

RACHMANINOFF AND SCRIBAN
Creativity and Suffering in Talent and Genius

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There is no greater question for a comprehensive psychology of the mind than that offered by what Freud once called "the problem of the creative artist," before which, he rather humbly declared, psychoanalysis must lay down its arms. Yet despite his own articulated reservations about the ability of the science of the unconscious to penetrate meaningfully into the depths of this fundamental aspect of the human condition, Freud himself could not help but attempt to enhance our understanding of this defining mystery.

In works on Leonardo, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Goethe, and Michelangelo, for example, he revealed an ever-present attraction to the conundrum posed by creativity, and in these and his general psychological writings laid the foundation for further contributions, of which the most significant has been the research of K. R. Eissler (1971), whose delineation of the distinctions between talent and genius is most crucial. I should also add that Freud treated a number of talented artists (Bruno Walter, the poet H. D.) and at least one genius (Gustav Mahler), providing us with valuable sources of information about the relationship between the psychotherapeutic and the artistic processes.

Freud has been castigated for referring to female psychology as a "dark continent," yet what his detractors have not realized is that the truly dark continent embedded in this comment is that of the mystery of creativity, for which the act of childbirth is the universal prototype.

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Yet, difficult and challenging as the nature of genius and creativity may be, it would be folly for us shirk our investigative responsibilities. This after all is the crown of human achievement, and the least we may expect from our inquiries is that our knowledge of general psychology may be deepened.

Allow me to preface this preliminary inquiry into the problem, which I will illustrate using the examples of the two musical giants, Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, with some general remarks about the nature of genius.

1. *The question of psychopathology.* Much has lately been made about the so-called madness of geniuses, in a way that seems to attribute to an assumed (and retrospectively diagnosed) medical condition the font of their creative ability. This is a short-sighted, superficial, and ultimately very dangerous attitude. Yes, the great talent or genius may in fact be "victims" of psychopathology, as any other individual may be, but then again what appears to be psychopathology may be something else altogether, as I hope to illustrate below, particularly in the case of Scriabin.

2. *The role of circumstance, chance, luck, or fate.* A popular notion these days is that genius is a triumph of the will over any and all interferences. Hardly so, in my opinion. A concatenation of complex fortuitous events that will always be beyond our predictive ability needs to occur. I am sure many a genius, without opportunity, or as a result of an unforeseen event, has withered on the vine. I hope to demonstrate how fate conspired against Rachmaninoff's bid for Olympus in what follows.

3. *Qualitative versus quantitative mental distinctions.* To some, a genius simply possesses much more talent and ability than a near-genius, but talent intrinsically of the same type; to others, a genius manifests a qualitative difference in faculties. I tend towards the latter assumption, that it is not a matter simply of having a superabundance of one kind of element, but a differing element altogether.

4. *Types or kinds of genius.* I have rather simplistically divided this realm, like Caesar's Gaul, into three domains: the artistic, scientific, and political/criminal. The *political/criminal* genius manipulates lives, people, the very earth which it seeks to organize according to inner demands (e.g., Alexander, Caesar, Augustus, Napoleon, etc.), and its swath of destruction is greatest

of all. This kind of intelligence is one of shrewdness, quick action, and pragmatic machination coupled with a detachment from the immediacy of the claims of humanity.

The *scientific* genius manipulates facts, and no matter how original or paradigmatic an idea, is inexorably tied to observation, explanation, and the power that results from knowledge. (It is quite possible that the process of science will facilitate the discovery of new laws and revolutionary ideas in the course of its ordinary progress and that it will free itself from dependence upon the individual genius, thus representing a triumph of cooperative collectivism.)

The *artistic* genius, on the other hand, is the most mysterious, most incomprehensible and most beautiful of all, for its mission is most purely creative, most purely an act of love, least tied to practical power and advantage. It is also the most difficult to find agreement upon, owing to the matter of "taste" or subjectivity in apprehension, and many an academic battle has been waged between adherents of one or other aspirant. There may yet be a time when the gods of today are discarded in favor of others, when even Mozart may be dethroned, unlikely as it may seem. But artistic creativity remains a solitary affair rather than a collective enterprise, and its demands upon the personality are most burdensome, most excessive, and most debilitating. The accomplishments and rewards of artistic creation are far different from those of the political or scientific genius: Here there is no demonstrably novel explanation of the natural world which makes for the practical accretion of power (such as the splitting of the atom and the harnessing of energy), there are no spoils of war with its expansion of territory and appropriation of labor, nor benefits of large-scale human reorganization. Instead there is the daunting and impossible task of creation *ab nihilo*—poetry, in the etymological sense of the word.

