

L. VAN BEETHOVEN – PIANO SONATA OP. 110 (I): FORMAL, RHETORICAL, AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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SUMMARY. This article offers a combined formal, rhetorical, and semantic reading of the first movement (Moderato cantabile molto espressivo) of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 110 in A flat major (1821). Building on sonata-form analysis, it interprets historically grounded rhetorical categories and performance-practice perspectives drawn from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century treatises (Türk, C. P. E. Bach, Czerny, Hiller). In a brief, cautious semantic layer - situated within reception history and key-character discourse - the study notes the importance of the rhetorical and declamatory conventions for Beethoven's style, arguing that a purely 'note-based' reading risks missing decisive cues for phrasing, articulation, timing, and affect.

Keywords: form, rhetoric, semantic, analyze, modernity

1. Introduction

Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 31, Op. 110 in A-flat major (1821), is part of the final triad of genre works by the great composer: written between 1820 and 1822, they also benefited from numerous revisions. Their complex character is influenced by the context in which the composer was working at the time: the Missa solemnis crowns the period in which the maestro was struggling with the visible deterioration of his health. While the first movement (Moderato) is in sonata form, the second (Allegro) presents an unexpected scherzo, and the last contains an avant-garde formal pattern, which also includes recitative formulas, a dolente arioso, and two complex fugue structures. An analysis of the sonata (for now, of the first movement) is necessary when combining aspects of traditional (formal) analysis with rhetorical and semantic ones.

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2. L. van Beethoven – Piano Sonata Op. 110 (Part I): formal, rhetorical and semantic analysis

“The movement begins directly in the manner of the theme from the variations op. 109. The similarity is striking when you play op. 110 immediately after op. 109, because op. 109 ends with the return of the theme”, observes H. Riemann³.

In this sense, the beginning and the end of Sonata Op. 110 may be inspired by a note from Bülow, which he writes about the final measures of Sonata Op. 109 in his instructive edition Beethoven: *“The theme itself should be played with even simpler expression than at the beginning of the entire movement, like a kind of recapitulative epilogue, like a memory. The final measures are only allowed to be ‘softened/drowned’ (‘Hingetaucht’)”*⁴.

The theorist and piano teacher Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935), originally from Austrian Hungarian Galicia, studied all of Beethoven’s sonatas and the Ninth Symphony; among other things, he produced a critical edition of the last five piano sonatas, with numerous pieces of information and explanations, which are also visually very interesting. No detail is taken for granted but analyzed very thoroughly (Kapp⁵).

In the analysis of Sonata Op. 110, Schenker assigns a structure to the exposition divided into three “groups of ideas.”⁶ The construction of the main theme in Sonata Op. 90 is very similar to Op. 110: tripartite, with three contrasting emotional spheres that come together in an arch and round off.

FORM

The first part, in sonata form, includes the following sections:

Exposition:

Main theme:

1. First affective sphere:

a) first phrase: theme head (measures 1–4)

A-flat major, T–D–T–D

b) second phrase (measures 5–11)

A-flat major, a brief modulation to the subdominant (*) and back to the tonic (A-flat major)

³ Hugo Riemann, *L. van Beethovens Sämtliche Klavier-Solosonaten (L. van Beethoven's Complete Piano Solo Sonatas)*, p. 419.

⁴ Hans von Bülow (Hrsg.), *Beethoven, Sonate Op. 109, Instruktive Ausgabe (Beethoven, Sonata Op. 109, Instructive Edition)*, Stuttgart und Berlin, 1891, p. 35, footnote.

⁵ Reinhard Kapp, seminar on Beethoven, 27–29 Apr. 2007, Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien (*University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna*).

