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Karol Szymanowski’s Musical Language in *Myths* for violin and piano, op. 30

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ABSTRACT

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In his second period work, *Myths* for violin and piano, op. 30, Karol Szymanowski created an innovative musical language by synthesizing different styles and aesthetics. In *Myths*, Szymanowski expanded his early compositional style, which was heavily influenced by contemporary Germans, developing an individual style which adopted and integrated distinctive stylistic and nationalistic compositional techniques that he discovered from the *fin de siècle*. The paper proceeds to discuss Szymanowski’s innovation in a number of stylistic aspects, including program, form, theme, texture, harmonic language, and large-scale bass motion.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my academic advisor, Dr. Karim Al-Zand for his suggestion to undertake this project and his insightful advice while writing this thesis. I am also grateful to my piano teacher, Mr. Brian Connelly for his continuous support and musical inspiration throughout my doctoral studies at Rice University. I would also like to thank Levi Hammer for proof-reading and endless encouragement. Finally, I am most grateful to my parents for their patience, support, and love from afar.
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INTRODUCTION

Born in 1882, Karol Szymanowski grew up in an extraordinarily cultured home in Poland. As a child he wrote poetry, read constantly (especially from the Romantic literature) and composed an opera that he performed with his siblings, all of whom were artistically inclined. His sister Stanisława became a well-known opera singer who performed Szymanowski's vocal compositions; his older brother Felix became a fine pianist and composer; and his sister Zofia became a writer and wrote the texts for several of his songs. At the age of ten, Szymanowsky was sent to his uncle Gustav Neuhaus's music school at Elisavetgrad to study the classics, specifically Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and Chopin, as well as the works of Skriabin.¹ During his apprentice years, generally designated his first or "romantic" period, Szymanowski wrote music heavily influenced by Chopin and Skriabin, and later by Wagner, Richard Strauss, Brahms, and Reger. His earlier compositions show his affinity for the techniques of late German Romanticism. Only three years prior to the completion of Myths, he wrote the one-act opera, Hagith, heavily influenced by Strauss's Salome and Elektra. His strong association with late German Romantic tradition started to weaken in 1910 and 1911, triggered by his two trips to Italy and Sicily, and in

1913 with his discovery of Stravinsky’s music. In that same year, Szymanowski played *Petrushka* in its two-piano arrangement with Artur Rubinstein.\(^2\) The year 1914 was particularly important for Szymanowski. In that year he traveled extensively to Sicily and North Africa once more. The journey expanded his imagination and kindled his interest in ‘exotic’ culture. He also traveled to Paris in the summer with his friend, Arthur Rubinstein, and was introduced to an influential group of expatriate Polish intellectuals who frequently invited Ravel, Debussy, Cocteau, and Stravinsky to their salons. The exposure to French Impressionistic music had a profound influence on Szymanowski. The influence of these trips reshaped and modified his compositional technique.

Szymanowski’s *Myths* for Violin and Piano, op. 30, composed in Zarudzie, Poland the following year, 1915, is a piece which exhibits these influences in particular. Scholars consider *Myths* the initiation of his second or so-called “impressionistic” period, when Szymanowski finds his true individual compositional voice.

*Myths* is significant not only because it marks Szymanowski’s turning point from his early compositional style heavily influenced by contemporary Germans (especially Strauss), but also because it is undoubtedly one of the most imaginative masterpieces of the early twentieth century. *Myths* initiates important stylistic features of Szymanowski’s second period: his treatment of literary subject matter and his synthesis and eclectic integration of distinctive stylistic and

\(^2\) Palmer, 13.
nationalistic compositional techniques. And by doing so Szymanowski created his own individual musical language in *Myths*.

This paper will discuss that newly developed musical language. In order to specifically identify Szymanowski's innovation, a number of stylistic issues will be examined separately, including program, form, theme, texture, harmonic language, and large-scale bass motion. Combined, these stylistic and compositional elements form and define Szymanowski's unique musical language as found in *Myths*.

Before proceeding to the body of this paper, one must preliminarily define a few issues that are especially important in dealing with Szymanowski's music. As the noted Szymanowski scholar Jim Samson writes, the original musical language in *Myths* is "the result of Szymanowski's innovative synthesis of different styles."³ *Myths* embraces many of the conflicting concepts and ideas from the *fin de siècle*. In it we can hear many of the important musical dichotomies of the period: German versus French versus Russian musical styles; expressionism versus impressionism; tonality versus non-tonality; melody/counterpoint versus texture/sonority; and emotions versus images. From this eclecticism, four main styles emerge prominently: German expressionism (as in Strauss' *Salome* and *Elektra*), French impressionism, and Skriabinesque and Stravinskian harmony. The simplistic nature of these juxtapositions must be acknowledged, but some definite truths about Szymanowski's music can be

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discovered from them nonetheless. It is also valuable to make an inventory of
typical (perhaps stereotypical) features of impressionism and expressionism, as
well as typical concepts of French and German aesthetics. The aesthetic of
French impressionism is one of clarity, sensual impression, allusion, restraint of
overly felt emotions, and evocation of mood, sentiment and atmosphere.
Contrastingly, the aesthetic of German expressionism is one of conflict, tension,
anxiety, barren expression, subjective inner experience, and extremes of overt
(often erotic) emotional experience. Consider, for example, two works from the
same time period that represent the earliest masterpieces of impressionistic and
expressionistic styles: Debussy’s Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune (1894) and
Schoenberg’s Verklärte Nacht (1899). Both works are programmatic, portray
intense emotion, and are heavily influenced by Wagnerian harmony, but they
express totally different aesthetics. Keeping in mind that such a stark
polarization of things French and German is somewhat artificial, and
acknowledging that these aesthetic characteristics are broad generalizations, we
can nevertheless examine how they inspired Szymanowski’s music.

The features Szymanowski uses from the late nineteenth century German
tradition include clear structure, chromatic harmony, lyricism, thick contrapuntal
texture, long-linear motion, and extreme intensity of emotion. The characteristics
that he adopted from French impressionism are modal, whole-tone and
pentatonic harmonies, white-note/black-note bitonality, non-functional chord
progressions, coloristic sonorities, and image-evoking atmospheres. Myths also
reveals Szymanowski’s association with Skriabin’s harmonic vocabulary, such as
the “mystic” chord and exact transpositions of melody and harmony as moveable building blocks. Szymanowski’s discovery of Stravinsky’s music is evident in his use of the octatonic scale. By combining these different stylistic features, Szymanowski created his own style, achieving an equilibrium between contrasting aesthetics.
CHAPTER I
PROGRAM

Many titles in Szymanowski's second period were inspired by themes from classical and oriental antiquity. His experiences in Sicily and North Africa kindled his interests in mythological characters and inspired him to use these characters to evoke exotic images and stories. The three movements of *Myths* are based on erotic stories from Greek mythology: *The Fountain of Arethusa, Narcissus,* and *Dryads and Pan.* Other programmatic compositions from the same period include his *Masques* and *Métopes* for piano, the Third Symphony, and the First Violin Concerto. The three movements of *Masques* are based on legendary love stories, the titles of which are: *Scheherazade, Tantris the Clown,* and *Don Juan's Serenade.* *Métopes* for piano, is inspired by women that Odysseus met on his celebrated journey, entitled: *Isle of the Sirens, Calypso,* and *Nausícaa.* The Third Symphony, entitled *Song of the Night,* is a setting of a poem by the thirteenth century Persian mystic poet Rumi, which evokes the beauty of an eastern night. The literary inspiration for the First Violin Concerto was *May Night,* a poem by Micinski, which intermingles mythological and pantheistic elements.

