

A DETACHED EXPRESSION: THE FINALE OF CHOPIN'S THIRD SONATA

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SUMMARY. Scholarly debates about the finale of Chopin's Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58, have centered on its formal structure, yet the movement's striking expressive dimensions reveal the work's essential character. Musical topics and the concept of high points prove effective tools for elucidating the work's expression, while their analysis delineates the work's expressive structure and addresses the dominant expressive concerns in Chopin's music. This expressive analytical approach thus contributes to the formal debate by delineating the work's expressive form. Given the finale's rondo characteristics, the analysis incorporates concepts from the comic opera tradition that popularized this form, including elements such as the shock tutti and stretta, which provide an appropriate framework for examining the content presented within the finale. This study applies this analytical method to examine the finale's disputed formal sections and coda while considering evidence from score editions. The findings validate the effectiveness of the analytical tools and concepts employed while filling interpretive gaps in the literature concerning this movement.

Keywords: musical topics, high points, buffa finale, Chopin

1. Introduction

Early studies of the finale of Chopin's Sonata in B minor, Op. 58, reveal its distinctive character: while displaying fiery rhythmic energy, it possesses a quality markedly different from the blithe character found in the

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composer's earlier similar works. Its relentless forward momentum creates a compelling effect that diverges from the typically cheerful nature of classical rondo form⁴. Though these observations offer valuable insights, they leave unanswered the question of how Chopin achieved this particular expression.

Subsequent related studies are predominantly form-focused, though these primarily examine the Sonata's first movement rather than its finale⁵. When certain musical events resist explanation within established formal paradigms, interpretations of the work's expression often remain superficial or resort to metaphysical speculation. Explanations invoking violations of form, anomalies in form, form fusion, and form evolution fail to illuminate how heterogeneity emerges within normative structures. Regarding the imitative passage with chromaticism in the first movement's exposition (mm. 23-29), its designation as an "interpolated atemporal module"⁶ offers narrative insight but inadequately accounts for the passage's underlying expression. Alternative scholarship on Chopin's Third Sonata explores motivic cohesion⁷. While this "post-Leichtentrittian"⁸ approach to material homogeneity elucidates the logical construction of the composition, interpretive issues remain dependent upon discrete musical parameters. As Walker observes, expressive elements including tempo, timbre, and dynamics articulate musical meaning through their own discursive modes.

Nevertheless, different theoretical frameworks yield divergent interpretations. Helman⁹ applies Reicha's dichotomous theory of sonata form to analyze the first movement at multiple structural levels. Through proportional analysis, she designates the exposition of the B minor Sonata as one unit and combines the development and recapitulation as another. Utilizing dramaturgical principles, she distinguishes the primary theme and transition from the secondary theme and closing section, arguing that the persistent cantilena mood throughout the closing section creates expressive equilibrium between the two parts,

⁴ Leichtentritt, Hugo. *Analyse Der Chopin'schen Klavierwerke [analysis of Chopin's Piano Works]*. Max Hesses Verlag, 1922; Chomiński, Józef. *Sonaty Chopina*. Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1960.

⁵ See e.g.: Newman, William S. *The Sonata Since Beethoven*. W.W. Norton, 1983; Leikin, Anatole. "The Sonatas." *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, edited by Jim Samson, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 160–87.

⁶ Davis, Andrew. "Chopin and the Romantic Sonata: The First Movement of Op. 58." *Music Theory Spectrum*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2014, p. 281.

⁷ See Walker, Alan. "Chopin and Musical Structure: An Analytical Approach." *The Chopin Companion: Profiles of the Man and the Musician*, W. W. Norton, 1973, pp. 227–58; Samson, Jim. *The Music of Chopin*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985;

⁸ Tomaszewski, Mieczysław. *Chopin: The Man, His Work and Its Resonance*. Edited and translated by John Comber, The Fryderyk Chopin Institute, 2015, p. 547.

