

Thematic Transformation in John Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy*

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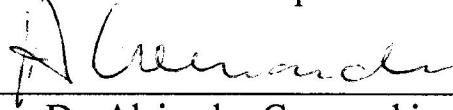
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## **Abstract**

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Thematic Transformation in John Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy*  
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John Corigliano describes his *Etude Fantasy* (1976), a piece for piano, as “a set of five etudes combined into the episodic form and character of a fantasy.”<sup>1</sup> Scholars have identified six themes used throughout the work. However, how these themes function throughout the opus has not yet been discussed and thus will be addressed in this paper.

This analysis will focus on the thematic transformation of the work's six themes. Understanding these transformations will help a pianist organize the many layers of material and make decisions on which aspects they should highlight. In addition, these insights will enable pianists to help audiences understand what to listen for, whether done through lecture or program notes. The analysis will closely examine only the first etude. A single theme dominates this movement. The analysis will show that this theme transforms from subdued to powerful. First, a discussion of the six themes will be given, followed by the main analysis. Significant transformations in other movements will also be identified.

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<sup>1</sup> John Corigliano, *Etude Fantasy: for Solo Piano* (USA: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1981).

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## Introduction

John Corigliano (1938 - ) is an American composer famous for his symphonies and concerti. His compositions have earned numerous awards. One of Corigliano's most popular pieces is his *Etude Fantasy* (1976), a virtuosic work for piano. It was premiered by James Tocco. Corigliano describes the opus as “a set of five etudes combined into the episodic form and character of a fantasy.”<sup>2</sup> Throughout the work, Corigliano heavily utilizes two intervals, the interval of a second (ic 1), and a third (ic 3).<sup>3</sup> Pianists and audiences love the work for its technical feats and high drama.

The *Etude Fantasy* can be perplexing to listen to due to its nontraditional structure. For example, there are elements of ternary form and also of arch form. By pairing etudes one and two, and four and five, a ternary form emerges. On the other hand, the thematic material used in each movement<sup>4</sup> supports an arch form. Thus, scholars have tried to analyze the opus to better understand how it functions. Pitch has been discussed through intervallic relationships and some set theory. Most significantly, scholars have identified six themes used throughout the work. However, how these themes function throughout the opus has not yet been discussed and thus will be addressed in this paper.

Two terms are important to this analysis – developing variation and thematic transformation. Developing variation is a term coined by Arnold Schoenberg, which he used to discuss the music of Brahms. This term describes the constant manipulation of a basic idea

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<sup>2</sup> John Corigliano, *Etude Fantasy: for Solo Piano* (USA: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1981).

A dissertation by Janina Kuzmas gives a detailed history of the development of etudes and fantasies and how the *Etude Fantasy* relates respectively (cited in bibliography).

<sup>3</sup> Ic stands for interval class. For example, ic 1 represents a minor second, a major seventh, and all octave equivalents of these. Ic 3 represents a minor third, a major sixth, and all octave equivalents.

<sup>4</sup> Each etude represents a movement in this work. The terms “etude” and “movement” will be used interchangeably.

throughout a work. Schoenberg wrote of developing variation: “Variation of the features of a basic unit produces all the thematic formulations for fluency, contrasts, variety, logic and unity, on the one hand, and character, mood, expression, and every needed differentiation, on the other hand – thus elaborating the *idea* of the piece.”<sup>5</sup> The term thematic transformation is “used to define the process of modifying a theme so that in a new context it is different but yet manifestly made of the same elements.”<sup>6</sup> Although earlier composers used this type of variation technique, it is usually associated with composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and later, such as Franz Liszt. One of his works that uses this process is his B-minor sonata. For example, in the first movement Liszt transposes and rhythmically augments a “diabolical” theme to create his second theme, one that is sweet and *cantabile*. Similarly, thematic transformation is the driving force of Corigliano’s *Etude Fantasy*. The themes change characters through variation of tempo, articulation, dynamics, accompaniment, and various other means.

Developing variation and thematic transformation are somewhat interconnected. Developing variation focuses on subtle and organic changes to a motive. These minute variations can generate new material, even creating new themes. Thus, through developing variation a work's material can be derived from its basic units.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the *Etude Fantasy*, the basic units are intervals and melodic contour. These units are combined in various ways to create all six themes, as well as to transform them. Thematic transformation on the other hand, tends to be

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<sup>5</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, “Bach 1950,” in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (New York: St Martins Press, 1975), 397.

<sup>6</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Transformation, thematic,” by Hugh Macdonald, accessed April 7, 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000028269>.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Frisch, “Brahms, Developing Variation, and the Schoenberg Critical Tradition,” *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 3 (1982): 216-218.

more overt in its identification. The affect of themes change, which is more readily apparent.