5. *The destructive aspect of creativity.* The genius is typically a most difficult person: He cuts a wide swath of destruction in his personal dealings while serving as benefactor to humanity as a whole. Tolstoy is said to have remarked that all of the good of a genius finds expression in his work; the bad is left for those in his immediate orb. With few exceptions this appears very much to be the case. Destruction too must occur of artistic precedes-

sors within the genius's field, that is, the work of forebears must be surpassed in the genius's estimation, and in some instances this may even amount to open disparagement and repudiation.

6. *The link between creativity and suffering.* Are we prey to a deeply ingrained myth of Western culture that only intense suffering can yield novel creative works, that the artist must sacrifice personal happiness for the abstract accomplishments of his handiwork? I doubt it—that is, I doubt the mythic nature of this notion. The strains imposed by the task of discovering a novel expressive language are generally impossible to sustain and can only be overcome by an interlocking complex of fortunate circumstance, personal support, and private courage.

7. *Assimilation, exclusion, and optimal stimulation.* The artistic genius must in the course of his education assimilate the fundamentals of his art and heritage, and must reach a profound understanding of basic principles through study, performance, and the like, but must also, if he is to succeed in creating new values, avoid total immersion in the works of his forebears. As I see it, a kind of optimal stimulation is achieved, principally unconsciously, wherein the exposure to others' work is kept within bounds that do not confuse or overcome the task of novel creation. Hence it becomes necessary for the genius to exclude from his ken a flood of perceptual influences lest they, no matter how beautiful or great, contaminate efforts to achieve creative independence.

8. *Courage and character.* Genius is not solely an outcome of intellectual endowment: It requires courageousness and attributes of character that can withstand prejudice and ignorance and persist in dedication to a line of development that runs contrary to commonly accepted notions. Darwin's personal achievement seems more of doggedness, courage, and character rather than sheer intellectual brilliance.

Finally, there are no more controversial topics than those of genius and music, so whatever I conclude, with whatever caveats, is sure to be disputed, a phenomenon which I can neither prevent nor rue, since disputation is certain to lead to further inquiry and interest.

The opportunity to compare the parallel lives of Rachmaninoff and Scriabin has proven irresistible: It is as if Nature had

taken it upon herself to run a controlled experiment, an experiment which, notwithstanding the enormous number of variables, may provide some small sliver of a clue about psychological matters of utmost import. I do hope to shed some light on the psychological preconditions for the evolution of genius from talent, and I hope also to be able to apply some of my observations to the practical task of psychotherapy with the creatively gifted.

The best and most revealing record of a composer's creative life is of course his or her music, its character and trajectory, and here again in the different routes taken by Rachmaninoff and Scriabin differences of psychology are manifestly displayed.

RACHMANINOFF AND SCRIBABIN: PARALLELS AND DIVERGENCES

Scriabin was born in Moscow in 1871, Rachmaninoff in St. Petersburg in 1873. As contemporaries they were each possessed of prodigious musical abilities, though it appears as if Rachmaninoff's were superior, compared as he was to the young Mozart. Both men were ushered into a world poised for a cataclysm: politically, socially, martially, and artistically. It was the most exciting of times. Serious Russian music was relatively young and the sense of a national musical mission was ubiquitously felt. After Glinka, the father of Russian music, came the so-called "mighty handful"—Rimsky-Korsakov, Cui, Moussorgsky, Borodin, Balakirev—who were virtually self-taught and thus imbued with a powerful originality: pioneering "amateurs" outside an academic conservatory. And of course there was Tchaikovsky's imposing eminence, accompanied by an explosion of Russian literary genius in the personages of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenyev. In a relatively brief period of time Russian music rose to magnificent heights and established a tradition of rigor and high accomplishment in its young conservatories.

Both Rachmaninoff and Scriabin studied with the same piano teacher, the flamboyant Zverev, and at the same conservatory: the Moscow Conservatoire. Both excelled, Rachmaninoff taking his much-prized Great Gold Medal, only the third in the Conservatoire's history to do so, and Scriabin taking the Little Gold Medal. Tchaikovsky was for Rachmaninoff an idol and

mentor; for Scriabin he meant a kind of music to avoid. They respected each other's talents, however different their musical sensibilities were to become.

