

Edvard Grieg and the Piano Variation Form.

Ballade in the Form of Variations on a Norwegian Melody, Op.24, for Piano, and Old Norwegian Melody with Variations, Op.51, for Two Pianos:

An Interpretive Study of the Variation Procedure

Outside the numerous miniature forms that dominate Grieg's piano output, there are two important essays in the variation form: the *Ballade in the Form of Variations on a Norwegian Melody, Op.24 for piano* (composed in 1875-76), and the *Old Norwegian Melody (Romance) with Variations, Op.51 for two pianos* (composed in 1890). The variation form was particularly suited to Grieg's skills as an arranger, because the form allows the composer to treat relatively brief material in a variety of ways. It is notable that both variation sets are based on Norwegian folk tunes. Moreover, Grieg's music has the power to strongly portray a wide range of emotional content in very brief and concise settings, and the small-scale sections of variation form can very successfully embody Grieg's picturesque miniature-structures. In his Op.24, Grieg already reveals a unique approach to variation form, as his *Ballade* is written in the form of variations, a form that traditionally had not been associated with the piano ballade genre. Moreover, the structural similarities between the *Ballade, Op.24* and the *Old Norwegian Melody with Variations, Op.51* provide further evidence in support of a unique approach to variation form exhibiting specific characteristics.

The overall organization of the variations within each set can be explored by means of various parameters that reflect the developmental progression of the variations, such as successive modifications in form, harmonic structure, meter, tempo, key signature, texture, and others. Moreover, a comparison between the *Ballade, Op.24* and the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51* reveals important similarities regarding the treatment of the theme and the overall progression of the variations, leading also to conclusions about Grieg's manipulation of the variation form.

Handling of the Theme

Both the *Ballade, Op.24* and the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51* are based on Norwegian tunes. The *Ballade* is based on the folk song "Den nordlandske bondestand" (The Northland Peasantry) and the *Old Norwegian Melody* is based on the heroic ballad of "Sjugurd og trollbrura" (Sjugurd and the Troll-Bride); both tunes were taken from Ludvig Mathias Lindeman's collection *Ældre og nyere norske Fjeldmelodier (Older and Newer Norwegian Mountain Melodies)*. Grieg's choice to base both of his variation sets (two of his very few large-scale keyboard compositions) on Norwegian folk tunes is in accordance with the dominant role of the Norwegian folk tradition in his compositional output. Regarding the importance of the national element in his art, Grieg himself wrote:

I was educated in the German school. I have studied in Leipzig, and musically speaking am completely German. But then I went to Copenhagen and got acquainted with Gade and Hartman. It then struck me that I could only develop myself further on a national foundation. It was our Norwegian folk tunes that showed me the way. In Germany the critics treated me badly because I didn't fit into the categories into which composers are commonly placed. In Germany it is often said: 'Er norwegert!' [He exaggerates the Norwegianness.] It is true that I create out of the Norwegian folk tunes, but even Mozart and Beethoven would not have become what they did if they had not had the old masters as models. The sublime German folk song was a basis for them, and without such a basis no serious music is possible.¹

Grieg employs the traditional theme-and-variations form as a means of embodying and promoting his national musical heritage. The folk song becomes the basis and the inspiration for the composition of a larger and more complex work.

Moreover, in both works, Grieg harmonizes the original tunes using rich harmonies and linear progressions, especially underlined by the use of chromatic motion and firm bass lines which bind the short melodic motives under a long phrase (Examples 1 and 2). These harmonic settings not only reveal the “undreamt-of harmonic possibilities”² of the Norwegian folk melodies, but they also provide an additional thematic element —besides the original melody—that plays a constructive role in the variation procedure.

Example 1. *Ballade Op. 24*, Theme (mm. 1-16).

¹ Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg: The Man and the Artist*, trans. William H. Halverson and Leland B. Sateren (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 334.

² In Grieg's words: "I have found that the obscure depth in our folk melodies has its foundation in their undreamt-of harmonic possibilities. In my arrangements in op. 66 and elsewhere I have tried to give expression to my sense of the hidden harmonies in our folk tunes." [Edvard Grieg to Henry Theophilus Finck, 17 July 1900, *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Finn Benestad, trans. William H. Halverson (Columbus: Peer Gynt Press, 2000), 229]

4 Allegretto espressivo. $\text{♩} = 66$.

Allegretto espressivo.

codetta $\text{♩} = 40$.

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Example 2. *Old Norwegian Melody*, Op.51, Theme (mm. 1-11)

Overview of Musical Parameters in the Variation Process

In both works, the theme is followed by fourteen variations. Additionally, the *Old Norwegian Melody*, Op.51 has a short introduction, a lengthy finale, and a coda which concludes the piece. Grieg avoids numbering the individual variations in the score. The overall organization of the variations can be studied through various musical elements which are retained, modified, or radically changed as the variations proceed. In the following pages a number of these parameters of the large-scale formal plan will be examined.

- *Linked Neighboring Variations*

As easily observed in the two scores, some of the variations are separated with fermatas between them, while others follow *attacca*. Additionally, some of them are musically linked in

various ways (such as obvious similarities in the texture of consecutive variations, unresolved harmonic suspension at the end of a variation leading directly into the following, or variations connected through tied notes). The following tables summarize these relationships using dashes (--) between the variations that follow *attacca* or are linked in any of the abovementioned ways:

<i>Ballade, Op.24</i>														
Theme	1	2	3	4	5	6--7	8	9	10--11--12--13--14	—Theme				

Table 1. *Ballade, Op.24*: Linked neighboring variations.

<i>Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51</i>														
Intro--Theme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11--12--13	14--Finale(1)--Finale(2)--Finale(3)--Theme--Coda		

Table 2. *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*: Linked neighboring variations.

- *Overview of Keys*

The majority of the variations adhere to the home tonality established by the theme. One variation in each of the two works has a transitional character, based on sequential passages modulating to other key areas. The only other departures from the home key refer to changes in the mode (g-G, F-f; see Table 3).

<i>Ballade, Op.24</i>	<i>Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51</i>
Theme: g	Intro: F (dominant chord)
Var. 1: g	Theme: F
Var. 2: g	Var. 1: F
Var. 3: g	Var. 2: F
Var. 4: g	Var. 3: F
Var. 5: g	Var. 4: F
Var. 6: g	Var. 5: F
Var. 7: g	Var. 6: F
Var. 8: g	Var. 7: f
Var. 9: g	Var. 8: F
Var. 10: g	Var. 9: F
Var. 11: Db-E-G (transitional)	Var. 10: F
Var. 12: G	Var. 11: F
Var. 13: g	Var. 12: F
Var. 14: g	Var. 13: F
Theme: g	Var. 14: f
	Finale (1): F, F# (transitional)
	Finale (2): F
	Finale (3): f
	Theme-Coda: F

Table 3. *Ballade, Op.24* and *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*: Outline of keys.

