Beethoven's Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 110: Music of Amiability, Lament, and Restoration
Meredith, William
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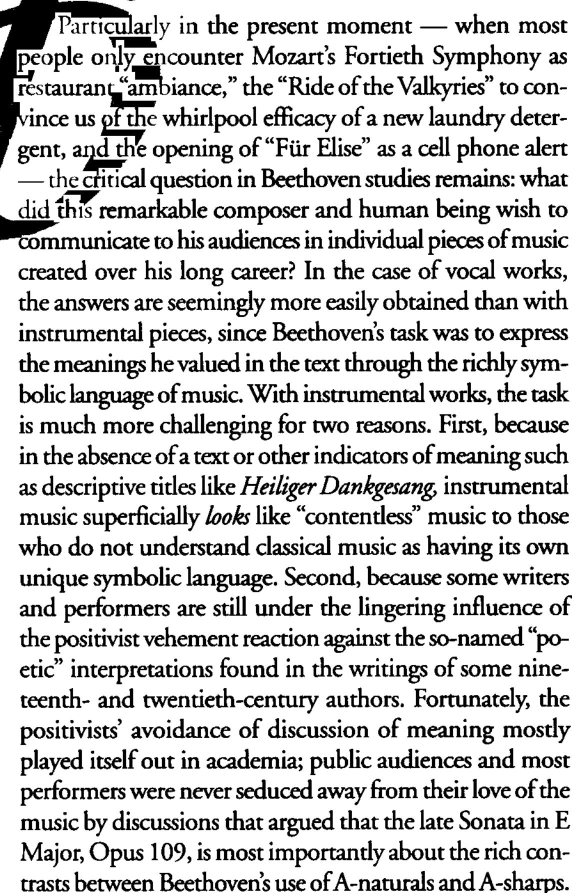
EXPLORATIONS IN MEANING

Beethoven's Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 110: Music of Amiability, Lament, and Restoration

WILLIAM MEREDITH

A preliminary version of this paper was given at the *Focus on Beethoven* festival and symposium at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in June 2002 in conjunction with a performance of the sonata by the festival's organizer, John Salmon. This paper is dedicated to my sister, Nancy Lene Meredith (1952-1977).

I. On the General Question of Meaning in Beethoven's Music[1]



Particularly in the present moment — when most people only encounter Mozart's Fortieth Symphony as restaurant "ambiance," the "Ride of the Valkyries" to convince us of the whirlpool efficacy of a new laundry detergent, and the opening of "Für Elise" as a cell phone alert — the critical question in Beethoven studies remains: what did this remarkable composer and human being wish to communicate to his audiences in individual pieces of music created over his long career? In the case of vocal works, the answers are seemingly more easily obtained than with instrumental pieces, since Beethoven's task was to express the meanings he valued in the text through the richly symbolic language of music. With instrumental works, the task is much more challenging for two reasons. First, because in the absence of a text or other indicators of meaning such as descriptive titles like *Heiliger Dankgesang*, instrumental music superficially *looks* like "contentless" music to those who do not understand classical music as having its own unique symbolic language. Second, because some writers and performers are still under the lingering influence of the positivist vehement reaction against the so-named "poetic" interpretations found in the writings of some nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors. Fortunately, the positivists' avoidance of discussion of meaning mostly played itself out in academia; public audiences and most performers were never seduced away from their love of the music by discussions that argued that the late Sonata in E Major, Opus 109, is most importantly about the rich contrasts between Beethoven's use of A-naturals and A-sharps.

Indeed, from its earliest reception Beethoven's critics and public perceived that his music is saturated with "content"; because the push and flow of his life acutely affected his creativity, and because he was a man of extraordinary breadth of experience and reflection on the world around him, the music's content is rich to the point of being inexhaustible. People committed to classical music can no longer rest in the luxury of assuming that the values of this music we treasure are commonly understood. It is our responsibility to articulate and advertise the meanings we hold dear.

William Meredith directs the activities of the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies.

Against this backdrop, here I explore the question of the meanings of Beethoven's Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 110, composed from the late summer or early fall through December of 1821 and published in 1822.[2] On the one hand, Opus 110 may appear to be too easy a choice for this exploration, since Beethoven left us direct and indirect signposts to the work's meaning. On the other hand, the presence of three indicators in the formally wayward third movement and a single allusion to the content of the first movement may encourage us to tackle the question of the content of the first two movements and simultaneously to have more faith in the values of the entire enterprise.

All music, like all plays or novels, exists as an art form that moves through time. The progression of musical ideas in a sonata, for example, functions similarly to the succession of events in a play or novel. In Donald Francis Tovey's formulation, "The sonata is an essentially dramatic art-form, combining the emotional range and vivid presentation of a full-sized stage drama with the terseness of a short story."[3] What we know of the central character of a drama in the first scene of the first act is not how we understand her or him at play's end. Similarly, as a Beethoven sonata unfolds through time, it presents a succession of what are best called psychological states, whose progress or regress constitutes the meaning of the work. These psychological states, widely discussed in eighteenth-century music treatises, were called affects or states of the soul, and they were part of a larger aesthetic theory called the doctrine of the affections. Music's task was to express these affections. Thus, in 1752 (only eighteen years before Beethoven's birth), the flute virtuoso, teacher, and composer Johann Joachim Quantz wrote in his seminal treatise, "If you were to ask what the true object of inquiry and reflection should be, my answer would be as follows. If a young composer has thoroughly learned the rules of harmony, he must strive to hit upon a good choice and mixture of *ideas from beginning to end in accordance with the purpose of each piece.* He must express the different passions of the soul properly" (emphasis mine).[4]