⁹ Helman, Zofia. "Norm and Individuation in Chopin's Sonatas." *Polish Music Journal*, translated by Radosław Materka and Maja Trochimczyk, vol. 3, no. 1, 2000, pp. 1–18.

thereby resolving conflict rather than perpetuating instability. Yet for tonal music, the inherent ebb and flow of tension and release remains present, and the underlying causes of these fluctuations warrant further investigation.

As Agawu¹⁰ demonstrates in his study of Romantic music, rigid formal norms may impede comprehension of deeper musical significance, failing to accommodate elusive and implicit meanings. Moreover, evidence from the Sonata – including ten musical topics evaluated in Sonata Op. 58 through separate research currently awaiting publication – suggests that Chopin privileges expressive immediacy over formal architecture. This does not diminish the importance of formal conventions but rather positions them as subsidiary characteristics. In this context, any deviation from formal expectations represents an expression of specific needs or desires, inviting investigation into the circumstances that generate such requirements. Agawu analyzes Romantic music by examining the events that establish formal norms and their sequential unfolding – a methodology that “promotes a processual and phenomenological view of the work; it recognizes moment-by-moment succession but worries not at all about an overall or resultant profile that can be named and held up as an archetype”¹¹. This approach informs the present analysis of the finale through Agawu’s concept of high points, as demonstrated in the examination of high points within the coda and their dynamic trajectory. This methodological choice explains the selection of the finale as the primary analytical focus. First, it exemplifies one of Agawu’s six analytical rubrics for Romantic music; second, the musical topics within the finale constitute interpretative acts constrained by topical signification, which correspond with other aspects of the work, including form. Consequently, this topic motivates a coherent framework for understanding both the encoding of meaning implantation and the decoding of meaning reconstruction within the finale.

This study therefore conducts an analysis based on musical topics, which constitute one of the most important codes for constructing musical meaning. As discussed extensively in the literature, musical topics serve as a powerful tool for examining the expressive qualities conveyed by music, offering essential interpretive foundations. Musical topics are among the few elements in music that carry rich semantic content, stimulating interpretive engagement. Based on the constraints defined in their significative process, they achieve satisfactory interpretation at specific levels. They motivate rather than dictate the interpretation of musical meaning. In a semiotic sense, given the elusive nature of musical meaning, these characteristics of musical topics

¹⁰ Agawu, Victor Kofi. *Music As Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Oxford Studies in Music Theory.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

naturally establish them as a key sign for studying musical signification. Furthermore, the evaluation of musical topics reflects the formal framework of a work, which constitutes one of the constraints imposed by the topics themselves. Accordingly, concepts related to the buffa finale are applied in analyzing the finale. Although Platoff's¹² exposition of the buffa finale derives from opera libretti and their inherent dramatic nature – manifested primarily through comparisons between musical effects and textual correspondence – these elements, including specific musical styles and articulating characteristics, are readily applicable to instrumental music. From this perspective, the musical shaping derived from text inspires a complementary interpretation of the finale.

This approach resonates with Agawu's conception that analysis, performance, and creation constitute creative activities¹³. The method operates without predetermined objectives. Through topical evaluation and interaction with musical material, the outcomes fulfill both the functional requirements of genre-related references and the aesthetic autonomy of formalism. Table 1 delineates the finale's thematic content and structure, representing its principal sections as a rondo – designated ABABA – alongside its tonal regions. The arrow indicates modulatory passages. The terms *shock tutti* and *stretta* are defined subsequently. The table's bottom row evaluates the finale's musical topics and associated styles. Table 1 serves as an analytical framework for this study's discussion, functioning as a guide rather than a definitive formal interpretation.

Table 1

A	B		Shock Tutti	RT	A	B		Shock Tutti	RT	A	Stretta
Refrain	Episode 1			Retransiti on	Refrain	Episode 2			Retransiti on	Refrain	Coda
9-52	52-76 (a)	76-83 (b)	84-90	90-99	100-143	143-167 (a)	167-174 (b)	175-195	195-206	207-253	254-286
b	B-d#	F#	B	V/e	e	E _b -g-c	E _b	A _b → F#	V/b	b	B
Tarantella					Tarantella					Tarantella	Brilliant Style Hunting Call

Outline of The Finale of Chopin's Third Sonata

¹² Platoff, John. "Musical and Dramatic Structure in the Opera Buffa Finale." *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1989, pp. 191–230.