After graduation from the Conservatoire, both applied themselves principally to composition. But here Fate intervened. Following the performance of his First Symphony in St. Petersburg in 1895, Rachmaninoff was plunged into an emotional crisis which scarred him for life and in my opinion (Garcia, 2004) drew him away from the path towards truly great compositional achievement. When, with the help of hypnotherapist Nikolai Dahl, Rachmaninoff resumed composition, it was with his Second Piano Concerto, a decidedly Tchaikovskyan work. None of his subsequent compositions would show more than glimpses of the powerful originality of his First Symphony, which Rachmaninoff literally removed from public view altogether. Thus, at a time of tremendous creative ferment, a potentially influential work was withdrawn from the field, an act of artistic self-immolation. Rachmaninoff then applied his talents to conducting, and later developed himself into a pianist of magnificent artistry, though apparently limited repertoire. He continued to compose, though not prolifically and certainly not in any groundbreaking fashion. Archconservative Cesar Cui, who had savagely attacked the First Symphony, praised the Second Piano Concerto; critic Grigori Prokofiev attributed to the Third Concerto, possibly Rachmaninoff's best-loved work, "a freshness of inspiration that doesn't aspire to the discovery of new paths" (Bertensson & Leyda, p. 166). Various self-observations indicate that he regretted his decision to "chase three hares," and that he admired Medtner for so exclusively dedicating himself to composition at the expense of any other pursuit, disparagingly comparing himself to a grisette addicted to the performing hall.

The conclusions I reached from my independent analysis of Rachmaninoff's reminiscences (Garcia, 2004; Riesemann, 1934) were corroborated by those of the critic Leonid Sabaneyev, who wrote in 1916:

The searches of a great talent are always interesting. Although personally I cannot consider Rachmaninoff a musical phenomenon of the highest order (for me his personality as a musician, as conductor, and especially as pianist must be placed above his ca-

reer as composer, in which I acknowledge him as an outstanding talent, no more), nevertheless one senses in him a tremendous inner power, a potentiality that some barrier prevents from emerging fully. . . . His artistic personality contains the promise of something greater than he has yet given us. (cited in Bertensson & Leyda, p. 202)

Scriabin, on the other hand, composed and composed, and in so doing evolved a new musical language. I personally hold him to be one of the greatest of composers, a musical genius of the highest order whom Fate has paradoxically treated unkindly in the relative neglect of his works. He is, too, a peculiarly modern genius, as defined by an unparalleled economy of expression, a tremendous concentration of a vast emotional range into notes that are relatively few but ferociously charged. I know of no composer whose ratio of masterpiece to number of compositions is so high: Nearly everything he wrote not only shows evidence of evolution and growth, but is simply magnificent.

The vast project he devised before he died testifies to his ever-reaching daring and transcendental ambitions. Some consider the *Prefatory Action* and *Mysterium* a sign of megalomania; I consider them the grand attempt of a genius to reach beyond his grasp.

Rachmaninoff's personal life, after he had settled and married his cousin, appeared to be quite stable. He is rumored to have had an extramarital affair or two, but if he did he was extraordinarily discreet. He was a man of few words. Scriabin's life was nearly always in turmoil, and he was a man with wide-ranging interests, perhaps overly full of words. When the boy Horowitz was brought to play for him, his advice to the boy's parents was to instill broad cultural learning. He seduced a student (statutory rape in our time), abandoned a wife, and incurred the wrath of prudish America on tour with his new "companion" Tatyana Schloezer. As a performing pianist Rachmaninoff tended to arrive at a reading and stick with it, focusing on achieving the "culminating point" in a piece. Scriabin, who played only his own music, apparently took liberties with his scores, coloring and even changing notes improvisatorily as the mood moved him. Where Rachmaninoff took pains to adhere to convention, Scriabin was unconventional—not out of affectation,

but independence, as in his predilection for going bareheaded at a time when hats were de rigueur for any gentleman, or in refusing to dedicate his compositions, contrary to custom.

At the Conservatoire the importance which Rachmaninoff attached to his grades is almost distasteful: An inordinate amount of space in the memoirs details his quest for such approval. After he had been granted dispensation to conclude the composition course in less time than usual, Scriabin applied for the same privilege but was rebuffed: his reaction—to leave without a composer's diploma, something which would have been unthinkable to his contemporary!