As mentioned above, eroticism is the overriding programmatic idea of *Myths.* The first movement, *The Fountain of Arethusa,* is based on the love
episode between Arethusa and Alpheus as recounted in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Szymanowski was inspired to choose this story when he visited the actual fountain of Arethusa on the island of Ortygia in Syracuse, Sicily. In the story the river-God Alpheus falls in love with the beautiful nymph, Arethusa, while she bathes in his waters. Frightened by the strange sound from the bottom of the waters, she runs away from the waters when she realizes that Alpheus is calling her. Tired of running, she then calls upon the goddess, Diana, who transforms her into a stream of water. However, Alpheus recognizes her and becomes a river so that their waters could mingle together.⁴

The second movement of *Myths* is based on a tale of Narcissus, likewise as told by Ovid. Narcissus was incredibly beautiful even as a child, and it was foretold that he would live only until he knew himself. When Narcissus turned sixteen years old, he was so beautiful that many desired his love, but he rejected them all, including the goddess Echo. Furious, Echo prayed to the gods that Narcissus also suffer from unrequited love. Nemesis heard Echo’s prayer and cursed Narcissus so that he fell in love with his reflection in a pool of water, thereby dying of unrequited self-love and turning into a flower.⁵

*Dryads and Pan* is the title of the third movement of *Myths*. Dryads were female tree nymphs, responsible for the welfare of trees. Pan, the Greek god of shepherds of woods and pastures, was basically human, but was endowed with


⁵ Ovid, 67-73.
the legs, horns and beard of a goat. In this movement Szymanowski directly evokes the sound of Pan's flute, the origin of which involves a love story between Pan and a beautiful nymph, Syrinx, as told by Ovid. When Pan saw Syrinx, he started chasing after her. Refusing to be caught by him, she asked her sisters to transform her. As a result, she was turned into river reeds as soon as Pan touched her. When he sighed over her transformation, the air stirred through the reeds and a sweet tone echoed from them. Amazed by the sound, he took the reeds and made an instrument, which he named "Syrinx." 

In 1923 the American violinist Robert Imandts asked the composer if the titles of the movements of *Myths* suggested anecdotes or images. Szymanowski's replied:

> It was not to be a drama, unfolding in a series of scenes, from which each has an anecdotal significance – it is rather a musical expression capturing the beauty of the Myth. The principal 'tonality' of the 'flowing water' in Arethusa, the 'still water' in *Narcissus* (the motionless, transparent surface of the water), which reflects the beauty of *Narcissus* – these are the principal lines of the work; besides, I bow to the free inspiration of the interpreter who has talent. In the Dryads one can imagine the material as anecdotal in a sense. Therefore, a murmuring forest on a hot summer night, thousands of mysterious voices intermingled in the darkness, merrymaking and dancing Dryads. Suddenly the sound of Pan's flute. Calm and unrest followed by a suggestive, languorous melody. Pan appears. The amorous glances of the Dryads and the indescribable fright in their eyes – Pan leaps backwards – the dance is resumed – then everything calms down in the freshness and calmness of the rising sun. In essence, an expression of complete reverie of a restless summer night.

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6 Ovid, 24-25.

In other words, the programs of at least the first two movements are to be considered as impressions "capturing the beauty of the Myth" rather than as narrative descriptions of the stories. This is the same form of impression, or expression, that one finds in the music of the French impressionist composers, Debussy and Ravel, and in the Symbolist poetry of writers such as Mallarmé and Verlaine which influenced them: that is, the literary reference is meant to create a mood or atmosphere. In contrast, the third movement reflects a specific narrative.
CHAPTER II
FORMAL OVERVIEW

Szymanowski constructs each of the three movements of *Myths* in a classical ternary form with an added coda. *Myths* demonstrates his mastery of clear logical formal plans in expressing "the beauty of the Myth," as Szymanowski describes in his letter. Despite his exhaustive use of a variety of materials from different stylistic aesthetics, the music flows naturally and his ideas are coherent. Szymanowski delineates sections using a variety of devices, including texture, harmony, tempo/character indication, and melody. In order to integrate and unify the musical content, the themes of all three movements stem from two melodic ideas: a four-note chromatically descending line and the pentatonic scale. Moreover, he manipulates the large-scale bass motion to articulate a deeper structure in the music. This chapter provides a formal overview of each movement before examining specific topics in the subsequent chapters.

*The Fountain of Arethusa*

*The Fountain of Arethusa* is cast in an ABA' form with a coda.

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8 Chylińska, 95.
Szymanowski uses colorful textures with extensive use of trills and tremolos to evoke the image of "flowing water." Table 1.1 shows the divisions of the sections with measures and tempo/character indications. The lowercase Roman letters (i, ii, iii, etc.) indicate subsections. The changes in mood, texture, harmony, and melody which define the sections are usually accompanied by tempo or character indications in the score. These are shown in the right column.

Table 1.1: Szymanowski, *The Fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30. Tempo/character indications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tempo/character indications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. mm. 1-8</td>
<td><em>Poco allegro, Delicatamente, Susurrando, Flessibile</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. mm. 9-28</td>
<td><em>meno mosso, seguire</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. mm. 29-40</td>
<td><em>meno mosso</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. mm. 41-56</td>
<td><em>molto express, affettuoso</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. mm. 57-73</td>
<td><em>subito più mosso</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. mm. 74-86</td>
<td><em>Tempo I</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. mm. 87-103</td>
<td><em>poco meno</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 103-117</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the melodies (excepting one at the beginning of B-ii) resemble each other very closely because they are generated from the four-note chromatically descending line mentioned above. (These melodic connections will be investigated in subsequent chapters.) However, each section (especially section B) has its own harmonic language, which distinguishes and separates it from other sections. Furthermore, the large-scale bass motion helps define the form by directing important bass notes towards key structural points. Table 1.2 summarizes the harmonic features and bass notes of each section.
Table 1.2: Szymanowski, *The Fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30. Important harmonic features and bass notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Important harmonic features</th>
<th>Important bass notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A i. mm. 1-8</td>
<td>White-note/black-note bitonality</td>
<td>E♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. mm. 9-28</td>
<td>White-note/black-note bitonality and exact transposition</td>
<td>E♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B i. mm. 29-40</td>
<td>The octatonic scale and exact transposition</td>
<td>G♯</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. mm. 41-56</td>
<td>Tonal and exact transposition</td>
<td>C♯</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. mm. 57-73</td>
<td>Symmetry built on minor thirds and exact transposition</td>
<td>G♯</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A' i. mm. 74-86</td>
<td>White-note/black-note bitonality</td>
<td>E♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. mm. 87-103</td>
<td>White-note/black-note bitonality and exact transposition</td>
<td>E♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda mm. 103-117</td>
<td>White-note/black-note bitonality</td>
<td>A/E♭</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Narcissus*