- Overall Structural Outlines

Both variation sets include a large number of character variations that alter in various ways the theme's character and expression. Some of these variations retain a very close affinity to the formal structure of the theme as well as to its overall harmonic structure, while others illustrate certain modifications in the formal and/or the harmonic scheme.

In the *Ballade, Op.24*, the first nine variations stay very close to the theme's overall harmonic scheme, with some slight modifications. Moreover, in two of these variations, Variations 3 and 8, the original melody returns in a very clear way.

In the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*, the first fourteen variations are also character variations, presenting the theme in various compositional styles and contrasting characters. In a number of these variations, (Variations 8, 10, 11, and 13) the two-part section of the theme (a1-a2 codetta) is enlarged with the insertion of a middle section (A1-B-A2 codetta). As a result of the formal amplification, the overall harmonic scheme is also altered, even though the outward points of similarity to the theme are still detectable. As happened in the *Ballade*, two variations, nos. 5 and 14, bring back the original melody forthrightly.

As the variations proceed, Grieg loosens his adherence to the structural boundaries of the theme. The turning point in the *Ballade* occurs in Variations 9-10, whereas in the *Old Norwegian Melody* considerable modifications in the form start with Variation 8 and proceed with brief breaks until Variation 14. The following sections, Variation 11 in the *Ballade* and the Finale (1) in the *Old Norwegian Melody*, are based on sequences and they do not present any considerable connection to the theme's formal structure. Instead they have a transitional function, building up tension before the triumphant return of the original melody in Variation 12 and the Finale (2) respectively. Both Variation 12 in the *Ballade* and the Finale (2) in the *Old Norwegian Melody* bring back the original melody in *ff-fff* full chords, combined with a more diatonic harmonic progression.

The next important point of similarity between the two works is the fragmentation and dissolution of melodic motives from the themes in Variation 14 and the Finale (3) respectively (in both cases marked *Prestissimo*). Variation 14 (in the *Ballade*) opens with a statement of the original melody's opening phrase over an open-fifth tonic pedal, while the Finale (3) (in the *Old Norwegian Melody*) presents the original melody without the codetta, in the key of the tonic minor, also above an open-fifth tonic pedal. The fragmentation and dissolution of the main melodic motives leads to a tremolo in Variation 14, and to obsessive scalar passages in the Finale (3), which in both cases cut off very suddenly on a *fffz* chord. The sudden break in the music is followed by the return of the theme.

The following tables (Tables 4 and 5) summarize and explain the above-mentioned structural parameters of the variation processes in the two works. The goal of this summary is to illustrate and emphasize the large-scale outward points of similarity between the two works. The modifications in the overall harmonic structure of the theme are expressed on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 given to the variations that have the closest affinity to the theme's harmonic structure. These evaluations are based on very broad harmonic outlines. Also, it is important to emphasize that the scale of 1 to 5 expresses relationships between variations that belong in the same variation set, as the differences between the formal/harmonic structures of the two themes create different harmonic parameters which cannot be evaluated on the same basis.³ The scale

³ For example, the degree (4) of the scale expresses different qualities and levels of similarity with the theme in the *Ballade* Table than in the *Old-Norwegian-Melody* Table.

evaluates the affinity of a variation with the theme's harmonic structure in terms of the overall structural scheme of the harmonic progression and also its "affiliation" with the home tonality. Moreover, the variations that display the original melody in a very transparent way are marked with an asterisk (*). The symbols **II**: and **:II** stand for the repeat sign.

<i>Ballade, Op.24</i>		Form of the Variation	Structural Proportions (Number of Measures)	Overall Harmonic Structure
Theme		(a a') II : b a' :II	(4+4) II : 4+4 :II	(theme)
Var. 1		A II : B A' :II	8 II : 4+4 :II	5
Var. 2		A II : B A' :II	8 II : 4+4 :II	5
(*) Var. 3		a a' a1 a''	4+4+4+4	5 (-)
Var. 4		a a' II : b a' :II	4+4 II : 4+4 :II	5
Var. 5		(a a') (a a')' II : b a'' :II	(4+4) (4+4) II : 4+4 :II	5
Var. 6		a a' II : b a' :II	4+4 II : 4+4 :II	5
Var. 7		a a' II : b a' :II	4+4 II : 4+4 :II	5
(*) Var. 8		a a' II : b a' :II	4+4 II : 4+4 :II	5
Var. 9		A II : B A' :II	9 II : 4+13 :II	4 (+)
Var. 10		A B A' B'	4+7+4+13	3
Var. 11	free/sequential (melodic motive from the theme, reshaped and abridged)			
(*) Var. 12	A B A'	13+11+16	3 (-)	
Var. 13	free (successive varied statements of theme's main melodic motive)			
Var. 14	free (fragmentation and dissolution of the main melodic motive)			
Theme	(a a')	(4+4)	(half-theme)	

Table 4. *Ballade, Op.24*: Outline of overall structural parameters.

<i>Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51</i>	Form of the Variation	Structural-Proportions (Number of Measures)	Overall Harmonic Structure
Intro	---	---	---
Theme	a1 a2 codetta	4+4+{2(+1)}	(theme)
Var. 1	A1 A2 codetta	8+8+4	5
Var. 2	A1 A2 codetta	8+8+4	5
Var. 3	A1 A2 codetta	8+8+4	5
Var. 4	A1 A2 codetta	8+8+4	5
(*) Var. 5	(a1 a2) (a1 a2)' codetta	(4+5) + (4+5) + 4	(essentially melodic)
Var. 6	A1 A2 codetta	10+8+4	5
Var. 7	A1 A2 codetta	8+8+(8+3)	4 (-)
Var. 8	A1 B A2 codetta	8+8+8+8	3 (-)
Var. 9	(A1 A1') A2' codetta	(8+8)+16+4	4 (+)
Var. 10	(a1 a1') b (a2 a2') codetta	(4+4)+4+(4+4)+2	3
Var. 11	(A1 A1') B (A2 A2') codetta	(8+8)+8+(8+8)+4	3
Var. 12	(A1 A2) (A1 A2)' codetta	(8+8)+(8+8)+4	4 (+)
Var. 13	(A1 A1) B A2 codetta	(8+8)+24+8+8	3 (-)
(*) Var. 14	a1 a2 (a1 a2)' {c-transition}	(4+4)+{4+(4+2)}+4	3 (-), free transition
Finale (1)	free (transitional passagework, including transformed motives from the theme)		
(*) Finale (2)	A1 A2 codetta	32+33+(12+23)	4
Finale (3)	free (brief statement of the original melody, dissolution of its main motive)		
Theme - Coda	a1 a2 - Coda (free)	4+4+40	(theme-reharmonized)

Table 5. *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*: Outline of overall structural parameters.

