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Out of Death and Despair: Elements of Chromaticism in the Songs of Edvard Grieg

Grieg's intriguing statement, "the realm of harmonies has always been my dream world,"¹ suggests the rather imaginative disposition that he held toward the roles of harmonic function within a diatonic pitch space. A great degree of his chromatic language is manifested in subtle interactions between different pitch spaces along the dualistic lines to which he referred in his personal commentary. Indeed, Grieg's distinctive style reaches beyond common-practice tonality in ways other than modality. Although his music uses a variety of common nineteenth-century harmonic devices, his synthesis of modal elements within a diatonic or chromatic framework often leans toward an aesthetic of Impressionism.

This multifarious language is most clearly evident in the composer's abundant songs that span his entire career. Setting texts by a host of different poets, Grieg develops an approach to chromaticism that reflects the Romantic themes of death and despair. There are two techniques that serve to characterize aspects of his multi-faceted harmonic language. The first, what I designate "chromatic juxtapositioning," entails the insertion of highly chromatic material within a principally diatonic passage. The second technique involves the use of $b\hat{7}$ (bVII) as a particular type of harmonic juxtapositioning, for the flatted-seventh scale-degree serves as a congruent agent among the realms of diatonicism, chromaticism, and modality while also serving as a marker of death and despair. Through these techniques, Grieg creates a style that elevates the works of geographically linked poets by capitalizing on the Romantic/nationalistic themes. At the same time, he also emphasizes more universal ideas by employing chromatic techniques that transcend national boundaries. This combination of influences finds provenance in a chromatic

¹ Edvard Grieg, *Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Finn Benestad, trans. William H. Halverson (Columbus: Peer Gynt Press, 2000), 229.

language marked by an inherent tension that exists between the national and cosmopolitan, the personal and the universal. This study will explore the elements of chromaticism in a selection of songs in order to reveal the functionality of prevalent features including chromatic juxtapositioning and the roles of $b\hat{7}$ in Grieg's chromatic language.

The themes of death and despair represent, on one level, elements frequently found within the poetry that Grieg selected. In addition, they provide a semiotic marker of the events that transpired in his own life for, as the composer noted, "My choice of poet is always connected with what I have experienced."² These themes can be traced through an evolution in Grieg's writing, for this aspect of universality served as a defining influence in the molding of his chromatic language. An important point of departure, however, lies in the more familiar realm of his piano works.

The autumn of 1875 marked an unusually severe period of death and despair in Grieg's life. That season, both of his parents died within months of each other, which drove the composer into a state of depression. Of this torment, he recalled that

I have not been able to pull myself together for anything whatsoever. Life and death and eternity, religion and art—everything creates hazy pictures before my inner eye . . . I thought that I would compose a great deal, but although my feelings are so strong that they overwhelm me, the urge to reflect is even stronger. I live in a continual struggle among these elements and find no resolution.³

These feelings were paralleled in a letter to the Norwegian poet Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson where he explained that "it has been dark and depressing, and I have been living cooped up with reflections of all kinds. What I have composed during this time reflects this as well."⁴ His epic

² Beryl Foster, *The Songs of Edvard Grieg* (Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2007), 10.

³ Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg: The Man and the Artist* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 199.

⁴ Grieg, *Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, 122.

Ballade, the theme of which is provide in Example 1, became the focal point of reflection during his 1875-76 battle with depression.

Example 1: *Ballade*, Op. 24 – Theme.

Six prevalent features regarding Grieg’s handling of these dualistic themes are evidenced in this example: (1) the use of a chromatic bass line serves as a harbinger of death and as a source for multiple harmonizations. This semiotic marker originates in earlier chromatic music, for example, “Dido’s Lament,” from Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* and Bach’s *Crucifixus* from the *Mass in B minor*; (2) frequent repetitions of a diatonic melody take place over a chromatic accompaniment; (3) the chromatic harmonization of each repeated melodic motive is frequently varied as, for example, the different harmonizations of the opening motive in measure 1 versus 2;

(4) structural cadences are often avoided through foreground counterpoint as in measure 4; (5) a mournful character yields to a brightening of mood (here, measures 9-11) before a melancholic return of despair; and (6) the use of Norwegian elements (in this instance, a folk melody) are employed not as a singular expression of nationalism, but rather as a means of conveying the universal themes of death and despair.