While this paper will show how developing variation creates some new material, this paper will primarily consider developing variation as a process that yields thematic transformations.

This analysis will focus on the thematic transformation of the work's six themes.

Understanding these transformations will help a pianist organize the many layers of material and make decisions on which aspects they should highlight. In addition, these insights will enable pianists to help audiences understand what to listen for, whether done through lecture or program notes.

First, an overview of the six themes will be provided, followed by the main analysis. Because of space constraints, the analysis will closely examine only the first etude. A single theme dominates this movement. The analysis will show that this theme transforms from subdued to powerful. Significant transformations in other movements will also be identified and discussed.

## The Themes

An understanding of the work's themes is crucial to this analysis. Throughout this paper, the term theme will not be limited to melody alone; it will include other types of material that play significant roles throughout the work. For example, theme B is an accompaniment figure in the second movement. Later in the work, it becomes fragmented and serves as part of a new theme. Some themes are comprised of smaller segments, which receive their own designation.

As the themes are developed throughout the work, they will continue to be identified by the same letter, even if only portions of the themes are present. There are six themes, five of which are found in the first movement.<sup>8</sup> The sixth is first found in the third movement. These themes are labelled with the letters A through F, in the order of their appearance.

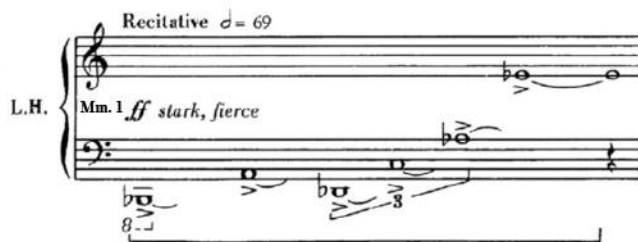
Example 1 shows theme A. Theme A begins the work and consists of a six-note motto (identified by Corigliano as a "row"). The notes begin low and *fortissimo* and as Corigliano indicates, "stark and fierce." Initially, they are whole-notes, eventually becoming triplet whole-notes. The forward motion of the rhythm emphasizes the theme's final note, E-flat. Ic 1 is prominent in this theme.

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<sup>8</sup> Janina Kuzmas, "Unifying elements of John Corigliano's Etude fantasy" (DMA diss., University of British Columbia, 2002), 46. and Beverly Simms, "The Solo Piano Works of John Corigliano: Etude Fantasy (1976) and Fantasia on an Ostinato (1985)" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 1990), 18.



**Example 1: p. 1, system 1, “Theme A”<sup>9</sup>**



Example 2 shows theme B, which consists of two parts: a percussive figure based around an axis of symmetry and a flourish figure. The initial segment is made up of minor-third dyads, reflected a half-step above and below an E-flat axis of symmetry. The repeated notes of the first portion are percussive and move forward with the *poco accelerando*, creating a sense of urgency. A flourish figure concludes this theme, exploring  $OCT_{0,1}$  and building excitement through rapid figuration.

**Example 2: p. 1, systems 1-2, “Theme B”**



Example 3 shows theme C, a figure that descends. It is marked by the presence of minor ninths and major sevenths. The latter half of the theme features descending minor thirds, separated by major seventh.  $Ic\ 1$  and  $ic\ 3$  are prominent in this theme. The two halves of the

<sup>9</sup> John Corigliano, *Etude Fantasy: for Solo Piano* (USA: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1981). All excerpts will be taken from this edition.

theme each form (0134). This theme is brusque due to the prevalence of harmonic ic 1 and “dry” articulation. The theme’s rhythmic values speed up, suggesting aggression.

**Example 3: p. 1, systems 2-3, “Theme C”**



Example 4 shows theme D, arguably the most melodic of the six themes. It is expressed in quiet dynamics and slow tempo/rhythm. The theme’s character is calm and mournful. The first half of theme D begins with a descending minor second. The second half of the theme ascends stepwise to B. The closing figure of theme D varies each time.

**Example 4: mm. 2-4, “Theme D”**



Example 5 shows theme E. In this example, theme E is marked by staccato articulation. The articulation and rhythm of this theme make it energetic. It is comprised of melodic minor thirds, separated by half step (like the closing portion of theme C). Theme E usually serves as an accompaniment or contrapuntal line in a lower voice.