- *Meters, Tempi, and Dynamics*

Grieg begins the piece with structural variations, that is, variations that respect the formal and harmonic properties of the original theme. As the work goes on, however, he respects these properties less and less: in some variations he adds new material, creates less balanced phrase structures, or transforms motives. This process of dissolution leads to a climactic fragmentation and complete destruction of the thematic material. A similar climax is also evident in the succession of tempos and dynamic levels towards the end of both works. The opening structural variations create a mosaic of various, contrasting tempos and characters,⁴ which is especially elaborate in the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*. A non-structural transitional section which is marked by a long *crescendo*, leads to the triumphant, last structural variation which is indicated *Meno Allegro e Maestoso* in the *Ballade, Op.24*, and *Pomposo* in the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51* (both using a *ff-fff*, heavy chordal writing accentuated by dotted rhythms). The last structural variation is followed by an acceleration in tempo which leads to a complete breakdown before the return of the opening theme. This rhythmic acceleration is also combined with a long *cresc.* reaching *fffz* before the *p* return of the theme. The following tables demonstrate the succession of the various tempi and meters in each variation set. The tables also present the dynamic range of each variation, with emphasis on the climactic increases in the dynamic level (see Tables 6 and 7).

<i>Ballade, Op.24</i>	Meter	Tempo Indication	Dynamic Range
Theme	3/4	<i>Andante espressivo</i>	<i>p-pp</i>
Var. 1	3/4	<i>Poco meno Andante, ma molto tranquillo</i>	<i>pp-mp</i>
Var. 2	9/8	<i>Allegro agitato</i>	<i>p-ff</i>
Var. 3	3/4	<i>Adagio</i>	<i>pp-mf</i>
Var. 4	3/4	<i>Allegro capriccioso</i>	<i>p-pp, (fp)</i>
Var. 5	3/4	<i>Piú lento</i>	<i>f-pp</i>
Var. 6	3/4	<i>Allegro scherzando</i>	<i>p-ff</i>
Var. 7	3/4	---	<i>p-ff</i>
Var. 8	3/4	<i>Lento</i>	<i>pp-ppp</i>
Var. 9	3/4	<i>Un poco Andante</i>	<i>ppp-ff</i>
Var. 10	12/8	<i>Un poco Allegro e alla burla</i>	<i>p-ffz (cresc., cut-off)</i>
Var. 11	4/4 - 12/8	<i>Piú animato</i>	<i>ppp-fff (long cresc.)</i>
Var. 12	6/8	<i>Meno Allegro e maestoso</i>	<i>fff-fffz</i>
Var. 13	3/4	<i>Allegro furioso</i>	<i>mf-(p)-fffz (cresc.)</i>
Var. 14	3/4	<i>Prestissimo</i>	<i>ff-fffz (cresc.)</i>
Theme	3/4	<i>Andante espressivo</i>	<i>p-pp</i>

Table 6. *Ballade, Op.24*: Outline of meters, tempo-indications, and dynamic-ranges.

⁴ Among them are the “funeral-march” variations: Variation 8 in the *Ballade, Op.24*, and Variation 7 in the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*.

<i>Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51</i>	Meter	Tempo Indication	Dynamic Range
Intro	2/4, 6/8	<i>Poco tranquillo</i>	<i>pp-ffz</i>
Theme	4/4	<i>Allegretto espressivo</i>	<i>pp-f</i>
Var. 1	4/4	---	<i>p-pp</i>
Var. 2	6/8	<i>Energico</i>	<i>ff-pp</i>
Var. 3	4/4	<i>Allegro leggiero</i>	<i>pp-ff</i>
Var. 4	6/8	<i>Poco Andante</i>	<i>pp-f</i>
Var. 5	4/4	<i>Maestoso</i>	<i>ff-fff</i>
Var. 6	4/4	<i>Allegro scherzando e leggiero</i>	<i>pp-f</i>
Var. 7	4/4	<i>Andante</i>	<i>pp-f</i>
Var. 8	4/4	<i>Andante molto tranquillo</i>	<i>pp-ff</i>
Var. 9	6/8	<i>Presto</i>	<i>pp-ff</i>
Var. 10	4/4	<i>Andante</i>	<i>pp-f</i>
Var. 11	3/4	<i>Tempo di Menuetto</i>	<i>pp-ffz</i>
Var. 12	2/4	<i>Allegro Marcato</i>	<i>pp-ff</i>
Var. 13	3/4	<i>Tempo di Valse</i>	<i>pp-f</i>
Var. 14	4/4	<i>Adagio, molto espressivo - Più Adagio</i>	<i>pp-ffz</i>
Finale (1)	2/4	<i>Allegro molto e marcato</i>	<i>(f)-ppp-ff (long cresc.)</i>
Finale (2)	2/4	<i>Pomposo</i>	<i>ff-fff (dim. to pp in the end)</i>
Finale (3)	6/8	<i>Prestissimo</i>	<i>pp-fffz (long cresc.)</i>
Theme-Coda	4/4 - 6/8 - 2/4	<i>Andante molto espressivo</i>	<i>p-(ff)-ppp</i>

Table 7. *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*: Outline of meters, tempo-indications, and dynamic-ranges.

The Variation Form in the Context of the Piano Ballade Tradition

The comparison between the formal models of the *Ballade, Op.24* and the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51* revealed some important points of similarity between the two works. Their similar overall constructions emerge out of similar formal and musical processes. Grieg titled the first work as “Ballade in the Form of Variations on a Norwegian Melody” and the second as “Old Norwegian Melody with Variations.” In other words, the first title not only describes the form of the work (variation form) but it also places the work in the piano ballade genre, while the second title reveals the traditional theme-and-variations form placing it among other piano variation sets. Therefore, considering also the formal similarities between the two works, the following questions can be posed: Should one examine Grieg’s formal model in the context of the piano ballade genre or as the traditional theme-and-variations form? Which elements of the two works are associated with the ballade genre and how are these elements presented within the variation form?

