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### Thematic Unity and Presentation of Conflict:

#### Extended Sonata-Form Analysis of Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 5 Movement I

#### **Overview**

Symphony No. 5 in e minor, Op. 64, was composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky in 1888. This symphony stands out for having a recurring "motto" theme that cycles through all four movements of the symphony, and it is also often known for its strong emotive quality. The presence of Introduction in the first movement (from which the motto originates), as well as Tchaikovsky's innovative approach to the use of harmonic trajectory, major-minor modes, and thematic intervals (all of which contribute to presenting an emotional conflict), forces us to abandon a strict Classical sonata-form interpretation in analyzing the first movement. Nonetheless, the essential Exposition-Development-Recapitulation structure and much of its defining tendencies can still be identified in the piece, allowing us to understand the piece as having an extended Romantic-era sonata form. This paper seeks to understand (i) the extent to which the first movement of Symphony No. 5 adheres to the sonata form, and (ii) how the movement's thematic unity and presentation of conflict are made possible by breaking away from the Classical sonata-form model.

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#### **Extended Sonata-Form Structure**

The following outlines the movement's overall structure using sonata-form terminologies borrowed from Hepokoski, with the section's key noted in [], and the overall emotive quality described in italics:

**I. Introduction [e]:** m. 1-37 (4/4 time signature)

*Presentation of the solemn funeral "motto theme"*

**II. Exposition [e -> b/D]:** m. 38-225 (6/8 time signature)- Primary-Theme Zone [e]: m. 41-115

*Grows from calm to extremely forceful*

Culminates with a Medial Caesura #1 at m. 115

- MC is the B major chord (dominant of e), or V: HC MC

- Caesura Fill on last 2 eight notes of m. 115

- MC normally appears at end of TR (and not end of P), but MC is necessary here to first take us to b minor, which will modulate once again to D major following the second MC at TR.

- Transition [b]: m. 116-153

*Remains calm overall, though short hairpin dynamic sequences convey insecurity*

Culminates with a (light) Medial Caesura #2 at m. 152

- MC is A major chord (dominant of D), or V: HC MC

- Caesura Fill on m. 152-153 with rising A major arpeggio

- This second MC takes us to the key of S in D, which is the relative major of b.

- Secondary-Theme Zone [D, but gives away to d at end]: m. 154-225

*Lyrical, singing S theme grows to triumphant energy of D major (having a climax at EEC), which cannot be maintained and falls down with a surprising switch of mode into d minor*

Force and momentum peaks at EEC at m. 198 (*fff* in D)

**III. Development [d]:** m. 226-320 (6/8 time signature)

*Overall, the Development is the section of struggle that builds up in Zone 2, is maintained throughout Zone 3, and is let go in Zone 4.*

- Zone 1 (optional link): missing- Zone 2: m. 226-253

*Mostly in piano dynamics in anticipation of the central action to come.*

*Characterized by numerous attempts at achieving an upward motion (through rotational Theme P and Theme S1) which fails each time and falls down (from violin I down to cello)*

- Zone 3: m. 254-308

*In the first half, strings continue their struggle in rotational Theme P, which is met with greater success with rising scales that heighten energy. Once momentum is attained, we take a short break from the struggle with the rotation of Theme TR (m. 269-277). After this respite, the winds continue the battle in the second half, which ultimately becomes a collective effort at maintaining the rhythm of P.*

- Zone 4: m. 309-321

*Calms down the fff dynamics of Zone 3 all the way down to pp in a short period of 12 measures. Harmonically prepares for the return of e minor.*

#### IV. Recapitulation [e -> f# -> c#/E]: m. 321- approx. 486 (6/8 time signature)

- Primary-Theme Zone [e -> f#]: m. 321-372

*Attain (temporary) comfort arriving back to our home key of e minor, yet modulation to f# at the end of P (m. 364-372) completely removes that feeling of ease and stability.*

Note: Recapitulation's P is not only shorter than Exposition's P, and but it also visits f# key area such that the key of Recapitulation's TR (in c# minor) is the dominant relative to f# minor. (This is analogous to how Exposition's TR in b minor was the dominant relative to Exposition's P in e minor.)

