

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PIANO SONATA IN C MINOR, OP. 4 BY FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

LIOARA FRĂȚILĂ¹

SUMMARY. The aura of the composer Frédéric Chopin penetrated the Western European musical culture, touching massively other cultures as well, up to the Chinese one; the certainty through which we recognize the thrill of this aura is mostly due to the fact that "Chopin's compositions have opened a new era in the piano's history"². Being present in the Parisian salon with Rossini and Liszt, the great Pole achieved an organic interweaving between the tradition of Austro-German and French music. The analysis of the sonata No. 1 in C-minor op. 4 builds the core of the present study and relevantly denotes the connection of its architecture together with the set of conventions belonging to the format of the sonata-genre coming from Beethoven. As we know, the Sonata-pattern designed by Beethoven was expanded throughout the Romantic period as well as the conditions under which the aesthetics of Romanticism found a specific corridor reaching its maximum of expression. In a way of an idiomatic, natural model of transmission, the Chopin's style of conceiving music played its predominant role. Taking into account in this approach theories belonging to the aesthetics field and some theoretical applications with significance for understanding the levers of construction concerning this sonata, op. 4 (composed when the composer was only eighteen (1828)) and Chopin's approach of the other stages of emancipation within the genre, I will highlight its rules which emphasize implicitly the dialogue with the "Sonata-Fantasy" genre, as this construct appears (for instance) in sonata op. 58.

Keywords: language, two themes sonata, polyphony, form, evolution

¹ Lecturer PhD, Lioara Frățilă, "Transylvania" University of Brașov, Faculty of Music, raluca.frățilă@unitbv.ro.

² Eigeldinger Jean-Jacques: Chopin: *Pianist and Teacher as seen by his Pupils*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 65

Introductory Aspects

The study of language and style in Chopin's piano-oeuvre covers significant layers of reception including the palette of affective aspects and more than that, a rich vocabulary of expressions. There is an enhanced literature which can document about the carefully researched realm which is focussing its attention to the Chopinian idiom. This literature appears to be nourished especially by taking part theoretically (musicologically) to the sound-poetry and intense rhetoric belonging to his music. But it seems that "of all the composers of his generation, Chopin is the one usually regarded as least influenced by Beethoven."³ The territory settled beyond the usual preoccupations aiming the heroic landmark in which the Polish romantic composer delved, a territory that captures through his life and creation an 'anti-hero', opposed to the Beethoven's positioning, caught in the objective a completely different model of his work examination. Separating his music from Beethoven's narrative, "[a] heroic figure larger than life"⁴, connoting it as less related to the Austro-German tradition, allowed a more adapted look at the idiom and the musical material.

Chopin's musical language leads to the perspective of the emotions' world from which we can infer the genetics of the category of emotions he manipulated, i.e., the process which particularly reached an evident climax within his art. In his *Method of Piano* where he set out some of his pedagogical ideas, it is written: "We use sounds to make music just as we use words to make a language."⁵ Józef Elsner, Chopin's composition teacher, guided him towards a kind of experience which enlarged his comprehension through studying the treatises of Satztechnik and melody-emancipation by Kirnberger and Koch, in whose contents the biology of the phrase or motif conquered a new space, new poetics, totally different from Beethoven's one and from his followers. Wilhelm von Lenz, a connoisseur of the composers' group in which Chopin was a part, stated about his piano-technique and vivid manner of playing, about the nature of its idiomatic elements, that "In the details of the performances, in the natural elegance – born of his feelings without being intentional or studied – in the taste and inwardness evidenced by all his interpretations, Chopin the pianist was a phenomenon of incomparable originality, a Polish (Sarmatian) phenomena, French in education and habits, with the advantages and drawbacks of both factors."⁶ The physiognomy of the Chopinian phrase has interested and still interests many theorists and

³ Petty, C. Wayne: *Chopin and the Ghost of Beethoven*. In *19-thCentury Music*, Spring, 1999, Vol. 22, No. 3, University of California Press, pp. 281

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 281

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71

performers. However, it is difficult to perceive an unique corridor oriented to the core of his phrasing. The above mentioned physiognomy can be understood both by its rhythm, by its pulsating character, and by balancing the melodic and harmonic functions; then, by the manner of leading the agogic and rhythm including the vocabulary of tensionalities and that of the prolongations will anticipate and optimize, as William Rothstein stated, "the rhythmic innovations of Wagner."⁷

The purpose of my analysis, of the Sonata op. 4 Nr. 1 in C-minor, finds out a relevance by matching my own research with the diverse approaches of authors such as Carl Sachter, Charles Burkhart, Alan Walker who remarkably try to maximize the knowledge and the capacity of comprehension with regard to Chopin's music. It is fully discussed today the modality of avoiding the tools of the standard-analysis, just for identifying some refreshing points which can be provided by extra-musical ideation as for example the resourcefulness fertilized by Harold Bloom's theories of poetry or by Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism in language.⁸ In my analysis I am interested in looking for certain connections between the syntax and narratives of the sonata in C minor and the 'critical mass' that the Beethoven's power of the musical dramaturgy imposed through the canon of this architectural form.

