-6/4 chord leading to a  $V^7$ . Importantly, this attempt locks onto the correct dominant, and does sound a  $V^7$  chord. It seems as if S is building momentum, moving closer to achieving its goal of the EEC. But, at the last moment, the tonic is transformed into a secondary dominant, a  $V^7/IV$ , by the inclusion of a D-flat. While this attempt is stronger than the first, it still fails to achieve the EEC.

At ms. 161, after 115 measures, two sub-rotations through all three S-modules, and two failed attempts, S finally achieves the EEC (Example 7). There is, for a third time, clear cadential rhetoric, with an Augmented-sixth, I-6/4,  $V^7$  progression, this time finally coming to rest on the I of E-flat Major, confirming the secondary key area and achieving the EEC. However, P still intrudes and undermines the strength of this cadence. Notice that P overlaps the EEC: the horns and the violas begin P during the final sixteenth note of ms. 160, meaning that the actual arrival of the cadence occurs simultaneously with P. This overlap, coupled with the rhetorically weak arrival of the cadence (discussed in detail in the EEC section of the analysis), undercuts the strength of S and subverts the expected form. This serves as the first major example, after the opening, of a subversion of the order-imposing hierarchy.



Example 12. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50,  
first movement. mm. 291–294. End of Development

**Recapitulation**

allargando      Maestoso      a tempo

P overlaps the cadence

291  
C Minor:      vii°7/V      Aug.<sup>6</sup>      V<sup>7</sup>      i  
i: PAC

The next subversions of form both occur at the start of the Recapitulation. Looking at Example 12, above, there is a i:PAC that both ends the development and begins the recapitulation. However, notice that, just as with the EEC, P cannot be contained, and it again overlaps the cadence. At this point, the orchestra executes an exact repeat of the first twenty-eight measures of the concerto, but with the piano tacet. It appears as if the orchestra may be able to regain some of its power. The recapitulation is expected to begin with an orchestral ritornello, and here, the orchestra is utilizing the relative strength of P to affirm this proper formal expectation and try to get things "back on track". However, there are two mitigating factors which serve to elevate P. First, this orchestral ritornello is the only point in the movement when a theme is sounded, in its entirety, for a second time. That makes P the only theme-actor in the piece with two executions of its full, original form.<sup>44</sup> Second is the placement of the cadenza.

Normally, a cadenza occurs near the end of the recapitulation when the orchestra opens up space by sounding a HC. At ms. 321 (Example 3), the point at which P<sup>1.1</sup> should cadence in a PAC, the piano interrupts and extends the dominant harmony, thwarting the orchestral cadence by launching into a very early cadenza, thus altering the form in the process. It is as if, in answer to an attempt to reestablish order, the transgressor asserts its dominance by preventing the expected cadence and altering the expected form. What follows is a discursive cadenza, much longer than most, encompassing mm. 321-397.

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44. There is a *fughetto* of *Al Rigore* in the development (mm. 230-246). Using the established rules for markedness and rank, this absolutely does elevate *Al Rigore*, but only in relation to the other S-modules. This is due to the fact that this *fughetto* serves no structural or formal function. It does not lead to any structural cadence and, since the development is non-rotational, it does not conform to or alter concerto form in any way. Additionally, the *fughetto* does not end, but is overlapped, then taken over, by P and TR rhetoric.

After the cadenza, P lies dormant until ms. 437 (Example 8) when Medtner, paralleling the ESC with the EEC, utilizes the same overlapping technique to undercut the strength of the ESC. The final sixteenth-note of ms. 436 overlaps with and undercuts the efficacy of the cadence, allowing P once again reassert its strength. Following this is a very brief C-space, which serves as a microcosm for the rest of the movement. The piano confidently sounds P until the final trill cadence at ms. 442. Simultaneously, different orchestral forces sound the fanfare portion of TR, and finally the tail fragment of *Cantabile*. There are two things the piano does in contrast to the orchestra that demonstrate P's higher rank. First, the piano confidently and consistently sounds P, while the orchestra executes fragments of the TR Fanfare (Example 8), and eventually a fragment from the tail of *Cantabile* (TR, and the origin of the Fanfare rhetoric can be seen in Example 13).

