

A MILESTONE OF SYMBOLIST MUSIC. A MULTI-PERSPECTIVE EXAMINATION OF NIKOLAI MEDTNER'S *SONATA-BALLADE*, OP. 27

I. INTRODUCTION

Among the fourteen piano sonatas by Nikolai Medtner (1880–1951), the *Sonata-Ballade* in F# major, Op. 27 holds an important position. This applies in context of Medtner's chronological order of works as well as to its individual relevance. The composition supersedes all of the composer's preceding sonatas in terms of cyclic architecture and supra-musical semantics, and, in that respect, also contrasts significantly with the following works to come. For the first time in his sonata output, Medtner realises a bipartite formal outline, subdivided into three movements, the second and third of which being connected through an *attacca* crossover (*Introduzione e Finale*) – a concept similar to that of Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata, Op. 53 (1803–1804). There are two other earlier works whose formal design may have served as a model: Beethoven's 24th Sonata, Op. 78 (1809), which pairs a rather lyrical first movement (*Allegro ma non troppo*) with a lively and sparkling finale (*Allegro vivace*); and Scriabin's 4th Sonata, Op. 30 (1904), a direct predecessor of Medtner's work, which with its *Andante* and *Prestissimo volando* sections shares Beethoven's two-movement design. Both works are written in the key of F# major as well.¹

The cyclic character of the *Sonata-Ballade* had evidently not been planned at first hand. As the sketches reveal, the composer had thought of a composition called "Sonate-Variationen," after discarding his plans for a piano concerto and a cycle of miniatures at an early stage of the work's genesis.² The first movement was eventually finished in 1912, soon after Medtner had retired from Moscow to his country estate in the village of Khlebnikovo, where he was able to devote himself almost exclusively to composing. In the following year he performed and published the first movement, which already bore the subtitle of *Sonate-Ballade*. The sonata as a whole, with its sections being connected through *attacca* transitions and quotes

of previously established motifs, was subsequently completed as a three-movement composition in 1913–1914. Medtner performed the world premiere of the entire composition in March 1914, and it was published by Édition Russe de Musique later that year. Interestingly enough, the title page of that edition ("Sonate-Ballade avec Introduction et Finale pour Piano op. 27") retains the subtitle for the first movement only, so that the *Allegretto* may still be considered a single-movement sonata on its own, despite the completion to a three-movement work.

The attribute of the "ballade" genre makes it possible for the composition to be regarded as sort of a generic hybrid – it is a cyclic three-movement sonata which contains within it a one-movement ballade. In that respect, the initial *Allegretto* hints to other composers' ballades and other one-movement works of descriptive or narrative character. Another fact is noteworthy: In Medtner's musical output that subtitle reappears in the 3rd Piano Concerto in E minor, Op. 60, "Ballade" (completed in 1942), a work bearing certain structural and semantic parallels to the *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27. Similarly to the sonata, the concerto features a short introductory movement in the middle of a tripartite structure, named *Interludium*. Its subtitle "Ballade" is taken from Mikhail Lermontov's poem *Rusalka*, assigning to the first movement a narrative directly derived from poetry, while the subsequent movements draw from the poem's atmosphere and main dramatis personae as well.³ The concerto relates to literature in a stronger way than most of Medtner's other instrumental compositions do, and thus features a more obvious programmatic dimension than in the case of the sonata.

Contemporary critiques were widely appreciative of the *Sonata-Ballade*, praising its formal and aesthetic mastery, which earned its composer the Glinka Prize in 1916. For Medtner himself, the *Sonata-Ballade* was clearly a work of great importance. He frequently performed it in

his recitals, more often than any other sonata, and recorded it in 1947 for *His Master's Voice*, along with a number of other piano works of his. Given the many autobiographical and supra-musical implications that are connected to its genesis, the sonata is literally bursting with meaning and semantics, making the work an impressive example of Medtner's musical symbolism. In order to make this associative network accessible for the listener, we need to distinguish at least three semantic layers:

