Narrative, Music, and Performance: Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* and the Example of Beethoven

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Sonate, que me veux tu?
Granges de Fontenelle

Whether at formal public readings, or simply in the company of close friends and colleagues, writers have often "unveiled" a new piece, or a work in progress, by reading it out loud. An example would be the literary group The Green Lantern [*Zelennaia lampa*] in which Pushkin, Delvig, and Gnedich introduced one another to their latest work. This type of activity allowed the author to present his work in a manner that could express most fully and effectively his particular creative goals and vision. He was able to provide the right intonation, make all the appropriate pauses, and render successfully, through tone, dynamics, physical presence, and eye contact, the full effect of the story in question. In essence, the oral presentation of a literary piece constituted a performance of sorts. For the audience assembled, this was a far more immediate and interactive experience when compared to the largely receptive process of quietly reading to oneself. When read out loud, a story is experienced orally rather than visually. Although one watches the storyteller and takes in his facial expressions and gestures, it is primarily through active *listening* that one internalizes the narrative in question. Much like a piece of music, which must be performed in order to be appreciated fully—reading a score can only provide limited enjoyment—so a "performed" story seeks to ensure that its narrative content will be fully and compellingly rendered.

Given this premise, the attention that Lev Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) exacts from the critic is twofold. Although it is a narrative text, it also bears the title of an entirely independent composition: Ludwig van Beethoven's sonata for piano and violin. By pointing directly and deliberately to the realm of music in its title, the first clue as to its identity, the story establishes a dialogue between two discrete signifying systems: the musical and the verbal. Although it is not uncommon to use one *signifier* to describe another *signified,* in this case the consequences are as revealing as they are far-reaching. After all, when one names a roller-coaster "Hurricane" because of its reckless and terrifying speed, or a dish "pig in a blanket" because if one tucked a pig in a snuggly throw it might resemble oven-baked pork sausage wrapped in dough, it is because one discerns a similarity between the two. Even if employed in irony—naming a Dalmatian "Stripe," for example —this device forces one to determine the potential resemblance in order to understand the humour in the nominal mismatch.

Tolstoy's use of this titular simile is not ironic. It is rooted, rather, in the eroticism he feels is inherent to the plot lines of both narratives.[1] As Ruth Rischin points out, however, their common ground extends beyond plot, whether real or imagined. Rischin writes that "Beethoven's music [serves] as the structuring principle of the narrative" (Rischin 43). In her study of Beethoven's presence in Tolstoy's oeuvre she examines how the author uses Beethoven's music as an analogue of the unconscious. Rischin specifies that, in the case of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the musical metaphor is based on Tolstoy's contention that "the language of art equivocates" (Rischin 43). Thus, as a language in its own right, music can at times also be found guilty of fostering confusion or transmitting immoral feelings. Hence Pozdnyshev's, the protagonist's, criminal act: he is moved to kill his wife as a result of the extreme agitation brought about by Beethoven's sonata in A major. Dorothy Green has already discussed a number of formal similarities shared by Tolstoy's and Beethoven's narratives and calls for a "minute musical analysis" of the two works (22).[2] That is what I attempt to do in this essay by examining the extent to which the two sonatas share a common narrative structure. In other words, I propose that it is in their respective formal composition, as well as in their genesis, that the two works are

most closely linked. A piece of music, like a story, can be experienced either in aural or written form: it can be read in script and alternately listened to when "narrated" in performance. In the case of Tolstoy's sonata, the narrative spans both these possibilities: the final "scripted" text that we read is, in fact, the written version of Pozdnyshev's oral account. More importantly, as I will show, Tolstoy's literary sonata appears to observe the same compositional guidelines to which Beethoven adhered in accordance with musical convention.

The sonata is essentially tri-partite in nature. In the first part, the *exposition*, two or more contrasting themes are introduced which are subsequently reworked in the second section, called the *development*. Finally, the *recapitulation* focuses once again on the original themes, often with modifications. It is remarkable that only two months following the publication of Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata in 1805, Friederich Rochlitz, editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, described the work as "a penetrating *dialogue*, restlessly driven forward, which sets and maintains our imagination and sensitivity in motion" (emphasis added).[3] According to him, the form that best describes this composition is "dialogue," a term that connotes the verbal in its very root: Logos. And, indeed, the musical progression of this piece as a whole is created by the heated debate between the piano and the violin who are the "main speakers" of the narrative. In his recollections, Sergei Tolstoy remarks that his father had himself once described Beethoven's sonata in C sharp as "a conversation between a man and his wife" (S. Tolstoy 228). It is this very configuration, that of dialogue, that Tolstoy chose as the foundation of his own sonata.

Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* is told by an anonymous character whom I will call the "executive narrator" because he performs the narrative, as a musician might perform a piece, rather than composes it. The narrative proper does not begin until the principal narrator, the murderous husband Pozdnyshev, is an active and, above all, a speaking participant in the events that make up the story. In fact, until he steps into that role, Pozdnyshev's mouth is kept from acting as an emitter; it is mostly used for everything *but* communication: "[he] looked out of the window, *smoked*, or *drank* tea and *ate* something he took out of an old bag" (emphasis added).[4] It is important to note that we, as readers, benefit from the executive narrator's performance because he actually serves as the stimulus for Pozdnyshev's narrative. Finding it too "painful [. . .] to be silent" (364) about his tragic life story, Pozdnyshev sees in the executive narrator both an addressee and a vehicle for his expressive needs. This corresponds directly to the creative history behind Beethoven's sonata which was specifically composed for the French violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer in hopes that he would eventually perform it for the public at large. At the time, Kreutzer had been a keen proponent and the principal implementor of a new bowing technique that afforded the violin much more versatility and power of expression. It was specifically with this novel bowing method in mind, known as "martelé" (hammered) or "contre coup d'archet" (reversed bowing), that Beethoven composed the Kreutzer Sonata (Jander 36-38). It seems quite clear that the piece is, ultimately, deeply concerned with form. It is likewise noteworthy that, much like a musician who listens to a piece as he performs it, the story's executive narrator is at once audience and performer. For although he is retelling Pozdnyshev's account for the reader's benefit, in the context of the narrative itself he is the one actually listening as it is being told to him. Indeed, as Green has already perceptively remarked, Tolstoy's story "was intended to make its appeal largely through the ear" (12).[5]

Rochlitz's description of Beethoven's sonata as "restlessly *driven* forward," and his perception that it sets "our imagination and sensitivity *in motion*" (emphasis added each time), is exceedingly thought-provoking given Tolstoy's own choice of narrative setting: a journey by train. Moreover, when he first began to study music seriously, Tolstoy sought to understand in what, exactly, it consisted. He determined that "music is the expression of the interrelationship of sounds in space, time, and force."[6] At the heart of his conclusion was the idea that "the reason behind the conception of space is movement; it is un-

avoidable that movement requires the conception of some kind of points or moments."[7] Indeed, both Beethoven's and Tolstoy's sonatas insist on the notion of movement as well as its periodic suspension. According to Jander, theorists have traditionally been befuddled by Beethoven's unusual composition: "why, from a rhythmic point of view, is this piece forever changing its mind: starting and stopping. . . starting and stopping. . . then lurching forth again?" (Jander 48). Tolstoy, himself an accomplished musician, certainly picked up on this salient structural characteristic, for the train trajectory of his own narrative, punctuated with numerous station stops, mimics the same type of interrupted motion that describes Beethoven's work. While Tolstoy's plot line moves steadily upon a system of train tracks, the course of Beethoven's narrative unfolds on a sequence of musical staves which are, by no means coincidentally, strikingly reminiscent of a railway line.[8]

Only a page into the narrative, the executive narrator leaves his train carriage to amble along the platform because he does not expect "to hear anything interesting" (356). But, as narratologists often point out, a story is set in motion only through narration, and so, for the executive narrator, the train journey, or the descriptive voyage that is the narrative, has yet to commence. In fact, soon after his departure from the carriage, he is warned of its imminent beginning by the ringing of a bell, as though he were being asked to take his place for the start of a concert. We should recall that Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata is a chamber piece intended for a small audience assembled in a more intimate setting, hence "chamber." In Tolstoy's version, the cozy train carriage reproduces precisely such a space for the narrative's performance.

Once the executive narrator returns to his seat, the common structure of the musical and literary narratives begins to emerge: "And the bell did ring before I had gone the length of the train. When I returned, the animated conversation between the lady and the lawyer was proceeding" (356). A similar introductory "conversation" occurs at the start of Beethoven's piece. It consists of a slow preamble that is pivotal in setting the stage for the *exposition*, the sonata's opening movement. According to Jander, Beethoven was probably influenced by Johann Georg Sulzer's *General Theory of Fine Arts*, in which he recommends the use of dialogue or debate (*Gespräch*) as an effective trigger for the main story of a prose work (Jander 42). In the preamble to the musical narrative this device is evident in the immediate struggle between the piano and violin, each of which insists on a particular rhythmic phrase. This disagreement persists throughout the composition and represents "the germ of the 'plot' of the 'Kreutzer'" (Jander 44). Pozdnyshev's narrative likewise stems entirely from the initial argument about love and marriage introduced by the two passengers in the carriage. The contrasting opinions that arise out of this discussion help to weave the fabric of the written narrative in the same way that the vying rhythmic themes construct Beethoven's sonata. Sulzer himself applies his observations on literature to other art forms, such as music and dance, and explains that sometimes what one is watching seems to be "a continuation of a plot that took its onset somewhere out of view" (Jander 42). This is certainly a common feature in both sonatas. Following western musical tradition at the turn of the century, one would have expected the violin to play an arpeggio that would lead the way to the high A in the first measure of the piece (see example in Fig. 1) (Jander 42). But instead, the audience joins the initial phrase without the expected progression; the chord is a musical *fait accompli* (see example in Fig. 2). In Tolstoy's *Kretuzer Sonata*, not only does the executive narrator begin the travel account a day into it, "it was [. . .] the second day of our journey" (355), but also, once he returns to the carriage, the animated conversation between the two passengers has already begun. Like the audience of Beethoven's sonata, he shares in the narrative preamble without the benefit of hearing its full progression.