A broad look concerning the cultural horizon in which the Sonata No. 1, op. 4, in C-minor, was conceived

At the intersection of the 18th and 19th centuries and at the crossing of two historical epochs, Classicism still had a powerful influence on the artistic style of musicians, and the sonata was considered a higher form of musical composition. To write a sonata meant more than a challenge: it was a step forward in the artistic evolution, an intrinsic experience for those who aspired to become renowned composers.⁹

In what concerns the ensemble of the *Piano Sonata in C Minor, Op. 4* by Frédéric Chopin, one can notice the formal unity, wrought with various motifs, intensely exposed and refined in every section, even if this modifies the equilibrium of the entire piece. The extent of the motifs' transformation underlines the composer's minuteness and his talent to exploit thoroughly the complete potential of a musical idea, in a variety of postures, transformations and reiterations. Even if this Sonata lacks Chopin's specific lyricism and the delicate and rich melodiousness already proven in his first

⁷ Goldberg, Halina: Phrase Structure in Chopin's Early Works in the Light of Elsner's Instruction. In *Indiana Theory Review*, Spring and Fall 2010, Vol. 28, No. 1/2, pp. 1

⁸ Petty C. Wayne, pp. 281-282

⁹ Berger, Wilhelm Georg. *Estetica sonatei romantice* (The Aesthetics of the Romantic Sonata), Music Publishin House, Bucharest, 1983.

creations, Chopin was able to make his way from the beginning of his illustrious componistic career with a technically and artistically rich and complex composition, thus exposing his true laboratory of artistic creation.

The first of Frédéric Chopin's sonatas is an ample musical composition and holds the status of an exercise, outlining the composer's effort to exert his creative fantasy within the rigors of a genre pertaining to the Classical tradition. The sonata was written in 1828 and was dedicated to his composition teacher, Józef Elsner. The young composer was just 18 years old at the time, and was interested in the creation of big scale works, filled with ardent Romanticism (as the *Piano Concertos*- 1830), *Sonata No 1*- 1828, *Scherzo No. 1*- 1831, *Rondo à la mazur* - 1826), to express the impetus of youth, the desire for perfection, shown at a structural level (both as a whole and in the microelements of musical language) and at the level of syntax (through a tight and heavy writing for piano, combining many types of syntax: homophony, polyphony, accompanying tune). Even if Chopin remained well-known in the music history for the minuteness of his piano mastery, his early compositions were a true revelation for the contemporaneity and must not be neglected. Let us not forget that, only one year previous to the composition of this Sonata, in 1827, when young Chopin presented one of his first compositions, *Variations Op. 2 in B-flat major* on the theme of *Là ci darem la mano* from *Don Giovanni* by W. A. Mozart for piano and orchestra, Robert Schuman famously exclaimed: "Hats off, gentlemen! A genius!"¹⁰.

In his first *Sonata*, Chopin gives the impression that he paid special attention to the architecture of the composition and to the componistic details, from the desire to exercise his technique, taking into account as faithfully as possible the rules and requirements of the genre.

The *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op.4* has four parts, faithfully following the classical architectural structure, based on the alternation of movement and form, as it follows: part I – *Allegro maestoso* – a form of two themes sonata, part II – *Menuetto-Alegretto* – in the form of three large stanzas, where B is a trio; part III – *Larghetto* – has the structure of three stanzas with varying elements; part IV – *Finale-Presto* – has the structure of the sonata-rondo.¹¹

Discovering of some language features in the Sonata No. 1 in C-minor, op. 4 by Frédéric Chopin. Analysis of its parts

Part I

The first part, having the notation *Allegro maestoso*, is an ample section, considered by some musicologists as a form of a two themes

¹⁰ Voynich, Ethel. *Chopin's Letters*, Dover Publication, Dover, 1988.