Yet today Rachmaninoff's music has become a concert staple, while outside Russia, where he is studied and revered, Scriabin's is more an occasionally performed oddity, a brief encore piece, despite the best efforts of organizations like the Scriabin Society of America. Unlike the serialists, his music is never a mathematical exercise; even at its most daring and disembodied it calls to the listener's earthly soul in a way that the atonal school has never succeeded in doing. Where Prokofiev drowns us in a barrage of arid notes, Scriabin's deft concentrated touch mystifies and inspires with its unique beauty. I am fond of proclaiming that not only is Scriabin the greatest composer of the twentieth century, but also of the twenty-first century! In essence he brought musical expression to the very brink at which it finds itself today, the cleft between the tonal and atonal—but more. It seems to me that in his later works, masterpieces all, the tonal-atonal distinction ceases to exist altogether, that in fact his music holds the key to the resolution of this conundrum by transcending such a paltry notion of artificial distinction (see Powell, p. 491). The sweep of creative innovation from his Fifth Sonata to Opus 74 is simply astonishing.

The Russian musicologist Varvara Pavlovna Dernova is credited with having decoded Scriabin's chordal and melodic construction. She writes:

Scriabin's harmonic system is a unique phenomenon in the history of Russian music at the beginning of the 20th century . . . In his last opuses almost none of his harmonies is ever repeated. Nor does he "use up" or wear out those harmonies already found in the *Poem of Ecstasy* and *Prometheus* which so perplexed his contem-

poraries. He continued to disclose even more and newer possibilities contained within the system. (cited in Bowers, 1973, p. 133; emphasis added)

This lack of repetition is cause for amazement.

In Scriabin we also find a "freedom from the superfluous." Nearly any one of the "little" preludes or albumleaves seems to be worth whole movements of the symphonies of his garulous and wasteful European peers. Furthermore, very significantly, there is never a trace of sentimentality in what he wrote—in stark contradistinction to Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Mahler, and many others. This repudiation of the sentimental is a paramount element, an attribute only of the greatest of art.

Unlike Rachmaninoff, Scriabin chased one hare, and one hare alone¹. His dedicated mission of constructing new cultural expressive values is a testament to the unfolding of genius, as opposed to great talent, and I will attempt to enumerate some of the psychological and circumstantial reasons why this could occur.

SOME SPECULATIONS ON PRECONDITIONS FOR THE ELABORATION OF GENIUS

Scriabin's mother, a pianist of considerable talent, Lyubov Petrovna Shchetina, died just over a year after giving birth to her son. His father absented himself from Scriabin's immediate environment to pursue a diplomatic career and left him in the hands of his loving aunt and grandmothers. Very soon Aunt Lyubov Alexandrovna, his father's sister, would decide to dedicate her life to the young boy. She became his first piano teacher, and after taking him to the great Anton Rubinstein, was advised to let Scriabin develop freely.

Rachmaninoff's early childhood was different. His mother appears to have been a demanding taskmaster, and it is of great note that Rachmaninoff mentions her only *twice* in his entire correspondence. After his father had dissipated the family estate (an apparent Russian pastime) and was separated from his wife, his mother became distant and cool, consumed more by yearning for her absent spouse than her children's interests. Fortu-

nately for Rachmaninoff, his maternal grandmother lavished her love upon him: In advance of the commencement of his musical training in Moscow, she purchased an estate solely for the purpose of giving the young boy a summer idyll!

The constellation of a "removed" father and doting maternal figure may be especially propitious in inculcating a sense of immeasurable importance in the male child, a feeling of something approaching omnipotence. Here Scriabin seems to have had the advantage: The ministrations of the ever-doting Aunt Lyubov, who gave Scriabin tremendous liberty in developing himself, far exceeded the compensatory efforts of Rachmaninoff's grandmother.

Although Scriabin, like Rachmaninoff, studied with Zverev, it was not as a pensionnaire, but as a visiting student. Rachmaninoff instead had to live with the colorful and brutal pedant, subjected to a severely coercive discipline that both ensured the development of immense pianistic accomplishment, but which also took a toll. Rachmaninoff to his credit finally rebelled and left—an act of courage that should be lauded—possibly in response to a homosexual advance, possibly the necessary act of liberation into manhood and a proclamation of compositional mission. Zverev developed pianists, not composers. Here too it seems Scriabin had the advantage: The "visitor" was praised lavishly for his pianism by Zverev, which must have irritated Rachmaninoff, and fortunately resided outside the sadistic domestic orb.