¹³ The characteristics of musical analysis have been addressed convincingly by Agawu elsewhere; see his famous article: Agawu, Kofi. "How We Got Out of Analysis, and How to Get Back in Again." *Music Analysis*, vol. 23, nos. 2–3, July 2004, pp. 267–86.

2. Topic of Finale

What, then, are the expressive constraints of the finale, and how can it be interpreted appropriately within these constraints? Existing scholarship converges on a singular characterization: the movement's extraordinary driving force. How is this relentless momentum achieved? Examining the basic characteristics of the finale – 6/8 meter at rapid tempo, the quality of perpetual motion, alternation between principal and auxiliary tones, and an effective vehicle for virtuosic display – evaluates it as a tarantella¹⁴. This dance genre, originating in Taranto in southern Italy, is traditionally considered a representation of hysteria¹⁵. Schumann, reviewing Chopin's precedent Op. 43, similarly observed the wildness and darkness embodied in this frenetic dance¹⁶. The finale's melodic structure parallels this earlier work through its characteristic rhythmic pattern: an eighth note followed by a quarter note, concluding with a dotted half note.

Grimalt¹⁷ categorizes the tarantella as a dance topic within the body genre, distinguishing it from the spirit genre. Religious traditions posit that spiritual pursuit necessitates bodily sacrifice, with martyrs exemplifying ultimate faith through physical transcendence. When discussing Chopin's transcendence of corporeal signs in music, Tarasti cites the finale's theme to demonstrate its dialectical nature: the originally pastoral, dance-like figure transforms through relentless repetition, acquiring transcendent qualities via its "fascination with process"¹⁸. Within the finale's context, this transformation culminates in ecstatic states, reinforcing the tarantella's association with frenzy. Following Tarasti's framework for transcendent moments in Chopin's music, the finale presents a dual dynamic: Chopin initially constrains his physicality within the tarantella's generic conventions – encompassing social contexts and stylistic parameters – as evidenced in the refrains; conversely, when his authentic creative identity emerges, transcendence manifests, particularly in the coda's climactic passages.

The agitation of Tarantella in the coda is notably influenced by the horn quartet in the bass and the subsequent four ascending-fourth calls. Unlike the triadic structure characteristic of military signals, this single-note

¹⁴ Schwandt, Erich. "Tarantella." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, 2nd ed., vol. 25, Macmillan, 2001, p. 96.

¹⁵ Riemann, Hugo. *Dictionary of Music*. Translated by J. S. Shedlock, 4th ed., vol. 2, Da Capo Press, 1970; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Tarantella." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 23 Feb. 2020.

¹⁶ Niecks, Frederick. *Frederick Chopin: As A Man and Musician*. 3rd ed., vol. 2, Novello, 1902.

¹⁷ Grimalt, Joan. *Mapping Musical Signification*. Springer International Publishing, 2020. *Humanities - Arts and Humanities in Progress* 15.

¹⁸ Tarasti, Eero. *Signs of Music: A Guide to Musical Semiotics*. Mouton de Gruyter, 2002. *Approaches to Applied Semiotics* 3, p. 132.

call typically signifies a hunting call. The repeated leap of a fourth constitutes a primitive marker of the hunting call, evoking associations with the outdoors – morning, woodland, freedom, adventure, and nobility. In the finale’s coda, the shift to the tonic major supports a vigorous and euphoric musical adventure, while a series of horn calls in the bass leading up to the global high point (which will be elaborated on later) vividly conveys Chopin’s masculine qualities. According to Tarasti, the “transcendental subject”¹⁹ within Chopin’s music underpins both the coherence of the musical discourse and the evolution of the topic.