This investigation therefore concerns itself with the features outlined in this brief example as they pertain to Grieg's overall harmonic language. The term *chromatic juxtapositioning* is applied to describe the manner in which Grieg produces expressive contrast in his songs, both harmonically and melodically, within a pitch space fused with diatonic, chromatic, and modal elements. Harmonic juxtapositioning arises contextually from a given phrase when a relatively simple diatonic progression is elided by the abrupt entrance of a distantly related harmony (bII, bVII, etc.) only to return to the tonic without any later emergence; the result of which produces detachment from tonal anchors in his late style. Melodic juxtapositioning occurs when a simple, diatonic melody is set against a backdrop of chromaticism in the piano accompaniment. Together, harmonic and melodic juxtapositioning may account for chromatic procedures in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the music. While these two aspects are not mutually exclusive in his writing, they will be examined separately in this study for purposes of clarity.

Indeed, by its very nature, all chromaticism in tonal music produces harmonic contrasts. For Grieg, harmonic juxtapositioning can be viewed as an outgrowth of earlier procedures. Here again the composer emphasizes that, "in the use of the chromatic scale, my ideal teachers were names such as Bach, Mozart, and Wagner. I have observed that when these immortal masters gave expression to their deepest and most fervent thoughts they had a marked fondness for

chromatic lines, each in his own original way. On this basis I quietly evolved little by little my own sense of the importance of this chromatic element.”⁵ In the songs, as in the *Ballade*, the chromatic scale often serves as the impetus for voice-leading that subverts closure and cadence. Table 1 lists the pieces that are surveyed in the course of this study. Collectively, they serve as a cross-section of Grieg’s songs that stand in contradistinction to the works of his contemporaries in the degree to which they employ, among other elements, chromatic juxtapositioning within an expressive landscape marked by death and despair.

An early example of a harmonic nature can be found in Example 2, *Modersorg* (“A Mother’s Grief”), Op. 15, No. 4. In this strophic song, the mutual themes of death and sorrow prevail as a mother laments the passing of her son. This uttered sorrow initiates chromatic juxtapositioning in measures 11-14. As with other songs, this short phrase bursts from an overtly diatonic landscape of Bb minor. A tonicization of the submediant, Gb major, gives way to a sequence that is projected down a major second to Fb major. The mother’s journey to this distant land is short and so too is the life of the sequence.

Unlike other nineteenth-century composers, Grieg’s sequences often do not unfold within the context of large-scale tonal progressions. They tend to occur in very short segments and introduce distantly-related keys. In this respect, Grieg distances himself from other nineteenth-century practices by the frequent absence of structural motivic development of these chromatic elements. Brahms’s *Liebestreu* (Op. 3, No. 1), for instance, is indicative of the manner in which chromatic elements (flatted and raised scale-degree six) take on different structural roles and

⁵ Ibid., 229.

then reemerge in the song as part of the composer's narrative.⁶ Grieg's chromatic language forgoes such Romantic practices in exchange for a unique style that favors surface contrasts.

⁶ See also Carl Schachter's illuminating *Unfoldings* [edited by Joseph N. Straus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)] for a discussion of Schubert's uses of motivic development, which are emblematic of wider nineteenth-century practices.

Diagram 1: Representative list of repertoire examined in this study (including themes of death/despair and chromatic juxtapositioning).