Both narratives are predicated upon contrast. In Beethoven's piece, the violin insists on an iambic rhythm (_ ⁄) and is in direct conflict with the piano which attempts to impose a trochée

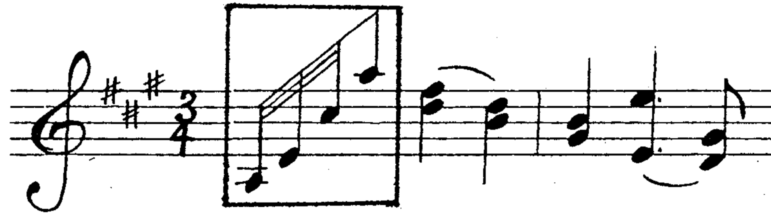

Figure 1

Figure 2

(⁄ _) on each melodic motif. As do people arguing, the two instruments continually interrupt each other and only unite long enough to provide the *exposition*, the second movement, as well as the entire sonata, with what Jander calls a "unifying device," a general issue that is debated throughout the piece (Jander 41). Any conversation must centre around a main topic of debate if a logical and relevant discussion is to ensue. Jander explains that, in the musical narrative, this function is served by the iambus which is represented in the persistent "up-down" motion of the bow and by the symbol ⊓ in the score. Being a central feature of the Kreutzer bowing technique, it is prominent in all the melodic ideas of the piece and a subject of great controversy emphasized by instances of increased dynamics, *crescendos*, and strong accents, *sforzandos*, in the execution. Jander's description of this heated musical argument is very compelling:

> As the pianist responds to the violin's opening phrase—smoothing it out, however, and removing the three up-down gestures—the violinist interrupts, as though to say, "No! Up-down, *up-down*!" The pianist, failing to see the point, continues a smooth succession of unbroken chords... whereupon the violinist again breaks in, at an even higher pitch, with insistent broken quadruple and triple stops: "No! Up-down, *up-down*!" (Jander 44)

A similar conflict takes place in Tolstoy's narrative. As it addresses a number of topics such as education, personal choice, and marriage, the bitter dispute between the elderly tradesman and the lady introduces the critical "unifying device," or polemic issue, that fuels the entire story: the nature of love. This question will reach its climax later in the narrative when Pozdnyshev inserts himself into the conversation. Whereas the tradesman pointedly argues that love ought to be based on a woman's fear of her husband, the lady insists that the time for such barbarity has passed and that love must entail genuine emotion and freedom of choice. Like the piano and violin, the voices of the two antagonistic opinions on love alternately insist, ignore, and obtrude: "'[women have] got so very educated' the tradesman *reiterated*, looking contemptuously at the lady and *leaving her question unanswered*" (357); "the tradesman was about to speak, but the lady *interrupted* him" (358); and "'a woman is a leaky vessel,' the tradesman continued *insistently*" (359) (emphasis added each time). There are numerous such examples throughout the *pre-exposition* section and they are all analogous to the interrup-

tions and acute dynamic changes in Beethoven's piece. Given the story's musical subtext, it is significant that the tradesman is the first one to throw down the gauntlet and state his patriarchal views. The fact he forces the lady to counter with her own "feminist" opinions imitates the typical progression of a sonata in which the second subject or theme is often called "feminine" (Kennedy 221).

Once the tradesman leaves the carriage at the end of the first chapter, the subject of love is distinctly foregrounded as the main subject of discussion. It is Pozdnyshev who takes up the new topical focus in the initial lines of chapter two, thereby setting the narrative proper in motion. Tolstoy underscores the word "love" (*liubov'*) as persistently in this part of his narrative as Beethoven emphasizes the iambus prior to the *exposition*. Pozdnyshev demands to know: "what kind of love. . . love . . . love is it that sanctifies marriage?"(360).[9] Incidentally, the Russian word has iambic value in itself, an interesting detail given the relentless repetition of the iambus in the measures that immediately precede the *exposition*, which begins at the measure marked *presto* shown in Fig. 3 below:

Figure 3

Significantly, Pozdnyshev, who had hitherto only uttered a series of "strange sounds" [*strannye zvuki*], and who had otherwise been resolutely silent, speaks up. It becomes clear at this point that an important change is taking place in terms of both thematic focus and narrative voice: we have reached the beginning of the *exposition*, the primary component of each sonata. Jander writes that, after a series of miscommunications, and as they pave the way towards the *exposition*, "the violinist and pianist in comprehending communication at last, dwell on the subject of the iambus, the up-down" (Jander 45). Moreover, the piece then modulates to the key of A minor, which establishes a new context in which the instruments can continue to interact. Modulation consists in changing the "tonic," the principal note of a given key, so as to cancel the original tonal focus and introduce a new one. In much the same way, Pozdnyshev's emergence as a participant voice establishes another premise for the discussion of love, and, just as the violin and the piano disagree on the iambus, Pozdnyshev and the lady quibble over the nature of love.