¹¹ Coman, Lavinia. *Frédéric Chopin*, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009.

sonata, and by others, as a single theme sonata, generating tacit polemic around this composition. Written in *alla breve* bar, the Sonata is based on a theme inspired by Johan Sebastian Bach's *Two Voice Invention No.2, in C minor*. Chopin's lifetime admiration for the German Baroque composer is a well-known fact, but the reasons that determined him to borrow elements from the creation of his predecessor were not elucidated until today. A critical consensus was reached stating that the theme inspired by Bach is a form of homage paid to him by the young Polish composer.¹²

Beginning with this theme, Chopin made some changes in rhythm, disposing the sounding material in equal eighths notes, and afterwards creating a complex basis for the processing and layering of the theme, harmonically and polyphonically, by combining the concept of rigor with the freedom of fantasy in his treatment of the source of his inspiration.¹³

As it constitutes an exercise, two important aspects about this Sonata are worth mentioning, meaning: the main theme of the part I is based on a theme inspired by *Two Voice Invention No.2, in C minor* by J. S. Bach, and the first theme of the part IV is inspired by the Wanderer Fantasy in C Major Op. 15 (*Wandererphantasie*) by Franz Schubert.¹⁴

In the examples below are the theme of J. S. Bach's *Invention* and the theme of Frédéric Chopin's *Sonata* rendered in parallel to clearly show the source and the form it acquires in the Romantic composition (see e.g. 1 compared to e.g. 2).

E.g. 1



J. S. Bach, Two Voice Invention No.2, in C minor, bars 1-2

¹² Denizeau, Gerard. *Să înțelegem și să identificăm genurile muzicale (Let's understand and identify musical genres)*, Meridian Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000.

¹³ Dimulescu, Vlad. *Repere de belcanto în pianistica chopiniana, (Belcanto landmarks in chopinian repertoire)* PhD thesis, Cluj:Academy of Music „Gh.Dima”, 2000.

¹⁴ Goldberg, Herald. *The Age of Chopin*, Indiana University Press, 2004.

Allegro maestoso. $\text{♩} = 72$.

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 1 to 4

It can be noticed that in the first phrase of the theme, (bars 1 to 4) there are deviations from Bach's model, starting with the replacement of the eighth sound (B flat) with G, which makes the slow transition to F sharp and enhances the austere expression of the musical idea. The second example reveals a compact writing, both on the vertical level (from the perspective of harmony) and on the horizontal (in what concerns the polyphony).

The *Sonata* begins by presenting the theme in a medium-key and a single voice (bar 1), then another two bass voices are added, imitating the first motif exposed before, with a third interval parallel movement, in ascending direction and on a chromatic trajectory. The theme stands out by austerity and fluency and it lacks melodic notability and rhythmic impulse, acquiring a better contour at the harmonic and polyphonic level. In the next example, the theme is rendered in its complete 8 bars format, and the accent is placed on the imitating feature of the debuting voices, the reversed counterpoint character of the first and second phrase, conferred by the takeover of the theme by the left hand, in the lower plan. The theme ends, according to the Classical norms, in an authentic perfect cadence on the tonal chord (see e.g. 3).

Allegro maestoso. $\text{♩} = 72$.

Piano.

V7 I

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 1 to 8

The transition or the bridge follows, developing in two stages, the first in C Minor, ending in half-cadence on a dominant chord, and the second gaining momentum on the plan of the melody and accompaniment, preparing the way for the second thematic group. Taking into account the number of bars, the bridge has a perfect symmetry, (8+8), and it follows the classical Sonata pattern. It is important to be mentioned that, in the unfolding of the musical discourse, the composer iterates the chromatic motif of the second bar and not the diatonic motif of the first (see e.g.3). The bridge contains a genuine development of this motif and walks it through different levels and through different harmonic contexts (see e.g.4).

E.g. 4

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part I, bars 9 to 22

A new theme appears in the midst of the austere atmosphere created by the first musical idea, in the 25th bar, bringing an expressive contrast – which feels comfortable after the previous tension. We see that it keeps main tonality, C major, and that the first notes of this idea coincide with the ones in the main theme (C-B natural-C-D), an aspect which lead to the interpretation of this Sonata as having a single theme (see e.g. 5). We opted for the variant of the two themes sonata due to the small number of common sounds, which gives the feeling of an intentional coincidence, dealt with in two opposite directions. The first theme of the secondary thematic group (B1) is completely different from the theme A by its warm and floating lyricism, like a caress, a divine blessing for a sorrowful soul.