Title	Poet/Text	Date Written /Date Published
<i>Modersorg</i> (“A Mother’s Grief”), Op. 15, No. 4	Richardt	1868/1868
<i>Den Saerde</i> (“The Wounded Heart”), Op. 33, No. 3	A. O. Vinje	1880/1881
<i>Epilog</i> , Op. 44, No. 6	Drachmann	1886/1886
“Henrik Wergeland,” Op. 58, No. 3	Paulsen	1893-4/1894
<i>Moderen Synger</i> (“The Mother’s Lament”), Op. 60, No. 2	Krag	1893-4/1894
<i>Vond Dag</i> (“Hurtful Day”), Op. 67, No. 7	Garborg	1895/1898
<i>Ved Moders Grav</i> (“Beside Mother’s Grave”), Op. 69, No. 3	Benzon	1900/1900
<i>Soldaten</i> (“The Soldier”), EG. 125	Andersen	1865/1908
<i>Taaren</i> (“Tears”), EG. 128	Andersen	1865/1908

Example 2: *Modersorg* (“A Mother’s Grief”) Op. 15, No. 4, mm. 11-14.⁷

11

Ak saa tom, saa tom, saa tom staar nu hans lil le Vug - ge,
 Gav du ham et Vin - ge - par og Him - lens ly - se Glæ - de,
 Oh how bare, how cold and bare, his cra - dle now is stand - ing,
 Hea - ven is rich but earth so poor, the world be - reft of glad - ness;

bb: Gb Seq M2 Fb

Another instance occurs in Grieg’s Op. 33 songs, set to the text of the Norwegian poet Aasmund Olavson Vinje⁸. These fifteen works rose out of a deep depression during which the composer was unable to work (due in part to marital troubles) until the emergence of this collection in 1880.⁹ More specifically, the third song, *Den Saerde* (“The Wounded Heart”), an excerpt of which is shown in Example 3, provides a narration of a figure who laments the painful passing of years and insatiable calls for peace. This piece begins diatonically (in C# minor) in much the same way as the preceding examples. However, as Grieg becomes more profoundly

⁷ As Richard Bass notes “[i]t is the presence of a tonal anchor or anchors, and not the intervallic alterations per se, that defines any sequence, either modulating or non-modulating, as tonal; as long as the focal harmonies are united within some larger tonal framework, other alterations (like secondary dominants) not introduced specifically to avoid a modulation may also occur.” [Richard Bass, “From Gretchen to Tristan: The Changing Role of Harmonic Sequences in the Nineteenth Century,” *19th Century Music* 19 (1996), 267-269.] The term “tonal anchors” refers to the diatonic context from which a sequence is launched and the subsequent reinterpretation of a given harmony at the end of a sequence within the framework of the overriding diatonic progression.

⁸ A. O. Vinje (1818-1870)-a Norwegian poet and leader in the nationalistic movement of the mid-nineteenth century. Vinje participated in the language debate that transpired during the 1840’s in Norway and thereby became a source of inspiration for Grieg [Illit Grøndahl and Ola Raknes, *Chapters in Norwegian Literature* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1923), 140-154.].

⁹ Sandra Jarrett, *Edvard Grieg and his Songs* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 69. See also Grieg’s comments on the Vinje songs in *Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, pp. 232-233.

immersed in the poetry and personally identifies with the narrator, his chromatic language also becomes more adventurous.

Example 3: “The Wounded Heart,” Op. 33, No. 3, mm. 7-10.

Mang - ei Rid, men en - då har get til den - ne Tid frå Gau - ken gje - ler i
 sad at start, but fol - low'd through know - ing well my part, de

c#: iv bII_4^8 (c.t.+6) ↗ Db:I
 D: V_4^8 V_3^7

Of particular interest in this piece is the striking harmonic ambiguity that occurs in measures 7-10. After a move to the minor subdominant in measure 7, the foreground is interrupted by the appearance of a Neapolitan chord in second inversion.¹⁰ The placement of this harmony is exemplary of Grieg’s harmonic juxtapositioning in that it arises abruptly out of a diatonic phrase and serves to disrupt and counter the prevailing mood of the song. What is even more striking about this progression is the fact that it does not resolve to the implied harmony of resolution, D major, for a tonicization of bII. Instead, the dominant of D major in measure 9 resolves as a common-tone augmented sixth harmony to Db major or enharmonically back to C#. This passage coincides with the text, ‘despite life’s cruel play.’ In Grieg’s setting, as part of the dissolution of life, the narrator finds himself not propelled into a distantly related key, but right back where he started: in C# with a change of mode.