Grieg’s friend and fellow composer Julius Röntgen—who also composed a *Ballade on a Norwegian Folk Melody* for orchestra using the variation form (in 1896),⁵—had referred to the formal correspondence between Grieg’s *Op.24* and *Op.51*:

Röntgen adds a work catalogue as supplement to his Grieg biography. In the section ‘For Piano’ Röntgen compared the *Old Norwegian Melody* with the *Ballade*: ‘For four hands Grieg has written [...] and the *Old Norwegian Melody with Variations Op. 51*, which formally corresponds to his *Ballade*.⁶

The formal correspondence between the two works leads to the hypothesis that Grieg’s manipulation of the variation form exhibits associations with the piano ballade genre, not only in *Op.24* but also in *Op.51*. It is worth mentioning that Grieg used the variation form in another, smaller work, which he also entitled as a Ballade, the *Ballade, Op.65, No.5*, in C Minor (from *Lyric Pieces, Op.65, “In Ballad Vein”*). In this piece, an eight-measure phrase is repeated six times, each time slightly varied.⁷ Grieg may have introduced a new formal structure in which the variation form meets the piano ballade tradition. In the process of studying this formal structure it is important to consider its relationship both to other piano variation sets of the nineteenth century and to piano ballades that preceded it. A comparison with other variation sets and ballades (particularly Chopin’s Ballades) reveals specific characteristics of the two works in order to create a more complete picture of their overall structure.

⁵ James Parakilas, *Ballads without Words: Chopin and the Tradition of the Instrumental Ballade* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1992), 211.

⁶ Patrick Dinslage, “Old Norwegian Melody with Variations, Op.51 - A Forgotten Masterpiece,” *Nordisk musikkforskermøte* (August 2008) [Nordic Music Research Meeting August 2008] (Accessed July 15, 2009), http://foreninger.uio.no/nmf/NMFL_aug08, 6n.

⁷ As Kathleen Dale notices, “at the end the listener is left with the feeling of having heard a pleasantly monotonous old ballad sung with deep conviction by an ancient bard.” (Dale, “The Piano Music,” in *Grieg: A Symposium*, ed. Gerald Abraham, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971, page 55)

- *Nineteenth-Century Piano Variation Sets*

Both the *Ballade, Op.24* and the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51* unfold in a series of character variations which present the thematic material in various contrasting settings. The character variation was the type of variation that was especially developed during the nineteenth century. Robert Nelson writes regarding the relationship between the character variation and its predecessor, the ornamental variation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

The nineteenth-century character variation contrasts strongly with earlier types in general. Whereas previous variations tend to preserve the expression of the theme throughout a series, the separate members of the character variation frequently alter the expression, or ‘character,’ of the theme profoundly. ... Another important difference from earlier types is that in place of a purely figural and ornamental treatment we find here, for the first time, an emphasis upon the development of motives from the theme. The character variation is thus not only more dramatic than its predecessors, through its sharp contrasts of mood, but also more organically constructed as well.⁸

Examples of character variations include Beethoven’s *33 Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli, op.120*, Schumann’s *Abegg Variations, Op.1* and *Symphonic Etudes, Op.13*, Mendelssohn’s *Variations Sérieuses, Op.54*, and Brahms’s *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op.9*, *Variations on a Theme by Handel, Op.24* and *Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op.56a*.

Another type of variation which appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the free variation. In the free variation, which emerged out of the character variation, “the basic structure and harmony of the theme are substantially altered, if not actually abandoned.”⁹ Robert Nelson articulates the characteristics of this type of variation:

The free variation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the last important type prior to the contemporary period. It marks a significant departure from all earlier species in that the bond between variations and theme is now frequently a theme motive rather than the theme in its entirety. This means that the structural and harmonic pattern of the theme is often discarded in favor of a free development, and that the free variation approaches, in plan and treatment, forms like the rhapsody and fantasia. As in the character variation, so in the free variation the expression of the theme is altered materially.¹⁰

⁸ Robert Nelson, *The Technique of Variation: A Study of the Instrumental Variation from Antonio De Cabezón to Max Reger* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949), 5-6.

⁹ Nelson, *The Technique of Variation*, 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

As Nelson mentions, the free treatment is opposed to the three structural types of variations which are the *cantus firmus* (“adhere closely to the melodic subject”), the *melodico-harmonic* (“simultaneous retention of the melodic subject and the theme harmony”), and the *harmonic* (“preserve only the general structural and harmonic outlines of the theme”).¹¹ Character variations that contain incidental use of the free technique include Schumann’s *Abegg Variations*, *Op.1* and *Symphonic Etudes*, *Op.13*, Brahms’s *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann*, *Op.9*, and Grieg’s *Ballade*, *Op.24*. Grieg’s *Old Norwegian Melody*, *Op.51* can be also classified in the same category.

The following paragraphs outline some overall structural characteristics of representative nineteenth-century piano variation sets, illustrating the various tendencies in the use of the form during that period, and also marking some structural differences or similarities with Grieg’s variation sets.

- L. V. Beethoven: *Andante* from the *Sonata in E Major*, *Op.109* (composed in 1820)

The third movement of Beethoven’s *Op.109* is an example of variations that adhere to the theme’s general harmonic structure. All six variations are written in the theme’s tonality (E Major) and they alter the theme’s character in various ways using different types of articulation, figuration, and overall texture, as well as various dynamics, meters, tempo indications, and registers. All the variations are individually numbered (unlike Grieg’s variations) and many of them follow *attacca*. The set includes some double variations and also contrapuntal variations.¹² The return of the theme is musically connected with the last variation through an extension of the last measure of the variation, making a *diminuendo* into the *pp* and *cantabile* theme-return. The exact repetition of the theme at the end brings to mind Grieg’s variation sets, which also close in the same way. However, in Grieg’s variation sets, as Gregory Martin describes for the *Ballade*, *Op.24*, “the effect is quite different, given the sudden rapture of the musical continuum immediately beforehand and the abrupt reversal thus created.”¹³

- F. Mendelssohn: *Variations Sérieuses*, *Op.54* (composed in 1841)

Mendelssohn’s *Variations Sérieuses* belong to the category of variations that preserve not only the harmonic outline of the theme but also its melodic material (intact, or embedded in various figurations). Sixteen out of the seventeen variations are written in the home key of D Minor, and only one variation is written in the tonic major (D Major). Moreover, all of them preserve the 2/4 meter of the theme. Almost all variations follow without any break, and most of them are connected through passing scalar or arpeggiated passages. Each variation varies, contrastingly, the expression of the theme. As the variations proceed, the theme’s melody is progressively disembodied and eventually reduced to short motives, while the connection with the theme’s harmonic scheme becomes looser. The structurally freer last variation (17th) features virtuoso figuration and a long climax reaching *ff* (similarly like the concluding variations in

¹¹ Ibid., 10,16,19.