Throughout the movement, P intrudes on every important cadence, thereby undercutting their strength and asserting its own. Additionally, the piano (as proxy for the transgressive agent) alters the expected form of the piece in three significant ways. First, by undercutting the strength of structural cadences, thereby opening space for the expansion of a given section; second, by disregarding the normative opening and entering earlier than expected; and third, by thwarting the orchestra's expected cadence at ms. 320 and launching into an early, discursive cadenza.

Example 13. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50, first movement. mm. 29–34. TR

TR

C Minor: 29  $i$   $iv^6_4$   $i$   $iv^6_4$   $I$   $ii \ \emptyset^4_2$

TR Fanfare

32  $III^6$   $V^{b9}$   $i$

## S

The S-themes, by contrast, serve as the proxies of the order-imposing hierarchy, attempting to maintain and affirm normative concerto form. While P's intrusions thwart and subvert the strength of cadences, the S-themes are constantly trying to achieve the primary structural cadences of the piece (the EEC and ESC). Their failure to achieve these cadences, and the rhetorical weakness of them when they do occur, is a characteristic of their relative weakness when compared with P. The second reason for the S-theme's relative weakness is their obscured formal-functional rhetoric. In order to demonstrate this, I will start each section with a brief analysis of each theme, showing its weaker formal functions. Following this, I will track each S-theme across the movement, just as I did with P.

Before proceeding I would like to quickly address the naming convention of the S-themes. The expressive labels are not meant to infer any meaning, rhetorical, expressive, or otherwise. They are merely used here for the sake of clarity and to avoid an interesting but ultimately extraneous discussion. There is room for debate about the exact labelling conventions for the S-themes in this piece. If the S-themes were to be labeled  $S^{1.1}$ ,  $S^{1.3}$ , and  $S^{1.3}$ , it would indicate they are smaller subsets, or modules, rather than fully independent themes. Given each theme's distinct identity, and their length, this label does not quite fit. However, they cannot be considered separate sections under Darcy and Hepokoski's system as there is no cadence that formally delineates their boundaries. So, we cannot properly label them as S1, S2, and S3. Additionally, they do not quite constitute a Tri-Modular S. While I personally think they are so distinct and project enough rhetorical strength to be labelled S1, S2, and S3, that argument (while interesting) is not immediately relevant to this discussion.

Therefore, I will refer to each theme by the expressive title Medtner provided in the score. The first will be referred to as *Cantabile*, the second as *Al Rigore*, and the third as *Dolce*.

### *Cantabile* (Sub-rotation 1)

In many ways, *Cantabile* is quite normative for secondary-theme. It is in the Relative Major key (E-flat Major, in this case), which is the higher-level default choice (read most common/expected) of subsidiary keys in a minor key concerto. It is opposite in character to P: it is a calm, cantabile, Major, and almost Pastoral in nature. These are all qualities that are very common among S-modules. At its start it is very diatonic, and moves almost exclusively through I, IV, and V chords. Finally, it has a more loose-knit phrase structure. However, that loose-knit phrase structure makes the formal-function rhetoric quite murky, which serves as the primary factor that weakens *Cantabile*.

In Example 14, *Cantabile* begins with the expected formal functional-rhetoric. The first four measures begin the theme, establish the key and mood, and align with the first 4-bar hypermetric unit. However, things quickly become murky. You can see that mm. 48-49 have been sequenced at mm. 50-51, which would generally indicate a continuation rather than a new module. Then, at ms. 52, the theme begins again. This parallelism with ms. 45 would generally indicate the beginning of the consequent module of a phrase, however there is no cadence beforehand to indicate the end to an antecedent module. In short, mm. 50-53 could be interpreted in multiple ways, leaving the formal-functional rhetoric unclear. Additionally, due to these unclear functions, the modules do not clearly align with the underlying 4-bar hypermeter.