**Example 5: mm. 14-17, “Theme E”**



Example 6 shows theme F. Theme F has a *scherzando* character, a sort of middle ground between the aggressive theme A and the mournful theme D. The first presentation of this theme is in the third etude. Theme F can be thought of in two ways. Intervallically, it is comprised of harmonic fifths closing to harmonic thirds. Melodically, it is recognized by an initial descent through a (0235). The contrary motion of the individual voices is like that in theme C.<sup>10</sup>

**Example 6: mm. 83-85, “Theme F”**



<sup>10</sup> Janina Kuzmas, "Unifying elements of John Corigliano's Etude fantasy" (DMA diss., University of British Columbia, 2002), 49.

The table below shows the usage of themes throughout the work.

**Thematic material of each etude (Illust. 1 from Simms p. 18. Revised by Ramos)**

	<b>Etude 1</b>	<b>Etude 2</b>	<b>Etude 3</b>	<b>Etude 4</b>	<b>Etude 5</b>
Themes Used	A, B, C, D, E	B, D, F?	F	A, B, C, F	A, B, C, D, E, F
Description	Fantasia Sectional Long Virtuosic	Slow Short	Fast Scherzo	Fantasia Sectional Long Virtuosic	Slow Short

## **Etude No. 1: For the Left Hand Alone**

As its title suggests, the first etude is played with just the left hand. This etude is virtuosic, challenging the performer to quickly traverse the entire keyboard and generate immense sound with the “weaker” hand. The movement is relatively long and features many sections, which, like a toccata, present moments of fantasy, improvisation, and virtuosic display.

This first movement features five of the six themes of the work (themes A through E). However, the most important aspect of the movement is the transformation of theme D. Themes A through E undergo minimal transformation, whereas theme D’s transformation dictates the trajectory of the movement. This paper will track the gradual transformation of theme D’s character.

This analysis begins by describing the opening section (p. 2 – p. 3 system 3),<sup>11</sup> which is unmeasured and introduces themes A through C. The opening section sets the tone for the movement and the entire opus. The first three lines of the section, which feature the first presentations of themes A, B, and C, are shown in example 7. The etude begins with theme A, played *fortissimo* and “stark, fierce.” The growl of the low range of the piano contributes to a sense of power and ferocity. Furthermore, the dissonance of ic 1 in theme A suggests aggression.

Next, the power of theme A is transformed into agility. Directly following theme A, pitches A and C are extracted from the theme on the lower staff, emphasizing ic 3. Then, two more pitches, D-flat and C are extracted as an ornament to an E-flat on the upper staff. Theme B appears at the end of the first system. It establishes an axis of symmetry on E-flat, which is repeated constantly and around which minor-third dyads are reflected. The minor thirds form

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<sup>11</sup> Unmeasured sections are labelled as single measures. Page number and system are used to reference passages in unmeasured sections.

(014) with the axis, emphasizing both ic 1 and ic 3. E-flat centricity is established through the repeated notes. The constant E-flat's *accelerando* into a flourish, which explores OCT<sub>0,1</sub>, with emphasis on ic 3.

Theme C begins at the end of the second system. It features ic 1 and destroys the sense of E-flat centricity. This theme descends to the lowest note of the piano keyboard. The latter half of theme C (pitches C – A – D-flat – B-flat) brings back the end of theme B's flourish in retrograde.

**Example 7: p. 2, systems 1-3**

**Etude N<sup>o</sup> 1: For the Left Hand Alone**  
 Recitative  $\text{♩} = 69$

The musical score is for the left hand and is divided into three systems. The first system begins with a treble clef and a bass clef, with the instruction "L.H." and dynamics "ff stark, fierce". It features a recitative tempo of 69 beats per minute. The second system includes "poco accel." and "sfz" dynamics, ending with "a tempo" and "marc. dry". The third system is marked "faster" and "a tempo", ending with "sfz.". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The rest of this unmeasured section (shown in example 8) repeats the material of the first two lines, now with more intensity. Theme A is brought back on the third system of p. 2, this time quicker, more agitated, and with less sense of space. At the end of the third system, pitches

A and C are extracted again, now using the lowest octave of the piano. Then theme B is presented an octave lower (p. 2 system 4), creating more sonority, as it is played in a more resonant register of the piano. This register is also a more comfortable position for the pianist, allowing him/her to transcend the already extreme agility reached in theme B's previous statement, by going even faster as instructed.

The sense of excitement is heightened as the pianist continues to transcend technical limits. After the flourish is played again, the A – C chord that was extracted earlier is transformed into a major third, A – C-sharp (end of system 4). The flourish figures are then extended, traversing more of the keyboard, thus increasing the demand on the pianist, especially regarding balance and power at the extreme ranges. The section ends with an *accelerando* to the lowest minor third on the piano, the two pitches originally extracted from the motto, A and C. The increase of speed focuses on conveying ferocity.