E.g. 5

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 25 to 30

The B1 theme is to be found again in bars 39 to 43, but slightly modified to allow the cadence on step I. Starting with bar 43, a cell from theme A is varied – the four eighth notes of the second beat of the first bar, in reversed position (see e.g. 3 compared with e.g. 6).

E.g. 6

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 41 to 50

The B2 theme underlines the composer's care for the formal equilibrium, seen in the search of the most coherent and autonomous inner form for every sub-section.

Circumscribed to the same artistic tradition is the transition (having a comprehensive status), which is not only written as a simple rhythmicity of the secondary theme, but also as a veritable independent section, with an attentively constructed internal evolution which is varied at the end of the exposition. During the 30 bars, the composer incessantly generates variations of the main chromatic motif, equally preoccupied to introduce modulating inflexions and to diversify the piano writing by insertion of new figures (resembling those of the *Étude Op. 10*, written a few years after). The passage towards the development is made suddenly and briefly, in a single chord with a dominant function for the new tonality of the development – A flat Major.

E.g. 7

The image shows a musical score for the first part of Chopin's Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The key signature is C minor (three flats). A red box highlights a specific section of the music, with the word "transition" written in red below it. The text "C minor" is also written in red at the bottom of the score.

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part I, bars 58 to 62*
(the first bars of the transition)

E.g. 8

The image shows a musical score for the end of the exposition in Chopin's Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The key signature is C minor. The score includes various dynamic markings such as "cresc.", "ff", and "dim.". Two red boxes highlight specific chord changes, with the label "C - V7 A-flat - V 4/3" written in red below the second box.

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part I, bars 81 to 89*
(the end of the exposition)

In the previous example, the chord transitioning to the development in the second repetition was underlined, the exposition having the structure of a Classical Sonata, noted by repetition bars. The cells and the motifs which compose the main theme are at the core of the whole exposition, and added to this is the minuteness of the development of the motifs, that result in an expressive and contrasting two themes sonata exposition.

The development indicates the composer's interest in creating the most sinuous modulation trajectory, as a veritable laboratory of the componistic fantasy concerning the modulation.

E.g. 9

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 90 to 94

In the last stage of the development, a pedal on the B flat Minor is required, preparing the return to the main theme.

E.g. 10

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 158 to 161

E.g. 11

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 175 to 179

The reprise emphasizes the originality of the composer's conception, due to the surprising apparition of the main theme in B flat Minor instead of the initial tonality, C Minor.

E.g. 12

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 179 to 184

The main theme returns, following the same schematics as those of the introduction to the exposition, retaining the imitative polyphony and the doubling in thirds parallelism. The bridge follows the same structure as in the exposition, modulating towards D Major, in the first stage, and in G major in the second stage.

E.g. 13

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 185 to 203

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The B group gathers, in this instance, the two themes exposed in the secondary thematic group of the exposition in a single structural unit, rendered in G Minor and modulating towards A flat Major. In the transition (again, given a comprehensive role), the tonal trajectory veers towards the basic tonality, C Minor. The transition contains elements of the exposition and is followed by a coda, with the notation *con forza*, characterized by virtuosity and bravery, with outstanding technical passages, with parallel third and eighth intervals, requiring an alternative execution of *legato-staccato* for a more permissiveness of the entire piano.

E.g. 14

The musical score consists of three systems of piano music. The first system shows the transition from G minor to A-flat major, with the final bars of the transition marked in red. The second system continues the A-flat major section, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The third system features a coda marked 'coda con forza' in red, characterized by rapid sixteenth-note passages and dynamic markings of *ff* and *f*. The score includes various articulation marks such as staccato and legato, and fingering numbers for both hands.

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part I, bars 235 to 248

Table 1

EXPOSITION (1-89)					
A	Bridge		B		Transition
	stage I	stage II	B1	B2	
1-8	9-16	17-24	25-43	43-59	59-89
C minor	-	C minor			
DEVELOPMENT (90-178)					
	stage I		stage II		stage III
	90-122		123-158		159-178
	A-flat-B-flat-DC-A-flat-F-E-flat-G-A-flat			B-flat V	
RECAPITULATION (179-248)					
A	Bridge		B	Transition	Coda
	stage I	stage II			
179-186	187-194	194-202	203-219	219-238	239-248

General scheme of part I of the *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4*, by Fr. Chopin