- a) A number of motivic cross-references, establishing direct connections to at least two other compositions by Medtner: *The Muse*, a song set to a poem by Alexander Pushkin from his op. 29 cycle; the Piano Quintet in C major, Op. posth.; and, more distantly, the 2nd Violin Sonata in G major, Op. 44.
- b) Possible references to 19th-century piano compositions of balladesque or narrative character. Works that come to mind are the Ballades by Chopin, Brahms, Fauré, Grieg, Lyadov, and many other composers.
- c) A religious background, conveyed through Afanasy Fet's poem *Kogda bozhestvenniy bezhal*, that is connected to the genesis of the sonata. The poem's content serves as a subliminal narrative for the music, and is enriched by more metaphorical annotations by Medtner's biographer Alfred Swan.⁴

These intertextual narratives must be examined in greater detail, since they establish a link between several compositions by Medtner pertaining to different genres written over a period of over 40 years. However, in this study of the *Sonata-Ballade I* had first assumed there existed only the score by itself, examined it as it appeared, and considered the aforementioned semantic implications at a later stage of the analysis.

II. THE SCORE ON ITS OWN

1st movement: *Allegretto – Allegro molto agitato*

The movement commences with a serene, slowly swaying theme in 6/8 meter (*molto commodo, cantabile*), reminiscent of the narrative tone of Chopin's large one-movement works. In particular, it points to his Barcarole in F# major, Op. 60 (1845–46), which Medtner's *Allegretto* seems to resemble not only in its key and narrative atmosphere, but also in its persistent ternary rhythm. Henceforward, I shall refer to this subject as the "ballade theme." Its regular sentence structure, closing with perfect cadences in mm. 4 and 9 in a nearly predictable

manner, defines the theme as a self-contained entity, seemingly lacking any organic connection to the movement's subsequent elaboration – hardly a typical approach for the construction of a sonata-allegro movement with its need for developable, open-ended musical material. It is not until the appearance of a figure in quavers, employing a cycle-of-fifths sequence (m. 10ff.) that the music shows a real potential for development. Naturally, it is this transitional theme and its continuation, a cantilena marked *appassionato*, descending from F# (m. 19, with an allusion to a canon in the following measure; see Example 1), which much of the material of the development and coda sections will be constructed of. As the movement continues to develop, a secondary theme enters in the key of D# minor (m. 35), later modulating to A# minor (m. 44). This subject, with its imitative dotted rhythm in both hands, disguises the 6/8 meter in a curious way. It remains fragile in character and unstable in tonality, and, just as the "ballade theme," for the most part stays in the background of the overall motivic development.

When at the end of the exposition section a closing section might have been expected, there appears a brief intermediate theme in dotted rhythms (m. 61ff.). After that, the "ballade theme" enters again (m. 67, *cantando*) – but, curiously enough, in the "wrong" key of F# major, which the exposition was supposed to leave behind. Medtner plays the same trick in the recapitulation section, where the "ballade theme," starting again in B major, builds a thematic link to the coda. The unusual manner of restating the primary theme of the sonata-allegro in an unaltered manner has been noticed by Aleksandr Alekseyev, who consequently observed elements of Rondo form find their way into the *Allegretto*.⁵ Ekaterina Podporinova points out that through the reiterations of the "ballade theme", each one of the three sections of the sonata-allegro forms a figure of an arch, establishing a "crystal symmetry" – and, what is more, the development section employs the subjects exactly in the reverse order of the exposition, which makes the thematic material "subordinate itself to the idea of mirror symmetry."⁶

Example 1 *Sonata-Ballad*, Op. 27, 1st mvt, exposition, mm. 19–21



While the *Allegretto* is held together by only slightly altered appearances of the “ballade theme,” the movement lacks an affirmative relaunch of its primary subject at the beginning of the recapitulation section. Instead, there appears a tender and distant reminiscent version of the “ballade theme,” sounding in the unexpected key of A major, after an extended dominant pedal could have easily made it possible to proceed with the regular F# major (m. 150). Thus, the movement’s recapitulation lacks a tonic resolution and thereby neglects the traditional sonata trajectory.