Example 8: p. 2, system 4 to p. 3, system 3

The musical score consists of five systems of music. The first system (p. 2, system 4) begins with a piano introduction marked 'accel.' and 'sfz.', leading to a section marked 'a tempo'. The second system (p. 2, system 5) continues with 'sfz.' and '(a tempo)' markings, featuring intricate fingerings and a triplet. The third system (p. 3, system 1) shows a continuation of the melodic line with a '3' marking. The fourth system (p. 3, system 2) is marked 'accel.' and 'cresc.', with a triplet and a sixteenth-note run. The fifth system (p. 3, system 3) is marked 'Slower (♩ = 76)', 'f poss.', 'lunga', and 'p icy', with a '5' marking and a change in tempo and dynamics.

The initial section projected power, aggression, and ferocity, achieved through loud dynamics and rapid figuration. It explored OCT<sub>0,1</sub>, and focused on ic 1 and ic 3, which are significant interval classes throughout the work. Ic 5 was also introduced between the fifth and



sixth elements of theme A. This section functioned both as an introduction and an exposition. The following section (mm. 2-8) is measured and offers respite from the intensity of the first section. The second section is slow and its character is bleak and cold. A new theme, D, begins as a lyrical line.

Theme D (shown in example 9) is the primary theme of the first movement. Initially, its character is “lamenting.” This theme is made up of two segments. The first is a descending minor-second figure, hereafter referred to as the incipit of theme D. Generally, the first note is long and the second is short, though this is inconsistent throughout. At times the first note is shortened, conveying a sense of forward motion. The second segment, G-sharp – A-sharp – B, is henceforth referred to as the stepwise ascent of theme D. The closing figures of theme D vary throughout the piece. In this first presentation, the closing figure dies away, fading into the next ornament (mm. 5-6).

**Example 9: mm. 2-9**

The musical score for Example 9, mm. 2-9, is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 2-5) is marked "Slower (♩ = 76)" and "f poss. lunga". It features "Theme D incipit" (Mm. 2) and "Theme D stepwise ascent". The second system (mm. 6-9) features "Incipit" (Mm. 6) and "Stepwise ascent". Both systems conclude with "Fading into ornament". The score includes treble and bass clefs, various time signatures (4/4, 3/4, 2/4), and dynamic markings like "p" and "f".

Material and compositional techniques used previously ornament theme D. As shown in the lower staff of m. 2 in example 9, the extracted A–C from the previous measure is reinterpreted as an ornament to theme D. Using the concept of “axis of symmetry” from theme B, this minor-third ornament is reflected over an A-flat axis. To execute the figuration, one must use finger-legato and play slower, to control the articulation.

After its first presentation, theme D gains forward momentum. In m. 6 it is repeated. The incipit is played three times instead of just twice, with the second and third iterations overlapping. Coinciding with the end of the third iteration is the stepwise ascent portion of the theme. Fragmentation used as an “interruption,” gives theme D a sense of urgency.

Mm. 9-12 (shown in example 10) serve as a transition and demonstrates relationships between important intervals. In m. 9, theme D is fragmented to just the incipit. This fragment is varied; its descending half-step is transposed up by two half-steps and then expanded in both directions, from B-flat–A to C–G (lower staff of m. 9). The C–G reminds one of the ic 5 introduced in theme A. After the G, by following the pattern of expanding intervals, D–F is expected. The D is found in m. 10, harmonized to create a (014). This sonority’s E-flat and G-flat are then reinterpreted melodically in the upper staff. The expected F is finally found on beat three of m. 10, emphasized with a tenuto marking. The four notes, D, E-flat, G-flat, and F are then reordered. The interval class from beat 3 to 4 of m. 11 is an ic 5. The quintuplet uses all three important interval classes so far, ic 1, ic 3, and ic 5. The material in m. 11 is sequenced down four half-steps to end this phrase. These brief four measures thus relate ic 1 to ic 5 through expansion of theme D’s incipit.

**Example 10: mm. 9-12**

Example 11 shows the beginning of the next section (mm. 13-21), indicated by the marking “moving forward.” In this section, theme D gains energy. At m. 13, theme D is brought back. In m. 14, the minor third that ornamented theme D thus far is turned into quarter notes. Transposing the minor third up by half-step yields theme E, a four-note accompaniment pattern marked by staccatos, shown in example 11.<sup>12</sup> The accompaniment provides energy through rhythm and articulation. The tempo gradually moves forward. This section builds until m. 22, the next unmeasured section. Theme D no longer feels lamenting; instead it conveys a sense of urgency.

**Example 11: mm. 13-17**

<sup>12</sup> Kuzmas, 56-57.