⁶ Heinrich Schenker, *Beethoven – Die letzten Sonaten. Sonate As-Dur Op. 110 (Beethoven—The Last Sonatas. Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110)*, Universal Edition, Wien, 1972.

c) third phrase (measures 12–20)

(ornamental passages modeled on the theme head, T–D–T–D, with a closing modulation to the dominant and back to the tonic)

2. Second affective sphere:

a) first part with two phrases (measures 20–28)

b) second part with one phrase (measures 28–33)

3. Third affective sphere: closing thought (measures 34–39)

Development (measures 40–55)

Recapitulation (measures 56–104)

Coda (measures 105–116)

Exposition

The first section of the exhibition connects three phrases full of expressiveness. The melody begins with a “C²” in the main voice and will end — in measure 20 — also with a (higher) “C⁴”, immediately starting the next period: thus, forming an “anadiplosis”, with the aim of creating a musical and mental link between the two parts. Interestingly, the “C” in the main voice returns at the beginning of the development (measure 40) and the recapitulation (measure 56); it moves to the left hand at the beginning of the coda (measure 105) and appears, in the end, again in the main voice, repeated twice, as the final sound of the section (measure 115–116).

E.g. 1



First theme of the first movement ⁷

A beautiful ‘embellishment’ of this note — but what significance could it have? Beethoven wanted to link the properties of the key of A^b major (flat keys are gentle and melancholic from the start; the four flats of A^b major, however, strongly indicate ‘death, tomb, doom, judgment, eternity are contained

⁷ David Beach, *Advanced Schenkerian Analysis: Perspectives on Phrase Rhythm, Motive, and Form*, Routledge, New York, 2012, p. 243.

within it' [Schubart, 1806]⁸) either to an allusion to C major ('completely pure'; 'innocence, simplicity, naivety, childlike language'⁹ of pure love), or to Lady Antonia, the queen of his dreams, or to a call to God — or to all of these at once.

The head of the four-measure theme (see figure 2) begins pianissimo, with a major third in the main voice, between C² and A^{b1} — a symbol of 'Antonia'? — repeated three times and interrupted by dotted notes, like sighs. The soprano and alto voices alternate in forming the chords, from the same 'imperfect'¹⁰ consonance (the major third C²–A^{b1}) to the 'perfect'¹¹ (and controversial) consonance of the perfect fourth (A^{b1}–E^{b1}).

Beethoven's dotted notes refer, according to Hiller, to a way of playing that is particularly expressive, similar to singing: "The easiest of the voluntary additions and ornaments, through which the melody becomes more lively and emphasized, is the dot after a note [...] it is [...] a means of strengthening the accent of the declamation."¹² The head of the theme thus gains "a better and more penetrating declamation,"¹³ and such dotted notes are generously introduced in the second emotional sphere of the theme (measures 5–11), as well as at the beginning of the third (measures 20–21) and, of course, in the development.

The harmony is pure A^b major, and in the second measure it 'rests' and 'waits' allegorically¹⁴ on a long B^b — a symbol of Beethoven? — in the dominant seventh chord. The melody rises and falls alternately.

⁸ Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (*Ideas for an Aesthetics of the Art of Music*), Wien, 1806.

⁹ Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (*Ideas for an Aesthetics of the Art of Music*), Wien, 1806.

¹⁰ Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule* (*Piano School*), facsimile reprint of the 1st ed. (1789), Bärenreiter, Kassel, p. 57.

¹¹ Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule* (*Piano School*), facsimile reprint of the 1st ed. (1789), Bärenreiter, Kassel, p. 57: „Ob die reine Quarte eine Kon- oder Dissonanz sey, darüber haben sich die Tonlehrer, nach vielen und heftigen Streitigkeiten, bis jetzt noch nicht vereinigen können. [...] Da das Konsonieren ... nichts Absolutes ist, so lässt sich überhaupt nicht genau bestimmen, wo das Konsonieren zweyer Töne aufhöre und das Dissonieren anfangen. Sulzers Theorie.“ *“Whether the perfect fourth is a consonance or a dissonance is something on which theorists, after many fierce disputes, have still not been able to agree. [...] Since consonance ... is not something absolute, it is therefore impossible to determine precisely where the consonance of two tones ends and dissonance begins. Sulzer's theory.”*

¹² Johann Adam Hiller, *Anweisung zum musikalisch-zierlichen Gesange* (*Instruction for Musical, Ornamented Singing*), Leipzig, 1780. Reprint, Leipzig, 1976, pp. 35 ff.