Part II

Following the ample, complex and tensed *Allegro*, the composer opted for a contrasting movement, not according to the classical model, but to his own intuition and musical conception. Thus, instead of introducing a slow movement, he oriented towards a easy, comforting, dancing part – a Minuet of small dimensions and accessible melody, with no ample development.¹⁵

The Minuet is written in a $\frac{3}{4}$ bar, specific to the dancing genre, the basic tonality being E flat Major. We notice the agogic notation – *Allegretto* – and the character notation – *scherzando* – and inside the Trio there is only one notation – *con espressione*. Formally, the traditional pattern of the Minuet genre is respected, with part II as a major three stanzas (A-B-A), where A is, in its turn, a minor three stanzas and B is a minor two stanzas. Stylistically, due to the melodicism and the accessible musical expression, some connections with similar movements from W. A. Mozart's Sonatas or F. Schubert's piano miniatures can be established.

The first section, *Minuetto-Allegretto*, starts with a cantabile theme, which appears with the bass at first, than it is taken over by a four bars canon by the higher voice, the medium voices having the role of harmonic filling. In what the harmony is concerned, a short inflexion towards the minor relative tonality, but with a quick come-back to the main dominant, E flat Major, can be noticed.

¹⁵ Manea, Carmen. *La pian cu Frédéric Chopin*, Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică, București, 2010.

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part II, bars 1 to 8:

The A section (the Minuet) has a three stanzas form, composed of three periods: A, A1 and A'. The middle period, although beginning in the main tonality, had an instable harmonic character, having inflexions veering towards C minor, E flat Minor C Major, G Major (perceived more as an inflexion of the C dominant) comes back through chromatic modulation to E flat Major. As a whole, the composer creates a contrast between the first two periods.

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part II, bars 17 to 23

The A stanza acquires the part of a choir, with a simple harmonic structure and an accessible melody, coming back towards to end of the Minuet in the same hypostasis, but with small dynamism in the spatial sounding plan – by the doubling in parallel eighths of the bass theme.

E.g. 17

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part II, bars 33 to 48

The *trio* is written in the corresponding tonality, *E flat Minor*, characterized by extended expressivity, having lyrical and melancholy accents. In what the structure is concerned, the *trio* has two sub-sections: B, B1 C, with different musical content. The first has a symmetrical structure, represented by two periods of eight bars. Due to the half cadence on the dominant in the 56th bar and to the perfect cadence in the 64th bar it can be seen as a question and answer structure, with antecedent and consequent.

E.g. 18

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part II, bars 49 to 64

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The second section of the trio, B1 C (similarly structured in two eight bars periods), begins in G flat Major, taking the characteristics of a graceful and tender Mazurka and returning to the tonality of E flat Minor.

E.g. 19

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part II, bars 65 to 74

At the end of the trio, according to the Classical structure, the Minuet is repeated *da capo al fine*. The juxtaposition of the two musical sections in this part was, for Chopin, the just moment to place the spotlight on the Polish folklore and to combine it with elements of academic music.

Table 2

MINUET (A)			TRIO (B)	
A	A1	A'	B	C
1-16	17-32	33-48	49-64	65-80
e-flat I-V, V-I	E-flat-C-E-flat-C-G	E-flat I-V, V-I	E-flat I-V, V-I	G-flat-E-flat

General scheme of part II of the Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, by Fr. Chopin

Part III

Due to agogic notations *Larghetto* and *con molto espressione*, part III is a calm section, of serene meditation, where the interpreter's concentration and ability to preserve the tension of the slow tempo is put to the test. In this section, Chopin surfaces the side of his genius he will later exercise in his

Nocturnes.¹⁶ Due to the expressivity, the dreamy and meditative character, but especially to the mellifluous tune, similarities with the oneiric style of his *Nocturnes* can be observed. Although the 5/4 meter is clear, one can identify an asymmetrical rhythmical structures (conceived to favor the tune), thus the composer annulling any tendency of fracturing the melody, any metric accent, and constructing a fluent, unitary and perpetual melodic narrative. The only elements indicating any form of inner metric organization are the harmony and the broken course of the piano accompaniment, parameters that are constantly changing from 2 to 3 beats. In the next example, the indications of inner metric organization in the first nine bars are underlined.

E.g. 20

The image shows a musical score for the piano accompaniment of Chopin's Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part III, bars 1 to 9. The score is in 5/4 time and marked 'con molto espressione' and 'p'. It features a complex rhythmic structure with various fingerings and articulations. Red arrows point to specific notes in the bass line, and some notes are underlined to indicate inner metric organization.