As in the first movement, tempo/character indications in *Narcissus* mark the beginnings of sections in its ABA' form, shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Szymanowski, *Narcissus*, from *Myths*, op. 30. Tempo/character indications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tempo/character indications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A i. mm. 1-22</td>
<td><em>Molto sostenuto</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. mm. 23-48</td>
<td><em>poco più animato</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B i. mm. 49-52</td>
<td><em>meno mosso</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. mm. 53-82</td>
<td><em>poco animato/poco meno mosso, Mesto</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. mm. 83-96</td>
<td><em>Largo assai</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A' i. mm. 97-122</td>
<td><em>a tempo, più mosso, agitato</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. mm. 123-137</td>
<td><em>molto tranquillo espressivo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda mm. 138-148</td>
<td><em>meno mosso</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4 shows the three main themes present in this movement as well as important harmonic features of each section. The first theme is based on the
pentatonic scale and the four-note chromatically descending line, while the other
two are based on the pentatonic scale. These themes receive densely layered
contrapuntal textures to intensify images of Narcissus admiring his beauty in his
own reflection.

Table 1.4: Szymanowski, *Narcissus*, from *Myths*, op. 30.
Important harmonic features and themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Important harmonic features</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>i. mm. 1-22</td>
<td>Skriabin’s “mystic” chord and exact transposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. mm. 23-48</td>
<td>Tonal and non-functional chord progressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>i. mm. 49-52</td>
<td>Pentatonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. mm. 53-82</td>
<td>B Myxolidian mode and tonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. mm. 83-96</td>
<td>pentatonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A¹</td>
<td>i. mm. 97-122</td>
<td>Skriabin’s “mystic” chord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. mm. 123-137</td>
<td>tonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>mm. 138-148</td>
<td>Pentatonic and non-functional chord progressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dryads and Pan

In *Dryads and Pan*, also cast in an ABA' form with an introduction and a
coda, the overall tonality, D, appears at important structural points to help define
formal clarity. However, programmatic considerations dramatically affect the
piece, creating an “unfolding in a series of scenes, from which each has an
anecdotal significance,”⁹ as Szymanowski has suggested. Although many
themes are introduced in this movement (four themes representing the Dryads

⁹ Chylińska, 95.
and two representing Pan), they all stem from the four-note chromatic
descending line and the pentatonic scale which unifies the piece. Table 1.5
presents the formal plan of the movement and its various themes.

Table 1.5: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30.
Tempo/character indications, themes, and important bass notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tempo/character indications</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Important bass notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro.</td>
<td>mm. 1-10</td>
<td><em>Poco animato</em></td>
<td>&quot;the murmurings of the forest&quot;</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>i. mm. 11-26</td>
<td>più mosso, scherzando</td>
<td>Dryads' theme 1 and 2</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. mm. 27-36</td>
<td><em>poco sostenuto, grazioso</em></td>
<td>Dryads' theme 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. mm. 37-41</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dryads' theme 1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv. mm. 42-54</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dryads' theme 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>i. mm. 55-58</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pan's flute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. mm. 59-68</td>
<td><em>Lento amoroso</em></td>
<td>Pan's &quot;languorous melody&quot;</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. mm. 69</td>
<td><em>più mosso, scherzando</em></td>
<td>Pan's flute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv. mm. 70-72</td>
<td><em>Vivace</em></td>
<td>Dryads' theme 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>v. mm. 73-80</td>
<td><em>poco meno</em></td>
<td>Pan's &quot;passionate melody&quot;</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vi. mm. 81-84</td>
<td><em>a tempo</em></td>
<td>Pan's &quot;languorous melody&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vii. mm. 85-90</td>
<td><em>molto sostenuto, con passione</em></td>
<td>Pan's &quot;languorous melody&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>viii. mm. 91-94</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pan's &quot;passionate melody&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ix. mm. 95-102</td>
<td><em>poco più tranquillo</em></td>
<td>Pan's &quot;languorous melody&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>x. mm. 103-112</td>
<td><em>risvegliando, più mosso, scherzando</em></td>
<td>Dryads' theme 1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>xi. mm. 113-120</td>
<td><em>poco meno</em></td>
<td>Pan's &quot;languorous melody&quot; and &quot;passionate&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. mm. 121-131</td>
<td>Tempo</td>
<td>&quot;languorous melody&quot; and Dryads' theme 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td>i. mm. 132-142</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dryads' theme 4</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>i. mm. 143-145</td>
<td>meno mosso</td>
<td>Pan's flute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. mm. 146-148</td>
<td><em>Adagio</em></td>
<td>Pan's &quot;languorous melody&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. mm. 149-157</td>
<td>a tempo</td>
<td>&quot;the murmurings of the forest&quot;</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER III

TREATMENT OF THEMES

In the melodies of Myths, we find an interesting synthesis of the long phrases and arching contours we associate with the late romantic tradition and the modal-tinged and fragmentary motives we hear in the music of Debussy. All the melodies used in the three movements in Myths stem from a four-note chromatically descending line and the pentatonic scale which both function as unifying devices for the entire piece. From these simple motives Szymanowski fashions long-breathed lyrical melodies. Throughout the piece each melody bears a certain resemblance to all the others, holding the whole piece together despite a variety of harmonies and textures.

Four-Note Chromatically Descending Line and Pentatonic Scale

In The Fountain of Arethusa, except for the pentatonic melody in the B-II section, all the melodies originate from the four-note chromatically descending line. Having a common motivic origin, the melodies help the music stand as a unified piece even though it is based on a synthesis of various harmonic vocabularies: the A section employs a white-note/black-note bitonality (Example 3.1); the B-i section uses non-tonal harmonic symmetry based on an octatonic
scale (Example 3.2); the B-ii section uses pentatonic and diatonic harmonies (Example 3.3); the B-iii section again uses non-tonal symmetry now built on minor thirds (Example 3.4). This motivic coherence can be observed in Examples 3.1-3.4, where the chromatic motive is circled in each example.

Example 3.1: Szymanowski, *The fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 9-12.10

Four-note chromatically descending line in violin in the A section.

Example 3.2: Szymanowski, *The fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 29-35.

Four-note chromatically descending line in violin in the B-i section.

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Example 3.3: Szymanowski, *The fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 47-50.
Four-note chromatically descending line in violin and piano in the B-ii section.

Example 3.4: Szymanowski, *The fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 63-64.
Four-note chromatically descending line in violin and piano in the B-iii section.
The theme in the A section (Example 3.1) cleverly conceals the four-note chromatically descending line (A, G♯, G♭, and F♯) within a melodic contour which includes contrary motion. The theme in the B-i section in Example 3.2 is essentially the same as the theme in the A section (F♯, E, D♯, and D♭) with some extended chromatic lines preceding it. However, the four-note chromatically descending line is presented clearly in the B-ii section (C, B, B♭, and A) (Example 3.3) and in the B-iii section with the piano doubling the motive (A, A♭, G, and F♯) (Example 3.4).