¹² A double variation consists of two distinct (sometimes counterposed) parts which are individually varied.

¹³ Gregory Martin, “Grieg as Storyteller: The Poetics of the Ballade in G Minor, *Op.24*” (D.M. diss., Indiana University, 2009), 36.

Grieg's works); it eventually brings back the first half of the theme on top of a tremolo dominant-pedal. However, the return of the theme functions as a transition, especially reinforced by the use of the dominant pedal combined with a long *accelerando* and *crescendo*. The return of the theme remains incomplete, interrupted by the *sf* dominant chord. The closing, fiery *Presto*-section based on sequences that use motives from the theme, ends with cadenza-like *ff* passages followed by a few slower moving chords that suddenly *diminuendo* into the closing tonic chord. The special emphasis given to the closing sections and independent finales is another characteristic tendency of nineteenth-century character variation-sets.¹⁴ Grieg's variation sets are also two representative examples of this tendency. The built up of tension in the last variation and the climactic ending (in Mendelssohn's set) could be compared with Grieg's variation sets. However, Grieg resolves the climax with the return of the theme, while Mendelssohn uses the theme to build up more tension before the last outburst of energy in the coda-like section (*Presto*).

- R. Schumann: *XII Symphonic Etudes, Op.13* (published in 1837)

Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes* form a set of character variations which features some structurally freer variations (in this sense, it can be placed in the same category with Grieg's works). Moreover, the overall title "XII Symphonic Etudes" illustrates Schumann's attempt to combine aspects of the etude into the variations. The individual etudes —except the third, ninth, and the finale— are additionally inscribed as variations. Each etude in the set changes drastically the character of the theme through alterations in texture, figuration, articulation, meter, rhythm, dynamics, register, and others. Most of them stay in the home key, C# minor; the seventh etude moves to the relative major (E Major). The eleventh etude is in the key of G# minor, preparing enharmonically the finale (twelfth etude) which is in Db Major (the G# Minor changes to Ab Major, the dominant of Db Major). The rondo-like finale abandons completely the structure of the theme and ends the set in a triumphant way; it is a great example of the special emphasis given to the concluding sections of variation sets, as mentioned earlier. This end-weighting that characterizes several nineteenth-century character variation sets adds a directional dramatic dimension to variation form, which is episodic in nature.

- J. Brahms: *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op.9* (composed in 1854)

The *Schumann Variations, Op.9*, is another set of character variations that features some significant deviations from the theme's structure. The set consists of sixteen variations that mostly stay in the home key F# Minor, with the last variation written in the tonic major (the only other keys used are B Minor, D Major, and Gb Major). Very characteristic is the return of the entire original melody in the eighth variation (exactly in the middle of the set), after a series of structurally freer variations. Moreover, the original melody comes back with some alterations (new meter) in the penultimate variation, in the key of Gb Major which has an enharmonic relationship with the tonic major (F# Major). The two returns of the original melody bring to mind Grieg's *Ballade, Op.24*, where the original melody comes back in Variation 8 and Variation 12 (in the tonic major). However, Brahms's variation set does not feature any buildup

¹⁴ Nelson, *The Technique of Variation*, 92.

of tension before or after the final return of the theme melody, while the complete theme never comes back in its original opening version. The last variation is written as a natural continuation of the preceding one, leading to a *ppp* ending.

- J. Brahms: *Variations on a Theme by Handel, Op.24* (composed in 1861)

The *Variations on a Theme by Handel, Op.24* is one of Brahms's most outstanding examples of character variations. Unlike his *Schumann Variations, Op.9* that include some structurally freer variations, in this set Brahms returns to "the more conservative pattern of Beethoven's Op.109, 120, and 131, in which free influence is completely renounced and the technique is either totally harmonic or predominantly harmonic with melodic-harmonic infusions."¹⁵ All twenty-five variations retain the outward structure of the theme consisting of two individually repeated four-measure phrases. Moreover, most of the variations stay in the home tonality Bb Major, and adhere to the theme's general harmonic outline (the only other keys used are the tonic minor, and the relative minor). The set includes some double variations and contrapuntal variations. Brahms concludes the set with a majestic fugue paying tribute to Beethoven who very often used fugal finales in his works (among them his *Fifteen Variations and Fugue, Op.35*).¹⁶

Grieg's variation sets, Op.24 and Op.51, follow the tradition of the nineteenth-century character variations. As in the abovementioned variation sets, most of the individual variations in each set adhere to the home tonality and the theme's formal and harmonic structure, while altering—often very dramatically—its character. However, the incidental use of the free technique that appeared in a number of nineteenth-century variation sets—among them Schumann's Op.13 and Brahms's Op.9—appears in Grieg's sets in a very systematic way, and not simply inserted among structural variations. Grieg's use of the free technique is dominated by a directional force, leading over the course of several variations (or a long finale) towards a dramatic climax which ends only with the final reassertion of theme.

¹⁵ Nelson, *The Technique of Variation*, 96.

¹⁶ Grieg also used fugato elements in the beginning of the Finale in the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*.

- *The Piano Ballade Tradition*

Grieg's Op.24 bears the title "Ballade in the Form of Variations." The title informs the performer and the listener that the work belongs to the piano ballade genre. However, the *Ballade*, Op.24 is written in the form of variations, a form which had not traditionally been associated with the piano ballade genre before Grieg. In the *Old Norwegian Melody*, Op.51, Grieg repeated the *Ballade*'s formal model, even though he did not inscribe the Op.51 as a 'Ballade'.

The piano ballade genre was born with Chopin's four piano *Ballades*, Op.23 in G Minor, Op.38 in F Major, Op.47 in Ab Major, and Op.52 in F Minor. Even though Chopin's *Ballades* are not connected by means of a common musical form, they established a musical narrative model with specific characteristics. This narrative model is defined by musical structures that convey the narrative techniques found in the ballad poetic genre.