¹⁰ Here, as in many of Grieg’s works, he displays a preference for the Neapolitan chord in second inversion—a rather uncommon presentation of this sonority for many other composers.

These instances of harmonic juxtapositioning are complemented by a pervasive occurrence of melodic juxtapositioning. As the *Ballade* discussed above illustrates, Grieg exhibits a propensity for taking simple melodies and setting them in a variety of chromatic guises. An example that occurs later in his oeuvre stems from his Op. 58 collection. The third song in this series, dedicated to the legendary figure Henrik Wergeland, unfolds in D major.¹¹ As shown in Example 4, the diatonic setting is disrupted in measure 15 by the entrance of C major (or bVII). While a larger function of this bVII will be ascribed later in the study, this

Example 4: “Henrik Wergeland,” Op. 58, No. 3, mm. 12-17.

12

ly - de dæm - pet o - ver tjær - nets vand,
 seek the si - lence of the for - est pond.

15 *tranquillo* *con moto*

da et suk i stil - he - den jeg fan - ger,
 Join with na - ture sob - ing bro - ken heart - ed,

ppp *p*

bVII [B:V#s]

¹¹ Henrik Wergeland (1808-1845)—Norwegian literary figure who, like Grieg, also dealt with the universal themes of death and despair. For the nature of his treatment of such themes, see Grøndahl, *Chapters in Norwegian Literature*, 52-73.

passage is symbolic in that it represents a transition out of the earlier despair and into a feeling of renewed hope that many Norwegians in the nineteenth century associated with Wergeland. The opening lines, “Come with me where ravens are flying/hear the solemn breeze through pine boughs sighing/hear the carillons their dirges crying,” are indicative of the symbolism in nature that is featured in many of Grieg’s compositions. Thus, following the melodic juxtapositioning of measures 15-16, the song returns to the original D major tonality as a reflection of this optimism.¹²

Many other instances of “superfluous” chromatic juxtapositionings also occur in passages such as that found in Example 5—Op. 60, No. 2, *Moderen synger* (“The Mother’s Lament”). The piano begins the song with a chromatic line in thirds that decorates the tonic Eb minor sonority. As the singer opens with the line, “Gretchen lies in her coffin deep in the frozen earth,” this descending gesture serves to convey the grief of the text. Yet, these chromatic inner voices, like much of Grieg’s chromaticism, are never developed at a deeper structural level in the course of the work. The chromaticism quickly dissipates as the third iteration of a plagal progression (IV₄⁶-i) is followed by the arrival of a half-diminished seventh chord on the downbeat of measure 7. The harmony in measure 8 then functions diatonically as ii₃⁶, which leads to the minor dominant in measure 9. In turn, this passage is juxtaposed with a structural dominant (Bb major) in measure 13 through the use of mode mixture.

¹² Here, as throughout the course of this study, the English translations by William Halverson will be offered as interpretations of Grieg’s original Norwegian text. Though these translations do not represent word-by-word correspondences, they elegantly present the themes of the poetry for the English speaking audience.

Example 5: “The Mother’s Lament,” Op. 60, No. 2, mm. 1-13.

Molto andante

Gret-chen lig-ger i Ki - ste dybt i den sor - te_ Muld.____ Gav jeg hen-de en
 Gret-chen lies in her cof-fin deep in the fro- zen earth;____ on her hand is a

8 Ky - se, fo - ret med rø - den Guld. Sæn-ked i sor - ten
 bon - net once worn in days of mirth. Laid in a coal-black

eb: i IV⁴ i ii⁵ v i V

While the harmonic direction of the foreground is quickly redirected in this song, other songs illustrate local progressions that lead to disruptions of the diatonic projections. *Vond Dag* (“Hurtful Day”), given in Example 6, is one such example in which a placid melody is overshadowed by a plethora of chromaticism in the piano accompaniment. More specifically, the final phrase (measures 21-27) is rather straightforward with respect to the motion of the bass and the singer’s melodic line. The arrival of the dominant pedal in measure 22 is only temporarily interrupted by neighbor motion to Bb before it moves directly to the tonic in the penultimate bar for the final cadence. Moreover, the melody remains mostly diatonic and seems

to imply a commonplace closing progression (V⁷-I) beginning in measure 23 that carries through to the conclusion.