In Narcissus, Szymanowski writes three distinct themes that are similarly generated from the four-note chromatically descending line and the pentatonic scale:

Example 3.5: Szymanowski, Narcissus, from Myths, op. 30, mm. 4-10. Theme 1 in violin.

Example 3.6: Szymanowski, Narcissus, from Myths, op. 30, mm. 26-32. Theme 2 in violin.
Example 3.7: Szymanowski, *Narcissus*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 49-52. Theme 3 in violin and countermelody in piano.

These examples show that the three themes are primarily based on the pentatonic scale. As shown in Example 3.5, the first theme is in the shape of an arch, ascending on a black note pentatonic scale (F♯, G♯, D♯, and C♯,) and descending chromatically (G♯, G♭, and F♯; A♯, A♭, and G♯.) The second theme (Example 3.6) is built on a pentatonic collection: B, C♯, E, F♯, and G♯. The third theme in the violin (Example 3.7) is built on the same pentatonic collection, however, the four-note chromatically descending line is constantly prevalent in the background as an accompanimental pattern or countermelody in the piano, a characteristic of Szymanowski's compositional technique which will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.
Themes of *Dryads and Pan* are closely related to the characters of the program to evoke the images of the Dryads, Pan, and "the murmurings of the forest". However, like the two previous movements, all the themes of the movement come from the same four-note chromatically descending line and the pentatonic scale. The theme in the introduction originates from the four-note chromatically descending line, but a quarter-tone between D and C# is used to portray the eerie sound of the forest: E♭, D, D quarter-tone flat, and C#. The use of quarter-tones in the violin is "one of the novelties of *Myths* and historically the earliest known use of the device, antedating its use by Hába and Berg by several years."\(^{11}\) In Example 3.8 the notes with upward stems are played on the violin's open D-string and the notes with the downward stems are played one-quarter tone below D on the G-string. The eerie alternation between the two strings is muted and interspersed with tremolos to create the mysterious sound of "a murmuring forest on a hot summer night,"\(^{12}\) as Szymanowski wrote in his letter.

Example 3.8: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 1-2. "the murmurings of the forest." in violin.

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\(^{12}\) Chylińska, 95.
The A section describes, “thousands of mysterious voices intermingled in the darkness, merrymaking and dancing Dryads.”\textsuperscript{13} This dancing Dryads scene contains four themes, as shown in Examples 3.9-3.12. The first consists of triads and the four-note chromatically descending line (C\#, C\#, B, and B\#). The second is based on the black-note pentatonic scale. The third also features the black-note pentatonic scale. The fourth theme develops the four-note chromatic motive with simultaneous major-seCONDS in parallel motion and continuous trills, achieved by the left hand sliding up and down the fingerboard playing the seconds while simultaneously trilling on the higher note.

Example 3.9: Szymanowski, \textit{Dryads and Pan}, from \textit{Myths}, op. 30, mm. 11-17. First Dryads’ theme in piano.

\textsuperscript{13} Chylińska, 95.

Example 3.11: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 27-33. Third Dryads’ theme in violin.

In the B section, new themes of Pan are introduced. Pan has three notable themes, as illustrated in Examples 3.13-3.15. The first theme is the direct programmatic quotation of Pan’s flute. The violin plays an arpeggio of natural harmonics by sliding up and down the G-string without actually pressing down. This gesture is concluded with another panpipe-like flourish of harmonics. Both the second and the third themes of Pan derive from the four-note chromatically descending line: Pan’s “languorous melody” (C, B, B♭, and A) and Pan’s “passionate melody” (C, B, A♯, and A♭). To represent what Szymanowski called a “languorous melody,” (marked molto affettuoso languido) the violin imitates the haunting sounds of the flute with a melody in artificial harmonics achieved by holding a lower note down and touching a fifth or a fourth lightly above. Pan’s “passionate melody” (marked molto express. ed appassionato) features double-stopped parallel sevenths in the violin.

Example 3.13: Szymanowski, Dryads and Pan, from Myths, op. 30, mm. 55-58. Pan’s flute.
Example 3.14: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 61-63. Pan's "languorous melody."

Example 3.15: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 73-76. Pan's "passionate melody."

After being introduced, Pan's "languorous melody" and "passionate melody" are juxtaposed side by side and/or vertically as the music progresses. For example, Pan's "languorous melody" and Pan's "passionate melody" are juxtaposed vertically in each instrument and also horizontally between the two instruments in measures 113-117. Example 3.16 shows another example of this idiosyncratic thematic technique, where fragments of the Dryads' first theme and Pan's "languorous melody" are juxtaposed vertically and horizontally between the two instruments. However, these juxtapositions are not immediately obvious
because many of the melodies are so similar; it has the effect of a kind of fragmented variation technique.

Example 3.16: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 121-125.
Vertical and horizontal juxtaposition of multiple themes.
CHAPTER IV

TEXTURE

In *Myths* Szymanowski creates a unique sound between violin and piano by combining impressionistic textures usually associated with the French tradition and contrapuntal textures usually associated with the German. In order to intensify the expression of images and the character of the program, he explores the subtly sophisticated sounds of impressionism, which is here mostly characterized by his extensive use of trills and tremolos. The influence of the French impressionistic composers is undeniable, especially considering that Szymanowski was in Paris in 1914 socializing in the same circles as Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky. This is significant, not only because *Myths* was composed the next year, but also because Debussy and Ravel's "water music" (and the textural writing associated with it) so strongly and obviously inspired Szymanowski in *Myths*. Chronologically, the most important "water music" of Debussy and Ravel far precedes *Myths*. Ravel's *Jeux d'eau* is from 1901, his *Une barque sur l'océan* from *Miroirs* from 1905, and his *Ondine* from *Gaspard de la nuit* from 1908. Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* from *Images* is from 1905, his *Ondine* from *Preludes* Book 2 between 1911 and 1913. Although the French textural influence is strong in *Myths*, another factor not usually associated with
French music is equally important: counterpoint. It would be mistaken to deny the French their contrapuntal merits, but the counterpoint used by the composer of *Myths* stems from the German variety cultivated by Bach and continuing through Strauss and Schoenberg. After all, Szymanowski was raised and trained in the German musical tradition. In this sense, his use of densely layered imitative counterpoint in passages of extreme passion, register, dynamic range and dissonance can be seen in the light of German expressionism as found in Strauss's *Salome* or *Elektra*, which Szymanowski greatly admired and emulated.

Four-Layered Texture

Szymanowski creates a variety of sonorities between violin and piano, ranging from transparent sound to colossal accumulations of various layers of sound. However, textures in *Myths* generally consist of four layers as a basic vertical structure: a violin melody in the highest layer, a contrapuntal piano melody in the upper-middle layer, (which might serve as a counter-melody or as imitation), accompaniment in the lower-middle layer in the piano, and a bass line in the lowest layer in the piano. A representative instance of this can be seen in Example 4.1.
Example 4.1: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 64-68. Four-layered texture.