3. Form of Finale

Formal structures, as noted by Agawu and Dahlhaus²⁰, constitute significant elements in the creative practices of Romantic composers, yet these structures more often invite active participation from the subject rather than demanding rigid adherence. In this regard, the formal elements within the finale complement its topical references – particularly its frequently discussed rondo-like structure – which is inherently shaped by the tarantella’s signification. As Cole notes, “the rhythms, thematic character and phrase regularity of the dance”²¹ frequently provide composers with a foundation for imbuing the rondo refrain with distinctive character.

Zukiewicz²² reviewed the scholarly debate concerning the finale’s formal structure in his doctoral dissertation. Given that several aspects of the finale resist conventional formal categorization – notably the E minor A-refrain’s failure to return in the tonic key and the premature appearance of the tonic within the B-episode – scholars have primarily disputed whether the movement constitutes a modified rondo or a sonata-rondo functioning as an alternative to a sonata. In his monograph on Chopin, Tomaszewski observed that the independent rondo characterized Chopin’s early compositional period, serving dual purposes: displaying pianistic virtuosity and incorporating folk elements. This early predilection evolved into a more restrained yet expressive approach in Chopin’s mature works. In these later compositions, which align with classical traditions, Chopin embedded the rondo within larger structures,

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 140.

²⁰ Dahlhaus, Carl. *Foundations of Music History*. Translated by J. Bradford Robinson, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

²¹ Cole, Malcolm S. “Rondo.” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, 2nd ed., vol. 21, Macmillan, 2001, p. 652.

²² Zukiewicz, Adam. *Chopin’s Third Piano Sonata, Op. 58: Late Style, Formal Ambiguity, and Performance Considerations*. 2012. University of Toronto, D.M.A.

specifically as the finale of Sonata Op. 58. Certain formal anomalies – including the refrain's absence in the tonic key and the tonic's premature emergence – prompted Tomaszewski to assert: "With the mature Chopin, it is not form that (a priori) shapes expression, but rather expression that determines the ultimate shape of form"²³.

The finale's formal framework is undoubtedly rooted in the rondo, with its distinctive expression reflecting the composer's contemplation within this structure. The finale's expression is simultaneously constrained by the tarantella and shaped by the composer's practical considerations. Drawing on extensive testimonies, Tomaszewski identifies two stages in Chopin's compositional process: the spontaneous stage (improvisation) and the reflective stage (perfection). The latter became particularly prominent during the 1840s, evidenced by Chopin's frequent manuscript revisions and delayed submissions to copyists. From an interpretative perspective, however, improvisation and perfection function as "complementary rather than opposing"²⁴ concepts. While improvisation establishes the work's framework, perfection draws from Chopin's rich musical repository to extract diverse materials, refining them into appropriate musical effects. This repository encompasses the elements and techniques that secured Chopin's widespread popularity, including his astute assessment of the contemporaneous music market.

The enduring popularity of Chopin's music stems from the synergy between his distinctive personal style and acute market awareness²⁵. This acumen likely originated from young Chopin's frequent visits to Brzezina's store in Warsaw, where he absorbed not only canonical works but also piano adaptations based on popular tunes, dance idioms, recent operas, and historical narratives²⁶. Within this context, the finale's deviations from conventional formal expectations may reflect the influence of opera buffa on the popularization of the rondo, as opera buffa composers' treatment of this form significantly contributed to its widespread adoption.

4. Buffa Finale

By the early 19th century, the rondo genre had firmly established its popularity in the music market. Both C.P.E. Bach and Mozart reported the

²³ Tomaszewski, *Chopin*, p. 427.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁵ Bellman, Jonathan D. "Middlebrow Becomes Transcendent: The Popular Roots of Chopin's Musical Language." *Chopin and His World*, edited by Jonathan D. Bellman and Halina Goldberg, Princeton University Press, 2017, pp. 147–70.