A ballad is a folk song of narrative content. According to *Grove Music Online*:

Ballad is a term used for a short popular song that may contain a narrative element. Scholars take it to signify a relatively concise composition known throughout Europe since the late Middle Ages: it combines narrative, dramatic dialogue and lyrical passages in stanzaic form sung to a rounded tune, and often includes a recurrent refrain. ... As a rule the story is not elaborated through explicit motivation or the description of personae or objects; rather, the singing pushes the story along relentlessly, leaping or lingering, sketching the story line economically and using the device of incremental repetition.¹⁷

Chopin used the ballad model not as a specific form but as a narrative genre. His *Ballades* were not based on a specific ballad or folk song; rather, they translated the narrative structures and techniques of the folk ballad as a genre into a musical composition. On the contrary, Grieg's *Ballade*, Op.24 is built entirely on the tune of a specific folk song which is progressively varied (in a similar way the *Old Norwegian Melody*, Op.51 is built on a specific folk ballad). Moreover, by choosing to base his compositions on specific Norwegian songs, Grieg establishes specific poetic and narrative associations as well as nationalistic references.

As already mentioned, the ballads are strophic songs, structured with lines and stanzas. As James Parakilas writes, "in the Nordic tradition, the melody repeats with each stanza of text."¹⁸ Moreover, structures of contrast, varied repetition, or symmetry that create specific patterns can be found in the arrangement of the lines and stanzas.¹⁹ This "melodico-textural" web of incremental repetitions embodies the unfolding of the story. In this sense, the variation form (particularly when using as a theme an original folk-song tune) constitutes a particularly fitting structure for the representation of ballad singing in the field of instrumental music.

¹⁷ James Porter et al, "Ballad," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed September 5, 2009), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

¹⁸ Parakilas, *Ballads without Words*, 40.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

Parakilas writes regarding this equation between the variation form and the strophic folk song:

For Grieg, ... the variation form may have been tied to the idea of strophic repetitions in a folk song. But in Grieg's *Ballade* the variations make such a dramatic progression that one wonders whether to understand the work as a new venture – within the piano *ballade* tradition – in suggesting both the form of the song and the progression of the story.²⁰

Even though Parakilas acknowledges the narrative element in Grieg's *Ballade* (the progression of the story, as he writes), he comes to the following conclusion after analyzing the *Ballade*:

Despite its dramatic ending, Grieg's *Ballade* cannot fairly be called a narrative work. It is a variation set in which some of the later variations no longer adhere to the structure of the theme. In that sense Grieg can be said to be following, or perhaps proving himself against, classic variation models notably Beethoven's. To analyze the departure from the structure of the theme as a narrative event would be to portray the earlier part of the work —the larger part and much of the subtlest music— as relatively inert.²¹

Indeed, the opening larger part of both Grieg's Op.24 and Op.51 constitutes a series of character variations. However, the dramatic and climactic ending of the *Ballade* transforms and brings new light to the opening series of variations which eventually is perceived as a single sequence of distinct events that progressively led to the final reckoning. Gregory Martin very appropriately associates the acceleration that follows Variation 9 (of the *Ballade*) with “a formal shift from what Aristotle called the ‘episodic’ to the tragic’.”²² As Martin writes, the first nine variations constitute what Aristotle defined (in his *Poetics*) as an episodic plot construction, “when there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of its episodes.”²³ The unexpected climactic progression of Variations 10-14 releases a narrative force which eventually transforms the episodic nature of the work into a unified drama.²⁴ Martin quotes from Aristotle's *Poetics*:

Even matters of chance seem most marvelous if there is an appearance of design as it were in them.²⁵

²⁰ Ibid., 159.

²¹ Ibid., 167.

²² Martin, “Grieg as Storyteller: The Poetics of the Ballade in G Minor, Op.24,” 20. In his D.M. dissertation, Martin aptly associates the manipulation of the variation form found in the *Ballade*, Op.24 with the epic genre and the Nordic epic tradition in particular, thus justifying Grieg's *Ballade* as a narrative work.

²³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. with introductions by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1992), 678; cited in Martin, 32.

²⁴ The word “drama” is used with its ancient Greek meaning, which is “action.”

²⁵ Martin, “Grieg as Storyteller: The Poetics of the Ballade in G Minor, Op.24,” 33.

The climactic later variations reveal a “design” that adds a dramatic dimension to an overall formal structure that progresses episodically, with no particular logic compelling the order of variations. Grieg uses the static nature of the variation form (the continuously repeated unchanging structure of the theme) as a context for the unexpected (precipitous) dramatic departure from the structure of the theme. This departure from the regular variation procedure is far too dramatic for us to consider Grieg’s work as a simple variation set. Parakilas argues that “despite its dramatic ending, Grieg’s *Ballade* cannot fairly be called a narrative work.” Indeed, if we project his *Ballade* against the ballade model established by Chopin, then Grieg’s work cannot fairly be called a narrative work. However, if we project his variation set against the classical model of variation form, then Grieg’s work conveys a dramatic quality not inherent in the traditional variation form. This dramatic and narrative quality is also reflected in Grieg’s intention to entitle his work as a “Ballade in the Form of Variations,” revealing a dual compositional conception.

A similar, overall dramatic process is also evident in the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*. In one of his letters to his friend and conductor Johan Svendsen, Grieg writes regarding the performance and interpretation of the work,²⁶ which as he says, “is conceived as a kind of drama”:

It certainly is a difficult piece to make into a well-integrated whole. I have conceived of it as a kind of drama, and I wish you could share this concept, especially for the latter half of the work, for the result is a more subjective and freer handling of the tempo. Looked at simply as music, variations can easily fall apart in such a composition—but of course a certain Johan Svendsen will prevent that from happening.²⁷

Even though Grieg’s words acknowledge the inherent danger in performing the music as a segmented variation set, they also reveal his conception of the piece as “a well-integrated whole,” drawing the performer’s attention toward an interpretation that focuses on the overarching drama of the work.