Notice that the two upper layers between violin and piano are closely interwoven with imitative counterpoint. A bass line in the lowest layer contains pedal points or moves slowly in octaves or in perfect fifths. The accompaniment in the lower-
middle layer in the piano plays a significant role in providing a languorous atmosphere directly related to the programs of the piece.

Impressionistic Texture

Szymanowky explores impressionistic sonorities like those of Debussy and Ravel to conjure up programmatic images in *Myths*. However, Szymanowksi’s coloristic devices are unique and individual. One of the most characteristic devices is “the use of trills or tremolos as a kind of backcloth against which thematic ideas unfold.”\(^\text{14}\) Particularly in the first and the third movements, trills and tremolos are constantly resonating in the background, “creating a separate layer of sound”.\(^\text{15}\) In *The Fountain of Arethusa*, shimmering tremolos at the beginning of the movement play a significant role not only in enhancing the coloristic effects but also in evoking the image of “flowing water.” This image is enhanced by subtle dynamic changes, unexpected *poco sforzandi*, and irregular alternation between 4/8 and 3/8 meters in the opening section. The violin melody begins in measure 9 in the high register against these gently moving tremolos in the middle register. Szymanowski expands the dimensions of sound by adding a bass line and contrapuntal melodic lines in the piano, gradually accumulating his standard four-layered texture, mentioned earlier, which can be observed in Example 4.2.


\(\text{15}\) Chylińska, 99.
Example 4.2: Szymanowski, *The Fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm 1-12.

Tremolo texture.
In the end of the A-ii section the range of tremolos becomes narrower and the speed becomes faster in order to develop into the trills of the B section. The piano plays a significant role creating colorful water images in the B-i section. Here different textural events occur in various ways. Constant trills and tremolos deliver the effect of rippling water in the middle resister while G♯ pedal tones appear sporadically in the lower register. Fragments of fast arpeggations and isolated ninths are also important textural events, perhaps suggesting water droplets in the fountain:
Example 4.3: Szymanowski, The Fountain of Arethusa, from Myths, op. 30, mm. 27-35.
Trill/tremolo texture.
The B-ii and B-iii sections feature an important piano technique that Szymanowski uses frequently to maintain a liquid texture. While the right hand plays the melody in octaves with the thumb and the fifth finger, the second and third fingers are playing trills at the same time.

Example 4.4: Szymanowski, *The Fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 41-45.
Characteristic piano texture.

Another notable coloristic device in *The Fountain of Arethusa* is Szymanowski’s employement of sympathetically sounding harmonics in the piano. After playing the whole-tone arpeggiation with the pedal down, the asterisk in Example 4.5
indicates that the small upward-stemmed notes are pressed down without actually sounding; the pedal is then changed. As a result, the sympathetic vibrations of the whole-tone arpegglization are carried over in the depressed notes, also a whole-tone collection. The violin then plays the same notes pizzicato and fortissimo. The sonorities of the two instruments combine to create a whole new sound.

Example 4.5: Szymanowski, The Fountain of Arethusa, from Myths, op. 30, mm. 72-73. Sympathetically sounding harmonics in piano.

In contrast to “flowing water”\textsuperscript{16}, the opening figure in the second movement suggests the image of “still water”\textsuperscript{17} with the hypnotic repetition of the same chord in the A-i section. Besides this accompanimental figure, Sicilian rhythmic patterns are also used in the A-ii section to portray “the motionless, transparent surface of the water, which reflects the beauty of Narcissus.”

\textsuperscript{16} Chylińska, 95.

\textsuperscript{17} Chylińska, 95.

Trills and tremolos also function as very important elements in *Dryads and Pan* where they are used to conjure up the Dryads and Pan dancing in a forest. Szymanowski explores new violin sonorities to a great extent in this movement, as exemplified in his uses of quarter-tones, doublestopped parallel major seconds and sevenths, and harmonics. Furthermore, in this movement both instruments exchange trills and tremolos unlike the first two movements in which only the piano has this coloristic role. For example, in the beginning of the A-i section, the violin plays tremolos between two double stops as well as fast
arpeggiations of chords back and forth on all four strings. With sforzandi and offbeat accents, this creates a restless, percussive-sounding accompaniment to the dance in the piano.

Example 4.7: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 11-16. Violin arpeggiations.

A characteristic common to all of Szymanowski's textures in *Myths* is his extremely meticulous notation of textural detail. As Example 4.8 demonstrates, virtually every phrase is marked with different tempo indications, tempo modifications, extra character adjectives, sudden contrasts in dynamics, and various articulations. For example, measure 95 by itself contains three different character adjectives, *dolciss.*, *delicatissimo*, and *rubato e capriccioso* under the tempo indication *poco più tranquillo.*
Contrapuntal Texture

Szymanowski’s use of imitative counterpoint between the violin and the piano shows his strong roots in the German contrapuntal tradition that goes back to Bach and the baroque period. In *The Fountain of Arethusa*, the four-note chromatically descending line is persistently imitated in the piano part. In the beginning of the movement the violin melody is interwoven with the chromatically descending lines in the accompanimental pattern (C#, C♯, B, B♭, and A; C#, C♯, B, and B♭) and in the bass of the piano (D♯, D♯, C♯, and C♯).
Chromatic counterpoint.

In the B-i section the violin melody is imitated by two voices in the piano: the upper voice in tremolos (B#, B♭, Bb, and A) and the lower voice in an ascending chromatic line (C#, D, D#, and E).
Example 4.10: Szymanowski, *The Fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 32-34.

Chromatic counterpoint.

In *Narcissus* Szymanowski uses remarkably free imitative counterpoint to portray *Narcissus' lust for his own reflection throughout the movement. The free imitative counterpoint is often buried or obscured by the texture, which often features tremolos, extreme register, and simultaneous accompanimental figures. To help identify the hidden counterpoint, Example 4.11 shows only the imitative melodic lines from measure 1 to measure 22. The complete theme is stated three times, marked A, B, and C, each time with slight variations, but a recognizable contour. While these complete statements occur, there are many simultaneous imitative fragments, all marked X in Example 4.11. $X^1$ is a fragment imitating the violin theme, occurring before the first statement is even
complete. $X^4$ is an inversion of part of the theme, occurring while the piano is playing the entire theme C.

Example 4.11: Szymanowski, Narcissus, from Myths, op. 30, mm. 1-22.
Counterpoint reduction.
The music in Example 4.11 returns in modified form in the recapitulation with an overwhelming, almost ecstatic intensity. The relentless repetition of the first theme begins in the A' section with canonic imitation between the violin and the piano, shown in Example 4.12.

Example 4.12: Szymanowski, *Narcissus*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 97-104.\(^\text{18}\) Canonic counterpoint.