The second unmeasured section (beginning after the double bar on p. 4 system 3 to p. 5 system 4) does not feature theme D. In this section (shown in example 12), theme D instead influences the material from the introduction. This section begins with theme B's axis of symmetry now on G, one of the primary notes of theme D's incipit. When theme A is presented (system 5 of example 12) it is first mostly unaltered, aside from an extra statement of its first two elements. However, in its second presentation (end of p. 5 system 2) the last two elements of theme A are reordered. Now theme A ends on and emphasizes A-flat, the other important pitch to the incipit of theme D. While the characters of themes A and B are largely unaltered, their pitch contents are affected by theme D.

Example 12: p. 4, system 3 to p. 5, system 3

Mm. 21

*a tempo* *ten.* *secco* *accel.*

*f* *ff* *marc.* *sf*

Theme B: Axis of symmetry on G

Theme A: Emphasis on E-flat

Theme A: Emphasis on A-flat

48190

5

In the next measured section (mm. 23-52) the character of theme D is transformed to “nasty,” as shown in example 13. First, the tempo increases to *allegro*. In m. 25 theme D is again accompanied by theme E. Here, theme E is rhythmically displaced by a quarter note. Corigliano indicates that the pianist should “mark the cross-rhythms.” This is an example of Corigliano using displacement dissonance, as described by Harald Krebs in *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*. Here, the two different layers share a “cardinality” of 4 and achieve displacement dissonance through the “different positioning of congruent layers.” A second way is “formed by the association of at least two interpretive layers whose cardinalities are different and are not multiples/factors of each other.” This second type can be seen in conjunction with the first type in m. 29.<sup>13</sup> The quicker tempo and metric dissonance accomplish the character change of theme D. Themes D and E are repeated an octave lower in m. 29.

**Example 13: mm. 25-28**

<sup>13</sup> Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 31-33.

Krebs uses the term cardinality to describe rhythmic groupings of notes. For example, 4/4 would have a cardinality of 4. 3/4 would have a cardinality of 3.

Beginning in m. 35 (not shown), theme D becomes insistent through repetition. In m. 35 theme D is transposed to begin on C. In m. 38 theme D is fragmented to its incipit, on E-flat. Until the next section, theme D's incipit is repeated insistently, louder and louder each time, building in urgency. In m. 52 (example 14), theme D's incipit is rhythmically expanded; the A-flat is interrupted by theme B's flourish before it reaches the G. The interruption allows the pianist to build intensity through dynamics, by means of the many notes of the flourish. The rhythmic augmentation of theme D and the rapid notes of theme B's flourish build intensity.

Example 14: mm. 42-54

Mm. 42

Mm. 43

Mm. 44

Mm. 45

Mm. 46

Mm. 47

Mm. 48

Mm. 49

Mm. 50

Mm. 51

Mm. 52

Mm. 53

Mm. 54

string.

(hard and driven)

sfz

accel.

Maestoso ♩ = 126

(loco)

poss.

fff dry and savage

Theme D completes its climactic transformation in m. 53, shown in the penultimate measure of example 14. Here, the tempo is pulled back to *maestoso*. The pianist characterizes “savage” through *ffff* dynamics and percussive articulation. The stepwise ascent of theme D also



interrupts the incipit on the lower staff. The interruption contributes to a sense of uncontrolled and chaotic energy. At this moment, theme D completes its transformation from a “cold and bleak” theme to one of power, ferocity, and frenzy.

Following the climax, theme D (mostly the incipit) is gradually brought back to its original character. The opening motto is presented again (mm. 55-56) with emphasis on E-flat, followed by the axis of symmetry portion of theme B (Example 15, p. 8, system 2). The stepwise ascent of theme D interrupts at the end of the first system in example 15. The axis of symmetry portion of theme B then resumes, decreasing in dynamics and losing energy. Theme D’s incipit then interrupts theme B (lower staff of third system), slowing the rhythm further. Next, the incipit and theme B overlap (end of third system) and the performer is given the instruction to “imperceptibly change to *legatissimo* and relax to 60 BPM to the half-note.” The changes in articulation, the reduction of speed, and the decreasing dynamics all contribute to theme D’s return back to a “lamenting” character. Theme D’s long journey to become a powerful theme is quickly reduced to that of its former self, serving as transition to the next movement, as seen in example 15.

Example 15: m. 58 (p. 8, systems 2-5)

\*) Imperceptibly change to *legatissimo* (Etude No. 2) and relax to  $\text{♩} = 60$

In sum, theme D directed the progression of the movement, primarily through the dramatic transformation of its affect. The transformations were achieved through developing variation; several minute changes contributed to the overall transformation from lamenting to

savage. Theme D was first introduced with a lamenting character, marked “slower” and “icy.” The theme is comprised of two parts: a slow melancholic incipit, descending down by half step and a forward moving stepwise ascent. Soon after theme D was introduced, these fragments’ metric positions began to overlap, conveying urgency. Feelings of anxiety and urgency were heightened as the aggressive themes A, B, and C were reintroduced.