¹³ Hartmut Krones and Robert Schollum, *Vokale und allgemeine Aufführungspraxis* (*Vocal and General Performance Practice*), Böhlau Verlag, Wien–Köln, 1983, p. 159.

¹⁴ Allegory – an acoustic symbol; from the Greek, meaning “emblem” or “parable.” Here: a long note can signify “rest” or “waiting.”

In the third measure, the positive and luminous ascent of an anabasis is intertwined with a crescendo that, surprisingly, is “cut” in the fourth measure by a piano. On this ascensus, the notes are marked with portato articulation: “*prescribed as a means of indicating a precise expression and, therefore... must always be respected.*”¹⁵ Türk gives instructions on how portato — “drawing the sounds” — should be played: “*The dot indicates the pressure each key must receive, and the tie (the beam) reminds the performer to maintain the sound after the pressure until the prescribed note duration has completely passed.*”¹⁶

In this fourth measure, prepared by a phatopoeia, there follows a dilemma presented by an extensio and a salto semple: a fermata on the dominant, with a diminished fifth and a trill in the right hand, creates unease and questions. The fact that this fermata receives a trill is, according to C. Ph. E. Bach’s instructions, perfectly logical: the fermatas found “*in slow and affectionate pieces “must” be ornamented, otherwise you fall into the mistake of simplicity.*”¹⁷

“*The trill (trillo – Italian, tremblement – French) consists of a repeated alternation, at the same speed, of two notes, which, according to the key or the added accidentals, relate to each other as a major or minor second,*” Türk describes¹⁸. In measure four, the trill must be on the notes D $\flat$ ² and E $\flat$ ², not on D $\flat$ ² and D², otherwise an inadmissible augmented unison would be formed. According to Hiller, trills must be “*executed with the greatest speed and clarity*”¹⁹; they must be the same in measures 25–27, 55, 59, 84–86. Under no circumstances should a large ritardando be introduced well before the fermata, but only “*immediately before the ‘holding’²⁰ (of the final note) the tempo slows down and then stops.*”²¹

¹⁵ Hartmut Krones and Robert Schollum, *Vokale und allgemeine Aufführungspraxis (Vocal and General Performance Practice)*, Böhlau Verlag, Wien–Köln, 1983, p. 83.

¹⁶ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 354.

¹⁷ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art, das Clavier zu spielen (Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments)*, facsimile reprint of the 1st eds. (Berlin 1753 and 1762), Breitkopf & Härtel Musikverlag, Leipzig, 1969, 2. Hauptstück (Second Main Section), p. 113.

¹⁸ Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende (Piano School, or Instruction in Piano Playing for Teachers and Learners)*, facsimile reprint of the 1st ed. (1789), Bärenreiter, Kassel, 1997, p. 252.

¹⁹ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 253

²⁰ Carl Czerny, *Klavierschule*, Op. 500 (*Piano School*, Op. 500) (1842), cited in Alfred Brendel, *Nachdenken über Musik (Thinking about Music)*, München und Zürich, 1976, p. 39.

²¹ Hartmut Krones and Robert Schollum, *Vokale und allgemeine Aufführungspraxis (Vocal and General Performance Practice)*, Böhlau Verlag, Wien–Köln, 1983, p. 136.