Once the composer had done her or his job, the performer was then obligated to carry on the "true object of inquiry and reflection."[5] In a section of his 1789 *Clavierschüle* titled "Concerning the Need for Personal and Genuine Feeling for All the Emotions and Passions Which Can Be Expressed in Music," Daniel Gottlob Türk (1750-1813) writes, "The final and indispensable requirement for a good performance is without doubt a proper and correct feeling for all expressive passions and emotions. ... If the composer of the required expression conveys it as well as possible throughout the work and in specific places, and the player has suitably employed all the aforementioned means given in the previous sections, there still remain

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particular cases in which the expression can be heightened by exceptional means." Türk then went to recommend performance practices that would vex not a few modern critics and performers who demand literalist devotion to the written score: "In music whose character is impetuosity, anger, scorn, rage, frenzy, and the like, one can perform the most forceful passages somewhat accelerando. Also, some ideas which are to be intensified when repeated require that one take into consideration to some extent the velocity. ... In exceptionally tender, languishing, melancholy places, where the emotion is brought to a point, so to speak, the effect may be unusually strengthened by an increasing ritardando. Also, in the expression before certain fermatas, one takes the movement a bit slower, little by little, just as if the strength were exhausted by degrees."[6] (I am quoting explicitly these passages because they illustrate the aesthetic ideal of Beethoven's day and because they are quite obviously applicable to Opus 110.)

In consequence, a Beethoven sonata, as understood by the general aesthetics of the period, presents a "mixture of ideas from beginning to end in accordance with the purpose of each piece." It is important to insert here that the doctrine of the affections was far from static — individual movements and works did not normally depict a single passion. As Quantz explained, "... since in the majority of pieces one passion constantly alternates with another, the performer must know how to judge the nature of the passion that each idea contains, and constantly make his execution conform to it."[7] Thus, it is the responsibility of the performer to interpret the ideas correctly as she or he translates them into sound. As Türk and every other writer on performance practices notes, the performer has the freedom to alter or enhance the literal text (that is, the notated score) in order to enrich the portrayal of the ideas and affects.

In purely instrumental works, how do performers correctly assess the meaning of the works? The answer is simply that they must learn how to read the individual concrete music elements that in combination and synergy symbolize the "different passions of the soul." Although some modern musicologists and theorists continue to chafe at the following formulation, music was considered to be a kind of symbolic language, substituting music notes, dynamic markings, articulations, registers, keys and modes, melodic shapes, tempo markings, and indeed every element for the letters, words, and sentences of spoken and written language. According to Quantz, "Reason teaches us that if in speaking we demand something from someone, we must make use of such expressions as the other understands. Now music is nothing but an artificial language through which we seek to acquaint the listener with our musical *ideas*" (the italics are in the original).[8] In another section of his treatise, Quantz, ever the meticulous pedagogue, described in some detail how to ascertain the correct passion. I quote him at some length here:

> I will now indicate some particular features by which, *taken together* [emphasis mine], you can usually perceive the dominant sentiment of a piece, and in consequence how it should be performed, that is, whether it must be flattering, melancholy, tender, gay, bold, serious, &c. This may be determined by (1) whether the key is major or minor. Generally a major key is used for the expression of what is gay, bold, serious, and sublime, and a minor one for the expression of the flattering, melancholy, and tender. ... This rule has its exceptions, however; thus you must also consider the following characteristics. The passion may be discerned by (2) whether the intervals between the notes are great or small, and whether the notes themselves ought to be slurred or articulated. Flattery, melancholy, and tenderness are expressed by slurred and close intervals, gaiety and boldness by brief articulated notes, or those forming distant leaps, as well as by figures in which the dots appear regularly after the second note [that is, Lombard rhythms]. Dotted and sustained notes express the serious and the pathetic; long notes, such as whole and half notes, intermingled with quick ones express the majestic and sublime. (3) The passions may be perceived from the dissonances. These are not all the same; they always produce a variety of different effects. ... (4) The fourth indication of the dominant sentiment is the word found at the beginning of each piece, such as Allegro, Allegro non tanto, — assai, — di molto, — moderato, Presto, Allegretto, Andante, Andantino, Arioso, Cantabile, Spiritoso, Affettuoso, Grave, Adagio, Adagio assai, Lento, Mesto, and so forth. Each of these words, if carefully prescribed, requires a particular execution in performance. In addition, as I have said above, each piece which has the character of one of those mentioned previously may have in it diverse mixtures of pathetic, flattering, gay, majestic, or jocular ideas.[9]

The five symbols of musical language that Quantz describes — mode, size of intervals, articulation, dissonances, and movement headings — were of course not all of the symbols used by composers (elsewhere Quantz discusses the use of other symbols such as dynamic markings, etc.); they were, however, by implication the five most important for *beginning* performers to learn to decode musical affect. The music's meaning lies in the almost infinitely variable combination of symbols.