Once love and the iambus are established as the principal subjects of debate, each narrative can continue its course towards the final outcome. Once again, the degree to which both "Kreutzer Sonatas" share an identical structural stimulus is remarkable. To exemplify this better, I will briefly turn to the *recapitulation*, or finale, of each narrative. Tracing the compositional history of Beethoven's sonata, Jander specifies that although the piece as a whole was completed in 1803, the *recapitulation* had been composed a full year earlier. In an anachronistic twist, the finale turns out to be the source that inspires the movements actually leading up to it (Jander 36). Similarly, before Pozdnyshev begins to relate the various circumstances of his personal story, he has already divulged its tragic ending by introducing himself as "that Pozdnyshev in whose life that critical episode occurred to which you alluded; the episode when he killed his wife" (363). In both sonatas, the *recapitulation* section effectively serves as a point of departure, and it is the road leading to the pre-established outcome that constructs the narrative itself. As discussed earlier, Tolstoy insists on this point by setting Pozdnyshev's account in the context of a train journey. Thus, his story comes to an end not only because he ceases to speak, but also because his audience, the executive narrator (who is also "performing" for the reader), must exit the carriage once he reaches his own destination. The calculated mention of the different stops made by the train further accentuates the specific course to which both the physical and narrative journeys are committed.

According to E. G. Babaev, Tolstoy had a keen interest in the nature of chord progressions; the expectation of where they might lead was central to how he experienced music (Paliukh and Porkhorova 15). In fact, it is in reference to Beethoven's Sonate Pathéthique that Tolstoy directly associates his knowledge of the melodic course of the piece with the depth of his musical experience: "it is precisely because there is nothing surprising in it for me, because I knew everything in advance, that this sonata afforded me [. . .] a quiet, wonderful enjoyment" (Paliukh and Porkhorova, 17).[10] Tolstoy was so fascinated by the "science of music" [*nauka muzyki*], that he was attracted by the possibility of adapting the rules of musical harmony to his own writing (Paliukh and Porkhorova 16). To be sure, he very effectively reproduces the structural character of Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata by tailoring his own compositional approach to the needs of the musical narrative.

The variations that make up the *development* sections of both sonatas are based on their respective sources of conflict: love and the iambus. Jander describes the second movement in Beethoven's piece as "a set of variations based on a theme whose phrases again and again begin with an up-down [iambic] feeling" (Jander 41). In Tolstoy's narrative, it is Pozdnyshev who provides a series of thematic variations based on the inherent conflict that pervades society's definition of love, which is spiritual in theory but sexual in practice. Pozdnyshev is unable to reconcile the spiritual and sexual spheres and decries man's perverse intent to camouflage the truth and to turn "this apish occupation [sexual intercourse] into

the most precious pearl of creation, into love" (384). As he leads the executive narrator toward the overt climax of the finale, his entire account arises as the product of this oppositional relationship and, at the same time, it continues to develop the conflict between the lady and the tradesman which was established in the preamble. When he recalls the formative phases of his life, Pozdnyshev is horrified by the realization that seemingly irreconcilable poles are nonetheless allowed to intersect. How, for example, love and purity are preached on the one hand, while on the other indiscriminate sexual activity is widely condoned: "I never heard those older persons whose opinions I respected say it [debauchery] was evil. On the contrary, I heard people I respected say it was good" (366). Thus, in the case of his relationship with his wife, it is the uncomfortable connection between spiritual and sexual love that intermittently draws them together and drives them apart. Like the struggle between the iambus and the trochée in the musical narrative, in Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* the antagonism between opposing stimuli is consistently developed and manifests itself in a variety of forms. Some of these variations are contextualized within social mores in general as, for instance, in discussions of romantic etiquette or courtship. Although touted as spiritually motivated, these social practices are shown to be of an incontestably sexual nature:

> Love is supposed to be spiritual and not sensual. Well, if love is spiritual, a spiritual communion, then that spiritual communion should find expression in words, in conversations, in discourse. There was nothing of the kind [. . .] There was nothing to talk about [. . .] Now if we had been animals we should have known that speech was unnecessary; but here on the contrary it was necessary to speak, and there was nothing to say, because we were not occupied with what finds vent in speech. (375)

In later variations this incongruity permeates the personal realm, Pozdnyshev's own marriage. Just as his first sexual encounter as a fifteen year-old guaranteed that his relationship with women would be forever sullied, so the consummation of his marriage causes an irreparable emotional rift to grow between him and his wife: "'What?' I [Pozdnyshev] thought. 'Love is a union of souls—and instead of that there is this!'" (380). The alternation of physical coupling and spiritual distance is more than a characteristic of Pozdnyshev's private life; it is the principal structuring element of his marriage, for it defines the entire relationship:

> I did not notice that the periods of anger corresponded quite regularly and exactly to the periods of what we called love. A period of love—then a period of animosity; an energetic period of love, then a long period of animosity; a weaker manifestation of love, and a shorter period of animosity. (393)

This pattern of alternating harmony and strife is, as we have already seen, also readily apparent in Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata where the piano and violin struggle consistently over which musical motif to emphasize.