²⁶ Goldberg, Halina. *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

impact of this genre on the sales and performances of their works. The straightforward and unembellished style of the rondo theme laid the foundation for its reputation among the public, while the incorporation of the spirit and techniques of opera buffa further enhanced the expressiveness of the form. Platoff points out that in the finales of Viennese opera buffa, two “detached”²⁷ expressive actions contribute to the dramatic demands of the music: shock tutti and stretta. The former represents an astonished reaction to an unexpected musical event through a sudden pause; the latter refers to the final expressive section of the finale, releasing musical tension with unexpected and forceful impact.

Much of the debate in research centers on the formal division of episode 1, due to the premature appearance of the tonic key in the second part (part b) of episode 1 and the subsequent refrain not appearing in the tonic key. In Platoff’s study of the buffa finale, he mentions an exceptional case in a given context, where a detached expressive passage often emerges during a plot twist or at the height of dramatic tension. This passage, on one hand, articulates shock through dramatic expression, and on the other hand, creates a “sense of separateness”²⁸ that interrupts the musical flow to mark distinct expressive moments. Such a detached expressive passage is evident in these contested formal areas.

In part b of episode 1, the anticipated return of the refrain is subverted by a passage in B major (mm. 84-90). This disruption transforms into a dominant preparation section (RT) for the subsequent return of the E minor refrain (mm. 90-99) through Chopin’s characteristic addition of a minor seventh to the tonic triad. This surprising maneuver unfolds as follows: at m. 83, a compound articulation – *portato* – marks the cadence of the phrasing-end (II-V⁷ in B major). This cadence, featuring rhythmic diminution, creates a rapidly closing gesture and reality that intensifies rhetorical expression. It releases the signal of shock tutti with its characteristic *portato* articulation. The harmonic progression also serves as the framework for the ensuing B major passage; thus, the peculiarity of this seven-measure segment stems not merely from the premature tonic arrival but from its response to the narrative’s demand for change while conveying separation. Chopin employs *portato* primarily to enhance expressiveness while maintaining thematic resonance, as exemplified in the Nocturne Op. 48 No. 1 (the *agitato* theme restatement at m. 54 and related measures) and Op. 55 No. 2 (the subordinate 16th notes in the alto voice at m. 8). Another use of *portato* by the composer is

²⁷ Platoff, *Musical and Dramatic Structure*, p. 219.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

to emphasize structural articulation points, or what Agawu terms “key moments of punctuation”²⁹, such as the end of the chief theme before the *maggiore* coda in the finale of his F minor Second Piano Concerto (mm. 87-88), where the descending scale in the piano solo features *portato* articulation. This theme ends with a half cadence, reinforced not only by an accent mark on the final dominant seventh chord but also by the marking *con forza* at the descent’s beginning. The reinforcing function of the descending impulse articulation preceding the dominant seventh chord is thus unmistakable.

The half cadence in m. 83 of the finale thus interrupts the ongoing harmonic motion, and this sudden cessation can be experienced not only through listening and hand positioning but is also signified by the *portato* itself (Example 1). This gasp serves merely as a rehearsal – a sign for the detached expressive passage, pointing to the subsequent real shock tutti.

E.g. 1

79

82

Portato
Sign of Detached Expression

F#: I⁴⁷

B: ii V⁷

***Portato* at the conclusion of Episode 1, Part B, m.83**

²⁹ Agawu, *Music As Discourse*, p. 77.

In episode 2, the composer employs a technique similar to that used earlier, adding a minor seventh (G $\flat$) to the tonic triad in m. 179. However, unlike the corresponding earlier section, this seventh chord does not function as a retransition. Instead, mm. 183-195 present a distinctive harmonic progression: beginning with an A $\flat$ triad, the voice leading moves through B $\flat$ as a passing tone to an A4/2 chord, then continues to F $\sharp$ ⁷ while maintaining common tones. This technique represents one of Chopin's characteristic methods for articulating transitions between formal sections, comparable to passages in the development section of the first movement and the harmonic progression linking the F minor section in the Largo's middle section to the final appearance of the middle section's theme. The *forzando* markings that appear at the beginning of each segment's dominant seventh chord intensify the mounting tension throughout this process. This accent sign, which Ekier (2013) identifies as "indicat[ing] crucial points in the forging of medium-sized formal structures"³⁰, constitute one of Chopin's most idiomatic expressive devices.