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part III, bars 1 to 9*

Formally, the delimitation is difficult, as the flow of the melody indicates the attempt to fracture the sounding course. Looking beyond this continuity, I discovered motifs and themes that are repeated along the movement, many times, revealing a three stanzas form, with varying elements. We can see, thus, three formal principles interconnecting: the stanzas, the variation and the freedom of structure (manifested through the asymmetry of the phrases formed by unequal number of bars).

The first period, A, begins with a four bars homophonic moment, where, in fact, is exposed the generating harmonic structure. Along the next nine bars, a suave and tuneful melody gently takes shape in the superior plan, accompanied by the bass voice in broken arpeggios, and by the intermediate voices which have the role to complete the harmony.

¹⁶ Sieluzycycki, Czeslaw. *Copernicus of the Piano, Chopin Studies*, no.6, 1999.

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The second period is contoured through the repetition of the musical idea from the introduction, in bar 14, where the same chords from the beginning are transposed in a higher octave in an arpeggio accompaniment. This period is composed of three asymmetrical phrases, with 7+6+5 bars. Starting with bar 21 (the delimitation between the first and the second phrase) a new cantilena emerges, more embellished and varying the theme exposed in the main period. The examples below include both the initial theme and the enhanced variant by means of arabesque in a higher tonality.

E.g. 21

Second phrase of A

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part III, bars 5 to 8*

E.g. 22

Second phrase of Av1

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part III, bars 21 to 24*

The third phrase of Av1 is characterized by tonal instability. Inflections towards the tonalities of D flat Major, C flat Major and E flat Minor can be identified and bars 30 and 31 make a come-back to the initial tonality, A flat Major, throughout an enharmonic and chromatic transitive passage.

The last period, Av2, is another variant of the initial theme, but this time it is developed in an ample ornamentation, written as a polyphony for each hand, on two plans of sound and with a rhythmic diversity given by the introduction of fifths and trios overlapping the binary formulas of the accompaniment.

E.g. 23

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part III, bars 31 to 35

The juxtaposition of the sound plans must be, again, underlined, as the right hand elegantly unfolds the arabesques on the higher plan, while the left hand utters the arpeggio motifs. The composer utilizes dynamic fluctuating nuances by means of successive *crescendos* and *decrescendos*, of simple harmonic passages, but arranged with refinement, novel rhythmical overlapping (creating expressive polyrhythms), all piano formulas that became a characteristic of Chopin's later creation.

The Nocturne atmosphere is preserved until the end of this part, as the two hands change places, the right becoming the accompanying piano and the left acquiring the part that conducts the melodic frame to completion. Chopin's specific ornamentation is present in the last bars, in a sober register, enriching the tune of the left hand (see e.g. 24).

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part III, bars 36 to 42

Table 3

A		Av1		Av2
1-13		14-31		32-42
4 + 9		7 + 6 + 5		6 + 5
A-flat	V	A-flat	~D-flat, C-flat, E-flat~	A-flat

General Scheme of part III of Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4 by Fr. Chopin

Part IV

The last part, *Finale*, is a movement of instrumental bravery which runs in an emphasized *Presto*, indicated by the very fast metronomic notation. The piano writing is characterized by impressive virtuosity, as the composer's focus is placed on the bright technique, through the difficult scales and arpeggio passages, spread along the keyboard for both hands. Some of the piano formulas present here can be recognized in some of his *Studies* gathered under the *Op. 10* (for instance, the chromatic passages from *Studies No. 4* and *12*, the arpeggios in *Study No. 8* or the alternating mix of thirds and sevenths from *Study No. 7*).¹⁷

Structurally, part IV is organized as a tri-penta-stanza rondo (A B Dev. A B A). Due to long transitions and ample development passages, which go beyond the simple developing function of a rondo, we can identify a tendency towards rondo-sonata. The choir is repeated several times, and the couplet appears once, twice brought between the three variants of the choir.

¹⁷ Berger, Wilhelm Georg. *Estetica sonatei romantice (The aesthetics of the romantic sonata)*, Music Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983.

Out of various componistic reasons, the last part of the *Sonata* is considered unrepresentative for the Chopin's work by theoreticians, as it does not prove the spontaneous imagination and melodiousness which is characteristic to the Polish composer. More than that, similarities between the theme of the choir and a famous musical idea from the *Wanderer Fantasy Op.15 (Wandererphantasie)* were discovered. The theme of this work left a strong impression on young Chopin, who created in the fourth part of his first Sonata a veritable variation starting from the rhythmic and melodic profile of the cyclical idea of Franz Schubert's fantasy.