As the movement continues, the “ballade theme” seems to pass gradually into the background, although it frames the thematic space of both the exposition and recapitulation. The F# minor coda once again presents the transitional theme with the cycle-of-fifths, starting with a cadence reminiscent of a very similar moment in Chopin’s *Barcarole*, appearing at a corresponding position in the course of the movement (m. 231; see Example 2).⁷ Medtner’s coda allows every of the movement’s themes to reappear, with the transitional theme gaining special momentum, and ending in the very same key of the tonic minor. This is a feature that is rarely found in major-mode sonata-allegro movements, and of special interest here is the fact that the *Allegretto* was first published separately as a single movement. One might regard this aspect as a tonal inconsistency, and a number of scholars looked upon the movement as incomplete, its minor-mode ending demanding for continuation – but, bearing in mind that the movement’s exposition appears just as imbalanced as the recapitulation and coda sections, this argument cannot satisfactorily explain why Medtner decided to append two more movements.⁸ The eventual bipartite structure manifesting the *Allegretto* and *Introduzione e Finale* as two poles complementary in form and mood owes more to a concept of integrative balance than to a strive for tonal resolution.

Example 2 *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, 1st mvt, m. 231 // Chopin, *Barcarole*, Op. 60, m. 93



However, in the multi-movement context of the final version, the *Allegro molto agitato* coda

is harmonically connected to the onset of the 2nd movement. The F# minor triad is occasionally enriched by the major sixth D# (mm. 285 and 287), as if to prepare for the *attacca* transition to the *Introduzione*, which starts with that very *sixte ajoutée* chord (see Example 3). In the movement’s last measures, Medtner employs a G major triad (Neapolitan sixth in F# minor) and Eb⁷ fifth-sixth chord instead of a regular antepenultimate and penultimate cadential progression,⁹ and with the Phrygian clausula G–F# replacing a clear V–I cadence (see Example 3).

Example 3 *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, 1st mvt, final measures 293–297 // 2nd mvt, mm. 1–2



2nd movement: *Introduzione (Mesto)*

The short *Introduzione* in F# minor, possessing a *quasi improvisando* mood, is less tightly constructed than the first movement. The gloomy initial subject, marked *pesante*, uses a harmonic minor scale with sharpened sixth and seventh degrees, which the composer was evidently fond of. The subject features a tripartite syntax, with a C# minor episode in dotted rhythm as its middle part (mm. 9–16). The central section of the movement starts with a steady *tenebroso* melody (m. 25) as the secondary theme, now stabilising the key of C# minor. According to Yuliya Moskalets, this second theme resembles the Gregorian chant *Dies irae* sequence, making the passage function as “A depiction in Medtner’s music of evil and the demonic element.”¹⁰ In the following measures Medtner introduces a phrase of crucial importance, the so-called “Muza” motif. After being brought in as a restrained left-hand subject in m. 37, developing to a chordal *pesante* theme (see Example 4), this motif unfolds to a network of intercontextual references and self-quotations, which will be subject to the following chapter of this analysis. As a sort of a recapitulation, the initial theme returns in a brighter F# major version (m. 49), before it is restated again at the ending of the *Introduzione*, now in a sombre unison and in the key of D# minor (m. 65). It finally halts at a fermata on the note B, thus preparing for the entry of the 3rd movement, and anticipating the subject of the fugato implemented into the finale’s development section.

Example 4 *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, 2nd mvt,
middle section, mm. 44–49



3rd movement: Finale (*Allegro*)¹¹

The finale's beginning is of a seemingly indecisive character, twice halting on a subdominant chord as if unsure how to proceed (mm. 4 and 8). The primary theme, displays an idiosyncratic upbeat figure in dotted 16th notes, and once more falls short of the expectations raised by a sonata's final movement. Being anything but affirmative in its character, it gropes its way forward into a sentence-like, hybrid thematic structure of sixteen measures, the continuation phrase itself forming an eight-measure sentence. In m. 48, the secondary theme in Eb major establishes a cross-movement connection as it quotes the "Muza" motif from the *Introduzione*'s middle section, presently shaped as a *dolce pacatamente* cantilena in Eb major (m. 48ff.). Later, this theme will be transformed into a two-part canon in F# major as it reappears within the recapitulation section (m. 314ff.; see Example 5). The exposition restarts as if it was to be repeated from m. 79 on, but then modulates to Db major before reaching the secondary theme, revealing that the development section had already begun.