The interaction of sound and silence is of utmost importance in both narratives and its effects are particularly revealing in their respective *development* sections. After a very conspicuous silence, Pozdnyshev begins his personal account with considerable emphasis on the action of "narrating" [*rasskazyvat'/rasskazat'*]: "If I am to *tell* it, I must *tell* everything, from the beginning: I must *tell* how and why I married, and the kind of man I was before my marriage" (364, emphasis added). The very act of narration affects *The Kreutzer Sonata*; whenever Pozdnyshev ceases to speak the narrative process comes to an immediate halt. Admittedly, this might seem obvious enough: if no one *tells* the story, then it cannot continue. The point is, though, that much like the eponymous musical piece whose melody is first heard, either by playing it out on the piano or in the composer's mind, before it can be committed to paper, Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* insists on the enunciatory nature of its narrative structure. It is a story that from its inception requires that it be "performed" for an audience, as Pozdnyshev does for the executive narrator. Similarly, just as each variation in Beethoven's *development*

section is announced by the short pause that precedes it, Tolstoy punctuates Pozdnyshev's account with obtrusive silences that stand in as "stations" between the many variations in the narrative journey: "He again made that sound, swallowed another mouthful of tea, and remained silent for a while" (370); "he was silent while [two new passengers] were seating themselves, but as soon as they settled down continued, evidently not for a moment losing the thread of his idea" (381); "[he] began to move about, and to get out his cigarettes and to smoke" (384); "'pardon me,' he muttered and, with his eyes fixed on the window, he remained silent for about three minutes" (396); "Pozdnyshev was silent, but sighed deeply all the time" (415). Although Pozdnyshev's pauses are longer than the customary five- or ten-second breaks between musical variations, they nonetheless mimic the sonata's performative progression, particularly in so far as the unifying theme or "thread" of the narrative is never lost.

For Beethoven, it was imperative that the movements that would herald his dramatic ending be "of such strength and length that would allow [the] finale to emerge as a gratifying outcome" (Jander 36). Clearly, the growing tension that arises out of the sexual-versus-spiritual-love dichotomy that defines Pozdnyshev's marriage also demands a considerable release, and this manifests itself in the form of the murder. In the musical narrative, the initial tempo of the closing movement is a *presto*, quick and immediately restless. Although there are some phrases that require a *ritardando*, or deceleration, along the way, this tempo persists up until the concluding measures of the piece. At that point, we witness that "the music seems to be talking *to* itself *about* itself, pondering the fundamental musical concern as to what is rhythmically weak, what rhythmically strong" (Jander 40, emphasis in the original). The tempo is now *adagio*, slow and pensive. It is true that the phrasing still has its roots in the iambus, but its power is reduced by the calmer tempo (see Fig. 4). After four measures, the *tempo primo*, the original tempo, is resumed but soon thereafter the slower *adagio* returns once again. This brings about a pivotal change: the up-beat, the short note that engenders the iambic motif, disappears entirely, and lends the musical phrase a decidedly trochaic quality that will colour the remainder of the movement. The disappearance of the up-beat is clear in the transition from the first to the second measures as in Fig. 5. As with any narrative, the self-referential quality of the musical piece rests on its capacity to tell itself, to reveal its principal concern by means of its very structure. In the case of Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata it is the sonata's discussion of the iambus, through constant juxtaposition with the rivaling trochée, that produces the "penetrating dialogue" in which the trochée emerges as the ultimate victor.

Figure 4

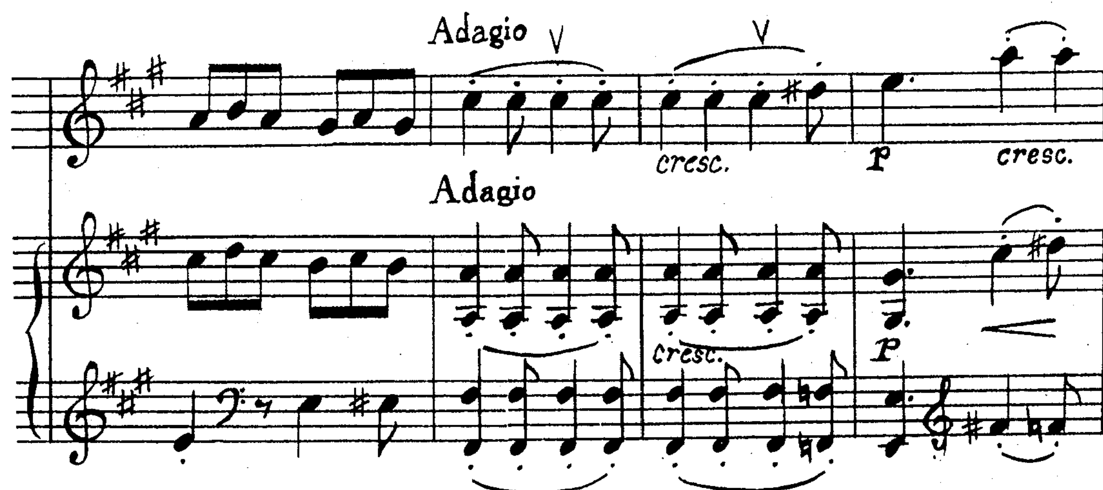

Figure 5

It should come as no surprise that the *recapitulation* of the written narrative echoes the structure outlined above. Pozdnyshev ends his final silent spell by introducing his own anxious *presto* and relating the events that lead to the narrative finale:

> He continued his story only after the conductor had gone out, and in the semi-darkness of the carriage only the rattle of the windows of the moving carriage and the rhythmic snoring of the clerk could be heard. In the half-light of dawn I could not see Pozdnyshev's face at all, but only heard his voice *becoming ever more and more excited and full of suffering.* (415, emphasis added)

The ever-intensifying pattern of distance and reconciliation that underlies both sonatas ultimately requires an outcome. Thus, the conversion of the iambus into the trochée in Beethoven's finale also occurs in the written narrative. Both Beethoven and Tolstoy seem to adhere once again to Sulzer's formula for what constitutes a good ending. Sulzer suggests that the perfect ending "should deal with some concern that was stated in the beginning and pursued throughout; a singularly effective ending results when there have been two or more opposing views which are finally unified into a single point of view."[11]

The antagonism inherent to Pozdnyshev's marriage reaches its climax when a young violinist, Trukhachevskii, makes his fateful appearance: "it was he with his music who was the cause of it all" (398). As a matter of fact, the truth of this statement extends farther than one might suspect, for, in being the trigger for the murder, Trukhachevskii is, indeed, "the cause of it all." He provides Pozdnyshev with the stimulus for the grand finale, the source of the entire *Kreutzer Sonata.* It is also worth noting that Trukhachevskii is closely associated with Paris and Parisian deception; his boots are of "special Parisian fashion," and he owns a number of unnecessary trinkets that "foreigners acquire in Paris" (398) just for show. These traits might serve as a subtle allusion to Rodolphe Kreutzer, himself a Parisian, whose revolutionary bowing technique was first made public through a violin manual issued by the Paris conservatory (Jander 36). However, Trukhachevskii does not represent an entirely new dynamic in the narrative. In effect, he embodies the exact motivations that governed Pozdnyshev earlier in life, the very source of his inner struggle: "He, looking at my wife as all immoral men do at pretty women, pretended that he was only interested in the subject of the conversation—which no longer interested him at all" (402). Incidentally, Tolstoy

himself once made a rather revealing admission with regard to his own (mis)use of music: "had someone taught me then to look upon music as a delight in itself and not as a means of seduction, I might have grown into a good musician" (S. Tolstoy 226). Pozdnyshev's observations on Trukhachevskii harken back quite distinctly to his own experiences when he courted his wife. It is understandable, therefore, that his description of Trukhachevskii's and his wife's performance of the Kreutzer Sonata should exude a strong sexual subtext:

> I had never seen my wife as she was that evening. Those shining eyes, that severe, significant expression while she played, and her melting languor and feeble, pathetic, and blissful smile after they had finished. (412)

This alleged sexual act, the physical union through music that takes place between Trukhachevskii and Pozdnyshev's wife, immediately precedes Pozdnyshev's trip to a Zemstvo meeting, which is another act of distancing. It is during the subsequent journey home, as he heads toward a final outcome, that the written narrative, like its musical counterpart, begins to focus on itself. As Pozdnyshev wallows in oblivion and yields completely to the calming effect of travel by carriage, it is the course of the journey, that which structures the narrative and not its result, that is deliberately foregrounded: "Looking at the houses, the fields, and the passers-by, I forgot where I was going [. . .] when I remembered where I was going to, I said to myself, 'We shall see when the time comes; I must not think about it'" (415). In the struggle between the spiritual and the physical, it is the spiritual that comes to the fore most prominently and actually dominates in the first part of the journey, as Pozdnyshev himself seems to suggest: "perhaps I enjoyed [the journey] just because I knew what awaited me and was saying good-bye to the joys of life" (415). In other words, he expects to put an end to the sexual component of his existence. Later, during the portion of the journey completed by train (and here we must not forget how Tolstoy feels about trains), it is the antagonistic sexual thrust—the iambus—that governs Pozdnyshev, causing him to experience intense anguish and excitability, and to fabricate a sexual encounter between Trukhachevskii and his wife:

> As soon as I entered the train something entirely different began [. . .] whether it was that having taken seat in the carriage I vividly imagined myself as having already arrived, or that railway traveling has such an exciting effect on people [. . .] I could no longer control my imagination, and with extraordinary vividness which inflamed my jealousy it painted incessantly, one after another, pictures of what had gone on in my absence, of how she had been false to me. (415-416)

Here, Pozdnyshev himself establishes a clear correspondence between music and the railway, the train tracks and the musical staff. Earlier, in discussing the adverse influence of music on his psyche, he asserted that music "has neither an exalting nor a debasing effect but produces agitation" (410), precisely the feeling he experiences while traveling by train. Music, Pozdnyshev insists, and the Kreutzer Sonata in particular, causes an "awakening of energy and feeling unsuited both to time and place, to which no outlet is given, [and] cannot act but harmfully" (411). Once again, this is also reflected in his experience on the train when his sudden and unexplained agitation finds release in irrational suspicions.[12] In essence, as he travels down the railway line, Pozdnyshev is simultaneously proceeding along the music staff adhering to the steady course of Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata.