After the rest comes four thirty-second notes, the first of which is tied to the trill note, followed by a double ascending appoggiatura towards “F².” Türk calls this appoggiatura a “*Schleifer*”: he says, “it consists of two or three appoggiaturas that ascend or descend gradually and which — as the name itself indicates — are always ‘slid’ into the main note; this can be a step above or below the last tone of this manner.”²² In our case, this unnotated *Schleifer* must be “played quickly, without regard for the longer or shorter note that follows,”²³ and, of course, on the beat²⁴. It is used “especially to enhance liveliness.”²⁵ In the same vein, C. Ph. E. Bach notes about the *Schleifer*: “they make thoughts flow.”²⁶

A *ritardando* is allowed here, because the passage can fall into several categories described by Czerny: “It is most appropriate to *ritard*: [...] c) on those sustained notes that must be struck with a special accent and after which short notes follow; d) until the passage [...] moves to a part completely different from the previous one; [...] l) at the end of any long trill that forms a sustain and a cadence and has a *diminuendo*, as well as at any gentle cadence in general.”²⁷ This fermata, which can also be seen as a small cadence, “generally should not last longer than can be held in a single breath.”²⁸

At the fermata, the “< >” sign refers only to the trill marked with the fermata character, and for the following reason: “above all, good taste has established the rule to attack dissonances, or dissonant chords in general, more strongly than consonant ones, namely because passions must be stirred especially through dissonances.” (Türk²⁹)

²² Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 245

²³ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 246

²⁴ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 246

²⁵ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 246

²⁶ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art, das Klavier zu spielen (Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments)*, kritisch revidierter Neudruck nach der 2. Auflage (Berlin 1759/1762), ed. Walter Niemann, 5th ed., C. F. Kahnt, Leipzig, 1925, p. 107. Online at: [https://imslp.org/wiki/Versuch_%C3%BCber_die_wahre_Art_des_Clavier_zu_spielen%2C_H.868%2C_870_\(Bach%2C_Carl_Philipp_Emanuel\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Versuch_%C3%BCber_die_wahre_Art_des_Clavier_zu_spielen%2C_H.868%2C_870_(Bach%2C_Carl_Philipp_Emanuel)) [accessed 2 Mar. 2026].

²⁷ Czerny, *Die Kunst des Vortrags (The Art of Performance)*.

²⁸ Johann Adam Hiller, *Anweisung zum musikalisch-zierlichen Gesange (Instruction for Musical, Ornamented Singing)*, Leipzig, 1780, cited in Hartmut Krones and Robert Schollum, *Vokale und allgemeine Aufführungspraxis (Vocal and General Performance Practice)*, Böhlau Verlag, Wien-Köln, 1983, p. 171.

²⁹ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 350

E.g. 2



The second phrase of the first affective sphere (measures 5–11) ³⁰

The second phrase (measures 5–11) sings an ethereal, wonderful, syncopated melody in the main homophonic voice of the right hand, mainly emphasizing two notes: A $\flat$ and E $\flat$, with a very simply ornamented accompaniment in the left hand. The syncopations (also called “ligature” or “synkopatio”) belong to the “figurae fundamentales” and originate, according to Bernhard, from the old style (“stylo”). They interrupt the melodic flow and require a “spoken” attention, an “*immediately recitative-like shaping*.”³¹

Türk considers that “*syncopated notes ... are not so difficult to play on the piano*,”³² but he points out that they occur between different individual sounds “*that must be presented with accent*.”³³ The syncopations fall on “*the weak parts of the beat or the measure*” (that is, on the unaccented beats)

³⁰ David Beach, *Advanced Schenkerian Analysis: Perspectives on Phrase Rhythm, Motive, and Form* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 243

³¹ Hartmut Krones, in *Vokale und allgemeine Aufführungspraxis (Vocal and General Performance Practice)*, by Hartmut Krones and Robert Schollum, Böhlau Verlag, Wien–Köln, 1983, p. 223.

³² Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 105

³³ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 337

and create an additional stimulation in the melody: *“This type of notation is used, among other things, to break, for a time, the excessive monotony and, so to speak, to create a displacement of the beat parts [...]. This goal would not be achieved if the first half of those notes were played softly and the accent were placed on the second half.”*³⁴ The good performer must therefore accentuate the syncopations in the right hand - even if delicately, due to the overall dynamics of the phrase.