Example 6: *Vond Dag* (“Hurtful Day”), Op. 67, No. 7, mm. 21-27.

21

Vrid seg Not - ti lang i Grå-ten så - re. Det slit i Hjar - ta og det brenn på
 tos - ses night - long, sleep - less till the mor - row. Hot tears a - gain stream down, her cheeks to

Kinn _____ No_ må ho doy ho mi - ste Gu-ten sin.
 scar _____ Now_ must she die; she's lost her love so dear.

cresc. *f* *dim. e rit.* *p*

V⁷ bVII⁷ V⁷ i C

This diatonicism is displaced in measure 23, however, where the piano part enters with a diminished-seventh chord on the downbeat. The text issues a dramatic closing line: “Hot tears again stream down, her cheeks to sear/Now must she die; she’s lost her love so dear.” Grieg’s predilection for serving the text rather than focusing upon harmonic resolution is illustrated as the diminished seventh continues the dominant function, but is not readily resolved. It streams like the tears and simply melts away through descending, chromatic inner voices. Just as in the *Ballade*, Grieg utilizes a descending chromatic line to signal death. However, the inner voices become so disruptive in this last passage that the final cadence hardly seems satisfactory. While its metric displacement contributes to this unfulfilled resolution, it is the chromatic

juxtapositioning that undermines the sense of tonality.¹³ This is manifested at measure 25 through the emergence of an Eb chord in second inversion, which emphasizes the role of $\hat{b}7$ at expected points of closure as a device of interruption—one that disrupts the narrative of the text and the tonal underpinnings of the accompaniment.

The second technique in this study, as illustrated in this last example as well as in the earlier Example 4, embodies the principles of harmonic juxtapositioning through the use of the flatted seventh scale-degree. From surface-level coloring to regions of dominant function, $\hat{b}7$ frequently serves as the element of cohesion between disparate harmonic regions, thereby providing functionality to modal elements within a diatonic framework. Indeed, a simple explanation for the occurrence of $\hat{b}7$ is to attribute it to the minor scale or to assume its genesis from modality. With regard to the latter, Grieg noted that

regarding my songs, I do not think that on the whole they have been greatly influenced by the folk songs. In cases in which local color *had to* play an essential role, the influence is probably evident . . . in my songs I have only in a few exceptional cases preferred the old church modes, and I dare say that it has happened almost unconsciously.¹⁴

Rather than the appearance of modality, a more significant consideration in the analysis of Grieg's language is the extent to which $\hat{b}7$ (and the major or minor triads built upon it) functions in a diatonic structure and the very contexts from which it is generated.

One of most ubiquitous features of Grieg's harmonic treatment of $\hat{b}7$ is its ability to function as a substitute dominant. His "Epilog," Op. 44, No. 6 (given in Example 7) is but one such case where the penultimate measure presents striking contrast to the prevailing context. At this final cadence, the G major dominant is replaced by a Bb minor harmony (or bvii). Grieg

¹³ In later songs, this process eventually leads to a distinct stylistic trait in Grieg's chromatic language whereby pieces are "ended" without traditional harmonic resolution.

¹⁴ Grieg, *Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, 226 (composer's emphasis).

thereby illustrates the potential for a dominant function of bvii by literally replacing the conventional dominant with it. The diatonic backdrop is further weakened by the Eb sonority that emerges just prior to the bvii. As in “Hurtful Day,” a bvii harmonically juxtaposes the final progression to interrupt its tonal progression. In this instance, Grieg hinges on tonal dualism, employing the Eb chord of the penultimate measure as bvii to the preceding subdominant harmony, F minor. In turn, bvii⁷ of C major assumes the dominant function at the point of ultimate structural resolution.¹⁵

Example 7: *Epilog*, Op. 44. No. 6, mm. 56-60.