At the Moscow Conservatoire both students excelled brilliantly, though in dissimilar ways. Each had champions. For Rachmaninoff it was Arensky and then the great Tchaikovsky who had a say as visiting dignitary; for Scriabin it was principally Safonov. Rachmaninoff took the Great Gold Medal for piano and composition, Scriabin the Little Gold Medal for piano. But while attempting to out-Lhevinne Lhevinne in pianistic speed and mastery, Scriabin injured his right hand, seriously: Though he eventually recovered, the hand would be a source of worry to the end. It was a crisis of great proportions, and it is particularly instructive to peruse his notebooks from the time:

At twenty: Gravest event of my life . . . trouble with my hand. Obstacle to my supreme goals—GLORY, FAME. Insurmountable, according to doctors. This was my first real defeat in life . . . my

darkest hour . . . Cried out against fate, against God. Composed First Sonata with its "Funeral March." (Bowers, 1996, I, p. 168)

Rachmaninoff's first great crisis occurred after the premiere of his First Symphony under the baton of the probably drunk but certainly inept Glazunov. Rachmaninoff responded to this event by withdrawing and nearly abandoning music altogether. As I have much more meticulously detailed elsewhere (Garcia, 2002), an illicit love affair (very probably un consummated) was connected with the composition of the symphony, and the symphony represented unconsciously a rebellion against his beloved mentor Tchaikovsky. The biblical quotation "Vengeance is mine, I will repay"—the same epigraph employed by Tolstoy for *Anna Karenina*—reported to have appeared on the lost autograph score, was actually found on one of the orchestral parts rescued from the original performance (Martyn, 1990). Nevertheless, Rachmaninoff's response to the crisis was ominous: to destroy. He prevented the First Symphony from being published (despite having been paid for it!) and he himself languished, unable and unwilling to compose until coaxed out of his predicament by Dr. Dahl. Rachmaninoff never recovered from this setback: it was, I strongly believe, the defining moment of his career as a composer.

Although documentation is scanty and therefore specifically reliable relationships are unclear, there is evidence that failed first love affairs played a role in both men's crises. Rachmaninoff had dedicated the First Symphony to "A. L.," Anna Lodyzhenskaya, the gypsy wife of a musical colleague, to whom he had previously and openly dedicated the song "Oh, no, I beg you, don't forsake me!" Scriabin's hand injury occurred during the time he was in love with Natalya Sekerina, and one must wonder whether the initial injury to the hand; its painful persistence; the composition of the First Sonata; the physical separation from his beloved, whose mother was bent on preventing their union; the fragile state of Scriabin's nerves; and the very origins of his mystical affiliation with Nature were not all somehow related to the travails of this great crisis of impossible first love. Most interestingly, it appears that from his letters to Natalya grew Scriabin's central idea that creativity was the source of all human power.

For Rachmaninoff the death of Tchaikovsky was a tremendous blow: It deprived him of his most powerful and influential

supporter. It may seem paradoxical, but had Tchaikovsky been alive, I think that Rachmaninoff might have been able to weather the storm of his First Symphony, that Tchaikovsky would have supported musical explorations in directions different from his own. In fact, years earlier the idol had admonished the young Rachmaninoff for *not* taking liberties with the four-hand transcription of *The Sleeping Beauty*, accusing him of a "lack of courage, skill, and initiative, too slavish a subordination to the composer's authority, depriving the work of force and brilliance" (Bertensson & Leyda, p. 35)!

Scriabin was fortunate in having Safonov's relentless and unstinting praise, and also in possessing the dogged, driving support of the publisher Belayev: For both men he was peerless, and they thus helped to buttress the composer as he struggled with the invariable demons of "creating from nothing." In fact, much to Scriabin's benefit, Safonov appeared to greet every new composition as if it were literally the greatest piece of music yet composed by anyone!²

Thus far I would enumerate three factors that played an essential role in the development of Scriabin's genius:

1. The inculcation of liberty and omnipotence in the young male child by a maternal figure whose sole aim is focused on the child (which generally occurs in conjunction with a weak or absent father)
2. The unstinting support in young manhood of powerful mentors who, if they are creators themselves, have already been eclipsed by his genius
3. The response to the first great crisis of youth by the act of creation

Please understand that I am in no way attempting to assert that these conditions *explain* genius, only that they may in some instances serve as essential factors for its evolution.