The more Pozdnyshev attempts to divert his attention from the conflict that shapes the entire story, the more intensely it plagues him. The fact is that Pozdnyshev is *forced* to travel this road, so to speak. Although he repeatedly attempts to modify his course either by dwelling on other concerns or by switching train carriages, his trajectory, like the narrative's, is firmly set. And so, as the voice that engenders the entire story, Pozdnyshev also, like Beethoven's piece, enters a reflective stage in which he endeavours to assess "what is strong and what is weak" in the narrative of his life. His agonizing doubt can only be eased

by a decision, by imposing control where he feels there is none: "I considered myself to have a complete right to her body as if it were my own, and yet at the same time I felt I could not control that body, that it was not mine and she could dispose of it as she pleased" (418). In killing his wife, Pozdnyshev attempts first to control and then to discard the animalistic element that stokes the conflict within him. It is at the very moment he stabs his wife that Sulzer's notion of "opposing views finally unified into a single point of view," becomes readily apparent. Pozdnyshev himself recalls experiencing a momentary fusion of the physico-instinctive with the conscious and ethical, an intersection of the narrative's antagonistic impulses:

> When people say that they don't remember what they do in a fit of fury, it is rubbish, falsehood. I remembered everything and did not for a moment lose consciousness of what I was doing. *The more frenzied I became the more brightly the light of consciousness burnt in me*, so that I could not help knowing everything I did. I knew what I was doing every second. (424, emphasis added)

In the same way that the trochaic rhythm vanquishes the iambus and eventually acquires total control in the musical piece, so does the spiritual emerge as the dominant thrust in Tolstoy's narrative, becoming the premise of Pozdnyshev's now transformed ethos: "For a long time afterwards, in prison when the moral change had taken place in me, I thought of that moment" (424). The basis for the musical sonata's structure does not rest solely on key relationships, but also on the interaction between the two rhythmic themes presented in the *pre-exposition* and subsequently examined throughout the piece. Like the vying thrusts in the narrative text, these two themes are responsible for weaving the texture of the narrative and bringing it to a conclusion. Therefore, the fundamental idea of opposition, of meaning brought about through difference, is as central to Beethoven's composition as it is to Tolstoy's text.

Tolstoy's general reception of Beethoven's music was, to say the least, complicated. On the one hand he admired and was deeply moved by the composer's work, but on the other, he saw it as the beginning of Western music's steady decline (S. Tolstoy, 228). In his aesthetic treatise *What is Art?* the author maintains that true art must be "infectious." By this he means that, to be genuine, a work of art must be able to transmit the author's own feelings and experience to its intended audience. But Tolstoy is quick to add that "infection" can be moral and immoral, and that true art must also be universally accessible: it must unite rather than distance people, it must be "Christian." Hence the author's demotion of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to "the rank of bad art":

> for not only do I not see how the feelings transmitted in this work could unite people not specially trained to submit themselves to its complex hypnotism, but I am unable to imagine to myself a crowd of normal people who could understand anything of this long, confused and artificial production, except short snatches which are lost in a sea of what is incomprehensible. (Tolstoy 249)

Given the extent of the conflict that Beethoven provoked in Tolstoy, it is very curious that the author turns specifically to *his* music so consistently. In addition to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Beethoven's work appears in *Family Happiness*, *Childhood*, *War and Peace*, and *Resurrection*. "When Tolstoy the writer writes of art," Richard Gustafson remarks, "he always thinks of a musical event. Tolstoy's art of infection is the art of a good performance" (Gustafson 374). It was, in fact, a performance that catalyzed the composition of the work itself, not only in narratological terms (Pozdnyshev's crime is the result of Trukhachevskii's and his wife's performance from which the entire story ensues), but also with regard to Tolstoy's own impulse to write the story. After a performance of the sonata at his house, Tolstoy eagerly proposed that his good friend, the painter Ilia Repin, should paint a scene inspired by what they had heard, and that the actor Andreiev-Burlak should stand before it and read a story that the author would write on the very same subject (Green 12). Tolstoy's literary rendition of Beethoven's piece reflects the author's personal recep-

tive experience at the time of the performance. In "'What is Art' and the Anxiety of Music," Caryl Emerson cites the author's admission to circumstantial subjectivity when he discussed the "chasteness" of Beethoven's sonata with the violinist Nedbal:

> Perhaps you are right; but I would never have written [my own] "Kreutzer Sonata" if I had heard the piece performed by high-minded musicians. In the performance I heard, by two poorly-playing students, it produced on me the impression of an erotic work. (Emerson, 442)

Ultimately, then, how a work of art affects or "infects" its audience appears to drift beyond authorial control. But what does remain as a constant from Beethoven to Tolstoy is the sonata's narrative structure. Its organization, in purely formal, not semantic, terms, allows for a revealing interdisciplinary dialogue between two unrelated art forms.