As the tempo quickened from "slower" to *allegro*, theme D began to convey a sense of nastiness, through the use of metric dissonance. The misalignment of theme D with the 4/4 accompaniment, added a feeling of uneasiness; the sudden *fortes* and accents added to this nastiness, as their entrances seemed rude. The feeling of nastiness was then transformed into a sense of insistence, as theme D’s incipit reappeared, constantly repeated, almost without a break between repetitions.

Theme D ended with a feeling of savagery, as the theme was played in *ffff* dynamics in *Maestoso* (a dramatic reduction in tempo from *allegro*), interrupted by an additional statement in a lower voice. Throughout the movement, themes A, B, C, and E were varied minimally, often interacting with theme D to facilitate said transformations.

**Etudes 2-5**  
**Etude No. 2: Legato**

The second etude challenges the performer to sustain long lines, split between hands. The overall character of this movement is calm and reflective. This slow and relatively short etude brings relief from the intensity of the first etude.

This movement generates a new theme, which is developed throughout the etude. This theme is based on fragmentation of theme D and thus will be called theme D'. Transposing theme D's incipit down by three half steps creates a four-note motive, theme D', as shown in the right hand in example 16. The creation/development of this theme embodies this movement. Also, theme B's development and interaction with theme D' is significant in this movement.

The first section (the first page) features a left-hand accompaniment figure taken from the axis of symmetry portion of theme B. Unlike in the first movement, here the pulse of theme B is consistent. Theme D' and theme B form metric dissonance. While the passage is metered in 11/8, theme B is in 4/4. The right-hand melodic line is more clearly notated in 11/8, as each note receives 5-1/2 eighth notes. The metric dissonance between the two hands, shown in example 16, makes theme D' feel uneasy.

**Example 16: mm. 59-60**

Etude N<sup>o</sup> 2: Legato

R.H. *pp* (*legato*)  
Mm. 59 (5 1/2 ♩'s = d ♩)

L.H. (♩ = 60)

In m. 63 the theme becomes listless. It is compressed; whole steps become half steps. The descending chromatic nature of this theme feels endless and meandering. In m. 66 theme B is reduced to three repeated notes, which becomes pickups to theme D', shown in the tenuto notes of example 17. The upward gesture of the pickup provides a little energy, which is then dispersed with a chromatic descent. In mm. 72-73 the theme has an interesting moment where whole steps are reinserted. This yields the four notes: C-sharp – B – B-flat – A-flat. These four notes form a (0235), which is the opening set for the melody of theme F.

**Example 17: mm. 67-71**

The second etude focuses on development of themes B and D. The fragmentations of these themes are combined to create a new theme, which is found in just this movement. By the end of the movement it loses all energy, fading away to the final chord.

### Etude No. 3: Fifths to Thirds

The title of the third etude, “Fifths to Thirds,” literally describes the technique involved in this movement. While this technical gesture fits the hand well, the performer is challenged to execute rapid figuration, coupled with sudden changes of articulation. The movement is scherzo-like, with many changing meters, articulations, and dynamics. Later in the movement, the intervals are reversed, becoming thirds to fifths. Other times, octave equivalents are used, such as thirds reinterpreted as tenths. The material of this movement can be divided into melodic, accompaniment/motoric material, delineated by articulation.

This etude has three large sections defined by tempo. The first is marked *allegro scherzando* (mm. 83-168). The second is a brief *andante* (mm. 169-179). The third is marked “tempo I” (mm. 180-202). This final section is a reprise of the first section, before it transitions to the fourth etude.

Etude no. 3 is perplexing in its relation to the rest of the work. It features a single theme, F, which is the only theme missing from the first movement. This etude also has the least in common intervallically with the other etudes. There seems to be a deliberate avoidance of ic 1, the most prominent interval class throughout the work. Furthermore, Corigliano mixes modes to contribute a sense of quirkiness. The tonality combines modal elements (usually Lydian and Mixolydian) with whole-tone scales.

While the material of this movement is peculiar, its primary focus is to transform and explore the various character possibilities of theme F. This is mostly done through variation of dynamics, articulations, and tempi. In m. 123 the theme is played in unison between the hands, *pianissimo* and *legato*. The character becomes “slithery.” The theme then gradually becomes percussive through accents and *fortissimo* dynamics beginning in m. 133, until a local climax in

m. 140, which is marked as “hammered.” The *andante* section presents the theme in a “dreamlike” state, as the sostenuto pedal is used to create impressionist-like color effects.