Moving forward, *Cantabile* does not have a clear ending, like P does. After the latter part of the theme begins at ms. 54 the theme eventually dissolves into a sequential pattern at



ms. 60, and is then altered at ms. 64 (when referencing this altered version of the theme later, I will refer to it as *Cantabile*-altered). By contrast, P ends on the downbeat of ms. 29, finishing a PAC, ending P<sup>1.1</sup>, and beginning TR all with great clarity and strength. *Cantabile* never ends, but merely disintegrates. This lack of an ending weakens *Cantabile*, in relation to P, because it does not contain the strength, rhetorically or structurally, to finish a thought. Additionally, this foreshadows the difficulty S will have in reaching the EEC. As you will see, this same weakness afflicts all of the S-themes. *Cantabile* is modified, almost as if it is trying a new tactic. But, even though an E-flat does feature prominently in the bass, this section is tonally ambiguous, possibly leaning towards C Minor (given the B-natural prevalent throughout). In fact, it seems as if this section will cadence in C Minor, but instead, there is a surprising move to G Major, as the modified *Cantabile* material disintegrates from thematic material to more chromatic, transitional rhetoric.

Example 14. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50. 1<sup>st</sup> movement. *Cantabile*

*Cantabile*

a poco allargando

rit. molto cantabile a tempo, ma espressivo

Piano

Archi

42

1

sequence of mm. 48-49

espress.

47

2

3

4

espress.

1

2

3

4

50

4

Beginning of theme- parallels ms. 46

Cl.

Fag.

Cor.

Piano

dim.

mp

cresc.

4

cantabile espress.

mp

cresc.

Archi

arco

p

53

Fl. 12

Ob.

Cl.

Fag.

P.no

V. ni

V. lo

V. e.

56

Fl. rit. a tempo

Ob. Cantabile head

Cl.

Fag.

Cor.

P.no

V. lo

59

potential source of sequential pattern

Sequential pattern begins

Ob.

Cl.

Fag.

Cor.

P.no

62

Altered Cantabile incipit (Cantabile-altered)

dim. ma a tempo

poco ritardando e accelerando

leggero

1

Cl.

Timp.

P.no

Archi

65

2

3

4

atempo risoluto

leggerissimo

sf brioso

pizz.

dim.

*Cantabile* (Sub-rotation 2)

At ms. 119, *Cantabile* returns and begins sub-rotation 2. It starts by overlapping with the previous section and arriving before its key has been established. However, this time, it is in an even weaker position than its first entrance. When *Cantabile* was first introduced, although it began before its key was firmly established (at the tail end of TR's modulation), it did immediately settle into the key area. Here, even though it is melodically the same as its first appearance, *Cantabile* is in a tonally ambiguous area, and the first melody tone of ms. 119—a G—is dissonant with the bass note—an A-flat. Additionally, the opening of the theme is given no room to breathe. The orchestra, beginning with the oboe, starts playing the latter-half of the theme simultaneously with the head of the theme.

What weakens this unit the most, though, is the build-up and subsequent failure of the EEC. Composers will frequently extend a phrase and delay the arrival of an important cadence in order to increase the harmonic tension. This is often achieved by extending the pre-dominant harmonies and then landing on a dominant lock for a few measures.<sup>45</sup> At first glance, that appears to be the goal here.

Example 15 (below) shows the bass reduction of this section, where you can see the F: V<sup>7</sup>/V to V<sup>7</sup> progression in mm. 119–120 lead convincingly to F. Following this, in mm. 122–124, a nearly diatonic ascent in the bass (the one passing harmony occurs over the B natural in ms. 123) serves as an extended passing-chord to increase the functional space of C<sup>7</sup>, thereby strengthening to pull to F<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, orchestral forces are increasing,

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45. As an example, Chopin used this technique to great effect in his first Ballade (Op. 23 in G Minor). The second iteration of the first theme occurs at ms. 94, and is essentially a twelve-measure dominant lock leading to the A Major iteration of the third theme. Medtner uses, and then undercuts, this same technique, here. Timothy Koozin, "Music of Chopin," Music of Chopin (class lecture, University of Houston, Houston, TX, Spring 2018).

rising in register, and the timpani begins to roll the F in the bass. This all culminates in a *forte, risoluto* call and response at mm. 129–130 between the piano and the orchestra leading to a strong, well-prepared cadence.