Culminates with a Medial Caesura #1 at m. 372

- MC1 is the G# major chord (dominant of c#), or V: HC MC

- Caesura Fill on last 2 eight notes of m. 372.

- Again, similar to in the Exposition, we have an MC in P as well, to prepare us for the shift to the key of c#, because our second MC in TR will then take us to yet another key, E major.

- Transition [c#]: m.373-410

*Recapitulation's TR is an exact transposition of Exposition's TR by a whole-step, and has more-or-less the same emotional quality as before.*

Culminates with a (light) Medial Caesura #2 at m. 409

- MC is B major chord (dominant of E), or V: HC MC

- Caesura Fill on m. 409-410 with rising E major arpeggio

- This second MC takes us to the key of S in E, which is the relative major of c#.

- Secondary-Theme Zone [E, but gives away to e at end]: m. 411-486

*Recapitulation's S is an exact transposition of Exposition's TR by a whole step (until m.478, from which a transition to Coda takes place), and has more-or-less the same emotional quality as before. That is, lyrical, singing S theme grows to triumphant energy of E major (having a climax at ESC), which cannot be maintained and falls down with a surprising switch of mode into e minor.*

Force and momentum peaks at ESC at m. 455 (fff in E)

#### V. Coda [e]: m. 487-542 (6/8 time signature)

*This relatively long coda section re-explores Theme P. Ends in a calm, low ppp mood in e minor, symmetrical to how the movement begins.*

Despite the clean organization of the movement that this outline may suggest, locating boundaries for structural division is not always clear, as Tchaikovsky is able to transition between sections quite seamlessly. For this reason, identification of the Closing Zone has been omitted from the outline.

Disregarding for the moment the interesting ways in which Tchaikovsky breaks away from the Classical sonata-form model, the following notes how the fundamental sonata-form characteristics have been *preserved* in the first movement:

- (1) Structurally, the subdivisions within Exposition (into P, TR, and S), Development (into various zones), and Recapitulation (into P, TR, and S, followed by Coda) can still be applied to this movement. It is also possible to identify the MC, EEC, and ESC with their intended cadential functions, as illustrated by the outline.
- (2) The concept of “rotation” is fully employed in this movement: the Development recycles materials from Exposition’s P, TR, and S, and the Recapitulation is thematically identical to the Exposition, despite having a slightly altered harmonic trajectory.

This movement, however, employs features that do not naturally belong to the Classical model. The following highlights some of the more important ways in which the form has been *extended*:

(1) Introduction:

The movement begins with an Introduction from which the motto theme originates. The motto, in turn, serves to unify thematic materials that arise in the rest of the first movement. (The details of how the motto relates to Theme P, Theme TR, and Theme S will be discussed in the following section.) The Introduction stands out as the only section in 4/4 time signature; The rest of the movement is in 6/8.

(2) Harmonic Trajectory:

As noted in the outline, the relationship between two major key areas explored in the first movement is between e/E and d/D: a whole-step relationship, as opposed to a 3<sup>rd</sup> or a 5<sup>th</sup>

relationship often used for a minor key. In fact, the narrative of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 can be viewed as a "struggle" between these two key areas, the effect of which will be described in detail later in the paper.

It is interesting to note that the harmonic trajectory over Exposition and Development (from **e minor** to its *dominant*, **b minor**, to its *relative major*, **D major**, to its *parallel minor*, **d minor**) has precisely the same contour as the trajectory over Recapitulation and Coda, aided by a shift up to f# minor in Recapitulation's P section (from **f# minor** to its *dominant*, **c# minor**, to its *relative major*, **E major**, to its *parallel minor*, **e minor**).

In this sense, the home key of e minor turns out victorious over d minor in the "second half" (over Recapitulation and Coda), which is the reverse of what had happened in the "first half" (over Exposition and Development).

(3) Major-minor Mode:

The harmonic trajectory makes use of relative and parallel major-minor modes. Specifically, transitioning from TR to S (within Exposition and Recapitulation) involves moving to a relative major, while transitioning out of Exposition and Recapitulation into Development and Coda, respectively, involves moving to a parallel minor.