Example 5 *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, 3rd mvt,
recapitulation,
mm. 314–318 (thematic reduction)



In the middle episode of that section, Medtner challenges the listener and performer with the extensive fugato, its subject taken from the *Introduzione*'s initial theme (m. 130). First, a regular four-part exposition in Bb minor is realised with entries of the theme starting with Bb and F. The fugato then deviates from the standard in a *più risoluto* passage in G minor, starting anew with entries on Bb, D and A (m. 154). Eventually modulating to Eb minor, Medtner proceeds with another four-part entry scheme (m. 172), making it possible for multiple allusions to the finale's primary theme to appear in the lower voices.

As the fugue subject gradually disappears, the music increases in intensity and dynamics, leading to an extended passage without a clear tonal centre. All of the themes of the *Introduzione* are quoted and varied in juxtaposition with occasional allusions to the finale's primary theme. This dense development culminates at a fermata on the polychord C major / F#⁷ (m. 270). At that point, there is a link to the recapitulation section.

In the last portion of the movement, the transitional theme from the 1st movement reappears, once again descending from F#, and replenishes the canonical treatment of the secondary theme (m. 334).¹² The Maestoso stretta then functions as a polyrhythmic combination of the sonata's most important subjects, including the "bell-like" restatement of the "ballade theme" from the 1st movement (m. 353ff.; see Example 6). Thus, the entire sonata is eventually legitimated as a hybrid formal entity comprising at once a single-movement ballade and a cyclic multi-movement structure. These contrasting concepts are realised independently from each other, and Medtner achieves their synthesis through the overarching quote of the "ballade theme" at its ending. This dithyrambic apotheosis gives an impressive close to the composition, which was of emotional and spiritual importance to its creator, the intertextual dimension of which has not yet been considered within this analysis.

Example 6 *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, 3rd mvt,
stretto, mm. 353–356 (two of three staves)



III. A MULTITUDE OF HERMENEUTICS

As has been shown, it is possible to analyse and appreciate the *Sonata-Ballade* as a three-movement cyclic work, comparable to such works as César Franck's F minor Piano Trio or Scriabin's Piano Concerto, Op. 20. However, in addition, the work is part of a musical-semantic network, established by the reference to poetry by Afanasy Afanasyevich Fet. Moreover, Medtner introduces a certain autobiographical context through self-quotation. This is evident in the recurrences of a certain phrase named the "Muza" motif by a number of scholars, according to its first considerable appearance in the

Pushkin song *Muza (The Muse)*, Op. 29 No. 1.¹³ This phrase is subject to a series of intercontextual quotations, valid for a certain group of compositions, most of them being key works in Medtner’s oeuvre. It is important to emphasise that these implications apply to the 2nd and 3rd movements only, whereas the balladesque *Allegretto* stands for itself. The metaphorical context of spring-time, pastoral scenes, and buoyancy, applying in particular to the “ballade theme,” is predominant in an assessment by Bernard Pinsonneault and, more precisely, in Alfred Swan’s description, suggesting that the three movements be characterised as “beautiful spring on earth,” “temptation in the desert,” and “the same spring again, but aspiring to heaven, and with bell-ringing.”¹⁴ Pinsonneault’s and Swan’s associations are based on oral transmission and the composer’s notebooks, but in any case they remain somewhat speculative. By no means do they provide a programme necessary for the reception of the music,¹⁵ and could more appropriately be considered a spiritual narrative, effective in the background.

When tracing back the origins of the “Muza” motif, we find that it has two sources, distinguishable from each other in a slightly altered melodic outline. First, the motif is developed as a homophonic sketch, underlain with a line from Fet, and in linear melodic motion with rising and falling seconds (see Example 7). Fet’s poem is untitled, starting with the very verse referenced by Medtner “Kogda bozhestvenniy bezhal lyudskikh rechey” (“When the God-like fled human speech”).¹⁶ In a free account of the Gospel of Matthew, it depicts the temptation of Christ in the wilderness and his assertion against the devil through overcoming the temptation. The sketch is undated, but origins from a very early stage of Medtner’s creative life, probably during the first years of the 20th century. Christoph Flamm found it among a number of drafts for the C major Piano Quintet, a work not to be completed until four decades later. Although Medtner did not elaborate these three measures as belonging to a complete song, they are nonetheless important for the instrumental works to follow.