The musical score for Example 7 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins at measure 56 with the lyrics "Alm, auf der Alm da gibt's ka' Sünd!'" and concludes with a fermata. The piano accompaniment is characterized by dense, multi-voiced textures. Performance directions include "Adagio", "Lento", and "ritard.", along with dynamic markings such as "ffz" and "p". Below the piano part, a harmonic analysis identifies the chords: C: V⁷, iv, f:i, bvii, and I.

This cadential segment coincides with an excerpt of Danish text: “Auf der Alm da geibt’s ka’ Sünd!” (“On the Alm there is no sin”). The redemptive powers of nature and God find residence in the land of the narrator as he is called to find resolution in the fact that he must leave the hallowed land. Therefore, the final *fortissimo* climax gives way to the tonic C major at a

¹⁵ See also Harrison’s comments regarding the dominant agent with respect to Grieg’s *Piano Concerto in A Minor* [Daniel Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 53.].

piano dynamic to mark the contrast between the land of spiritual wealth and that to which he must depart. Further instances of $b\hat{7}$ at points of cadence are abundant throughout Grieg's songs, which embody similar expressive powers. In Example 8 from "The Soldier," for instance, Grieg utilizes a text from Andersen.¹⁶ Here, $bVII$ can be found to assume dominant function for measures 41-43 do not unfold with an authentic cadence in the tonic, A minor; rather, $bVII$ enters as a marker of death and despair at measure 42.¹⁷

Example 8: *Soldaten* ("The Soldier"), EG 125, mm. 40-46.

The image shows a musical score for Example 8, "Soldaten" (The Soldier), measures 40-46. The score is in 4/4 time and features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins at measure 40 with the lyrics "a-ber traf ihn mit-ten in das Herz!" and "I who loved him, shot him in the heart!". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *ffz*, and *pp*. The score is written in treble and bass clefs for the vocal and piano parts, respectively.

The harmonic weight given to $b\hat{7}$ extends in a few instances to the level of key area or transpositional level within a song. A particular instance of this harmony used at a deeper structural level can be found again in "Epilog." Example 9a indicates the key scheme in the first half of the song. When compared with Example 9b—an earlier instance of a parallel phrase—

¹⁶ An English translation of the text for the given passage is offered by Halverson: "In this world but one true friend have I; the one who now is condemn'd to die. His steps mark the beat of the muffl'd drum, and I, a soldier, I too, must come! He sees afar the place of death, where he must draw his final breath. With ribbons of black they bind his eyes, so young, so fair, how brave he dies!"

¹⁷ The different major and minor qualities of the vertical sonorities found on $b\hat{7}$ do not alter its "dominantness." Instead, the qualitative differences emphasize the role of the contrapuntal and linear elements that Grieg often employs.

one will note that the bvii in measure 11 is employed interchangeably with the dominant-seventh chord in measure 30. While the use of $b\hat{7}$ (major or minor) in large-scale contexts is not as common as in its dominant contexts, it can function this way also and serves as an important aspect of Grieg's harmonic language.

Example 9a: "Epilog," Key Scheme, mm. 27-31.

Measure:	27	28	29	30	31
Harmony:	C: V7	iv	biii----bVI	V7	I

Example 9b: "Epilog," Key Scheme, mm. 1-15.

Measure:	1	9	10	11	15
Tonality :	CM	Fm	DbM	Bbm	C#m
Relation to C:	I	iv	N	bvii	

The song "Beside Mother's Grave" of 1900 comes relatively late in Grieg's life. In many ways, it is retrospective of the death and despair that inspired the writing of his *Ballade* a quarter of a century earlier. He revisits these universal themes again, just a few years before his own death, with a chromatic language that exhibits many of the harmonic procedures outlined within this study. The rather simple text by Benzon is set in ternary form (A, measures 1-11; B, measures 12-27; and A' measures 28-38).¹⁸

¹⁸ Carl Otto Valdemar Benzon (1856-1927): a Danish-born dramatist who was known for works such as *Surrogater* (Substitutes) and *Anna Bryde* (Foster, 235).