Of course, all languages evolve over time. One major problem for the modern performer who wishes to decode the meanings of Beethoven's compositions is that some of his symbols have lost their meanings and must be rediscovered. Nonetheless, it is important to note that (1) understood in the way that Quantz and his contemporaries articulated how music expresses meaning, those meanings are not "subjective" in the sense that they "proceed from or take place within a person's mind such as to be unaffected by the external world"[10] (indeed, for music to work as a language at all means that it must be built from symbols with commonly understood "external" meanings, as Quantz explains); and (2) it is indeed possibleto "mis-read" a piece either by misunderstanding the symbolic references or by missing them altogether.

Perhaps the most famous misread work of Beethoven is the first movement of the *Sonata quasi una fantasia,* Opus 27, no. 2, nicknamed the "Moonlight" Sonata.

"The sonata is an essentially dramatic art-form, combining the emotional range and vivid presentation of a full-sized stage drama with the terseness of a short story."

Donald Francis Tovey

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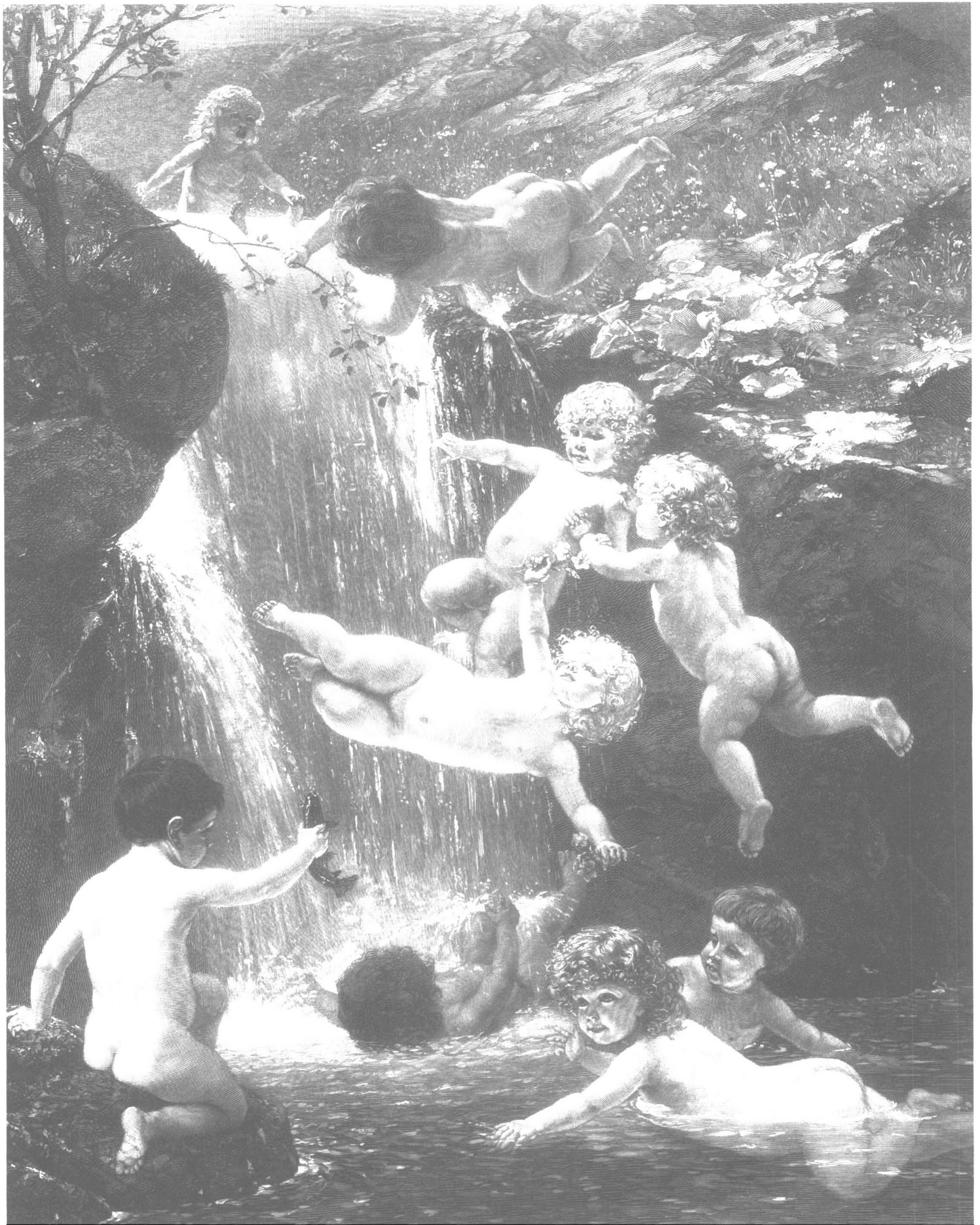

Engraving of "Beethoven's Cis moll-Sonate" (Beethoven's Sonata in C-sharp Minor) based on a painting by F. Bodenmüller (from the collection of the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies; gift of the American Beethoven Society)

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Late nineteenth-century engraving of "The Genesis of the Moonlight Sonata" (based on the story of the blind girl) after a painting by L. Vogel (from the collection of the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies; gift of the American Beethoven Society)