The harmony in these thirteen measures (mm. 183-195) creates a static harmonic state through the use of pedal point, effectively suspending temporal flow and interrupting the music's forward momentum, despite the tremolo oscillations in the bass. This passage receives exceptional treatment within the finale's overall design. The purely figurative texture lacks any melodic line – a striking contrast to even the preceding *leggero* section, which maintains melodic content through the additional note heads Chopin provides in the left hand. This disposition creates a pronounced sense of detachment; as a decisive turning point, it alters the trajectory of the episode, responding to the dramatic demands of the moment with astonishing expression. All characteristic elements from the episode converge in this shock tutti: the intervallic neighbor motion from part a and the expanded scalar runs from part b, indicating that these elements take on new meanings in this dramatic context. The passage culminates with imitative intervallic motion supported by a denser octave texture in the bass, preparing the retransition (Example 2). The accumulated tension from this shock tutti finds its ultimate resolution through the strategic deployment of high points in the coda.

³⁰ Ekier, Jan. *Introduction to the Polish National Edition of the Works of Fryderyk Chopin: Part 2. Performance Issues*. Edited by Paweł Kamiński, Translated by John Comber, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2013, p. 27.

E.g. 2

183

Part a material

Part b material

Shock Tutti

Harmonic stasis

Articulated Point of Separation

189

RT begins

V⁷ of b

Shock tutti, mm. 183-195

5. Coda of Finale: The Experimental Station of High Points

The *stretta*, another buffa finale technique that addresses dramatic requirements, finds precise exemplification in the Sonata's finale. Its tension-release mechanism aligns closely with Agawu's concept of high points. High points function as markers of "superlative moments"³¹ in music, typically signaling moments of intensity, peak tension, or release. From a psychological perspective, these individual high points collectively shape the work's dynamic curve, fundamentally influencing audience perception. This perception subsequently informs listeners' appreciation as prior experience, shaping both expectations and responses. As Agawu explains in his preface to studying Romantic music, the six principles, including high points and the dynamic curve,

capture salient features of the Romantic repertoire and can therefore convey aspects of their truth content ... Together, they provide listeners with a mechanism for organizing their intuitions about Romantic music. The resulting analyses can in turn engender further speculation about meaning³².

³¹ Agawu, *Music As Discourse*, p. 61.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

High points and musical topics work in tandem to illuminate the musical foreground; together, they constitute a semiotic method that reveals how a work's expressive form takes shape. The coda contains three distinct high points: first, a B with grace note, both under an 8va marking (m. 254), functioning as a decisive tension release; second, a B approached by melodic leap with 8va marking (m. 274), representing the finale's climactic moment; and finally, the work's endpoint, an octave B notated at actual pitch (m. 286), serving as the global high point. M. 268 presents what might be considered a pseudo high point (an E₆ with 8va marking), though its transient character and association with supertonic harmony diminish both its accentual force and harmonic significance within the high-point schema.

How does Chopin construct these transcendent high points in the coda? The coda begins with a four-bar cadence progression (I⁶-II4/3-IV-V6/4-V⁷ in mm. 250-253) that transforms the chromatic descent at the end of the refrain into an ascending line with chromatic alterations. A *crescendo* hairpin drives the agitation to a boiling point, creating the first high point of the coda: the *fortissimo* high B (Example 3).