In this sense, the minor mode wins out each time, and the hopeful and triumphant major-mode moments in Exposition's and Recapitulation's S sections are only short-lived.

The rest of this paper will focus on thematic materials in light of these three unique characteristics that extend the form of the movement beyond the traditional model. Specifically, we illustrate how the presence of Introduction thematically unifies the movement (and in fact, the entire symphony), and how the piece's unique harmonic trajectory and use of major-minor mode work with the themes to present the emotional conflict that must be resolved in later movements.

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## From Introduction to Thematic Materials

The first 37 measures of the symphony make up the Introduction, featuring a slow clarinet solo that sets a solemn funeral-like mood:



First important element of the passage is its I-IV-I (e-minor to a-minor to e-minor) harmonic movement in the first two measures. Interestingly, this plagal chord progression later defines the first half of Theme P. Second feature is the interval from G to E (in concert pitch) in the second measure, which later defines the second half of Theme P. Finally, we should take note of the sequence of six quarter notes that forms a downward interval of 6<sup>th</sup> (E-D-C-B-A-G, in concert pitch). This downward 6<sup>th</sup> interval is contrasted with upward 6<sup>th</sup> interval in Theme TR as well as Theme S2, described below.

This solo melody from the Introduction is often referred to as the "motto" theme, and it is this introductory theme that serves as a source of future thematic materials for the movement. Now we take a look at those thematic materials in P, TR, and S.

### (1) Theme P

Theme P, played by Clarinet and Bassoon, is derived entirely from the first two measures of the motto. The plagal harmonic movement, in red, makes up the first half of the theme (antecedent), while the G to E pitch relationship, in blue, makes up the second half of the theme (consequent).

(2) Theme TR

The image displays a musical score for Theme TR. It is divided into two systems. The left system features the string section (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Kontrabaß) with dynamics ranging from *ff* to *mf*. The right system features the woodwind section (Flute I and II, Clarinet I and II, Bassoon I and II) with dynamics ranging from *p* to *mf*. A purple oval highlights a specific melodic phrase in the woodwinds, and a green oval highlights a corresponding phrase in the strings.

Theme TR comprises of a singing melody from the strings, which has a swelling emotional quality due to hairpin dynamics, followed by staggered octave drops in the winds. Interestingly (and possibly coincidentally), the contour of the string melody has a rising 6<sup>th</sup> interval that could contrast the falling 6<sup>th</sup> interval in the motto theme.

(3) Theme S (S = S1 + S2)

The S section of Exposition and Recapitulation has two contrasting themes. The first, Theme S1, has the strong rhythm of quarter-eighth-quarter-eighth, with a downward 5<sup>th</sup> interval (played by the clarinet) that articulates the current key by repeating the dominant and the tonic note. This portion of S1, in orange, can be regarded as the antecedent of Theme S1. The consequent, in brown, answers the antecedent with a contrasting flowing melody that has a pleasant, slightly upward motion. The melody of the consequent, played by Violin I, is an upward 6<sup>th</sup> motion (A-B-C#-D-E-F#) that has an inverse relationship with the downward 6<sup>th</sup> motion of the motto theme.

150 **Un pochettino più animato** **Theme S1**

Ob. I  
Ob. II  
Klar. I  
Klar. II  
Fag. I  
Fag. II  
Hr. I  
Hr. II  
Hr. III  
Hr. IV

Viol. I  
Viol. II  
Viola  
Vcll.  
Kb.

*pizz.*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*mf*  
*arco*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*arco*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*arco*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*arco*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*sempre pizz.*  
*f*

**Un pochettino più animato** antecedent consequent

167 **Molto più tranquillo (♩ = 92)** **Theme S2**

Fl. I  
Ob. I  
Ob. II  
Klar. I  
Klar. II  
Fag. I  
Fag. II  
Hr. I  
Hr. II  
Hr. III

Viol. I  
Viol. II  
Viola  
Vcll.  
Kb.