The nickname, which apparently gained popularity in Germany around 1830, comes from a poet and critic named Ludwig Rellstab, who connected the first movement to "a boat visiting by moonlight the wild places on Lake Lucerne in Switzerland" ("une barque, visitant, par un clair de lune, les sites sauvages du lac des Quatre Cantons en Suisse").[11] Rellstab's lake has subsequently been transmogrified into all sorts of watery images, as evidenced in the accompanying illustration from a painting by F. Bodenmüller of girl and boy babies tumbling over a waterfall into a pool. The nickname "Moonlight" disregards the ominous dotted-note pattern of funeral music that is the characteristic rhythmic motive of the melody (think of the obsessive dotted rhythms in the "Funeral March on the Death of a Hero" in the Sonata in A-flat, Opus 26) and the strange key of C-sharp Minor (associated with lamentation and despair). Rather than music of amorous moonlight, this is music of lamentation. The description of Beethoven's student Carl Czerny much more closely matches the symbols of the music: he portrayed it as a "Nachtscene, wo aus weiter Ferne eine klagende Geisterstimme ertönt" ("night scene, in which the voice of a complaining / lamenting ghost / spirit is heard at a distance").[12] On the same theme of a lamenting spirit, Edwin Fischer has even drawn our attention to Beethoven's hand-written copy of a few lines from the scene from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* after Don Giovanni has killed the Commendatore: "Beethoven transposed the passage into C sharp minor, and the absolute similarity of this with the first movement of Op. 27, No. 2 is quite unmistakable."[13] Antonio Fogazzaro's black poetic interpretation discussed in the previous article accurately touches on the same themes of "lamentation," "funereal shadows," and "souls facing judgment."

Before I turn to Opus 110, I would like to declare that it is not my intention either to assert that my reading is the only possible reading or to discount readings suggested by others; in fact, I will include other readings that support and contradict my own as I proceed. What I am troubled about, however, as part of my larger agenda is that we are perhaps not as willing to entertain and explore questions of meaning in as much depth as we should.

II. Beethoven's Partial Explanations of Opus 110 and Common Understandings of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

Fortunately, Beethoven left performers (and us) several essential explanations of part of the sonata's meaning. The first movement, marked to be played in a moderate tempo in a singing manner and very expressively, is also to be played *con amabilità.* The second movement has no verbal clues; it is only given the tempo indication *Allegro molto* ("Very fast"). The player is instructed to begin the third movement slowly (but not too much) using the pedal that utilizes a single string of the pianoforte on each note instead of the full three strings. (This special effect cannot be obtained on a modern instrument.) This movement, marked *Adagio* at the beginning, is interrupted by a *Recitativo* in which Beethoven bizarrely repeats the pitch A-natural in m. 5 first over the dominant-seventh chord of E Major in the left hand, and then over the simple dominant-minus-seventh chord of E Major in the left hand. (See the facsimile of the first edition on p. 19.) Beethoven instructs the player to jump to three strings shortly before the climax of the recitative is reached, then switch back to *una corda* at the cantabile mark when the melody leaves its high A. Finally the dominant chord resolves to E Major, but the melody turns immediately aside, leading us to the *"Klagender Gesang / Arioso dolente"* ("Lamenting Song / Sorrowing Arioso"). The *Gesang* in turn gives way to a fugal section only marked *Allegro ma non troppo.* It in turn is interrupted by the return of the *Gesang.* This time Beethoven intensifies the expression of sorrow, heading the section, *"Ermattet, klagend / Perdendo le forze, dolente"* ("Exhausted, sorrowing / Losing strength, sorrowfully"). When the fugue returns, it gains an affective description: *"L'istesso tempo della Fuga poi a poi di nuovo vivente / Nach und nach wieder auflebend"* ("The same tempo as the fugue little by little coming to new life / bit by bit again returning to life").[14] Beethoven again asks for one string to be played until m. 165, where he instructs the performer to

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Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 110

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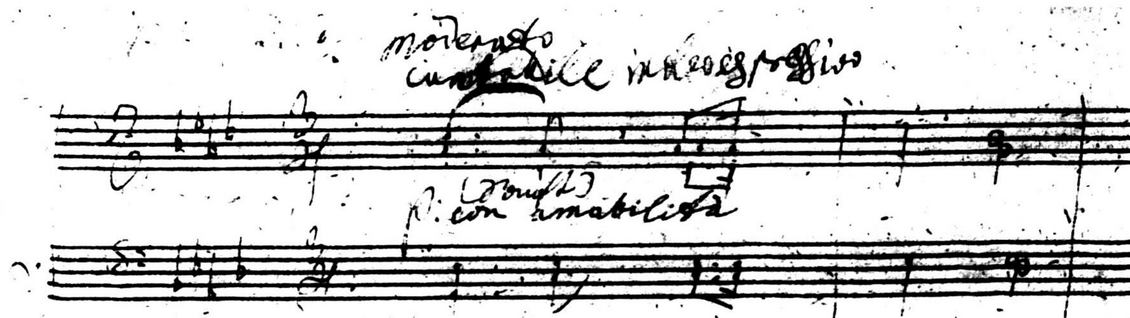

Example 1. The inscription to the first movement of Opus 110 in Beethoven's autograph (from the collection of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz)

add the other two strings bit by bit. With his headings for the complex third movement, Beethoven has thus given us a proximate outline of the ideas of the sonata's ending: recitative, sorrow interrupted by life, exhaustion, renewal of life. But what of the first two movements?