Example 18 shows these three transformations.

**Example 18: mm. 128-130, mm. 139- 141, mm. 169-172**

8

*p sub. legato (slithery)*

8

Mm. 128-130

*ff (hammered)*

*sim.*

*ff*

Mm. 139 - 141

Andante ♩ = 72

8

*p*

*pp (dreamlike)*

*pp*

*rit. a tempo*

*rit. a tempo*

*p*

*pp*

S.P.

Mm. 169-172

S.P.

Of the five etudes, the third etude differs from the others. Its light character falls between the virtuosity of movements one and four and the lyricism of movements two and five. Theme F appears for the first time in this etude, which is perplexing. As the movement only utilizes theme F, more study should be done to explore its subtleties of transformations.



### **Etude No. 4: Ornaments**

As the fourth etude's title implies, the main thematic material is heavily ornamented in this movement. This etude is frenetic and barbaric. Like the first, it is relatively long and features similar virtuosic, sectional, and fantasia-like elements. The climax of the entire work is also found in this etude. This movement is arguably the most technically challenging of the five, requiring agile motions coupled with a large amount of physical power.

The fourth etude showcases Corigliano's ingenuity in thematic transformation. Here, theme F interacts with the five other themes for the first time. In this survey of the etude, focus will be put towards theme F, as it has the most important thematic transformation in this movement.

The etude begins *andante* and *piano*, a brief respite from the third etude. A quiet statement of theme A begins the movement. Theme B's flourish leads into a truncated theme F (first right-hand chords of ex. 19). Here, theme F spans two "fifth to third" iterations. Like themes A and B, theme F is also slow and quiet. Its *scherzo* character is gone and instead is mournful, like the original presentation of theme D. Next, theme F is reduced to just the soprano voice (four notes: C-sharp – B – B-flat – A-flat) and placed in the left-hand thumb as the main melodic material (lower staff of third system). The resulting set of this fragmentation can be found in the second movement, as mentioned previously. The removal of the lower harmony of theme F transforms it to "lamenting." This is ornamented in the treble by the right hand. The four-note fragment "C-sharp – B – B-flat – A-flat" is repeated once more, again decorated. Refer to example 19 to see this fragmentation. Ending the unmeasured section is a statement of the flourish of theme B.

Example 19: p. 17, systems 3-4

Following is a short measured section (mm. 204-217), which gradually builds energy. This section pauses theme F's development. It begins with theme C, decorated by trills and alternating with the flourish of theme B. Here, the ornaments and pedaling imbue energy into the themes. At *mosso*, theme A is colored by tremolos. Theme A is presented a few times, though not always with all its elements. The tremolos added to theme A make it feel frenzied and chaotic.

The *allegro* in m. 218 resumes the development of theme F. First, it disguises the melodic fragment of theme F used earlier (C-sharp – B – B-flat – A-flat). Following the ornament to a group of cluster chords, the C-sharp is reinterpreted as a grace note to B. A flourish interrupts the completion of the theme. Theme F then restarts with C-sharp (m. 219), again as a grace-note to B. B-flat and A-flat switch orders here, as A-flat is the grace-note to B-flat. Theme F now feels

angular and jagged, as shown in example 20. A flourish follows, which utilizes these four notes. An A is added to the theme in m. 222. Rapid arpeggiated figures riff on these notes, using the entire piano. They are no longer presented in any particular order, adding to a sense of chaos.

**Example 20: mm. 219-222**



Theme F then becomes percussive. In m. 228 Corigliano adds a C to the theme. The six notes of this transformation of theme F are played with the thumbs of both hands, accompanied by cluster chords in the lowest octave of the piano. Using the thumbs is percussive, transforming theme F into a barbaric theme.<sup>14</sup> Now, theme F's closest relationship to its first presentation is the contrary motion of voices. This is shown in example 21.

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<sup>14</sup> Kuzmas, 69. Kuzmas views the melody as a transformation of theme E.

**Example 21: mm. 228-231**

Themes C and F then are combined, showing the similarity between the two. A fragmented theme C begins m. 234. The voice that begins in the right thumb however, deviates from the half-step motion on beat 3. Instead of moving down to C as expected, it instead moves down to B. Thus, theme C transforms into the four-note fragment of theme F. The melody notes are again reordered and now played in canon. Theme F now matches the aggressive character of theme C. See example 22.

**Example 22: m. 234**

In m. 236 B-flat is ornamented, giving a brief respite from the barbaric theme F. This passage is a rhythmic augmentation of the axis of symmetry portion of theme B.<sup>15</sup> B-flats are repeated, first without ornamentation. Soon after, the B-flats become decorated, each time with a longer ornament. Corigliano indicates the passage to be played without tempo change, forcing the ornaments to go faster each time, building up energy. This transitions back to the barbaric theme F.