Measures 5–8 “embrace” $A\flat$ through rises and falls in the melodic contour, suggesting heaven and sin in the love for Antonia. The entire phrase is constructed through sequences that recall an “epizeuxis,” with a “kyklosis” and, simultaneously, a “climax” that culminates on $E\flat^3$. The sforzando on F^3 (measure 11), as an appoggiatura toward $E\flat^3$, was prepared by the great crescendo and a small modulation to the subdominant in the two preceding measures. Should this effort suggest a desire for beauty, for perfection? Everything speaks in favor of this idea; one can even see the circle around $B\flat$ as a symbol of the ring of love. An ‘anadiplosis’ links the end of this sentence to the beginning of the next.

E.g. 3

The third phrase of the first affective sphere (measures 12–19): Beach³⁵

³⁴ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 337-338

³⁵ David Beach, *Advanced Schenkerian Analysis: Perspectives on Phrase Rhythm, Motive, and Form* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 243

E.g. 4



Measures 18-23, Beach³⁶

The third phrase of the first affective sphere presents eight measures (12–19) full of ascending and descending passages, “*consisting of various isolated figures*,”³⁷ in the right hand, supported by short eighth-note chords and sighing rests in the left hand. Although Türk evaluates the “passaggio” as “a [...] piece that has rather the purpose of practicing the fingers than any other purpose,” this statement fits Beethoven’s creation less well than Czerny’s observation: “*all the passages and moving figures are always only means, never an end; and even if [...] there are many places that call for the so-called brilliant interpretation, this must never become essential. Anyone who would want to merely display finger dexterity would completely miss what is spiritual and aesthetic and would prove that they do not understand these works.*”³⁸

To each first note of such a passage, Beethoven wrote a staccato; such short notes symbolize the restlessness, haste, and liveliness of this segment. Because only the indication *piano leggiermente* was added to the passages, and only later (from measure 17) does a crescendo appear, you can also draw inspiration here from Mattheson³⁹ regarding dynamics: repetitions should not be played the same way, but differently; repetitions of the melody should be “dressed” in a new “garment” and, in addition to “changed sounds, long and short notes, mannerisms, embellishments, ornaments,” differentiations of “strength and weakness” should also be used.

³⁶ David Beach, *Advanced Schenkerian Analysis: Perspectives on Phrase Rhythm, Motive, and Form* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 244

³⁷ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 389

³⁸ Czerny, *Die Kunst des Vortrags (The Art of Performance)*, p. 33.

³⁹ Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister (The Complete Kapellmeister)*, Hamburg, 1739, chapter “Vom Nachdruck” (*On Emphasis*), § 38.

The passages follow, in fact (measures 12–15), the harmonic basis of the main theme A $\flat$ major, T–D–T–D—A $\flat$ major, T–D–T–D—A $\flat$ major, T–D–T–D, while the small figures “embrace” either A $\flat$ or E $\flat$, leading to an ascending modulation in crescendo—the rhetorical figure of “anabasis.” The “passus duriusculus” in the right hand can be complemented by a reminiscence of a “pathopoiia” in the harmonization of the chromatic bass line. With the closure of the first affective sphere, “anadiplosis” on C 4 , in measure 20, brings along the next affect. Dotted eighth notes in the right hand, syncopations in the left hand—everything piano, molto legato, and yet only simple octaves in a “katabasis” (measures 20–21): it descends, the joy fades; such is love—a bitter doubt can sink all happiness.

The expansion of the statement through the repetition of these octaves in measures 22–23 resembles a figure from the Emphasis class, namely ‘paronomasia.’ Additional syncopations are added here (in the right hand), sighs and suspension notes leading to the octaves (in the left hand), and even a ‘parrhesia’ (measure 22, between A $\flat^2$, G 1 , and F $\sharp^1$).