Example 15. Bass Reduction and harmony, mm. 119–131. First failed EEC

119  
AbMaj<sup>7</sup> Aug<sup>6</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> fmin Eb<sup>6</sup> f#dim<sup>6</sup><sub>5</sub> gmin<sup>6</sup> b<sup>07</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

124  
d<sup>0</sup><sub>4</sub><sup>2</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> Eb<sup>6</sup><sub>4</sub>

1<sup>st</sup> failed EEC

However, this attempted cadence fails. *Cantabile*, for all its efforts, cadences in the wrong place, and lands on an E-flat<sup>6</sup><sub>4</sub>, rather than the root-position E-flat Major chord that would achieve the EEC. It is as if, in its excitement, *Cantabile* forgot to move from the secondary dominant to the regular dominant before expending its energy. This all means that the first S-theme has failed, thus far, in its primary purpose, and the EEC has been deferred. This failure to achieve its primary purpose, coupled with P's overlap of the failed cadence, both serve to undercut *Cantabile*'s strength.

#### P/TR Interlude

Here I will deviate from tracking S for short while, because what happens immediately after this first deferred EEC serves to further undercut the strength of S. After having expended its energy and failed, S needs help to redirect back towards its III: PAC goal. It is at this point that pre-MC material, in the form of an amalgam of P and TR Fanfare (see Example 10), is interpolated into sub-rotation 2 in order to help. This P/TR interlude does not move the music in a strong direction either harmonically or

thematically, there is no cadence, and nothing is really different after its intrusion. When it begins at ms. 131 we are in E-flat Major, and when it ends at ms. 139, we have simply moved, unprepared, to the relative minor. In this way, it cannot really be considered rotational, so these eight measures could arguably be conceived of as pausing concerto time, or existing outside the formal timeline.<sup>46</sup>

However, despite its lack of harmonic motion, the inclusion of this interlude both increases the value of P and decreases the value of S. The inclusion of Pre-MC material is relatively unusual within S-space. While it is not at all uncommon for C-space to consist of P or P-based material, it is quite rare to find that P material *before* the EEC. In this case, S is interrupted before it has completed its task, with P again asserting its strength over S by entering right at the point of failure. This indicates that P is able to intrude at any moment. It subjugates the orchestral ritornello that would normally open a concerto, and now it interrupts S-space. In contrast, S has been unable to achieve its goal, and is now receiving help from an unusual source. Although multi-modular S sections frequently require help to achieve their EEC, that assistance normally comes from other S-modules. Here, though, all S-modules have proven to be so weak that they require outside assistance. If all of this holds true, then the interlude can also be interpreted as mocking S and its inability to cadence. The static harmony indicates that P is not here to move things forward, but rather to allow S to rest for a moment.

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46. Andrew Davis, "Chopin and the Romantic Sonata: The First Movement of Op. 58," *Music Theory Spectrum* 36, no 2, (December 1st, 2014): 270-294. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/e90012057>

According to Dr. Davis, a shift in the level of discourse can place certain actors outside of sonata time. In his conception, when the level of discourse changes, it opens the opportunity for an actor to exist outside the normal bounds of sonata time. This would be similar to a narrator interjecting a quick reminder about a past event in the story they are telling. This reminder, while still part of the story, stands outside of the timeline of the story being told. Similarly, an actor within a sonata may recall the past, foreshadow the future, or otherwise be interpolated into the normal flow of sonata form. This allows for small alterations that do not necessarily disrupt the overall form of a piece.

*Cantabile* (Recapitulation)

With the exclusion of the cadenza, *Cantabile* is a relatively ineffective actor in the recapitulation, and its rank is lowered in contrast with P multiple times.<sup>47</sup> Its first appearance occurs at mm. 410–411 when the tail fragment of the theme is sounded in D-flat Major. It is another instance of the piano interrupting the orchestra. Until this point, mm. 398–409 consisted of the orchestra repeating TR while the piano sounded DE material. But then, mm. 410–411 seem to create a sudden shift in the level of discourse, meaning they occur outside of regular sonata time.<sup>48</sup> It is demonstrative of the strength of the solo instrument compared to that of the orchestra, when the latter is stopped from moving forward seemingly at random. Obviously, *Cantabile* was first introduced after TR Fanfare was sequenced in the exposition, and here it occurs in a similar place. In fact, the chromatic descent of the previous measures mirrors the sequential and registral descent used to modulate to the subsidiary key in the Exposition. After the two measures of *Cantabile*, TR continues for five more measures, almost as if nothing had happened. This marks S in contrast to P, and lowers its rank, yet again. In the exposition, when P (or TR) would interrupt S-space, it was both given room and remained in the same tonality as S. Here, though, *Cantabile* is immediately dismissed before it can fully form.