Subsequently, the motif appears in a more distinctive contour within the mentioned song *Muza (The Muse)*, the first piece from a set of seven songs set to Pushkin’s poems, Op. 29, written in 1912 or 1913. Here it comprises a significantly descending major sixth (see Example 8). What both versions have in common is their melodic anacrusis and a three-note repetition, before rising a major second

on the downbeat. In the song, the corresponding passage (m. 11ff.) bears the text “i gimni vazhnie, vnushennie bogami” (“and of great hymns, inspired by the gods”). This line maintains the religious context of Fet’s poem, but with the plural form “bogami” now pointing towards polytheism. After the 1st movement of the *Sonata-Ballade* Op. 27 had already been finished, the Pushkin song may have directly preceded the composition of the 2nd and 3rd movements.¹⁷ It seems likely that Medtner’s idea to elaborate on the “Muse” motif within the sonata is associated with the Pushkin setting, since he uses the motif in exactly the same appearance as in the song.

Example 7 Fet sketch (quoted after Flamm 1995, p. 193)



Example 8 Seven Poems by Pushkin, Op. 29, No. 1: *Muza*, mm. 11–14 (voice part only)



In his handwritten conceptual notes to the *Sonata-Ballade*, however, Medtner once again refers to Fet’s poem – in particular to its last stanza that is concerned with Jesus’s answer to Satan and rejection of his offer. The composer directly links verses to certain passages of the music that would later form the 2nd movement of the sonata, which may be understood as a paraphrase of Fet’s line “i satana ischez” (“and Satan disappeared”),¹⁸ with its initial theme characterising the devil.¹⁹ Later, by the first appearance of the “Muza” motif within that movement, entering in a middle voice within figurations (m. 37), the devil’s disappearance is depicted. Its continuation, a chordal realization of the motif marked *sostenuto*, *pesante* (m. 44ff.; see Example 4), is connected to the words of Christ in Fet’s poem “Pred bogom gospodom lish’ preklonyay koleni” (“Before God alone bow your knees”).²⁰ One might even conclude that the reiteration of the “devil’s theme” in the tonic major (m. 49) indicates that he has been overcome by Christ. The finale of the sonata presents, in Medtner’s own words, a “variation” of the *Introduzione*’s topic, related to Fet’s phrase “i angeli prishli” (“and angels came”).²¹ Here the “Muza” motif is finally developed to a full

cantilena, functioning as the movement’s secondary theme. It finally culminates in the work’s stretta, realised in a brilliant figure in the right hand that is combined with the 1st movement’s “ballade theme” in the middle staff (m. 349). The sonata finally closes with an enthusiastic burst of the “Muza” motif, in a chordal *pesante* / *allargando* that, as a I – #IV⁷ – V⁷ – I cadence, sums up the work’s harmonic and motivic content, and simultaneously hints back to the theological struggle of the 2nd movement.²² All of these quotes employ the “Muza” motif as heard in the Pushkin song, with the characteristic descending sixth, and do not refer to the smoother melodic outline of the Fet sketch.

A decade after completing the *Sonata-Ballade*, shortly after his emigration from Russia, Medtner introduces reminiscences of the “Muza” motif within the 1st movement of his 2nd Violin Sonata in G major, Op. 44 (1925). Here the motif is reduced to its first four notes, appearing several times in a remarkable nonfunctional harmonisation during the movement’s introduction (m. 16ff.). Later, the same contour emerges in G minor during the secondary theme zone, now in the violin part, and in a mainly diatonic environment (m. 80ff.). The rather anonymous contour of a twice-repeated note, followed by an ascending second, weakens the motif’s referential quality, and detection of a derivation from the “Muza” motif may seem insecure, if not questionable.