For me, the crucial signal in the first movement is the notation *con amabilità.* This wording reflects the version found in Beethoven's autograph, as seen in Example 1. (The first edition published by Schlesinger, however, has the slightly different *Avec Amabilita;* see Example 2). But what does *con/avec amabilità* mean? The term *amabilità* is actually somewhat unusual in music in general and in Beethoven's music (the only other occurrence of another form of the word in Beethoven, as pointed out by William Behrend, is in the Bagatelle, Opus 126, no. 6: *Presto — Andante amabile e con moto).*[15] *Con amabilità* is not found in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (though it does contain *amabile* defined simply as "amiable, lovable"). When you look up *con amabilità* in <www.grovemusic .com>, you are directed to "see *amabile"* (defined as "charming, gracious"). Neither of these definitions gets us as far as we would wish.

Fortunately, *con amabilità* may be found in various nineteenth-century music dictionaries. For example, in 1839 Gaetano Moreali defined *con amabilità* as "d'une manière gracieuse et insinuante" ("in a gracious and insinuating manner"). In 1842 James Warner defined a close relative of the word, *amabile,* in a manner helpful to our exploration, especially as he combined it with a tempo marking: "amiable, affectionate, &c. The term denotes a sweet, tender, affectionate mode of performance. *E.g.* Andante amabile, an andante which is to be delivered with an affectionate expression."[16] In his 1865 *Adams' New Musical Dictionary of Fifteen Thousand Technical Words, Phrases, Abbreviations, Initials, and Signs,* John Adams defined *amabilità* as signifying music to be performed "In an amiable or affectionate manner."[17] In 1870 Hermann Mendel wrote, in his *Musikalisches Conversations-Lexikon,* "Amabile, amabilmente (Ital.), performance direction: charming, pleasing, insinuating. This direction obliges the performer to a light, gracious, moderately accented execution in a moderately quick tempo. The direction *con amabilità* is identical to this indication."[18] In a similar vein, J. Stainer and W.A. Barrett, in their frequently reproduced *Dictionary of Musical Terms* of 1876, defined *con amabilità* as "With gentleness, tenderness."[19] Thus, *amabilità* signals the performer to play with tender, insinuating, and affectionate expression. But how does one play tenderly or affectionately? Indeed, does the term refer to a manner of playing, or rather to the subject of the music, for whom the player feels such affection, or to the state of mind of the player when she or he envisions the person who arouses such an affect? I'll return to this question later.

Having begun with Beethoven's descriptions of the passions of two of the three movements, we can turn to other two other important musical symbols as commonly understood in Beethoven's time. The first is the belief that different keys and modes refer to distinct passions. This topic is the subject of an important and valuable monograph by Rita Steblin titled *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,* which contains a valuable Appendix A listing the characteristics of each key.[20] (The descriptions that follow are taken from that appendix.) Several scholars have investigated the subject in Beethoven's works as well, including Bruce Clausen, Herbert Kelletat, Lydia Ledeen, Gabriele Meyer, Norbert Schneider, Michael Tusa, and Alan Tyson.[21]

What do these descriptions tell us of the work's mean-

Example 2. The inscription to the first movement of Opus 110 in the first edition (from the collection of the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies; gift of the American Beethoven Society)

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ADAGIO

Ma non troppo.

Una corda.

Recitativo. Piu adagio.

Péd.

Andante.

Adagio. Péd.

Tutte le corde.

Dimin. Ritand.

Cantabile.

Una corda.

Sempre. Tenuto.

Meno adagio.

Ten. Adagio.

Adagio ma non troppo.

Cres.

Dimin. Smorzando.

Péd. Tutte le corde.

Arioso dolente.

Cres.

Dimin.

p Cres.

The beginning of the third movement of Opus 110
(first edition from the collection of the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies; gift of the American Beethoven Society)

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ing? The sonata begins and ends in the key of A-flat Major. When we examine the descriptions of this key from various writers between 1779 and 1821, we discover, as is not uncommon when comparing such descriptions, two opposing passions described by various authors. Georg Joseph Vogler (1779), C.F.D. Schubart (c. 1784), Justin Heinrich Knecht (1792), and Francesco Galeazzi (1796) describe A-flat Major as a black and gloomy key from the Plutonian realm, fit — in Galeazzi's morbid description — "to express horror, the silence of night, stillness, fear, and terror." Opposing these sepulchral descriptions were those of the mysterious G.G. R...r (1786), Johann Jakob Heinse (1795), E.T.A. Hoffmann (c. 1814), and William Gardiner (1817). They viewed the key as splendid, majestic, and affable. Gardiner's and Hoffmann's descriptions are worthy of being quoted in full. Gardiner writes that the key was the "most lovely of the tribe. Unassuming, gentle, soft, delicate, and tender; having none of the pertness of A in sharps. Every author has been sensible of the charm of this key, and has reserved it for the expression of his most refined sentiments." Hoffmann, meanwhile, effuses brilliantly and poetically about this key as an ethereal atmosphere of intertwining spirits: "What is it that rustles so miraculously, so strangely around me? Invisible wings glide up and down. I am swimming in an ethereal fragrance. But the fragrance shines in flaming circles, mysteriously intertwining. They are tender spirits, moving their golden wings in magnificently voluminous tones and chords." (Hoffmann's description closely parallels mm. 12-23 of the first movement of Opus 110.)