E.g. 5

Mm 24-38, Beach⁴⁰

⁴⁰ David Beach, *Advanced Schenkerian Analysis: Perspectives on Phrase Rhythm, Motive, and Form* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 244

“Epizeuxis” (measures 23–24) brings the second interval into agreement with the bass’s ‘diabolus in musica’ dissonance; thus, it modulates to the more ‘holy’ and ‘charming’ key of E $\flat$ major. The contrasts (‘antitheton’) of the previously used katabasis begin softly (piano) and conclude majestically with a sforzando on ‘C³.’ ‘Anabasis’ (measures 25–27)—interrupted by ‘tmesis’—sighs—culminating in a ‘hyperbole’ (measure 27), and the combination of ‘klimax’—equally both a ‘hyperbaton’ (in the upper voice) and a ‘palillogia’ (in the bass)—gives the musical phrase a special intensity, further reinforced by the notation symbolism: in measure 28, the hyperbolized ‘B $\flat$ ³’ immediately leaps to ‘G¹,’ from where another ascent begins, allegorically comparable to the sunrise across the firmament.

However, the bass line descends at the same time, always toward the same target note “G,” which can sometimes also be understood as a synonym for “grave” and, therefore, “death” — perhaps due to the Greek Γῆ (gê), which means “earth,” from which the association with “grave” becomes plausible. The double grace notes in the upper voice (measures 25–26) should be sung in time, together with the beginning of the trills in the bass. These attacks, whose notes are so far apart from each other, should not be sung as quickly and mechanically as Türk describes: “*this manner is sung somewhat more slowly when the first small note is several steps away from the main note that follows.*”⁴¹

C. Ph. E. Bach describes exactly the case of the trills mentioned: “*When many trills follow one after another, and after them come one or more short notes that can serve as an ending (Nachschlag), then the latter disappears.*”⁴² C. Ph. E. Bach also clarifies the way of playing the ascent from measure 28 to the beginning of measure 31 in such a way, “*that the beginning of the bow receives a slight pressure from the finger. (...) the end of the bow is not sustained, because the finger must be lifted quickly.*”⁴³ The four notes marked ‘sf’ (sforzando) must, according to Türk, ‘*be played strongly, as if the sound were forced out; (often it only applies to the note next to which it stands),*’⁴⁴ and indicate the highest tension in the upper voice as well as in the bass (where the sforzando is caused by gradual katabasis () and increasingly dense chords of ‘palillogia’).

⁴¹ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p.242

⁴² C. Ph. E. Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art, das Clavier zu spielen*, 2. Hauptstück, C. Ph. E. Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art, das Clavier zu spielen (Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments)*, 3. Hauptstück (Third Main Section), p. 76

⁴³ C. Ph. E. Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art, das Clavier zu spielen (Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments)*, 3. Hauptstück (Third Main Section), p. 127

⁴⁴ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 116

After a sighing pause follows a “passus duriusculus” in piano (measures 31–32) and a chromatic “tirata” in crescendo and, ultimately, diminuendo. In piano and dolce — “*pleasant, sweet, gentle*”⁴⁵ — the next four measures (34–37) must be played, without any dynamic change, despite the numerous rhetorical figures that continuously emphasize the affect. “Kyklosis” (on A $\flat$ ¹ and C¹), simultaneously an “interrogatio,” is repeated, with the help of another figure — “polyphoton” — in a lower register. From there begins the final “anabasis” of the exposition (measures 35–37) toward the octaves that precede the development.