*p*  
*f*  
*p*  
*f*  
*p*  
*f*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*mf*  
*ff*  
*sempre pizz.*  
*f*  
*p*  
*p*

**Molto più tranquillo (♩ = 92)**  
*molto cantabile ed espr.*  
*molto cantabile ed espr.*



Theme S2 is a lovely, singing material that contrasts a more rigid and serious Theme P. This opposing quality is also directly linked to how the P section is in a minor key while the S section is primarily in a major key (in both the Exposition and Recapitulation). Theme S2 modifies and combines the antecedent and consequent of S1: the rhythm of violins in S2 is the combination of rhythm of horn and winds from antecedent S1, while the melodic contour of winds in S2 is taken from that of Violin I from consequent S1.

In this manner, the motto theme of Introduction serves as the source of the first movement's thematic materials. As a side note, this motto theme that gives rise to the thematic materials of the first movement works in a similar manner in the other three movements, unifying the entire symphony.

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### **Presentation of Emotional Conflict**

The narrative goal of the first movement can be regarded as presenting a conflict that must be dealt with and resolved in the later movements of the symphony. This presentation of conflict, and the resulting emotional feelings that are diametrically opposing, are made possible through elements we have discussed that *extend* the form of the movement from a more traditional sense.

As described previously, the juxtaposition of key areas that are a whole-step apart allow us to associate the key of e/E as a comfortable home, and the key of d/D as a tension area. Thus, a visit back to e minor in the beginning of Recapitulation, and a permanent return to e minor at Coda, brings a sense of comfort and familiarity. On the other hand, modulation to the secondary key area of D major and d minor in the Exposition and Development, respectively, make us feel anxious, and drives us forward in search of security (which we find upon arriving at Coda).

Similarly, the use of major-minor mode of relative and parallel relationships provides another dimension in which the polarity of emotions can be explored. Naturally, the major mode connotes triumphant hope, while the minor mode connotes a dark struggle. This relationship is best portrayed in the S sections of Exposition and Recapitulation, surrounding the climactic EEC and ESC, respectively. The S

sections are the only places in the movement that settles down on a major mode. Here, the flowing Theme S2 grows into an accelerating positive energy up to Tempo I (m. 194/ m. 451), which marks the peak struggle in *fff*, ending in a triumphant EEC/ ESC in *fff* four measures later. The fifth-interval Theme S1 is used at the climax, to emphasize the major tonic triad (in D/ E). However, the victory is short lived: both the dynamics and the pitch range gradually falls down, and a surprising switch of mode into a parallel minor (achieved by the horns using Theme S1, m. 218-9/ m. 475-6) ends the Exposition and the Recapitulation in a quiet, enervated manner.

Finally, the contrasting thematic materials provide yet another dimension in which the emotional conflict is presented. The struggle between Theme P and Theme S is best portrayed in the Development, in which the beginning fragments of each theme interrupt and causes the other to fall down:

**Theme S1 (fragment): interrupts P's effort**

**Theme P (fragment): tries to move up**

but falls down...

This struggle repeats several times, and it is not until the winds cease to oppose the strings (in m. 254, which marks the beginning of the central action zone) and join them in a collective effort at sustaining Theme P, that P's falling pattern reverses to a rising one. Once the momentum with P's rhythm has been attained in m. 267, we take a brief rest (m. 269-277) and continue on with the conflict. Upon reaching the height of P (m. 297-306), S1 fragment recoils and falls to *pp*, ending the exhausting thematic battle.

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## Conclusion

By considering the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 as an extended Romantic-era sonata form, we are able to understand not only how the presence of the Introduction aids in thematic unity, but also how diametrically opposing emotional qualities are attained through Tchaikovsky's innovative approach to the use of keys, modes, and themes. By applying a unique harmonic trajectory that juxtaposes key areas that are a whole-step apart, by incorporating major-mode keys that are parallel to the two minor key areas explored in the piece, and by putting the two major themes into a battle in the Development, Tchaikovsky is able to quite effectively present the element of "conflict" in this movement.

## Bibliography

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