A comparison of Grieg’s *Ballade* with Chopin’s *Ballades* reveals common narrative/musical structures which justify the *Ballade* as a work following the piano ballade tradition established by Chopin. The same structures can also be found in the *Old Norwegian Melody Op.51*. Parakilas emphasizes the adherence of Chopin’s *Ballades* to a “single line of action, precipitously developed,” which according to Albert Friedman is an important characteristic feature of the folk ballads.²⁸ Indeed, Chopin’s *Ballades* are through-composed works, not episodic in form. On the other hand, Grieg’s Op.24 and Op.51 are based on the variation form which is an episodic form. However, the climactic progression of the variations in the second halves of both of Grieg’s variation sets creates a “precipitously developed line of action.” This line of action cannot be perceived separately from the opening variations because it shares with them a very important compositional element: the theme itself! The progressively varied theme becomes the “thread” that eventually binds the episodic opening variations with the

²⁶ Grieg refers to the orchestral version of the *Old Norwegian Melody Op.51*.

²⁷ Edvard Grieg to Johan Svendsen, 5 November 1905, *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends* ed. Finn Benestad, trans. William H. Halverson (Columbus: Peer Gynt Press, 2000), 646.

²⁸ Friedman, “Ballad,” in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, enlarged ed. Ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 62; cited in Parakilas, *Ballads without Words*, 51.

climactic later variations into a single drama. The idea of a single drama is also evident in the fact that Grieg avoided numbering the individual variations in both works (unlike all the previously mentioned nineteenth-century piano variation sets).

The “precipitously developed action” of the folk ballads appears as an ever-increasing momentum in Chopin’s *Ballades*.²⁹ This ever-increasing momentum is particularly perceived as a continuously increasing pace leading to a climax at the end.³⁰ A similar increasing rhythmic momentum leading to a final climax appears in the last four variations of Grieg’s *Ballade, Op.24*, which are linked, and in the Finale of the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51* (see Tables 8 and 9):

<i>Ballade, Op.24: Variations 9-14:</i>
<i>(Un poco Andante) - - Un poco Allegro e alla burla → Piú animato → →Meno Allegro e maestoso→Allegro furioso→Prestissimo</i>

Table 8. *Ballade, Op.24*, Variations 9-14: Overall increasing rhythmic momentum.

<i>Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51: Variation 14 - Finale (1-3):</i>
<i>(Adagio, molto espressivo - Piú Adagio) ~ Allegro molto e marcato→Pomposo→ →Prestissimo</i>

Table 9. *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*, Variation 14 - Finale (1-3): Overall increasing rhythmic momentum.

As Parakilas mentions,³¹ a special narrative technique that is used for the “precipitous development of action” in folk ballads is the technique of “leaping and lingering,”³² “a tendency to initiate a sudden act and then to linger hypnotically after the event.”³³ In Chopin’s *Ballades*, this technique is used in various ways:

- (a). Passages or sections “increasing in speed” or “marked as held back.”³⁴
- (b). Transitions that “leap” (break off suddenly and move suddenly ahead into the following contrasting section), or “linger” (move smoothly, especially in the form of dominant preparations).³⁵

²⁹ Ibid., 52.

³⁰ Ibid., 53-54.

³¹ Ibid., 46.

³² The term was first used by Francis Gummere in his book *The Popular Ballad* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907), 90-91.

³³ Description given by Alan Bold (*The Ballad*, London: Methuen, 1979).

³⁴ Parakilas, *Ballads without Words*, 52.

³⁵ Ibid., 66.

Examples of “leaping and lingering” of this kind can also be found in the concluding linked variations (Var. 10-14) of the *Ballade, Op.24* and in the Finale (1-3) of the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51* (see Tables 10 and 11):

<i>Ballade, Op.24</i>		
(a).		
Var. 9:	<i>Un poco Andante</i>	
Var.10:	<i>Un poco Allegro e alla burla</i>	(“increasing in speed”)
Var.11:	<i>Più animato</i>	(“increasing in speed”)
Var. 12:	<i>Meno Allegro e maestoso</i>	(“marked as held back”)
Var.13:	<i>Allegro furioso</i>	(“increasing in speed”)
Var.14:	<i>Prestissimo</i>	(“increasing in speed”)
(b).		
“Leaping” transitions:		
Var.10→Var.11,		
Var.12→Var.13,		
Var.13→Var.14,		
Var.14→Theme		
“Lingering” transitions (dominant preparation):		
Var.11→Var.12		

Table 10. *Ballade, Op.24*, Var. 10-14: Technique of “leaping and lingering.

<i>Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51:</i>	
(a).	
Var.14: <i>Adagio, molto espressivo - Piú Adagio</i>	("marked as held back")
Finale (1): <i>Allegro molto e marcato</i>	("increasing in speed")
Finale (2): <i>Pomposo</i>	("marked as held back")
Finale (3): <i>Prestissimo</i>	("increasing in speed")
(b).	
"Leaping" transitions:	
Var.14 (<i>Piú Adagio - attacca</i>) → Finale (1),	
Finale (2)→Finale (3),	
Finale (3)→Theme	
"Lingering" transitions (dominant preparation):	
Finale (1)→Finale (2)	

Table 11. *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*, Finale (1-3): Technique of "leaping and lingering."

Another important characteristic of Chopin's *Ballades* is the existence of distinct, counterposed themes, usually a primary (functioning as the narrator's voice) and a secondary (representing one of the characters in the story).³⁶ Through thematic transformation, these themes acquire new characters and they are brought together, forcing the action to a final climax, "to the brink of the final reckoning" as Parakilas describes.³⁷ Likewise, in Grieg's works, the climactic transformation of the theme in the later variations (or finale) carries the action to the final reckoning. However, in Grieg's music, the thematic transformation does not act as an additive force, in the sense that it does not bring together any opposing forces. It rather acts as a destructive force itself, which dramatically transforms the thematic material, leading to its final disintegration. The climactic transformation and disintegration of the theme represents a formal analogue to the "single line of action, precipitously developed" that characterizes the folk ballads.