At the ecstatic climax shown in Example 4.13, Szymanowski writes densely layered contrapuntal textures that span six octaves from the lowest C# to the

highest C# in a three-stave piano format. This shows the influence of the German expressionists: overt, uncensored expression using the extremes of register, dynamics, chromatic voice-leading, and counterpoint. He uses an accumulation of various layers of sound and interweaves contrapuntal voices creating enormous orchestral effects. The texture of this massive climax demonstrates the intricacy of the contrapuntal texture containing four different layers; the melody in the violin in the highest layer, multiple contrapuntal layers in the upper-middle layer, the rhythmic pattern that uses a harmony derived from Skriabin's "mystic" chord in the lower-middle layer, and slow-moving low octaves in the lowest layer.

CHAPTER V
HARMONIC LANGUAGE

In Szymanowski’s harmonic language, there is always an overall key center present beneath the surface of the music. An elaborate vocabulary of modal, symmetrical, and Skriabinesque harmonies is mixed with subtle implications of temporary tonal centers. What makes Szymanowski’s harmonic language unique in *Myths* is his way of combining these various vocabularies to serve the poetic images of the program.

Tonality

In *Myths* each movement has a tonal focus: *The Fountain of Arethusa* might be thought of as bitonal in A-minor/E♭ pentatonic scale, *Narcissus* in B, and *Dryads and Pan* in D. Szymanowski continues to use traditional harmonic language such as simple triads, and straight-forward functions, such as V-I progressions, but also incorporates newly developed harmonic techniques and vocabularies. However, he does not utilize these elements in a traditional way.

In *The Fountain of Arethusa* is remarkable for its “subtle integration of tonal reminiscences into non-diatonic contexts.”\(^\text{19}\) For example, Szymanowski

\(^{19}\) Samson, 154.
uses the second inversion of the $E\flat$ triad to provide temporary tonal relaxation in measure 21 after presenting a somewhat disorienting white-note/black-note bitonality at the beginning of the A section. Similar tonal relaxation also occurs in the B-ii section. After the tonally ambiguous B-i section, which is built on the octatonic scale, the harmonic language temporarily stabilizes in the B-ii section. Tension built up by C# minor and F# minor seventh chords resolves into two temporary tonics: the F-major triad in measure 47 and G-major triad in measure 51.

The tonal center of the second movement is B-major. B-major is established at the arrival of the second theme area in measure 23 by means of the long-linear bass line moving through the circle of fifths (G#, C#, F#, and B) from the beginning of the movement to measure 23.

The third movement has a tonal focus of D. Throughout the movement, D is articulated at important structural points. For example, a single note, D, opens the introduction of the movement. The second inversion of the D-major triad occurs at the beginning of the A section, and at the return of the A section. An open fifth on D takes place at the end of Pan’s flute and at the very end of the piece. The recurring D helps integrate the piece as a whole in the course of complicated harmonic and thematic events.

Symmetrical Collections and Chords

Non-diatonic symmetries are significant in Szymanowski’s harmonic language, especially in the first movement of *Myths*. Symmetric materials used
in this piece include the octatonic scale, the whole-tone scale, the diminished seventh chord, and the “French augmented sixth chord” (namely, a chord of two interlocking tritones). Inevitably, the emphasis on the interval of the tritone is prominent in these symmetrical harmonies. From the very beginning, the piano accompaniment presents the underlying tritonal relationship between the E♭ pentatonic scale and A-minor. At the very end of this piece, the bass motion going from A to E♭ summarizes the tritonal bitonality of the whole movement. In order to intensify this tritonal quality, Szymanowski makes frequent use of the pitch class set (0268), particularly in section B. He is aware of the versatility of the pitch class set (0268) as a symmetrical collection, and as a whole-tone subset, capable of various tonal implications. In the B section, (0268) appears in three different forms: a French sixth chord; two pairs of major ninths, the lower notes of which are separated by a tritone; and two pairs of tritones where the lower note of each tritone is separated by a major second. It is noteworthy that (0268) is also the pitch class set of the first four notes of Skriabin’s “mystic” chord, with which Szymanowski’s music is deeply associated. Furthermore, (0268) can be derived from either the octatonic scale or the whole-tone scale, as shown in Example 5.1. Szymanowski uses it in both of these harmonic contexts.
Example 5.1: The octatonic scale, and the whole-tone scale, the French augmented sixth chord, and Skriabin's "mystic chord".

![Musical notation]

Firstly, (0268) is used in the B-i section, which is based on the octatonic scale (C, D, D#, F, F#, G#, A, and B). It appears as a "French augmented sixth chord" and as two pairs of major ninths, along with some fast figures in the piano part that are derived from the octatonic scale.
Example 5.2: Szymanowski, *The Fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30. mm. 29-33.\(^{20}\)

Pitch class set (0268) derived from the octatonic scale.

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Secondly, (0268) is used at the end of the B-iii section, which is based on the whole tone scale (C, D, E, G₆, A₆, and B₆). In this example, (0268) appears as two pairs of tritones following the whole-tone arpeggiation.

Example 5.3: Szymanowski, The Fountain of Arethusa, from Myths, op. 30, mm. 72-73.
Pitch class set (0268) derived from the whole tone scale.

Lastly, Szymanowski utilizes the diminished seventh chord as a generator for symmetrical harmonies. He further weakens the tonal center by symmetrically structuring the B-iii section around minor thirds. This section starts with a combination of the G♯ diminished seventh chord and the B♭ diminished triad. Then the broken G♯ diminished seventh chords ascend to a high B in the violin.
Example 5.4: Szymanowski, *The Fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 57-62.
The diminished seventh chord.

The bass line in the piano begins to move down by minor thirds until the original note, G#, is reached. The reduction of this bass line will be given in the next chapter where large-scale motions are specifically discussed.

**Impressionistic Influence**

Szymanowski incorporates the harmonic languages of French impressionists into his new harmonic vocabulary in a highly individual way. The
most notable features of French influence in *Myths* are the white-note/black-note bitonality, parallel motion, and pentatonic and modal scales.

The opening piano accompaniment of the first movement presents a common impressionistic idiom, white-note/black-note bitonality. This is achieved with the right hand playing white keys in A-minor and with the left hand playing black keys on an E♭ pentatonic scale. The configuration serves to establish the tritonal relationship between E♭ pentatonic and A-minor on which the piece is constructed:

Example 5.5: Szymanowski, *The fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 1-2.\(^{21}\)

White-note/black-note bitonality.

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Szymanowski might have modeled this opening texture of *Myths* on any number of impressionistic piano pieces. Observe how the left hand plays white keys while the right plays black in Debussy’s *Feux d’artifice*:

Example 5.6: Debussy, *Feux d'artifice*, from *Preludes* Book 2, mm. 1-2.\textsuperscript{22}

White-note/black-note bitonality.

Another such use of white-note/black-note bitonality happens at measure 20 of the third movement, as shown in Example 5.7. Here the right hand plays only black keys and the left hands plays white keys (with a few F\#s inserted).

Example 5.7: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 20.\textsuperscript{23}

White-note/black-note bitonality.

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Szymanowski creates non-functional chord progressions with chords moving in parallel motion in a way similar to Debussy and Ravels' treatment. As a result, tonal focus is undermined. Example 5.8 shows both hands moving separately with non-functional chords in parallel motion in the piano accompaniment.