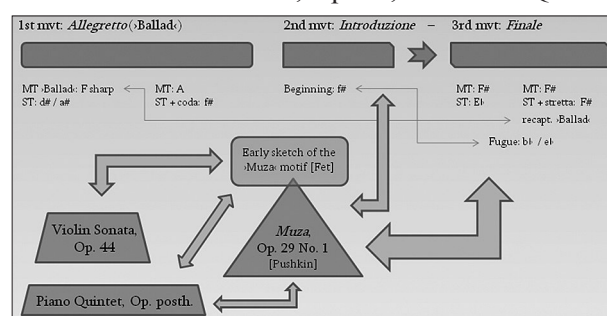
More distinctly, the “Muza” motif is incorporated in the C major Piano Quintet, Op. posth., Medtner’s *opus summum* – a work that encapsulates all of his musical, aesthetic and spiritual values, and in which “his artistic and religious convictions are finally united.²³” Its genesis spans a period of nearly 50 years before being finally completed in 1948. The hermeneutic implications of Fet’s *Kogda bozhestvenniy bezhal* are of even greater relevance here due to the Quintet’s explicitly religious content – at least two of its three movements were originally inspired by biblical texts. In the 1st movement, the linear version of the “Muza” motif is introduced as an expressive secondary theme of the strings (m. 71ff.), giving an exact reproduction of the melodic contour and the Lydian-mode harmonization of the Fet sketch, while the movement closes with the more expressive version as heard in the *Muza* song (m. 215ff.). In the middle section of the 2nd movement, the “Muza” motif reappears as a violin cantilena, transposed to A minor (m. 41ff.). Among its many further occurrences, one of the most remarkable is the transitional passage connecting the Quintet’s 2nd

to its 3rd movement—the motif repeatedly sounds in the upper voice, harmonised with a progression of triads in tritone relation (m. 68ff.). Moreover, the musical topos of a hymn, possibly derived distantly from Pushkin’s line “i gimni vazhnie,” comes to clear expression in the finale’s march-like secondary theme, marked *quasi Hymn*. Whereas the preceding works quoting the “Muza” motif made use of only one of its instances, the Piano Quintet finally unites and synthesises both.

IV. CONCLUSION

Given the numerous semantic implications caused by the so-called “Muza” motif (an overview is given in Figure 9), it seems somewhat inappropriate to name that phrase solely after the *Muza* poem. This label hints toward Pushkin, while its original inspiration by Fet’s poetry and the descendance from a biblical context is neglected. Another possible, yet unintentional notion is its proximity to the title of Medtner’s book *Муза и мода* (*The Muse and Fashion*), his aesthetic legacy, published in 1935.²⁴ I suggest that, if the term is maintained, its use should be limited to occurrences in a secular context or directly related to Pushkin. For the more frequent usage in a distinctly religious environment, as in the Piano Quintet, the phrase might more suitably be referred to as a motif of “temptation” or “overcoming.” However, one does not have to be aware of the mentioned implications to perform or analyse the *Sonata-Ballad*. The composition will also work as a piece of absolute music, due to its cyclic structure and teleological design, aiming towards the finale’s stretta. However, if we dare to submerge into its deeper semantic layers, the sonata will prove to be an unique work of Symbolist art, unfolding the most personal and idiosyncratic of its creator’s aesthetic views to the listener. It seems hardly possible to come closer to Medtner’s artistic personality than here.

Figure 9 Intertextual relations between Medtner’s Op. 27, Op. 29 / 1, Op. 44, and Piano Quintet



NOTES

¹ Other sonatas by Medtner with a bipartite outline and an introductory first movement are the *Sonata-Vocalise* in C major, Op. 41 No. 1, and the *Sonata-Idyll* in G major, Op. 56. The succession of *Canzona matinata* and *Sonata tragica*, Op. 39 Nos. 4 and 5, forms a pair of compositions with similar teleology. Dolinskaya 2013, p. 120, draws a connection to the relationship of the introduction and sonata-allegro section of the E minor Sonata, Op. 25 No. 2, as well as to the two *Skazki*, Op. 8.

² See Flamm 1995, p. 436ff., and Martyn 1995, p. 95f.

³ Flamm 1995, p. 249f. quotes from Medtner's programmatic notes to the 3rd Piano Concerto, with its 2nd movement (*Interludium*) being "just an introduction to the finale."

⁴ See Swan 1967, p. 79f.