E.g. 3

254 Broken Octave B as High Point
ff Brilliant Style
B: I

258 Literal repetition for pure musical excitement
Coda as Stretta in tonic major
Phrasing ends
V⁷

The broken octave B as the high point, mm. 254-261

This B presents a crucial notational ambiguity that bears on both performance practice and analytical interpretation. While it appears to have an acciaccatura structure, the ornament, rather than functioning as a non-harmonic tone, participates in the harmonic structure by forming a broken octave with the main B. Its melodic execution introduces octave stretching

that immediately distinguishes the coda from preceding sections. This departure from the preceding harmonic intervals marks a decisive structural boundary. The National Edition, in its critical examination of the score sources, reveals that neither the autograph nor other versions clearly indicate whether the first grace note in mm. 254 and 258 falls under the 8va sign. Based on contextual evidence and performance practicalities, the National Edition applies the 8va sign to both the grace note and the main note. This editorial decision corroborates the hierarchical organization of high points revealed in this study. Excluding the grace note from the 8va sign would not only contradict the National Edition's considerations but would also disrupt the perception of subsequent high points, given the progressive hierarchical relationship between the coda's high points. Such an initially exaggerated registral leap would compromise the internal coherence and emerging expression of the dynamic curve, undermining the work's aesthetic whole. The coda functions within the *buffa* finale tradition, where it must fulfill dual requirements: it must release accumulated tension while simultaneously conveying sufficient climactic force to establish its role as the movement's final statement. The high points in the coda therefore create formal articulation not through maintaining musical continuity, but by constructing "strongly articulated points of closure, which build steadily towards a climactic cadence"³³.

Following this first high point of the coda, a four-bar arpeggio passage in brilliant style appears twice in literal repetition (mm. 254-261). The separation becomes evident at the end of the second iteration (mm. 260-261), where the left hand's phrasing slur, unlike the first time, terminates at the final dominant seventh chord rather than extending to the next measure, thereby emphasizing the isolated quality of the individual high point. In fact, omitting this repetition would neither compromise the musical architecture nor diminish the listener's sonic experience – indeed, it would eliminate the technical demands of connecting two phrases over a large span (one might experiment by performing the passage without repetition, proceeding directly from the first phrase to m. 262). As Platoff observes, this exemplifies a characteristic feature of the *stretta*:

The use of such a long repeated section, which states over and over words that do not need repeating, suggests that, in the *stretta*, dramatic values are by convention subordinated to musical ones ... the important action has concluded, and pure musical excitement can take over³⁴.

³³ Platoff, *Musical and Dramatic Structure*, p. 227.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

However, a single relaxation cannot adequately counterbalance the finale's prolonged accumulated tension. This tension-release process extends throughout the coda's dynamic trajectory. The dynamic level recedes to soft before restarting with a rapid, chromatic ascending figure (m. 262). This linear ascent is supported by an accompaniment that references the "dancelike character"³⁵ of the *leggiere* section, while demanding greater agility and flexibility. At m. 268, the right hand's narrow position expands into an arpeggio and reverses direction. When this downward plunging motion coalesces into block chords in m. 270, the movement evokes the iambic rhythm characteristic of episode a. This passage gradually ascends in stretto fashion to reach the coda's – and the entire piece's – superlative moment: the *fortissimo* B in m. 274. While this pitch matches the previous high point, its formation of an ascending interval of a 17th with the preceding A $\sharp$ establishes it as a focal point in the musical experience. Following this climax, the musical movement subsides again. These dynamic fluctuations in the high-point scheme reflect "organic life and psychological processes"³⁶.

The oblique descent commencing from the second high point alludes to Chopin's A minor Etude Op. 25, No. 11. The left-hand *marcato* chromatic descent concluding the Etude finds its parallel in the corresponding *crescendo* descent within the Finale's coda (mm. 280-282). Chopin accentuates the coda's climactic moment through a horn call built upon a 6/4 chord in the bass (mm. 274-276). This 6/4 chord, approached and left by leap before resolving to I⁶, functions as a constant 6/4 generated by the arpeggiated tonic chord in the bass. Throughout the coda, rapid, florid figures in the right hand assume prominence, while the left hand provides arpeggiated support to create a turbulent effect. This consonant arpeggio 6/4, however, transcends its previous supporting role to become an independent melodic line. Beyond its altered chordal function, it sustains for nine full measures near the coda's end (mm. 274-282). Within the constraints of the tarantella topic and its transcendent elements – specifically the hunting-style horn calls – the superlative moment of the coda signifies a "firm commitment to the male gender, and a tone that is strongly euphoric"³⁷, thereby facilitating the effective signification of musical signs, as shown in Example 4:

³⁵ Zukiewicz, *Chopin's Third Piano Sonata*, Op. 58, p. 157.