At this juncture it is now necessary to discuss the inevitable internal struggles concomitant with that act of creation, and the role of suffering. But I must first clarify that I am referring to creation of original values, not imitation or contentment with the familiar, but a necessary exploration of the unknown and hence feared. Second, I must aver that for the serious composer,

the task of creation is even more challenging: Unlike his scientific counterpart, compensation for breaking the bonds of conventionality or normality is neither tangible, nor immediately evident. The epiphanies of Newton or Darwin, for example, resulted in explanatory power of immense magnitude. The composer, try as he might to order the universe within the compass of musical notation, is granted no such visible reward. Innovation is often met by rejection. Thus, the ability to pursue relentlessly the path of creation requires a commitment to sacrifice, and consequently to suffering, perceptible to others or not. In depth-psychological terms, the act of original creation (in the male) is equivalent to the fulfillment of the repressed and forbidden core fantasies, not only of oedipal possession and penetration, but beyond, though because of their seating in the prearticulate unconscious, we can scarcely specify them. All of the various means by which composers, writers, poets, and others seek to attain inspiration are in effect ways to loosen the grip of repressive forces upon the mind's ability to uncoil, and therefore *risk the loosing of uncontrollable forces which may disrupt mental integrity.*

The act of novel creation is consequently an act of immense courage: not only must the giants of the past, the composer's predecessors, be minimized, but their phantasmagoric reflections in the mind, those relics of the parental imagoes, must too be tamed. It also goes without saying that in practical terms such a mission is scarcely ever financially viable; yet the genius will endure, if necessary, the travails of poverty, as well as the blandishments of superficial praise.

There is one other indispensable element too. The genius creates a reality that competes with the overarching reality of Nature, or the external world; it is of course always lesser than the reality of Nature, but it gives the illusion of similar greatness and comprehensiveness. The world of Shakespeare probably comes closest to achieving this end. The internal construction of the genius, the new world of his making, which is then projected in the form of an artistic creation, becomes an essential factor in permitting creativity to occur, in overcoming the obstacles against creativity's expression. Here the example of Scriabin is most pertinent; I believe we can now explain more adequately

his preoccupation with mysticism, the "megalomaniacal" fantasies of grandiosity, and his culminating project for a celebration that would bring about the end of the known world to give birth to another in the *Prefatory Action* and *Mysterium*.

SCRIABIN'S MYSTERIUM

Sometime around 1902 Scriabin conceived the grandest and most ambitious project in the annals of art, his *Mysterium*. The *Mysterium* would be a synthesis of all the arts and would engage all human sensory perceptions to effect a literal cosmic cataclysm that would result in a newly transformed world. It is suffused with abstruse mystical conceptions, and so grandiose and transcendental was it that mankind needed to be prepared by what he termed a *Prefatory Action*, a festival itself of immense proportions, set in India with the Himalayas as background, incorporating, choruses, dance, aroma, lights, music, and for which Scriabin was readying himself by preparing to travel to the Orient. In its synthesis of the arts it would out-Wagner Wagner, one of the two composers Scriabin truly admired (the other, the daringly innovative Chopin). In its professed salvation of mankind it rivaled Western religious doctrine. If there is a single central element in the *Mysterium* it is the boundless creative power of art.

Madness? On one level, of course. As Koussevitsky wryly remarked, after the performance of the *Prefatory Action* a good dinner was the most to be expected. Yet considered from another perspective, the *Mysterium* was a construction of Scriabin's daemonic genius that served several indispensable functions:

1. It imbued Scriabin with a sense of omnipotence that allowed him the strength to create music establishing original, innovative, breathtaking novel boundaries.
2. It provided the framework of a "competing" reality for the composer, a world that supplanted all else, the description of which could be musically rendered.
3. It voiced in a projected and literal way the innermost unconscious beliefs of any creative artist, namely, that by his handiwork the world would be transformed, that the power of his

artistic tools was indeed omnipotent, and that the artist in creating would become immortal, cheating death, a savior of mankind.³

As Schloezer (1987) notes, "this dream was surely a delusion, but it gave meaning to his entire creative activity, it was his sun" (p. 332). For the aspiring creator the discovery and establishment of one's unique "voice" out of the relentless clamor of competing, shaping voices from the past, is a nearly insurmountable challenge. What better guide toward this independence and novel language than the world of the *Mysterium*?