In the examples below are the first bars of both the musical pieces in order to make the similarities visible:

E.g. 25

Finale.
Presto. (♩ = 132)
con fuoco

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part IV, bars 1 to 5

E.g. 26

Allegro con fuoco, ma non troppo
f
Franz Schubert, Op.15

Franz Schubert, *Wanderer Fantasy in C Major Op. 15*, part I, bars 1 to 4

E.g. 27

Adagio
pp

Franz Schubert, *Wanderer Fantasy in C Major Op. 15*, part II, bars 1 to 4

Franz Schubert, Wanderer Fantasy in C Major Op. 15, part IV, bars 1 to 6

We can see that the two works have in common two motifs: the first (see E.g. 25 – noted with α) has a chord profile and becomes noticeable especially through rhythm, by succession of half note – two quarter notes, respectively quarter note – two eighths, conferring a vigorous, willing character (as martial signals, given by the C-C scale) to the musical writing; the second motif (see e.g. 25 – marked β) is present only in the first part of Schubert's *Fantasy*, and is represented by the ascending arpeggio.

Coming back to Chopin's *Sonata No. 1*, we identify the classic harmonies, first of all, the authentic cadence, but still enriched by a writing of ample arpeggios, chords placed in a vast position, together with constitutive chromatics which create tensions in their succession.

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part IV, bars 1 to 8

The choir spreads along 16 bars, organized in the form of a double period, composed of antecedent phrases (half cadence on the dominant chord, as in e.g. 29), and consequent (ended with authentic cadence on the tonal chord), respectively. This is repeated integrally during this part twice more, in almost the same hypostasis and the same tonal profile. The original motif α is more often repeated, on different levels, different tonalities and in continuous development as a motif. In the following examples (30 to 33) are a few representative moments for this motif:

E.g. 30



Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part IV, bars 24 to 25: (bridge, stage I, where α is underlined as a reminder of the initial rhythmic motif)

E.g. 31



Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part IV, bars 65 to 71: (secondary theme B1, developing phrases)

E.g. 32



Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part IV, bars 84 to 87: (secondary theme B2, where α is to be found again by rhythmic impulse)

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part IV, bars 264 to 268

The bridge is structured in two stages: stage I, having 16 bars (8+8), in C minor, where the first phrase has half cadence on the dominant and the second on step I. Stage II, according to the classical rigors, is modulatory. There is a passage to G minor and the cadence is on the dominant of this new tonality. The bridge has the aspect of succeeding melodic parallelism, where the rhythmic pulsation taken from the main theme can be distinguished.

The secondary thematic group is composed of two musical ideas, both exposed in G minor. The first, B1, has a similar aspect to the preceding bridge, keeping the voluble character conferred by the succeeding arpeggios exposed by a piano writing of impressive virtuosity. Although it can be easily mistaken with a new phrase of the bridge, due to the continuity between the moments and to the flowing development, I marked it as a secondary theme, starting with bar 41, because the tonal mark indicates a clear stabilization on the central dominant of C minor. As it can be seen in the general scheme placed at the end of this analysis, B1 is structured as an asymmetrical three-part (8+16+8 bars).

Fr. Chopin, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor*, Op. 4, part IV, bars 40 to 47

As it can be seen in the general scheme placed at the end of this analysis, B1 is structured as an asymmetrical three-part (8+16+8 bars). The two secondary themes are connected through a short transitory passage (bars 72 to 83), characterized by an intensely chromatic writing, taking the shape of an ascending chromatic stair, sustained harmonically by the accompanying piano chords, constructed on the dominant of the 5th step of G minor.

E.g. 35



Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part IV, bars 72 to 77

The second minor theme, B2, is much visible and well-shaped. Unlike B1, which is constructed around the dominant of G minor and thus gives the impression of a perpetual tonal instability and of a stringent need of resolving, B2 debuts with an impression of certainty, stability and interiorized vigor. It has the features of a choir by Bach due to the homophone syntax; structurally, it is composed of three asymmetric phrases, the first of which has a moment of modulatory inflexion on the dominant, as it follows: the first 8 bars are in G minor and the next 4 are in D major, and afterwards, in the third phrase, there is a come-back to G minor, with the variation of B2.

E.g. 36

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part IV, bars 83 to 97

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In bar 116 starts an ample thematic development, starting from the micro-units of the previous themes. It cannot be divided into stages, as the sound discourse develops as a perpetual flux of tension accumulation, gathering diverse moments of motif variation in a perpetual flow. In the example below (e.g. 37) is rendered a segment of the rendering of B2 theme as sequences of different tonal areas.