The piece begins with a two-measure piano introduction after which the voice enters with a peaceful melody. However, the mood of the work becomes darker in measures 5-6. Grieg employs chromatic juxtapositioning as a triadic outline in the voice is set against a piano part characterized by a descending chromatic scale. As in the *Ballade*, the chromatic line acts as a symbol of death and the same is true for many of Grieg’s songs that deal with this theme as further illustrated in Example 10.

Example 10: *Taaeren* (“Tears”), EG. 128, mm. 1-4.

The musical score for Example 10, 'Taaeren' (Tears), measures 1-4, is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is for the voice, the middle staff is for the right hand of the piano, and the bottom staff is for the left hand. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The piano part begins with a descending chromatic scale in the bass line, starting on G4 and moving down to E3. The vocal line enters in measure 1 with a peaceful melody. The score includes dynamics like 'p' (piano) and 'dim. rit.' (diminuendo and ritardando).

Example 11 provides a complete harmonic reduction. This analysis reveals how Grieg divides the chromatic descent from tonic to dominant into two parts so that measure 6 acts as an altered sequential restatement of measure 5. The sequential aspect of the voice is obvious, but the momentum of the bass line and the alteration of the initial harmony of the pattern’s restatement in measure 6 (a ^o7th instead of a minor triad) serve to obscure the surface repetition (as is often the case with chromatic juxtapositioning). As in the *Ballade*, this setting also employs a functional augmented-sixth chord to serve as a harbinger of the local tonic.

Example 11: *Ved Moders Grav* (“At Mother’s Grave”), Op. 69, No. 3, harmonic reduction.

A n 5

ped

i vi i vi i V⁷₅ V⁷/III seq ⁷VII ⁺6 V⁷₆₋₅

8

B iv⁷ ⁺6 V/V iv/V dec V⁷/VII V⁷/i i V⁴/V p V⁷ i⁴⁻³

12

ped

g: i vi c.t.⁷ V⁶₅ i⁶ iv⁶ V⁶ VI⁶ (i⁶) V/V --- ⁺6/i vii⁴₂/III

18

21

m.s.

---> V⁴/VI VI vii⁴₃ -> V/V vii⁷₃ (N⁶) iv V⁷₄₋₃ I ped

25

dec. res.

V⁷₅/IV IV V⁷₆/bVII bVII bVI V⁹

A 28

N

C: N

V⁷₄₋₃ i vi i vi i V⁷₅ V⁷/III seq ⁷VII ⁺6

m3

Example 11: continued.

The arrival at V^7 of C minor at the end of the bass motive in measure 6 is followed by a “deceptive” progression. While the melody would support a move to VI, the piano part maintains a dipartite agenda. With the addition of suspensions, an implied subdominant on the downbeat of measure 7 segues to a chromatic voice exchange through measure 8 as indicated on the reduction. An augmented sixth harmony then proceeds to a V^{b9} of G minor, thereby conveying the restlessness of the text at this point. The lack of a “successful” cadence is thereby perpetuated in measure 9 as the pitch G resolves the preceding dominant; but it is ambiguously harmonized in this instance as an extended cadential six-four progression. Thus, Grieg amplifies the paradox of hope and grief as he juxtaposes this rising line with the descending motive to follow in the bass at measure 10. Indeed, only at measure 11 does one find a satisfactory authentic cadence in the tonic to end the A section.