Unfortunately, we are roughly bumped down to earth when we turn to Beethoven's own description of A-flat Major as a "barbarous" key (which matches neither of the poles articulated above). In an often-quoted letter of February 19, 1813, to his publisher George Thomson, Beethoven writes, "The last two Airs in your letter of December 21 pleased me very much, for this reason I composed them con amore, particularly the second. You wrote it in [four flats] but as this key seems to me to be so little natural ["peu naturel"] and so little analogous ["peu analogue"] to the inscription Amoroso that on the contrary it would change it to Barbaresco, I have treated it in the key that suits it."[22] The song in question, an "Andantino amoroso," has been identified by Barry Cooper as "Judy, lovely, matchless creature," no. 19 of the Twenty Irish Songs, WoO 153. Beethoven changed the key to B-flat Major, a key more often associated with, in Schubart's words, "cheerful love, clear conscience, hope, aspiration for a better world."[23]

Most writers have taken Beethoven at his word here,[24] but I am more strongly inclined — at least in the case of this letter — to side with the English author W. Wright Roberts, who, after citing Beethoven's letter to Thomson, asserts: "The recorded opinions of composers [on the affects of the keys] help us little; on the whole they add to our bewilderment."[25] Rejecting Beethoven's remark, Roberts concludes that A-flat Major "is the consolatory key in Beethoven, speaking of peace and steadfastness, and of hope that fate cannot crush."[26]

Why is Roberts so quick to dismiss, rightly in my opinion, Beethoven's statement? Roberts argues that A-flat Major "is the key which in works of his too familiar to specify waits with its 'calm and deep peace' to quell the fateful gloom of C minor! Can the most erudite dig out anything of the master's in A-flat which could with any propriety be called 'barbaresco'?"[27] We can add several examples to Roberts' single reference to the calming second movement of the Fifth Symphony, which E.T.A. Hoffmann similarly described as "a charming spirit voice, which fills our breast with comfort and hope."[28] The following incomplete list contains movements in A-flat Major that could hardly be described as "primitive, lacking refinement, or coarse":[29] the second movement of the Pianoforte Trio, Opus 1, no. 1 *(Adagio cantabile)* of 1793-94; the second movement of the Pianoforte Sonata, Opus 10, no. 1 *(Adagio molto)* of 1796-98; the second movement of the first Pianoforte Concerto *(Largo)* of 1795-98; the slow movement of the *Pathètique* Sonata, Opus 13 *(Adagio cantabile)* of 1798-99; the first movement of the Sonata, Opus 26 *(Andante con Variazioni)* of 1800/01; the beginning of the third movement of the *Sonata quasi una fantasia,* Opus 27, no. 1 *(Adagio con espressione)* of 1800-01; the second movement of the Violin and Pianoforte Sonata, Opus 30, no. 2 *(Adagio cantabile)* of 1802; the third movement of the Pianoforte Trio, Opus 70, no. 2 *(Allegretto ma non troppo)* of 1808; Florestan's aria "In des Lebens Frühlingstagen" of *Fidelio (Adagio)* of 1805-06/1814; and the second movement of the String Quartet, Opus 127 *(Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile)* of 1822-25. (It is useful to note how often *cantabile* is used as part of these movement headings.)

Most important of all for our purposes, Beethoven's own heading for the first movement of Opus 110 *(con amabilità)* directly contradicts his 1813 letter. *Amoroso* and *con Amabilità* are fairly closely related in meaning. Both on the basis of Opus 110's description and the long list of "consoling" works in A-flat Major, surely we must reject Beethoven's statement in his letter of 1813 as a casual and playful remark seizing on the weak pun play of words "Amoroso-Barbaresco."

Fortunately, no such contradictions arise concerning the key of the second movement, F Minor (perhaps because Beethoven left us no description of this key in a letter). There was no dissent about its affect among critics writing between 1691 (Jean Rousseau) and 1821 (Francois Henri Joseph Castil-Blaze). In 1787 Heinrich Christoph Koch wrote that it "arouses deep sorrow; expresses the sound of lament"; in 1796 Francesco Galeazzi wrote that it is "Most fit to express weeping, grief, sorrow, anguish, violent transports, agitation, etc." Of these two definitions, it is the latter half of Galeazzi's description, in my reading, that is close to the affect of the second movement.

The third movement begins in the remote key of B-flat Minor with its five flats. Here too critics were unanimous about the key's meaning. Already in the 1690s Marc-Antoine Charpentier labeled it "Gloomy and terrible." Jean-Philippe Rameau in 1722 said that one should use it for "Mournful songs." The most remote key of the movement, however, occurs at the first appearance of the

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Lamenting Song where Beethoven turns to A-flat Minor, the parallel minor to the key of the first movement and a key with seven flats. (A-flat Minor is also the key of the "Funeral March on the Death of a Hero" in the Pianoforte Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 26.) Only two authors described the key before the sonata was written: in 1796 Galeazzi wrote that it was "Not in use on account of its overwhelming difficulty," and around 1814 E.T.A. Hoffmann penned another of his poetic descriptions: "Ah, they are carrying me to the land of unending desire. But as they lay hold of me they give rise to a pain which would rend my breast asunder in an effort to escape."