The rank of *Cantabile* is lowered further at the end of the recapitulation. It appears four more times but is fragmented and altered in various ways. Each variation is in the primary key (C Minor) and is couched within the two-measure bass ostinato that begins at m. 423, which can be seen in Example 16. The first three statements share the same basic

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47. Within the cadenza, *Cantabile* does get a nearly full statement. However, it never cadences and still has unclear formal-function rhetoric.

48. Davis, "Chopin and the Romantic Sonata: The First Movement of Op. 58."

weaknesses: they all dissolve into transitional material and have no strong formal-functional rhetoric

Example 16. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50, first movement. mm. 422–423  
Bass Ostinato and *Cantabile*-modified

Deferred ESC

*tempo*  
*legato*

*Cantabile*—modified

*dim.*

Bass ostinato—continues through ms. 438

*dim.*

422

The first appearance is from mm. 423-424 and is the modified version of the theme (Example 16). The two transitional measures that follow simply fill out the bass ostinato while the violins play *Dolce*. The second statement, from mm. 427-428, also lasts for only two measures. In this case, though, the nocturne-like accompaniment that normally flows underneath *Cantabile* has been eschewed for the new accompaniment figure that began at m. 423. Additionally, the theme is sounded in a lower register than normal. Indeed, the right hand is written in the bass clef. The third statement is an augmented version of the theme and begins at ms. 430. This time, it lasts for six measures (ending at ms. 435), but it, too, dissolves. Also, the left hand continues the new accompaniment pattern just as before.

All three of these statements do end up leading to the ESC, however, the cadence arrives on a hypermetrically weak beat (i.e. not aligned with a normative 4-bar hypermeter)



and at a rhetorically weak location. For the second time in this piece, S has barely managed to achieve its goal; and, after having done so very weakly, P-based material swoops in immediately to finish the job and strengthen ending. The final iteration of *Cantabile* happens from mm. 442-443. Here the cellos and basses play the tail fragment of the theme in their lower registers. Actually, this final statement of an S-module is literally placed lower than P, as the low strings are registrally below the piano's final statement of P and the ensuing trill cadence.

### *Al Rigore* (Sub-rotation 1)

The second S-theme, *Al Rigore*, begins at ms. 68 (Example 17). It serves as a stark contrast to the more lyrical S-themes (*Cantabile* and *Dolce*) as it is rhythmically lively and highly staccato. Similar to *Cantabile*, this theme is undercut by a lack of formal-functional rhetoric, with modules that never align with a normative 4-bar hypermeter. Specifically, *Al Rigore* appears to have no closing rhetorical functions, and all of its modules are either cut off or just meander like a run-on sentence.

Although each iteration of the theme begins with normative opening rhetoric, *Al Rigore* has no closing rhetoric as it never manages to cadence, never manages to finish the idea begun at ms. 68, and just meanders into a modulation at the end. Notice that the first iteration is cut short, and the second and third iterations are completely different after the first four measures (compare mm. 77–80 to mm. 84–90). However, notice at ms. 73 the orchestra overlaps the piano, stopping what might have been consequent rhetoric to close out the brief antecedent module, and also interrupting what might have been a second 4-bar hypermetric unit. The orchestra manages to move the theme a little further along in the second iteration at ms. 73, but the same thing occurs when the piano's entrance at ms. 84

overlaps the cadence and prevents it from having the rhetorical strength necessary to complete the phrase. Following this, *Al Rigore* seems to lose its way during its third iteration, meandering through mm. 87–90 as it modulates to A Minor and leads to the next S-theme.

This serves as the next piece of evidence for the relative weakness of *Al Rigore*, it does not have a clear ending. In a manner similar, though less complex, to *Cantabile*, this theme eventually dissipates. Throughout mm. 88–90, *Al Rigore* modulates to A Minor, opening space for the entrance of the third S-theme. You will notice that this is a common occurrence throughout the movement, the S-themes frequently dissolve into something else, rather than sounding a clear, definitive ending.