The introduction of the third movement also utilizes parallel motion in the piano accompaniment with white-note/black-note bitonality: the right hand plays black keys and the left hand white keys, together moving in parallel motion:

Example 5.9: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 4-9. Parallel motion in white-note/black-note bitonality.

Szymanowski uses the pentatonic scale extensively in *Myths*. As mentioned in chapter 3, all the themes in *Myths* stem from the pentatonic scale and a four-note chromatic descending line.
Modal scales also contribute to the impressionistic quality of *Myths*. In the second movement, a canonic passage between two instruments occurs on the Mixolydian mode on B.

Example 5.10: Szymanowski, *Narcissus*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 53-59. Mixolydian mode.

![Musical notation for Example 5.10]

**Skriabin's Influence**

The opening sonority of the second movement shows the influence of Skriabin's later music. Samson interprets the harmonic content of the layered accompanimental texture as a combination of elements: ‘The tritone and perfect fourth unit, so important in the early atonal literature of the ‘Second Viennese School,’ forms one layer, the dominant-quality trichord another and the grace
notes and bass pedals a third.\textsuperscript{24} This is very similar to Skriabin’s way of forming exquisite patterns by layering motivic molecules\textsuperscript{25}, from which melody and harmony are generated. Apart from Samson’s interpretation regarding the opening sonority as layered units, the sonority can be also regarded as Skriabin’s “mystic” chord on A (A, D♯, G, C♯, F♯, and B) with an extra note, G♯. The extra note, G♯, functions as a pedal point under the opening sonority. G♯ eventually moves through the circle of fifths (G♯, C♯, F♯, and B,) towards B, which is the overall tonal center of this movement.

Example 5.11: Skriabin’s “mystic” chord on A and Szymanowski, Narcissus, from Myths, op. 30, mm. 1-2.\textsuperscript{26}

\footnotesize

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Jim Samson, The music of Szymanowski (London: Kahn and Averill, 1980), 91.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Palmer, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Karol Szymanowski, Mity: trzy poematy na skrzypce i fortepian, op. 30, ed. Eugenia Umińska i Jerzy Lefeld (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1971).
\end{itemize}
Szymanowski often repeats the same melody immediately after its first statement with the entire passage transposed exactly. Furthermore, his transpositions usually reflect non-traditional harmonic relationships or intervals that symmetrically divide the octave. For instance, in the beginning of the second movement, Szymanowski immediately transposes the opening melody and harmony up a minor third. Example 5.12 shows the opening harmony and its transposition at measure 12.

Example 5.12: Szymanowski, Narcissus, from Myths, op. 30, m. 1/m. 12.
Exact transposition of harmony.

This technique is very similar to Skriabin’s treatment of his “mystic” chord: a single sonority is explored at various transposition levels, creating moveable harmonic “blocks” rather than a sense of harmonic progression. This feature also predominates in The Fountain of Arethusa. For example, the entire passage in measures 35-40 is an exact repetition of the passage in measures 29-35, transposed up a minor third.
CHAPTER VI
LARGE-SCALE BASS MOTION

In *Myths* the large-scale bass motion reveals Szymanowski’s premeditated structural plans. To help define the deeper structure of the music, he deliberately controls large-scale bass motions towards tonal goals at important structural points. For this reason, even though the harmonic language of this piece is not entirely tonal, a reductive analytical method is used here to show the deeper structure of each movement in this chapter.\(^{27}\) The reduced outlines of the bass motion of *Myths* also disclose Szymanowski’s innovative way of synthesizing different harmonic approaches: diatonic and symmetrical. The large-scale bass motion is governed either by the circle of fifths (with some modifications), or by some consistent interval, which symmetrically divides the octave, such as semitones, whole tones, minor thirds, or tritones.

*The Fountain of Arethusa*

A bass line reduction of the first movement reveals an overall descending/ascending fifth motion, E\(_b\) – G\(_\#\) \(\rightarrow\) (A\(_b\)) – E\(_b\), on the very deepest

\(^{27}\) Samson, 152.
level. The three harmonic areas correspond respectively to the A, B, and A' sections of the ternary form.

The bass line reduction in Example 6.1 clearly shows the direction from the beginning of the movement towards the arrival of the B section with the fully chromatic bass line descending a perfect fifth from the tonic note, E♭, to G♯.

Bass line reduction.

The bass line reduction of the B section also reveals a descending/ascending fifth motion (G♯ – C♯ – G♯) in the bass, corresponding respectively to the B-i, B-ii, and B-iii sections. In the B section, G♯ functions as a tonic note, and C♯ as an intervening subordinate bass goal. Thus, the larger structure is reflected in the details of the middle section in this ternary design. Example 6.2 shows the bass line reduction of the B section with structurally important G♯s (or A♭s) beamed downward together, and C♯s upward. Each part of the B section has its own distinctive bass line. The B-i section has only two bass notes that divide this section into two equal parts: one built on a long pedal point, G♯, and the other on B. The bass line reduction of the B-ii section illustrates the bass line moving through the circle of fifths with chromaticism.
interpolated, starting from C# and coming back to the same note. In Example 6.2, chromatic lines are shown with upward beams and circle of fifths with downward beams between the beamed C#s. Two temporary tonal centers are established here: F-major on the bass note, F, which is approached from a chromatic neighboring tone, F#; and G-major on the bass note, G, through the traditional V-I progression (D – G). The bass line in the B-iii section features the extensive use of minor thirds. The first bass note, G#, descends by minor thirds repeatedly until the original note is reached.


In order to return to the tonic note (E♭) at the arrival of the A' section, the bass line simply ascends on a black-note pentatonic scale from A♭ to E♭, shown in Example 6.3. The original bass line accompanies the return of the A section. In the final measures, the gesture going from A to E♭ in the bass line emphasizes the tritonal relationship between the E♭ pentatonic scale and A minor on which the A and A' sections are based. This example reveals in
summary both the overall structural tension between the $E_b - A - E_b$ of the characteristic opening harmony and the $E_b - G\# (A_b) - E_b$ of the overall structure.

Example 6.3: Szymanowski, *The fountain of Arethusa*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 74-117.
Bass line reduction of the $A'$ section and coda.

![Bass line reduction](image)

**Narcissus**

A bass line reduction of the second movement also shows a descending/ascending fifth motion ($B - E - B$) in the overall bass. The tonic bass note, $B$, is established in the opening second theme area, and $E$, at the return of the second theme area. Both notes occur at major tonal arrival points after a long circle of fifths bass line.

The circle of fifth motion in Example 6.4 shows the strong tonal leaning towards the arrival of the second theme area in $B$ major, which is the overall tonality of this movement. This bass line functions independently as a clear tonal directing force, which works against the overall ambiguous sonorities in the beginning of the movement.

Example 6.5 shows a large-scale chromatic descending line (with downward beams) interpolated with a circle of fifths motion (with upward beams) in measure 49-82. As shown, the tonic note, B, descends chromatically to F, the goal of the passage as a whole. Here, the first theme is stated three times. The piano plays the first statement (measures 62-67), and then the violin the second statement (measures 68-75) with the same bass motion (and some modifications at the end of the second statement). The open-headed Gs in Example 6.5 initiate the bass line of the first two statements of the sequence. The open-headed F# ends this sequence and also initiates the third statement of the first theme as a pedal point. This F# ultimately descends to F#. 
Example 6.5: Szymanowski, *Narcissus*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 49-82.
Bass line reduction.