The first four measures of the B section parallel the beginning of the A section, but in the key of the minor dominant (G minor). The chromatic juxtapositioning continues as the placid vocal line is set above incremental voice-leading in the piano accompaniment, suggesting that the mother’s “rest” is less than peaceful. Subsequently, the following phrase at measure 16

initiates another chromatically descending bass line. In addition, the sequential writing seen in the A section returns here, but with a new contour and a different harmonic realization. Foreground chromatic movement saturates the texture as the G minor tonality dissolves into a dominant of VI, Eb major, at measure 17. In turn, the passage in measures 18-20 is characterized by a lightening of mood as the mournful bass of the previous phrase arrives on Eb major. The ending of pain (suggested by the poetry) is conflated with the shift of mode at measure 20 and also marks the arrival of a G pedal in the piano, which extends for eight measures. These eight bars represent a proportionately long period for a static bass in such a short song. This timeless quality, however, symbolically serves to convey the transition from a direct narrative to a contemplative phrase of remembrance.

The restatement of the A section proceeds in a parallel fashion to the beginning. One last chromatic descent is taken up by the piano approaching the final cadence. This time, however, the chromatic motive does not lead to the dominant, but to IV. Grieg thereby initiates the descending chromatic line that extends from Bb to F (as in the B section) instead of the more probable excerpt from measure 5 that extends from tonic to dominant. In so doing, he provides a hermeneutical link between the analogous descriptions of blessings in the text. A plagal cadence then closes the piece in the penultimate bar as the incremental half-step motion of the inner voices finally leads to a IV^{add6}, marked triple *piano*. Grieg's extensive use of subdominant harmonies is indicative of the final words of the poem where the singer's lines symbolize a shift out of the hellish pain and into the endless joys of love. Taken together, these features present the universal theme that redemption in death is offered amidst the paradox of grief and despair.

From these examples, an aesthetic view emerges in which Grieg responds on a personal level to numerous obstacles encountered throughout his life including the death of his daughter,

the loss of his parents, and the near dissolution of his marriage. From a language of small-scale chromatic juxtapositioning and multiple functions of $b\hat{7}$ evolved a style that paid homage not simply to his country, but also to a cosmopolitan harmonic language marked by the same traits issued in his 1875 *Ballade*. He elevated the works of these geographically linked poets by capitalizing upon these themes. As he sometimes preferred to emphasize the widespread over the national, so too do his elements of chromaticism—marked by chromatic juxtapositioning—often transcend national boundaries. Grieg extolled this virtue by noting how “this harangue about having to be a Norwegian in order to understand Norwegian music, and especially to perform it, is sheer nonsense. Music that has staying power, in any case, be it ever so national, rises high above the merely national level. It is cosmopolitan.”¹⁹ This confluence of cosmopolitan and universal impulses comes to life most ardently when one views his songs through the lens of chromatic juxtapositioning where the supposition of melody and accompaniment, progression and expression, reveals an interaction of pitch collections that remains as subtly complex as the very influences that gave rise to this unique technique.

The examples outlined in this study illustrate how Grieg invites the listener to experience the depths of humanity and not only those characteristics belonging to the folk heritage of his own country. Daniel Grimley notes that

this tension, between the infinite and the enclosed, is fundamental to the nineteenth-century Romantic perception of landscape in particular. Indeed, the inability to resolve this tension accounts for the melancholy quality of landscape in the nineteenth-century imagination.²⁰

¹⁹ Edvard Grieg, *Diaries, Articles, and Speeches*, ed. Finn Benestad, trans. William H. Halverson (Columbus: Peer Gynt Press, 2001), 13.

²⁰ Daniel Grimley, *Grieg: Music, Landscape and Norwegian Cultural Identity* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 57. For a definitive analysis of the idealistic function of Grieg’s landscape devices, see chapter two, “Landscape as Ideology.”

Grimley's notion of landscape is complemented by the universal themes presented in this study and in Grieg's statement that "I can tell you I have quite a burden on my weak shoulders—the task of arousing an awareness of the ideal in music."²¹ This unique approach to idealism emerges in Grieg's songs as an intersection of the individual, the cosmopolitan, and the national. The composer mediates these tensions through a personal approach to chromatic techniques in a language that speaks beyond the parameters of Norwegian folklore and nationalism; it communicates with humanity through the common bond of suffering.

²¹ Quoted and analyzed in Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg: The Man and the Artist* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 395.

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