Example 17. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50. 1<sup>st</sup> movement. *Al Rigore*

*Al Rigore*  
al rigore di tempo

overlap

*Al Rigore*

1 2 3 4 1 2/1 2

6 rinforz. mp rinforz. overlap

*Al Rigore*

3 4 1 2 3 4/1 2

75

Fl. Different material than mm. 77–80

adolo. (poco espress.) cantando

arco

3 4 1 2 3 4

modulation to A Minor

*Dolce*

p dolce

88 5?

G: ii<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup>/V  
a: V<sup>7</sup> i<sup>6</sup><sub>4</sub> V<sup>7</sup> i

*Al Rigore* (Sub-rotation 2)

In sub-rotation 2 it appears, at first, that *Al Rigore* will fare better in its attempt to move S closer to the EEC by more firmly re-establishing the subsidiary key of E-flat Major. This module is brief and straightforward, especially compared to its first iteration. After the P/TR interlude gave S a chance to regroup following *Cantabile's* failed EEC, *Al Rigore* corrects the error made by its predecessor and locks onto the correct dominant. In Example 11 you can see the I-6/4 chord leading to the V<sup>7</sup> of E-flat. In fact, it could be argued that the second 4-bar hypermeter that begins at ms. 143 has been extended for the purpose of prolonging the harmonic tension. This would serve the same purpose as it did during *Cantabile's* attempt, increasing the tension before the arrival of the cadence, but it is rhetorically too weak. There has not been enough build up and not enough strength gathered before the cadence, which is why the inclusion of the flat seventh is enough to defer the cadence.

However, this attempt also fails due to its rhetorical weakness. The orchestral forces are relatively subdued: there is no significant brass until ms. 147, the woodwinds are sparse and in a lower register, as are the strings. There is no building up of forces as one would expect at an important structural cadence. Additionally, the pre-dominant harmonies are not terribly convincing. A I<sup>6</sup>-IV-I<sup>6</sup><sub>4</sub>-V<sup>7</sup>, while technically correct, does not carry as much weight as something like an embellished half-cadence would. Importantly, the piano is also wholly absent from this attempt. Again, assuming the piano is a proxy for the transgressive agent, this is a clear example of the inability of S to achieve its goals without assistance.

*Al Rigore* is used so little in the recapitulation that it does not require its own section in the analysis. It is only referenced once, for two measures at mm. 435–436 (Example 8).

Medtner uses its incipit and its rhythmic profile to imply a brief recollection of the theme.

Additionally, the re-worked theme, especially when coupled with the bass in the left hand of the piano, serves the same purpose it did at the end of the development, it leads back to P.<sup>49</sup>

*Dolce* (Sub-rotation 1)

The final S-theme is marked *Dolce* and begins at m. 91. This theme comes the closest to having clear formal-functional rhetoric that aligns with the normative 4-bar hypermeter.

The first module, mm. 91-94, aligns with a 4-bar hypermetric unit and demonstrates antecedent rhetoric. As you can see in Example 18 , it presents the thematic material, establishes the key, and is harmonically static—alternating between the tonic and dominant harmony without moving towards one or the other—leaving room for the next module to move the phrase forward harmonically. The next module, which begins at m. 95, starts to display consequent rhetoric, moving to a predominant harmony at m. 96 and developing the thematic material. But it is prevented from continuing when *Al Rigore* interrupts at m. 97.

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49. As referenced earlier, *Al Rigore* is transformed into a Fughetto in the Development. But, as is not rotational and does not affect the structure of the movement, it does not have a significant effect to the narrative arc. Therefore, it is not relevant to this discussion.

Example 18. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor,  
op. 50. 1<sup>st</sup> movement. *Dolce*

a minor: **1** V **2** **3**

*Al Rigore material interrupts*

*Dolce*

V **4** i **1** iv<sup>7</sup> **2** **3** **4** **1**

V<sup>sus</sup> **2** V i **3** V<sup>sus</sup> **4** V i **1** iv<sup>7</sup> V<sup>4</sup><sub>3/vi</sub> **3**

Ob.

Cl.

Fag.

P.no

V.ni

V.ni

V.le

V.c.

cadential effect

Dolce tail

modulatory contrapuntal section

Cantabile

Dolce

106 4

*cantando* *f* *p*

Fl.

Ob.

Fag.