⁵ See Alekseyev 1969, p. 281: «Необычайно частая для сонатного аллегро повторность главной темы привносит в него элементы рондо». The continuous changes of mood, expressed in the alternation between the bright "ballade theme" and the gloomy contrasting subjects, are described as a process of "emotional swaying" or "swinging" (ibid.: «эмоциональная раскачка»), producing a dialectic struggle between light and dark forces. The similarity of the Russian verbs *раскачать* (to start swinging) and *рассказать* (to narrate) may be more than just a coincidence in this context.

⁶ My translation of Podporinova 2007, p. 139f.: «Многоуровневая «кристаллическая симметрия» составляет <...> организацию первой части Сонаты-Баллады, op. 27. Здесь <...> композитор выстраивает арочные своды экспозиции, разработки и репризы. <...> На каждом этапе их появление подчиняется идее зеркальности». The author inapplicablely marks the intermediate passage (m. 61ff.), preceding the restatement of the "ballade theme" in the exposition and recapitulation, a closing zone («ЗП» for «заключительная партия»).

⁷ Plaistow 1976 perceives these chords as an allusion to Chopin. I would go even further and call them a quotation, for it is only the higher octave of the anacrusis that distinguishes Medtner's cadence from m. 93 of Chopin's *Barcarole*, Op. 60. See also Martyn 1995, p. 96.

⁸ Kalendarev 2005, p. 32, considers the coda an unsatisfactory ending with a need for continuation in order to "prolong the broken line of the development and bring the piece to a stable conclusion." See also Plaistow 1976.

⁹ For Malikova 1967, p. 302, the Eb⁷ is an altered subdominant chord of the preceding Neapolitan harmony – an interpretation that fails to illuminate the progression to the final F# major («чуждый fis-moll'ю «вводящий» аккорд «пришел» из тональности предыдущей «неаполитанской» гармонии в качестве принадлежащей ей альтерированной субдоминанты»).

¹⁰ My translation of Moskalets 2004, p. 126: «Образ злого, демонического в музыке Метнера символизируется посредством темы, интонационно связанной

с секвенцией *Dies irae*». The similarity only applies if the first note of the *Dies Irae* is omitted and without considering Medtner's repeated notes.

¹¹ The first edition of 1914 only reads *Allegro*. In the printed copy owned by his English student Edna Iles, Medtner added a handwritten *Sempre al rigore di Tempo*. This amendment was taken over into the Soviet Edition of Collected Works of 1959, probably through Anna Medtner's influence, and omitted again in the Muzika edition of c. 1975, for whatever reason.

¹² Boyd 1980, p. 24, writes about an "almost forgotten phrase from <...> the first movement," allowing the music "to proceed naturally to a transformed version of the first ('Erdenfrühling') theme."

¹³ Vasilyev 1962, p. 139, was the earliest author to notice this derivation in his brief study of Medtner's piano sonatas, even if he only stated the motif to have accompanied the composer through his entire musical output. Plaistow 1976 called it the "Pushkin theme." Boyd 1980, p. 23ff., has first examined the intertextual and motivic relationship between Op. 29 No. 1, Op. 27 and the Piano Quintet, Op. posth., but without illustrating the spiritual and poetic background in detail, and neglecting the two different sources and melodic guises of the motif. However, Boyd's terminology ("the 'muse' theme") was maintained by many other authors to follow and eventually became a topical phrase in Medtner scholarship.

¹⁴ My translation of Swan 1967, p. 79f.: ein herrlicher Erdenfrühling, "Versuchung in der Wüste," and "derselbe Erdenfrühling, aber schon gen Himmel strebend und mit Glockengeläute." See also Pinsonneault 1959, p. 38: "au premier [mouvement], c'est le thème du Printemps, avec ses joies, ses chants, mais sans croyance en un Créateur."

¹⁵ Dolinskaya 2013, p. 119: «Соната – сочинение непрограммное».

¹⁶ Lacking a reliable English version of Fet's poem, I made the translation of these lines by myself.

¹⁷ Since the composition dates of the individual pieces from the song cycles Opp. 28 and 29 are hard to determine, it is not quite clear if the Pushkin song *Muza* really precedes the use of the "Muza" motif in the *Sonata-Ballade*. Martyn 1995, pp. 97 and 103, suggests it to be the other way round – but given the close neighbourhood, or even simultaneity, in the genesis of the song and the sonata, the question which piece was finished earlier might not be relevant at all.