It indicates too Scriabin's temperament, and the temperament par excellence of the genius, in never being content, never being satisfied with the work or means at hand. As we know, Scriabin possessed immense musical gifts, but he became disappointed in his ability to express the inexpressible by music alone. Hence the experiments with the keyboard of light for his orchestral poem of fire, *Prometheus*, hence the vast reaching beyond his own art into the fantastic project of the *Mysterium*. Scriabin's vision would take more than "mere" music to realize.

And this brings me to a subjective observation. Generally speaking, for every other composer with whose music I have been taken, I have had the sense of a personal kinship in that the composer was expressing something from me, that a melody or movement represented an aspect of my own emotional constellation so precisely that the composer had done me the favor of describing my own feelings with exquisite accuracy in an idiom far beyond my own abilities.

With Scriabin, on the other hand, the sensation is as a "watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken," that is, of being privileged to be introduced into a hitherto unimagined universe, a universe of new sensation and apprehension. In all my experience of musical listening, this is unique, and I believe it is related to the inspirational intensity with which Scriabin's *Mysterium* fueled his creative faculty.

In the aspiration to reach beyond his medium, to incorporate and transform all life itself, Scriabin displays for us, in all its nakedness, the uncompromising (and generally unspoken) mission of genius. He is Hamlet to Rachmaninoff's Horatio. He is

the genius as Prometheus, bearer of light to the ignorant from a world removed, sacrificial vessel of transport, who must pay for his audacity and benefaction.⁴

Thus Scriabin's "madness" is not madness in any conventionally understood term, but a reflection of subservience to a vision imposed by his daemonic quest to break the bonds of conventional reality in favor of the intricately complex experience of ecstasy, itself modeled after the erotic communion of earthly love.

A NOTE ON PSYCHOTHERAPEUTICS AND PSYCHOSOMATICS

Can we learn from our excursion into the lives of these composers and apply such learning to the practical task of psychotherapy? I think so. To the best of my knowledge there is no known record of any instance of classical psychoanalytic treatment with a genius—with talents, yes. Freud's analytic "crisis intervention" with Gustav Mahler, a four-hour walk in Leyden, comes closest (Garcia, 2000). Eissler (personal communication) believed that a true genius would be impervious to the ministrations of a true analysis and I tend to agree, but a *sophisticated psychoanalytically informed psychotherapeutic approach can be critical to the preservation of the creative faculty*. The "primitive" methods employed by Nikolai Dahl in his treatment of Rachmaninoff, and Wilhelm Erb, the neuropathologist at Heidelberg University, in his treatment of Scriabin's migraines, are instructive to our approaches now, which I summarize as "go gently and beware of tampering with the creative daemon."

There are times in a personality's life when the creative faculty is extremely fragile, and the sensitive psychotherapist will be cognizant and careful, will attempt to gain as full an understanding of the patient's use of other means to cope with the burdens of talent and creativity while directing the patient toward healthier constructions. The psychoanalytic approach—and I will define what I mean by this momentarily—is best suited for devising the appropriate kind of psychotherapy because of its comprehensive understanding of the psychology of the human mind. When none other than the father of psychoanalysis, Freud himself, treated the conductor Bruno Walter, he did not employ classical analysis—daily meetings with use of the couch and free

association—but instead sent his patient on a pilgrimage to Sicily! I have described the complexities that underlay this unusual therapeutic advice elsewhere (Garcia, 1990), but suffice it to say that the broad understanding of the human condition that is essential to the psychoanalyst serves as the basis for adapting knowledge about the patient into the most appropriate therapeutic tack. This is an area that has not been adequately explored. In my own work with creative and performing artists (including composers) my emphasis varies from patient to patient, as dictated by the parameters of the patient's personality and the nature of the pressing conflict. Typically this results in an enhancement of the creative capacity. One should bear in mind Rachmaninoff's own description of a composer's needs as it relates to the development of any creative talent: "Praise! Praise! Praise!" (Swan & Swan, 1944, p. 179).

Freud once rather famously defined mental health in accordance with the ability to love and to work. Implicit in this remark, but not necessarily obvious or well-considered, however, is the ability to create. Whether talented, untalented, average, above-average, genius or ordinary human being, unless the creative faculty is set into operation, the person will be, frankly, sick. *Unless one creates, one must destroy*.