P.no

V.ni

V.ni

V.le

V.c.

modulatory contrapuntal section

Cantabile

Dolce

113 114

*poco rit.* *I solo* *cresc.* *espress.*

However, undeterred, *Dolce* makes a second attempt at ms. 99, and it goes quite well at first. Just as before mm. 99–103 display antecedent rhetoric, followed by a consequent module at ms. 104. Following this, the thematic material is developed, but does not come to a clear point of respite at its end in ms. 107. Additionally, there is a “cadential effect” at this point. Under certain circumstance, a  $v^{67}$ –I progression could arguably be considered a weak cadence, but here it is too weak, rhetorically, to really conclude the harmonic motion started earlier. The final moment of subversion is the modulatory contrapuntal module that overlaps with the cadential effect at ms. 107 undercutting what little strength the cadential effect had.

Following the modulatory counterpoint, the tail of *Dolce* begins in C Minor at m. 111. Although this four-measure module displays similar consequent rhetoric to that of mm. 103–107, it is even less effective. Notice that this module is also overlapped, and similarly undercut, by the same contrapuntal module from before transposed up a Minor Third. Additionally, this consequent is sounded in isolation, completely unmoored from an antecedent module. Even if mm. 111–115 had managed a strong cadence, it would not have very clear formal-functional rhetoric as an isolated consequent disconnected from any antecedent pair.

#### *Dolce* (Sub-rotation 2 and Recapitulation)

After a relatively long absence, the piano enters playing *Dolce* at ms. 149, after the second failed EEC. Although *Dolce* begins this section that will successfully achieve the EEC, it is not the S-theme present at the moment of the cadence. Continuing the pattern from the first sub-rotation, *Dolce* is interrupted by of S-modules: by *Cantabile* at ms. 152, and again at ms. 157. In fact, at this point *Cantabile*-altered takes over completely and finally leads the EEC at ms. 161.



The next significant instance of *Dolce* does not occur until mm. 417–422 in the recapitulation. *Dolce* is the S-theme that almost achieves the ESC at ms. 423. Throughout this section, which can be seen in Example 19, the theme is sounded in the piano, and altered to create a rising gesture in mm. 419–420. During this time, the orchestral forces begin to mount, and then, at ms. 421, the full orchestra (sans piano) plays the beginning of *Dolce* over relatively strong harmonic motion towards the cadence. But, following the established pattern, the ESC fails and another S-theme, *Cantabile*-altered, takes over. Importantly, notice that the piano was absent for the final two measures leading up to the cadence—mm. 421–422—and then immediately re-enters sounding another S-module. Yet again the orchestra and S-space material are unable to achieve any structural cadence without the piano (serving as proxy for the transgressive agent). Importantly, notice that the piano was absent for the final two measures leading up to the cadence—mm. 421–422—and then immediately re-enters sounding another S-module.

Example 19. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, op. 50, first movement. mm. 416–424. ESC Deferral, *Dolce*

416 C Minor: bII i<sup>6</sup> dim. iv i<sup>6</sup> ii<sup>ø7</sup> III iv

419 ? iv<sup>6</sup> V<sup>7</sup> [String of diatonic 7<sup>th</sup> chords] III<sup>6</sup> VI II<sup>ø7</sup> i<sup>6</sup> iv

Piano is absent before the cadence

allarg. ESC Deferral

(Piano is absent from the cadence)

a tempo *Cantabile*-modified  
non legato

Bass ostinato

422

i<sup>6</sup><sub>4</sub> IV V<sup>7</sup> i  
PAC

### **Conclusion**

The central argument of this paper is that Medtner has outlined an ironic narrative in his second piano concerto through the manipulation and subversion of normative concerto form and the formal functions of its themes. In doing so, I interpret P and S as proxies for the transgressive agent and the order imposing hierarchy, respectively. I demonstrate that all three S-modules are rhetorically weaker, or less effective, than P, and can subsequently be ranked lower in value since they fail to achieve any structural cadence without interruption or assistance. These failures arguably occur due to the S-themes relative weakness; i.e. none of them have consistent formal-functional rhetoric, making it more difficult to discern their purpose or function at any given moment. Additionally, when they do demonstrate a formal function, it frequently does not align with the underlying 4-bar hypermeter, robbing them of the added strength such an alignment can provide. By contrast, P<sup>1.1</sup> has a tight-knit, albeit expanded, sentential structure made up of 4-measure modules, each of which demonstrate clear formal-functional rhetoric and align with an underlying 4-bar hypermeter. Finally, P has a clear, distinct ending which aligns with a moment of cadence (the beginning of TR at m. 29), whereas the S-themes never have a clear ending. Rather, they tend to transform, modulate, or get usurped by another theme.