When it came to making sense of some musical works, Tolstoy expressed a frustration uncannily similar to that in the epigraph to this essay: "Que me veux cette musique?" "What does this music want from me?" he would frequently ask (S. Tolstoy 226). Interestingly enough, the figure of Beethoven in the film *Immortal Beloved* voices the same brand of confusion: "Music is a dreadful thing. What is it? I don't understand it. What does it do?" Sergei Tolstoy explains that music could elicit all manner of intense, and often contradictory, emotions in his father. Perhaps, as Nikolai Strakhov observed, Tolstoy "subtly understood and felt melody, but not harmony" (Paliukh and Porchorova 15). Contrary to harmony, which moves along the vertical axis of the music staff, melody, which consists of an organized progression of notes, moves horizontally. In other words, melody has to do with forward motion, with movement toward a particular goal; it is the narrative thread of a composition. "A sturdy little steed without a flaw will get you there," Tolstoy once wrote to Strakhov, "while you may get nowhere with a trotter, and it might even land you in a ditch." Although meticulously trained and thoughtfully bred, a "trotter" tends toward unnecessary artifice and, in Tolstoy's eyes, that invariably leads to trouble. Likewise, harmony, which essentially adds "frills" to the melody, threatens to sap attention from what is central and truly important in a musical piece: the main melodic theme that "gets you there." To be sure, Tolstoy appears to have been especially attuned to this particular aspect of music, for it is the relentless thrust of the drive forward that most saliently describes the "melody" of his own sonata.

Notes

1. As he worked on this story, Tolstoy commented on its deep "sensuality" [*chuvstvennost'*] in his personal diary (Paliukh and Porkhorova 139).

2. Other scholars have probed into the two narratives' formal similarities. See the following articles in volume 40:4 (1996) of *Russian, Croatian and Serbian, Czech and Slovac, Polish Literature* devoted exclusively to Tolstoy's work: Mahoko Eguchi, "Music and Literature as Related Infections: Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata Op. 47 and Tolstoj's Novella *The Kreutzer Sonata,*" 419-432; and Elizabeth A. Papazian, "Presto and Manifesto: The Kreutzer Sonatas of Tolstoy and Beethoven," 491-516.

3. Cited in Jander 35.

4. All quotes from the story are from the Maude translation and will be henceforth followed by a page number.

5. Tolstoy himself was rather proud of his own readings, or "performance," of this story.

6. The next two quotes about the nature of music are taken from Tolstoy's " Three Fragments on Music' (*Tri otryvki o myzyke)* which appear in *PSS* 1: 241 and 244. The translation is mine.

7. In her article Rischin also discusses Schopenhauer's theory that music was nothing other than moving sound. Although Tolstoy's relationship with the philosopher was very conflicted, in this particular case their thoughts appear to concur rather well.

8. According to Liza Knapp, Pozdnyshev's account suggests that it is not just Beethoven's music, but also

the railroad—"for Tolstoy, the purveyor of debauchery and a symbol of the decay of society,"—that is responsible for his crime (Knapp 38). In fact, the music staves bearing Beethoven's music and the railway line are essentially one and the same: both serve as the structuring course of the narrative, be it musical or literary.

9. This is a slightly amended version of the Maude translation. Although the original Russian repeats the word "love" three times, the English translation only includes it twice.

10. The translation from Russian is my own.

11. Jander argues, very compellingly, that it is most likely due to Sulzer's influence that Beethoven's finale is so focused on its own structure and musical progression. See Jander 40.

12. In a scene from Bernard Rose's film *Immortal Beloved*, which is a dramatization of Beethoven's life, Anton Schindler, the self-appointed executor of Beethoven's will, suggests that it was in all likelihood "that damned sonata, the Kreutzer," that triggered the events which lead to the maestro's emotional ruin. He recalls his first meeting with Beethoven, during a rehearsal for the premiere performance of the Kreutzer, in which the composer had expressed utter confusion at the nature of his art. "Music," he told Schindler, "is a dreadful thing. . . It is the power of music to carry one directly into the mental state of the composer; the listener has no choice. It's like hypnotism. Now, what was in my mind when I wrote this [the Kreutzer]?" Schindler is befuddled by this question, and Beethoven proceeds to paint the scene of the very thoughts that occupied his mind when he composed the piece. He describes a man traveling by carriage in a rainstorm so as to reach his lover who will only wait for so long. The road is muddy, the carriage is delayed, and he never reaches his destination in time. "This [the Kreutzer]," Beethoven explains, "is the sound of his agitation."

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