These two measures (38–39) present a striking similarity to measures 20–21, which recalls the figure of “epanalepsis” – thus, the beginning and the end of the third affective sphere of the exposition are “linked,” “repeated,” mentally associated. The dynamics should be “*decreasing*,”⁴⁶ with only the last “reb¹” receiving an odd marking: “cresc.,” and immediately afterward the development begins with the beloved figure of “anadiplosis” (on “do”). But how can the piano produce a crescendo on a single note? For a key struck by hammers, this is not really possible — Beethoven surely knew this! Then the spiritual meaning of the crescendo must be sought; in this way, the desired affect can be conveyed. This crescendo must be felt internally, as preparation for a tragic modulation that will be described below. Acoustically, the first sound of measure 40 will sound fuller and more intense; there must be no pause between the previous note and this one.

The theme of love in Beethoven shifts from A $\flat$ major at the beginning of the movement to F minor in the development (measure 40). It is very interesting to note that the pairing of A $\flat$ major as the main key with its parallel F minor recalls the initials A (from Antonia) and F (from Franz Brentano). In addition, according to Quantz, a melody in F minor is particularly sad: “*A minor, C minor, D $\sharp$ major, and F minor express the sorrowful affect far more than other minor keys...*”⁴⁷. To Schubart, it suggests “*a deep melancholy, wailing, moaning of grief, and longing for the grave*”⁴⁸.

The theme’s head is extensively recapitulated in various registers and tonalities. It modulates to D $\flat$ major in measures 47–48; then to B $\flat$ minor from measures 50 to 54. This B $\flat$ minor, suggesting Beethoven’s name (in measures

⁴⁵ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 115

⁴⁶ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 117

⁴⁷ Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen (Essay on a Method for Playing the Transverse Flute)*, 3rd ed., Breslau, 1789. Facsimile reprint, Kassel, 1968, p. 138.

⁴⁸ Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst (Ideas for an Aesthetics of the Art of Music)*, Wien, 1806.

52–53 the B $\flat$ –E $\flat$ combination even appears), is “a *strange one, dressed more in the garment of the night. It is somewhat sullen and very rarely takes on a pleasant expression. Ironies against God and the world; dissatisfaction with oneself and everything; preparation for suicide — resound in this tonality.*”⁴⁹ (Schubart) However, the final suffering of the development quickly modulates — in measure 55 — back to the main key of A $\flat$ major and thus leads, through “anadiplosis,” to the recapitulation.

E.g. 6

The Development⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst (Ideas for an Aesthetics of the Art of Music)*, Wien, 1806.

⁵⁰ David Beach, *Advanced Schenkerian Analysis: Perspectives on Phrase Rhythm, Motive, and Form* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.245

Recapitulation (measures 56–104): a return, but “different”

E.g. 7



The Recapitulation⁵¹

This final section of the part reprises—as expected—the material from the “exposition.” However, some things appear slightly differently, for example: the theme-head chords (measures 56–59) are in the right hand, and the left-hand accompaniment consists of the same passages as in measures 12–20; from the fermata in measure 4, only the trill remains now, under a changed dynamic (instead of a crescendo–decrescendo there is a long decrescendo, leading to a restatement of the theme-head in the left hand).

The second syncopated phrase of the first affective sphere (from measure 63) takes place in E $\flat$ major (after the modulation from measure 62, see figure 10) and leads to a completely unusual modulation, such as the one to E major (measures 67–77) – and E major means “*a shout of strong joy, laughing merriment, and still not fully, not completely, pleasure*” (Schubart, 1806⁵²). The performer must, therefore, emphasize this modulation very delicately: it speaks of hope – even if not yet fully – and then returns “to the grave.” Keys with many sharps – like E major – express “*wild and powerful passions*” (Schubart, 1806⁵³).

Through the subsequent modulation in measure 76, the sun appears (the first dotted note waits on G = “sol” = “sun”; this note can therefore have a double meaning) on the way to A $\flat$ major - Antonia; in G minor in the third part, the sun will be extinguished in the grave (recapitulation of the Arioso - Ermattend, klagend; Perdendo le forze, dolente). The final section of the reprise prepares the coda through a brief modulation to E $\flat$ major (measures 97–100), “*the key of love, piety, and intimate conversation with God; through*

⁵¹ David Beach, *Advanced Schenkerian Analysis: Perspectives on Phrase Rhythm, Motive, and Form* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.245

⁵² Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst (Ideas for an Aesthetics of the Art of Music)*, Wien, 1806.