Next, in Example 6.6, the bass line descends on the whole-tone scale leading to *a tempo, più mosso, agitato* (m. 97), after which a large-scale chromatic descending bass line (interpolated with a circle of fifths motion) directs us to the end of the piece. When the second theme area returns, the bass line does not arrive on B as expected after a strong dominant preparation on F#. Instead, it arrives on E, which is the goal of the circle of fifths motion. After the unexpected arrival of E, the bass line nonetheless continues to descend chromatically, leading back toward the overall tonic note of this movement, B.

Bass line reduction.
Dryads and Pan

A bass reduction of the third movement reveals a more traditional D – A – D motion. The tonic note, D, opens and closes the piece in the introduction and in the coda. The bass note, A, appears frequently with the first Dryads' theme, most importantly at the beginning of the A section (m. 11) and at the beginning of the A' section (m. 121). The recurring bass note, A, is also found in the A-iii section towards the return of the first Dryads theme (m. 39), prepared by a chromatic ascending bass line. Example 6.7 shows that after arriving on A, this chromatic bass line continues to ascend until a circle of fifths motion starts leading towards the end of Pan's flute and an open fifth on D – A. Then, this bass note, D, descends a fourth, arriving on A at the beginning of Pan's "languorous melody" (m. 59), another significant structural point in this movement.

Example 6.7: Szymanowski, Dryads and Pan, from Myths, op. 30, mm. 27-59. Bass line reduction.

In the B section, shown in Example 6.8, the bass line tends to move chromatically towards important thematic recurrences, or new character
indications. For example, the V-I progression (F# – B) marks the beginning of
the *poco più tranquillo* section at measure 95, which is preceded by a large-scale
chromatically descending line.

Example 6.8: Szymanowski, *Dryads and Pan*, from *Myths*, op. 30, mm. 73-95.
Bass line reduction.

Lastly, the coda has a long chromatically descending bass line outlining a
tritone, which leads towards the tonic note, D, at the end:

Bass line reduction.
CONCLUSION

Karol Szymanowski’s compositional individuality stems from his full understanding and innovative application of different styles from the fin de siècle. His daring fusion of different aesthetics and nationalistic features compelled him to compose a true masterpiece of the twentieth century, Myths for violin and piano, op. 30.

In Myths, the evocation of the program is achieved through his new-found language. To enhance the meanings of the program, Szymanowski synthesizes various textures and harmonic vocabularies from different styles. At the same time, he also unifies the music through thematic coherence and structural clarity.

It is important to remember that for all of Szymanowski’s compositional invention, he also wrote masterfully for his chosen instruments. In this sense, he is the equal of Stravinsky and Ravel in his instrumentation. Aside from the fact that Szymanowski greatly benefited from close relationships with several eminent pianists and violinists with whom he worked to develop new instrumental writing, Szymanowksi himself was a fine pianist. He was taught by his uncle, Gustav Neuhaus, and was very close to his cousin, Harry Neuhaus, the famous teacher of Sviatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels, and Radu Lupu. Artur Rubinstein was another friend who performed Szymanowski’s piano pieces frequently.
The virtuoso violin writing of *Myths* was possible through Szymanowski's close collaboration with violinist, Paweł Kocharński, while the two were staying at Zarudzie together. Kocharński had been a friend of Szymanowski since their early studies in Warsaw. In a letter written many years later in March 1930 to Zofia Kocharńska, Paweł's wife and the dedicatee of *Myths*, Szymanowski claimed:

Together Paweł and I created in the *Myths* and [first] Concerto a new style, a new mode of expression for the violin, something in this respect completely epoch-making. All works by other composers related to this style (no matter how much creative genius they revealed) came later, that is, through the direct influence of *Myths* and the Concerto, or else with Pawel's direct collaboration.

Wightman comments insightfully on Szymanowski's "new mode of expression":

Paradoxically, there is little in Szymanowski's 'new mode of expression' which had not already been exploited by earlier composers. The only novelties are the use of quarter-tones in Dryades et Pan and the persistent use of chains of double-stopped seconds and sevenths in both Narcisse and Dryades, a technique which arose from the requirements of his harmonic language. None of the other double-stoppings was new, and his tremolando's also had their (admittedly less atmospheric) precedents in Paganini (Caprice No. 6) and Mendelssohn (Violin Concerto). Harmonics too, magically exploited in the evocation of the pipes of Pan in Dryades, had been extensively employed by earlier virtuoso, so much so by Paganini that Sir Thomas Moore was driven to compare them to the mewlings of an expiring cat. Other features of Szymanowski's technique, for example triple and quadruple pizzicato (in the almost

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28 Wightman, 141.

29 Palmer, 42.

contemporaneous Nocturne) had been used by Paganini and Joachim, while the simultaneous left-hand pizzicato and arco, another of Paganini's favorite tricks, goes back as far as the seventeenth century to the works of Walther. The very characteristic notated portamento was of more recent origin, appearing in much music around the turn of the century (notably Mahler's orchestral works). The originality of Myths lies in the way that techniques which previously had been superficial pieces of showmanship now became genuine substance in their own right.  

It was probably this integration of substance and virtuosity that so impressed Szymanowski's contemporaries and successors. Musicologists such as Chylińska and Wightman confirmed Szymanowski's influence on Bartók's violin works. Béla Bartók requested Szymanowski's latest published violin works from their Viennese publisher in 1921. Soon after, he played Myths with the violinist Zoltan Szekely in Budapest, and subsequently completed his own first violin sonata. As Wightman notes, "Examination of Bartók's two violin sonatas, composed after a detailed study of Myths, Nocturne, Masques and the Third Piano Sonata, reveals abundant internal evidence of Bartók's debt to Szymanowski whom he once described as one of the leading composers of the world."  

At present Myths is somewhat of a novelty in the concert repertoire, although it has long been championed by great violinists such as Menuhin, Szigeti, Enesco, Szerying, Oistrach, Heifetz, Danczowska and Haendel, and by eminent pianists such as Bartók, Zimmerman and Ashkenazy. Besides

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31 Wightman, 142-143.

32 Wightman, 143.

33 T. Chylińska, Karol Szymanowski: His Life and Works (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1993), 96.
understanding and digesting its harmonic complexity and technical difficulties, one of the challenges of performing *Myths* lies in the ensemble between the two instruments, which is no easy matter without ample rehearsal time and complete assimilation of the score from both violinist and pianist. Balance issues arise due to the thick multi-layered textures in the piano and intricate contrapuntal dialogue between the two instruments. Furthermore, interpretation of tempo relationships can be problematic because of Szymanowski's exceedingly detailed tempo/character indications and modifications. But once the plunge is made, fully and deeply, into the depths that Szymanowski offers in *Myths*, one cannot help but revel in its eroticism, its sensuality, its logic, its structure, and its beauty.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