Obviously few can manage to create at the level of high artistic accomplishment, but the act of creation may be manifested in much humbler, though no less salutary, and infinitely manifold ways. The essence of what we may call the "good" in humanity is just this faculty of creation, and the therapist who does not nurture the emergence and strengthening and activity of this impulse in patients is failing them.

In the genius the act of creation may well be indispensable for life—physical life—*itself*, and when creation becomes impossible, physical life is extinguished. (For us mortals, the cessation of creativity simply results in torpor and apathy, an emotional death.) I realize that I am entering into what may seem mystical terrain, but what I am offering, though highly speculative, is meant in all scientific seriousness.

Very early in his career Freud engaged in writing about psychosomatics. In particular he spoke of the influence of emotions on the power to resist infection, noting for example that the

defeated in battle died from wounds at a greater frequency than those of the victorious side, and even asserting that bona fide organic illnesses might be remedied by strictly psychological means. Freud hinted that Gustav Mahler's death from streptococcal endocarditis may have been hastened by emotional factors (Garcia, 2000). Since that time there has been growing if as yet unclear evidence of the effects of mental and emotional states on physical health and illness.

Is it all that implausible to wonder whether Scriabin's resistance to bacterial infection wasn't compromised by complex emotional factors connected with his having reached the limits of his creative potential? After all, the *Mysterium* was an impossible project, and with the composition of Opus 74, where could he have gone in strictly musical terms? The Russian theoretician Boleslav Yavorsky comes close to this viewpoint when he asserts that genius must of necessity eventually burn out, exhausting its own fuel, when he described Opus 74, No. 2 as "The soul of Scriabin's swan song . . . the last, damp trace on sand from an exhausted, vanishing, dying wave" (Bowers, 1973, p. 145). Death came to Scriabin in the form of generalized septicemia at a time when he had been writing about death as apotheosis for his *Prefatory Action*: "a sacred instant of creation, fiery instant . . . the reflection—pale, white and fatal—of Death" (Bowers, 1973, pp. 99–100).

CONCLUSION

When Leo Tolstoy was introduced to Scriabin's music by Alexander Goldenweizer, he was effusive in praise, calling it a sincere expression of genius. This is all the more remarkable given Tolstoy's reactionary artistic devolution, which resulted in his repudiating his own masterpieces and ridiculing Wagner. The giant had somehow perceived the essence of Scriabin: a conjunction of the genuine and the great.

Scriabin once unkindly referred to Rachmaninoff's music as "boiled ham," and positively loathed Tchaikovsky altogether. This was not at all out of petty malice, but rather out of an awareness that the path he had chosen to take lifted him far away from these others.

I hope in my attempt to describe this trajectory something valuable may have been gained, not least of which is an impulse to listen anew to a music that transcends itself and reveals a universe of unforeseen dimension, like Shakespeare's, enlarging our vocabulary of feeling.

NOTES

1. Here I am not including the composer's performance of his own works as an independent activity, potentially distracting from the task of composition.
2. Safonov called Scriabin's improvising "one of the highest pleasures of my musical life" (Bowers, 1996, I, p. 144); he remarked that Scriabin was "very, very great . . . a great pianist and a great composer . . . cleverer than Chopin ever was" (Bowers, I, p. 164). After reading the score of Scriabin's First Symphony he wrote: "I cannot begin to convey to you my rapture over your new symphony. . . . it is divine creation" (Bowers, I, p. 269). He waved the score of the Second Symphony to the orchestral musicians he was rehearsing, saying "Here is the new Bible!" (Bowers, I, p. 285). Such praise was of inestimable value.
3. Scriabin left no doubt about the importance he attached to the role of the artist in society: "Politicians and bureaucrats are not to be praised. Writers, composers, authors and sculptors are the first-ranking men in the universe, first to expound principles and doctrines, and solve world problems. Real progress rests on artists alone. They must not give place to others of lower aims . . ." (Bowers, 1996, II, p. 215).
4. Scriabin's project may yet hold the key for the salvation of classical music in its active engagement of the audience in a kinesthetically liberating festival far removed from the sacrosanct tedium of today's concert hall. Bear in mind too that the concertgoing experience of early twentieth-century Russia tended toward the epiphanic.

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