¹⁸ Dolinskaya 2013, p. 119 quotes Medtner's handwritten notes to the sonata, which are preserved in the Moscow State Glinka Museum for Musical Culture, fund No. 132, archival unit no. 56, p. 6). The corresponding lines are: «II часть как бы вариация, относящаяся к словам: И сатана исчез.» See also Flamm 1995, p. 438f.

¹⁹ Moskalets 2004, p. 127, refers to this subject as «тема страдания» ("theme of suffering").

²⁰ Swan 1967, p. 79, had already quoted this line with reference to the composer's oral transmission, but failed

to clarify its origin in Fet's poetry. This background remained a somewhat blurred in the writings of the following decades, and scholars tended to give only vague hints, mostly unaware of Medtner's sketches and handwritten notes, until the issue was finally put straight in Flamm 1995, pp. 194 and 438f. For an alternative translation of the Fet line, see footnote 22.

²¹ Dolinskaya, *ibid.*: «III часть – вариация, относящаяся к словам: И ангелы пришли.» The term “variation” must be understood here not only as a means of thematic transformation, applied to the “Muza” motif, but also as a metaphysical concept of staging an idea in different light. Cf. Dolinskaya, *op. cit.*, p. 120: «Основной характер Интермеццо [sic!] определяет маршевая поступь темы шествия, развивающейся в ряде вариаций, линия которых завершается уже в финале».

²² At the very end of Edna Iles's copy, Medtner wrote the line “Before the Lord alone, (only) one can kneel,” as if to demonstrate that the “Muza” motif finds its ultimate realization here. With a minor deviance, these words were already quoted in Martyn 1995, p. 98. Thanks to Aleksandr Karpeyev and Bradley Emerson, who provided me with a scan of Iles's copy, I am able here to give the exact translation from Medtner's hand.

²³ Boyd 1980, p. 25.

²⁴ Medtner apparently was so fond of Pushkin's poem *Muza* that he decided to use it as an epigraph to the first chapter of his book. See Boyd 1980, p. 23. However, the connection of the lyrics to the thoughts unfolded here dealing with the fundamentals of musical “language” remains very vague.

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A Milestone of Symbolist Music. A Multi-Perspective Examination of Nikolai Medtner's Sonata-Ballade, Op. 27

Nikolai Medtner's *Sonata-Ballade*, Op. 27, is a cyclic three-movement work which incorporates into itself an independently published ballade as its first movement. The sonata's refined structure is enriched by a number of intertextual narratives, establishing motivic cross-references to other compositions by Medtner. In addition, there are strong religious implications derived from a poem by Afanasy Fet which is closely connected to the genesis of the work. The article first attempts to examine the score as it appears, and then considers the mentioned semantic implications in a separate stage of the analysis. The results reveal the *Sonata-Ballade* to be a unique work of Symbolist art, unfolding the most personal of the composer's aesthetic views to the listener.

Keywords: Sonata, ballade, Medtner, Fet, Pushkin, cyclic form, musical semantics, hermeneutics, symbolism, narrative, spiritualism, self-quotation, muse, temptation

Вежа символистской музыки.

Многоаспектный анализ Сонаты-баллады оп. 27 Николая Метнера

Соната-баллада оп. 27 Николая Метнера является циклическим трёхчастным сочинением, содержащим музыку отдельно опубликованной баллады в виде её первой части. Утончённая структура Сонаты обогащена некоторыми внутритекстовыми повествовательными элементами, содержащими мотивные отсылки к другим произведениям композитора. Помимо того, она несёт усиленный религиозный подтекст, исходящий из стихотворения Афанасия Фета, тесно связанного с исходным замыслом сочинения. В статье вначале исследуется музыкальный текст Сонаты, затем рассматриваются отмеченные семантические отсылки по ходу дальнейшего анализа. Автор приходит к заключению, что Соната-баллада Метнера является уникальным произведением символистского искусства, в котором раскрываются самые личные из эстетических позиций автора, обращённые к слушателю.

Ключевые слова: соната, баллада, Метнер, Фет, Пушкин, циклическая форма, музыкальная семантика, герменевтика, символизм, повествовательность, духовность, самоцитирование, муза, искушение.

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