The scholar Owen Jander has analyzed the significance of Beethoven's use of extreme keys (specifically C-flat Major with its seven flats) in his article "The Prophetic Conversation in Beethoven's 'Scene by the Brook.'" There he quotes Friedrich Rochlitz's 1810 review of the symphony, which noted that the modulations draw the listener into "increasingly introverted contemplation." Jander describes the tonal trajectory of the descent from B-flat Major to C-flat Major and the following "'rescue' from the depths of C-flat" as a "story of descent and return," relating it to the crisis of Beethoven's advancing deafness.[30] Similarly, Beethoven's use of A-flat Minor in Opus 110 points both toward introverted contemplation (also of a painful event) and "descent and return" (the latter coming in the fugal sections).

At the first fugal section in the third movement of Opus 110, Beethoven returns to A-flat Major as refuge and perhaps as reminder. At the reappearance of the *Lamenting Song,* however, it appears in the less threatening G Minor instead of A-flat Minor despite Beethoven's words, "Ermattet, klagend." The use of the less extreme key at the return may reflect that the fugal section has somewhat succeeded in its work. Even so, in the minds of the writers of the Classical Period G Minor was still a key associated with the pathetic, with pensiveness and discontent.

When the fugue subject returns in inverted form, it appears in the further transformed parallel key of G Major, a key associated with "tender and gay songs" (Jean-Philippe Rameau). It is, said Georg Vogler in 1779, "Already livelier [than C major], although not stormy." The transformation from G Minor to Major in the sonata is another of the work's strangest and striking moments: Beethoven reiterates a six-note G Major chord in the bass nine times with a crescendo. (Unfortunately, he did not indicate how loudly the performer should play at the peak of the crescendo, and it is not uncommon for some artists to overplay here.)

In summarizing the meanings of the keys as described by some of the writers of Beethoven's day, we may trace the following outline of the sonata as whole: tenderness and gentleness in the first movement, agitation and violent transports in the second, and a progression of gloominess — great pain — life —discontent — liveliness in the third. I find it more than coincidence that these descriptions of the keys exactly match Beethoven's descriptions of the meanings of the first and third movements.

III. Applying Deryck Cooke's "Basic Terms of Musical Vocabulary" to Opus 110

As mentioned above, if music does function as a language, even an artificial one, it relies on many types of symbols to express human emotions. Some of the most important are certain basic expressive shapes that evolved over the centuries and served as building blocks for many melodies. They could be used in their absolute simplest forms or, as was more often the case, they formed a framework around which melodies could be constructed. In 1959 the English scholar Deryck Cooke published his valuable study called *The Language of Music;* in Chapter 3, "Some Basic Terms of Musical Vocabulary," Cooke described the basic shapes he had uncovered from studying hundreds (if not thousands) of pieces of western European tonal music written between the Renaissance and the late twentieth century. His breath-taking aim was to "establish the emotive significance of each term,"[31] and he did so — at least to my satisfaction, if not to some of his positivist critics of the 1960s — by studying the shapes as they were used in pieces of vocal music. Cooke discovered that there were indeed basic shapes (my wording) that correlate to certain passions and that these have been used with consistency through several centuries of tonal music. It is important to note that the shapes are not "Cooke's" shapes: they are, rather, musical symbols developed by composers of tonal music over centuries as part of the common vocabulary of musical language. For example, the basic shape of an ascending melody built on the following tones in major 1-(2)-3-(4)-5 has been consistently used by composers to express an outgoing, active, assertive emotion of joy. (Tones in parentheses are tones that may or may not be used if composers wish a more ornate version of the shape.) One of Cooke's examples is the unsurpassably exuberant beginning of the Gloria of the *Missa solemnis.* The Finale of the Fifth Symphony also begins with this shape and elaborates on it.

One of the basic shapes identified by Cooke is used in its original and inverted form as the most important melodic building block of Opus 110. It is the shape 1-(2)-(3)-(4)-5-6-5 in a major key. As Cooke describes it,

> The ascending major 1-3-5 progression, with the 5-6-5 phrase dovetailed on, is another of the most widely-used basic shapes of musical language; it is almost always employed to express the innocence and purity of angels and children, or some natural phenomenon which possesses the same qualities in the eyes of men. That this should be so is hardly surprising, when we consider that the phrase confines itself entirely to the joyful elements of the scale, and being an ascending one, it is consequently an affirmation of maximum joy. It is, in fact, expressive of an absolute happiness that can never be fully experienced in civilized human life but only by savages, children, animals or birds, or saints or imaginary blessed beings.

Indeed, many Christmas carols employ this basic shape (the Czech carol "Little Jesus, sweetly sleep," "In dulci jubilo," etc.); it is also used for the Pastoral Symphony of Handel's

"It is, in fact, expressive of an absolute happiness that can never be fully experienced in civilized human life but only by savages, children, animals or birds, or saints or imaginary blessed beings."