E.g. 37

The image shows a musical score for Chopin's Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part IV, bars 152 to 166. The score is presented in three systems, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system is marked 'sempre legato' and 'B-flat minor'. The second system is marked 'Idem' and 'F minor'. The third system is marked 'cresc.', 'dimth.', and 'D minor'. Red circles highlight specific notes in the treble clef across all systems, indicating a thematic motif. The bass clef part consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Fr. Chopin, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4, part IV, bars 152 to 166

The return to A is preceded by 8 meters of pedal on the basic tonal dominant, C minor, after which the choir is identically repeated, starting with bar 184.

The bridge is formed out of two stages, the first with an identical course as that of the exposition, except the ending and the transition to the second stage, where a modulation towards the relative tonality, E flat Major is present. The second stage is more ample and has a more convoluted modulatory trajectory, in tonalities as C flat Major and F Major.

The secondary thematic group starts with the same musical idea exposed through arpeggios and with a character of piano virtuosity, in F Major, swiftly modulating towards the corresponding F minor. Then, the trajectory becomes oscillatory between the newly reached tonality and the basic tonality, as it can be seen in the general scheme. The link between B1 and B2 is made through the same transitory passage.

The second secondary theme appears as a variation, accompanied in the lower plan with the help of a linear, and not a homophonic, as in the exposition, sounding display. The formal structure is maintained, the same is the tonal plan (the first 8 bars of B2 are in F minor, the next 4 in C Major and back to the F minor). The last occurrence of the choir is preceded by an ample developing section (bars 325 to 366). The last reprise also has the function of a coda, bringing back the main theme, A, from the perspective of sound, chord and arpeggio in an amplified form, in order to enhance the expressivity and impact. The virtuosity is required until the last chords of the last bar.

Table 4

EXPOSITION (1-115)				
A			B	
A	Bridge		B1	B2
	Stage I	Stage II		
1-16	17-40		41-71	84-115
8+8	8+8	8	8+16+8	8+4 8+4+8+13
CV - I	V - I	~G__V#	solV~F~GVI-V#_____ G ~D ~G__	
DEVELOPMENT (116-183 – undivided)				
G I - II - VI alt. ~D# ~ A ~ A ~ F ~ B-flat ~ B-flat ~ F ~ C ~ D ~ E C 16/4 - V _____				
* bars 154-172 = variation B2				
* bars 177-183 = pedal on the dominant of C				
RECAPITULATION (184-325)				
A			B	
A	Bridge		B1	B2
	Stage I	Stage II		
184-199	200-240		241-280	293-325
8+8	8+8	16+10	8+8+8+16+8	8+4 8+4+8+13
CV - I	V -	~E-flat ~F	F ~ C____IIb ~ E V____F ~ C ~ F____	
developing section (326-366)				A (367-399)
				8+12+12
~ B-flat ~ C ~ G V# ~ D ~ E ~ F ~ E-flat CV_____				C_____
(pedal on dominant)				

General Scheme of the part IV, Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 4 by Fr. Chopin

Conclusions

Although it is seen as an exercise, Chopin's Sonata No. 1, Op. 4 in C minor bears, in an anticipating manner, the stylistic features of the later creations of the composer: rhythmic variety and pregnancy, harmonic and polyphonic refinement, rich and unexpected character of modulation, the originality of the piano embellishments and the constant attempt to innovate the musical expression. This sonata can be grasped, of course, by a multitude of instruments of analysis, as I have already mentioned, extra-musical, such as they can be offered by the perspective of the levels of narratives that are relevant in defining the musical time. This trajectory has already been traced by the theorists in the literary realm such as Gérard Genette. Current sonata's theories such those belonging to James Hepokoski are entirely convincing and helpful, appearing to function as a liaison between their contents and the performers' expectations. I cannot fail to point out other, new models of experience in the analysis of Romantic musical variety of expression, to justify the nuances and the essence of the material of this sonata; and here has its place the spectrum of associations suggested by the reading process as they are described within the design of the coding layers commented in Roland Barthes' meaningful remarks. This whole field of investigation enables for this sonata a sort of conceptual understanding through its transitory aspects beyond the immediate utterance, i.e., an instinctive and intuitive one, thus creating a significant semantic and hermeneutical space; this space can be for sure fulfilled in successive approaches in the future.

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