A variation of theme C closes the movement and serves as the climax to the piece. The theme is played in octaves and traverses the entire keyboard, creating a frenetic climax. An explosive amount of energy is accumulated through “as loud as possible” dynamics. The final four notes of the movement are a transformation of theme E, now in a low register with a grand pause in the middle.<sup>16</sup> These notes are dramatic and ominous. The climax and the transformation of theme E are shown after the double bar in example 23.

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<sup>15</sup> Kuzmas, 70.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Example 23: mm. 292-294

The musical score for Example 23, measures 292-294, is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 292-293) shows a piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble staff with chords and melodic fragments. The second system (m. 294) includes markings for 'accel.', '(hammered)', and 'f poss.'. The score is marked with 'Mm. 292' and '8'.

The fourth etude showcases Corigliano's ingenuity in reusing and manipulating material. Theme F was transformed constantly, to the point of bearing little resemblance to its original presentation. While theme F had the most development in this etude, theme C provides the climax to the work. In addition, similarities between themes F and C were revealed.

## Etude No. 5: Melody

The final etude challenges the pianist to sustain a melodic line. This can be difficult due to the interweaving of material between hands. This etude is calm and resolved. A gentle rocking ostinato permeates this placid movement. Like the second, this etude is slow and relatively short.

The character of this movement is surprising, given expectations of virtuosic works. Instead of exciting and flashy, this movement is calm and subdued. The characters of all six themes have relaxed. For example, theme A is no longer presented with forward rhythmic motion and is marked with a quiet dynamic level. Also, the aggressive characteristics of theme C vanish. Perhaps theme D has subjugated all the themes of the work to match its own character. Examples of these transformations follow.

Themes E and D are paired again here. Theme E is reduced to two notes, A and C, to form the rocking ostinato that pervades much of this movement. Theme D is the main melodic material. In m. 301 an ornament based on theme C is played above the melody. In this grouping of themes, theme D's calm character influences themes E and C, as shown in example 24.

### Example 24: mm. 312-316

The image shows a musical score for Example 24, measures 312-316. It consists of two staves: the upper staff is the right hand (r.h.) and the lower staff is the left hand (l.h.). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/8. The piece begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The left hand plays a rocking ostinato of two notes, A and C, marked *ppp*. The right hand plays a melodic line with various ornaments and dynamics, including *pp* and *ppp*. The score includes a trill in measure 314 and an eighth-note ornament in measure 315. The piece ends in measure 316 with a final chord.

Like theme E, theme B (m. 319) serves as a calm accompaniment. Here it is indicated to be played “held back.” This marking and the movement’s slow tempo and quiet dynamics make theme B no longer percussive. The middle staff of example 25 shows this.

**Example 25: mm. 319-323**

In this movement, theme F is again presented with a mournful character, no longer lively. The four-note fragment of theme F (C-sharp – B – B-flat – A-flat) is found in m. 326, shown in the tenor voice of example 26. The three repeated-note fragment of theme B, originally found in the second etude, serves as a prefix to theme F. With little rhythmic intensity and sparse accompaniment, theme F again feels lamenting.

**Example 26: mm. 325-327**



Themes A, D, and E close the work, as shown in example 27. Theme A in retrograde is found in m. 341. Here, it does not move forward rhythmically. The dynamics are much quieter relative to its first presentation. Theme A is no longer aggressive or powerful, and instead feels resolved. Both the incipit and stepwise ascent of theme D are played simultaneously from mm. 344-347. The piece comes to an end as the rocking A – C accompaniment of theme E fades away, marked “*dim. al niente.*”

**Example 27: mm. 341-352**

The final etude of the opus provides a respite from the virtuosity of both the fourth etude and the entire work. It relies on “calming down” the aggressive themes to match the character of theme D. The movement ends resolved, fading away. Further study could explore the etude’s relationship with the other slow movement, etude no. 2, or its relationship with the other bookend to the set, etude no. 1.

## **Conclusion**

Thematic transformation is crucial to the *Etude Fantasy*. This paper closely examined the first etude and tracked the transformation of theme D from “lamenting” to “powerful.”

Discussion of the remaining four etudes covered significant transformations in each. Future work could further study of the transformations in the last four etudes and how they function on a large scale.

Understanding these transformations will help pianists better perform the opus. They will be able to further organize the many layers of material and make informed decisions on which aspects they should highlight. In addition, these insights will enable pianists to help audiences understand what to listen for, contributing to an enjoyable listening experience.

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