The fiery energy that is unleashed in Variations 13-14 of the *Ballade, Op.24*, and in the Finale (3) of the *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51* corresponds to what Parakilas describes as the "final reckoning of the ballad process" in Chopin's *Ballades*. More specifically, the above

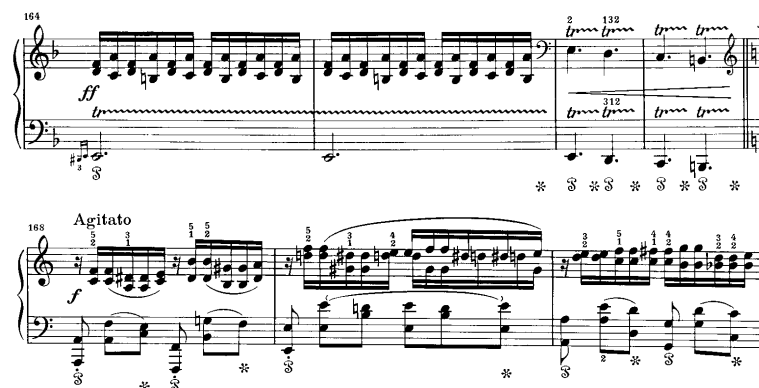
³⁶ Parakilas, *Ballads without Words*, 65.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

mentioned sections of Grieg's *Ballade* and *Old Norwegian Melody* can be compared with the final *Presto con fuoco* and *Agitato* sections of Chopin's *Ballades No.1* and *No.2* respectively (see examples 3 and 4). These sections (in Chopin's works) arrive abruptly after a temporary "lingering" on the dominant chord.³⁸



Example 3. F. Chopin, *Ballade No.1* in G Minor, Op.23, mm. 206-210.³⁹



Example 4. F. Chopin, *Ballade No.2* in F Major, Op.38, mm. 164-170.⁴⁰

³⁸ In the *Ballade No.2*, the "lingering" comes in the form of long trills that interrupt the sixteenth-notes and move stepwise from the dominant tone to the tonic (in the ending key of A Minor).

³⁹ Frederic Chopin, *Balladen*, ed. Ewald Zimmermann, fingering by Hans-Martin Theopold (München: G. Henle Verlag, 1976), 16-17.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 27-28.

A “similar type” transition also occurs in Grieg’s works (see examples 5 and 6).

38

ff

p cresc. molto e strepitoso

ff

Allegro furioso

mf cresc.

f

Example 5. *Ballade, Op.24*, Var.12 (mm. 38-40) - Var.13 (mm. 1-4).

dim.

molto

al

pp

longa

longa

(continued)

Example 6. *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51*, Finale (2) (mm. 96-100) - Finale (3) (mm. 1-8).

(Example 6, continued)

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. Both systems are marked 'D Prestissimo. ♩ = 92.' and feature a crescendo from *pp* to *ff*. The first system shows a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The second system continues the same material, with the right hand playing a more complex, arpeggiated figure. The notation includes dynamic markings *pp*, *cresc.*, and *ff*, and a tempo marking 'D Prestissimo. ♩ = 92.'

The dramatic way in which the music stops before the final return of the theme in both the *Ballade, Op.24* and *Old Norwegian Melody, Op.51* brings particularly to mind Chopin's *Ballade No.2* (examples 7, 8, and 9).

The image shows three systems of musical notation for piano, representing measures 192-203 of Chopin's *Ballade No. 2*. The first system (measures 192-194) features a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand, with a crescendo from *pp* to *ff*. The second system (measures 195-197) shows the continuation of the melodic line in the right hand and the supporting bass line in the left hand, with a tempo marking 'Tempo I' and a dynamic marking *pp*. The third system (measures 198-200) shows the continuation of the melodic line in the right hand and the supporting bass line in the left hand, with a tempo marking 'Tempo I' and a dynamic marking *pp*. The notation includes dynamic markings *pp*, *cresc.*, and *ff*, and a tempo marking 'Tempo I'.

Example 7. F. Chopin, *Ballade No.2 in F Major, Op.38*, mm. 192-203.

20 8

Andante espressivo

fff *lunga* *p* *il canto ben tenuto* *p molto legato*

trem.

Example 8. *Ballade, Op. 24, Var. 14* (mm. 20-28) – return of theme.

68 8

fff *pp* *senza Ped.*

H Andante molto espressivo. ♩ = 48.

p la melodia ben tenuta

D♭ Major → N/V

H D-dorian Andante molto espressivo. D-Minor

Viljo 3 V

p la melodia ben tenuta

Example 9. *Old Norwegian Melody, Op. 51, Finale (3)* (mm. 68-74) – return of the theme.

The restatement of the theme is particularly charged with a strong narrative expression which is enhanced by the preceding abrupt break in the music combined with the *tenuto* indication referring to the return of the original melody (*il canto ben tenuto* in the *Ballade*, Op.24, and *la melodia ben tenuta* in the *Old Norwegian Melody*, Op.51). Moreover, the theme returns with some alterations. In the *Ballade*, it is only the theme's first half that returns. In the *Old Norwegian Melody* the theme returns with some alterations in its harmonization, while its *codetta* is extended to a larger coda. Additionally, the theme-return is marked *Andante molto espressivo*, instead of the *Allegretto espressivo* that Grieg indicated in the beginning of the work (the *Old Norwegian Melody*). Through these alterations, (in both works) the theme reflects the dramatic action that preceded its return. At the same time, the return of the theme marks a return to the beginning of the work binding thus all the variations under a single narrative, the narrative that emerged out of the dramatic transformation and complete deconstruction of the theme. The return of the theme not only reflects the voice of the narrator but also completes the narrative itself. The theme conveys the narrator's voice, and the dramatic variational transformation of the theme conveys the narrative. The story-teller and the story are bound together; after all, there is no story without a story-teller, and similarly there is no story-teller without a story. In Grieg's variation sets, the return of the theme creates a different kind of "framing effect" than the one found in Chopin's Ballades, as in Grieg's works the narrator and the characters of the story speak through the same voice which—even though altered and transformed—is always present: the theme. Additionally, the continuously varied theme carries one more voice, the voice of the ballad-singer who sings the same melody with each stanza of the text. The theme suggests the ever-repeating melody of a ballad, while its variations suggest the different episodes in the ballad's narrative. In total, Grieg aims to represent not only the narrative structures of the folk ballads but also ballad singing as a musico-narrative performance event.

Conclusion

In the *Ballade*, Op.24 and the *Old Norwegian Melody*, Op.51, Grieg proved his remarkable skills in the use of the variation form. Both works reflect Grieg's exceptional lyrical gifts, exquisite harmonic idiom, and compositional craftsmanship. Moreover, they illustrate a unique manipulation of the variation form characterized by narrative and dramatic dimensions. In the Op.24 and Op.51, the variation procedure becomes a narrative itself. For Grieg, the variation form had a special meaning as a result of its inner structural connection with the stanzaic process of folk ballad-singing. On this common structural basis, he absorbed narrative strategies from the already established piano ballade tradition, creating thus a hybrid form that introduced a new type within the piano ballade tradition and combined the folk tradition and art music through an organic interrelationship. Grieg's variation sets are the product of a hybrid thinking, a conscious blending of the centuries-old variation form with folk ballad tradition in the broader context of nineteenth-century programmatic and narrative structures.

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