⁵³ Idem.

its three flats expressing the Holy Trinity" (Schubart⁵⁴). Coda (measures 105–116): the "F" that always stands in the way, the final dissonance, and silence

The passages in the coda, lightly played in A $\flat$ major, rise in crescendo and suddenly find piano and silence on the 'f' that forever stands in the way (Franz Brentano?) – something that happens once more, with the crescendo of a section of the theme in the left hand (measure 112), which again leads to piano and 'f' in measure 113.

E.g. 8



Measures 110-113, Beach⁵⁵

The final ascent of the passage culminates in fortes on a repeated dissonance (augmented second: "G" – "F $\sharp$ " in the alto voice) and resolves in the short final chord, repeated twice. The sigh ("suspiratio" in measure 115) ends in the silence of an "aposiopesis" – eternity seems full of longing and silently waiting.

3. Conclusion

*"The sonata deserves, among the pieces intended for the piano, probably with the most right, the first place."*⁵⁶ "Die Sonate verdient unter den Tonstücken, welche für das Klavier bestimmt sind, wohl mit dem mehrsten

⁵⁴ Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst (Ideas for an Aesthetics of the Art of Music)*, Wien, 1806.

⁵⁵ David Beach, *Advanced Schenkerian Analysis: Perspectives on Phrase Rhythm, Motive, and Form* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 249

⁵⁶ Türk, *Klavierschule (Piano School)*, p. 390

Rechte die erste Stelle.” In works such as Beethoven’s Sonata Op. 110, there is much more than can be clarified with just a few pages of commentary. For us, in the 21st century, the musical language of the 18th century remains always an attraction and visually very interesting. No detail is taken for granted but analyzed very meticulously. (Kapp) never fully deciphered. We will always ask ourselves: what was the ideal back then? What did Beethoven want? Why? Is that compatible with the spirit of our time? Can it still be played as it was then? How can I approach a certain work if I am influenced by so many factors?

Today we have at our disposal, everywhere, centuries of musical development—how can we ask our ears to remain ignorant yet curious, noble, perhaps skeptical, and to process a piece as the ears of that time did, for which it was written? One option would be to take the music written then and engage in interpretive history with it, growing within this music, interpreting it, and enriching it in accordance with the present time. In this way, a score can continue to develop—shaped by personality—toward infinity.

Another option would be to use today’s knowledge, technical level, tools, and contemporary taste, and yet look back to where the sources and scores are waiting to be deciphered — even if incompletely! From this symbiosis, music can be built and played. Of course, it will always sound different; nevertheless, there are limits and rules in interpretation: *‘Up to here and no further!’ ‘Bis hierher und nicht weiter!’*⁵⁷ One thing is certain, however: if I want to be faithful both to our time and to that time, and to enjoy music through playing, I will best remember the words of Czerny, the great student of Beethoven, and apply them in regular practice: *‘For you can easily imagine, young lady, that the happiest talent is of no use if the fingers are incapable of obeying and following it.’ ‘Denn Sie können sich leicht denken, Fräulein, dass das glücklichste Talent nichts nützt, wenn die Finger unfähig sind, demselben zu gehorchen und nachzufolgen.’*⁵⁸

⁵⁷ J. Moscheles, *Vorbericht zur Beethoven Ausgabe (Preface to the Beethoven Edition)*, Leipzig, 1858.

⁵⁸ Carl Czerny, *Briefe über den Unterricht auf dem Pianoforte (Letters on Instruction at the Pianoforte)*, Wien. Reprint, 1988, p. 81. Online at: <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb10598440?page=89> (accessed 2.3.2026).

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