³⁶ Agawu, *Music as Discourse*, p. 62.

³⁷ Monelle, Raymond. *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral*. Indiana University Press, 2006. Musical Meaning and Interpretation, p. 95.

268 Pseudo High Point
sirello

273 High B with an ascending 17th
The Superlative Moment
Descending pattern referencing Etude Op. 25 No. 11
Consonant ♯ expanded by arpeggiation
Horn Quartet signifies euphoric musical adventure

277 dim.
Horn Calls articulates masculine expression

281 Expression affirmed by *marcato* articulation
Global High Point
A Written-Out Octave B

The superlative moment, the high B with an ascending 17th, and the global high point -- a written-out octave B, mm. 268-286

The final cadential tag (mm. 282-286) echoes the preceding climax with a *fortissimo* V⁷-I progression. This cadential motion, articulated through rhythmically punctuated dotted chords, reasserts tonic authority and culminates in the ultimate global high point – a written-out octave B. Its robust stance distinguishes it from the previous two high points, revealing these earlier points to function as local high points within a broader dynamic curve. Together, they form a gestalt perceptible as a complete high-point schema throughout the coda's ebb and flow.

Beyond the coda, other sections of the finale, including the refrain (G, m. 44; C♯, m. 135) and episode (B, m. 52; G, m. 143), similarly feature salient registral peaks. From a synoptic perspective, however, these peaks delineate a more expansive dynamic contour wherein earlier high points assume varied roles. The refrain's peak, for instance, operates as an upper neighbor to the prevailing harmony while simultaneously connecting to the preceding measure's anchor tone (A♯, m. 43), thereby establishing a moderate tessitura. Conversely, episodic peaks frequently serve as formal delineators, signaling the transition from refrain to episode. These preliminary dynamic nodes collectively prepare the arrival of subsequent structural high points.

6. Conclusion

Compared to its predecessor, Sonata Op. 35, which generated at least some brief commentary, Newman found that Op. 58 left no records beyond publication-related information. In this context, the score itself, as the composer's direct legacy, provides essential clues for analysts seeking to uncover the work's essence.

According to Dahlhaus's division of aesthetic postulates in music history, the aesthetic of expression dominated art theory in the 18th and 19th centuries, emphasizing how style reflects the composer's persona. In semiotic terms, interpreting meaning invariably involves signs. The musical topics employed in this study, along with the high points rubric operating under their constraints, represent signs of musical expression. Musical topics reference the work's artistic character while simultaneously carrying inherent social functions as genre tokens. Through the preceding discussion, musical topics convincingly explain Tomaszewski's evaluation of Chopin's late sonatas: "an absolute and unquestionable unity on the level of expression and meaning, an iron logic on the level of form, and a dramatic tension which, in a performance worthy of the works, brings genuine catharsis"³⁸.

This study focused on one of Agawu's six proposed rubrics for analyzing Romantic music: high points. Future research could incorporate all six rubrics into a comprehensive analytical framework. Furthermore, the concept of climax analogous to high points appears in the discourse of other musicians. Rachmaninoff, for instance, identified "culminating point(s)"³⁹ as essential to a work's organic nature, noting that their position and intensity vary across

³⁸ Tomaszewski, *Chopin*, p. 534.

³⁹ Bertensson, Sergei, and Jay Leyda. *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*. New York University Press, 1956, p. 195.

different compositions and that failing to recognize them would cause the entire expression of the work to collapse. This observation suggests that the concept of climax is at least pervading Romantic music. Future research could employ this concept for comparative analyses across composers' works, further investigating how high points illuminate structural coherence and expression. This approach also underscores Dahlhaus's endeavor to reconcile the historical and aesthetic dimensions of musical works, that is, by revealing historical connections through high points, thereby situating compositions within their historical context.

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