Given their relative weakness, it should not come as a surprise that S is frequently thwarted in its attempts to achieve a structural cadence; and when it does achieve such a cadence, it is always assisted by the piano. Look at m. 131, the first failed EEC which occurs after a dominant lock on the wrong dominant. Following this, a potential EEC at ms. 149 is easily evaded when the piano enters and alters the tonic to a dominant-7<sup>th</sup> chord. Then, when

the EEC finally does sound at ms. 161, notice that it is the piano which actually sounds the cadence, while P overlaps it, undercutting its strength.

A similar overlap is present at the end of the development when, at m. 293, P overlaps the cadence which begins the recapitulation. After this, the orchestra finally has a ritornello (although this, the only true orchestral ritornello, is executing an exact repeat of P<sup>1.1</sup>) but is prevented from cadencing when the piano enters at 319, extends the dominant harmony, and launches into an early, discursive cadenza. Following this cadenza, there is no time any S-theme is played in full for the rest of the movement, making P<sup>1.1</sup> the only theme to be sounded in full during the recapitulation. The EEC, at m. 437, is yet another cadence overlapped by P, and even after this final structural cadence, the piano continues to play P-based material while the orchestra plays snippets of other themes, all the while diminishing in both volume and number.

Examining the order-imposing hierarchy and the transgressive agent, I argue that normative Type 5 concerto form is the order-imposing hierarchy. This is because there is enough normative concerto rhetoric throughout the movement—i.e. a Ritornello 3 which sounds P-based material; the cadenza splitting the ritornello into two sections, etc.—to justify such a reading (see the end of the section on Form). Given this, major deviations or subversions of this form can be considered the transgressive agent which arrives and challenges that order.

I also propose that, at the thematic level, the S and P themes serve as proxies for the order-imposing hierarchy and the transgressive agent, respectively. Throughout the movement, it is S and the orchestra that are present at moments when it appears the piece will achieve an expected structural goal. Take, for example, the multiple attempts at an EEC in

the development, the apparent attempt to wrest control back from the over-eager piano at the start of the concerto, and the ritornello trying to restore the normal order at the beginning of the recapitulation. All of these indicate that S, and the orchestra, are being used to achieve the normative formal schema. P and the piano, by contrast, are almost always present when the order is subverted or breaks down. At the very start of the piece the orchestral ritornello is suppressed by P's early entrance in the piano; P overlaps the EEC, the ESC, and the end of the development, thereby undercutting their strength and efficacy; the piano interrupts the orchestral ritornello and launches into an early cadenza. This all points to P and the piano as being strongly associated with the transgressive element attempting to thwart normative concerto form. Even the first iteration of P<sup>1.1</sup> pushes the boundaries of sentence structure at the beginning of the movement.

Using the formal and thematic arguments outlined above, I propose that an ironic narrative has been outlined in this piece. To review, an ironic narrative occurs when the order-imposing hierarchy has been defeated by a transgressive agent. An ironic archetype sheds light on all of the flaws inherent in a system. Sometimes this is done more lightly, with a more comedic bent. Other times the goal is to expose the cracks in the foundation and push them so hard that the entire structure collapses. Sometimes the goal is to explore just how far a structure can be pushed, thus expanding its limits. I believe the latter is at work here, that Medtner's concerto is an ironic archetype that sharply indicts concerto form, and thus pushes its limits and expands what is possible within the form. This can be seen from when P enters early and suppresses the opening ritornello, to the end, when P overlaps the ESC, undercutting its strength. Throughout the movement the order-imposing hierarchy of the concerto is subverted, interrupted, undercut, or otherwise altered when P and/or the piano

intrudes. In this way, Medtner has laid out an ironic narrative that expands what is possible while retaining a great deal of the normative form, without abandoning or breaking what makes the form so compelling and stable in the first place. One could imagine Medtner's goal here, given his own writing, was to preserve a more conservative concerto form by increasing its expressive potential.

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