– Deryck Cooke

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8va
cresc sf p
1 3 5 5 4 5 6 6 5 4 3 5 4 7 1

Example 3. The melody of mm. 9-12 of the first movement of Opus 110 underlaid with scale degrees in A-flat Major

Messiah and the beloved chorale tune "Wie schön leucht't uns der Morgenstern" ("How brightly shines the morning star").[32]

This shape first appears in its simplest version in mm. 9-11 of the sonata's first movement, as can be seen in Example 3. Set in a high and ethereal register of the pianoforte, the melody ascends from the tonic to climax on the sixth scale step and then returns to the tonic. Notice how carefully Beethoven prepares the arrival at the sixth step: the last two eighths of m. 10, where the sixth is reached in anticipation of the next downbeat, are both marked to be played *appoggiato* ("marked, leaned upon").[33] The melody crescendos to the downbeat sixth scale step, which is marked with a "sf" accent.

The same shape is the backbone of the opening melody of the sonata, as seen in Example 4. Here, however, Beethoven composed a more ornate version of the basic shape: instead of the simple 1-2-3-4-5-6 we will find in mm. 9-11, he inverts the opening of the shape to 3-1, 4-2, 5-6-5. (As several writers have noted, this somehow echoes the opening of the preceding sonata's variation movement, which opens 3-1-(2)-7-5.) At the beginning of Opus 110, the pair of descending thirds (3-1 and 4-2) serves to introduce the sense of "incoming pleasure" that Cooke describes as the common expressive effect of this interval. Notice in Example 4 how Beethoven has also ornamented the arrival at the sixth step; we find the same two "leaning" notes marked *appoggiato,* but then Beethoven moves with a sigh motive to a trilled fourth scale step (D-flat), which then quickly ascends to retouch the sixth scale step before descending to begin the long melody in m. 5. As has been pointed out by several scholars, the bass mirrors the melody, outlining 1-3, 2-4, 3-6-5. Thus, Beethoven builds his melody and bass on a unique and sophisticated elaboration of one of the most common shapes of the vocabulary of music.

Other important symbols are (1) the adoption of a gentle and moderato 3/4 time signature in a first movement (the only other first movement of a pianoforte sonata in a moderate tempo triple meter is the other Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 26, notated in 3/8),[34] (2) the reliance on four-part chorale texture in the first four measures followed by a turn to melody with accompaniment to emphasize the cantabile theme, (3) the high register, which reinforces the impression of otherworldliness, and (4) the inventive use of first, second, and third inversions from mm. 6-11 to reinforce the impression of etherealness. The pianist and scholar Kenneth Drake writes, "Measures 5-12 occur on a new plane of consciousness, just as the writing begins in a new, higher range of the keyboard. Also, instead of four-part writing, there is now melody and accompaniment. Furthermore, the first dynamic marking in m. 4 is a *subito piano,* while in the parallel measure (m. 11), it is a *sforzando.* The music therefore makes a point of saying what earlier was left unsaid."[35] Perhaps another way of making Drake's final point would be to say that mm. 5-12 free the music from its solid, earthbound register and make more explicit what had been more subtle.

In sorting out the meaning of the opening, we return to Beethoven's marking *con amabilità* ("Sweet, tender, affectionate") and to the choice of A-flat Major, a "consolatory key in Beethoven, speaking of peace and steadfastness, and of hope that fate cannot crush." Cooke's description of the basic shape is uncannily descriptive of Beethoven's richly symbolic version: the melody Beethoven wrought is indeed "expressive of an absolute happiness that can never be fully experienced in civilized human life but only by … imaginary blessed beings."

In an important article on Opus 110, William Kinderman underscores the importance of the sixth scale step (F in A-flat), the note composers have associated with pleasure. I quote his analysis of the last six measures of the coda of the first movement at some length: "This closing passage marks the last of several striking withdrawals from the high pitch registers toward the end of the first movement and brings a drop of a tenth from high A-flat to F along with an abandonment of the thirty-second-note figuration. The characteristic Beethovenian dynamic intensification of a crescendo leading suddenly to a *piano* here highlights the crucial pitch F, which becomes the focal point for a concentrated summary of the movement. At the beginning, F forms the upper compass of the opening four-measure motto as well as the peak of the following period (m. 10). And whereas throughout the development the motivic unfolding to the sixth is denied, at the begin-

p con amabalita
p
(3) 1 (4) 2 5 6 5 5 6 5 4 3

Example 4. The melody of mm. 1-5 of the first movement of Opus 110 underlaid with scale degrees in A-flat Major

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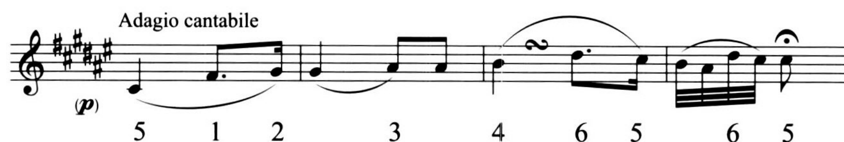
Example 5. The melody of mm. 1-8 of the first movement of the Sonata in A-flat major, Opus 26, overlaid with scale degrees

ning of the recapitulation the music achieves this goal, and even moves beyond it. The climactic aura at the beginning of the recapitulation thus arises not only from the synthesis of tones noted by Dahlhaus but also from the new continuation, as the motto rises beyond F to G-flat in the left hand (m. 62) while an ethereal thirty-second-note figuration resonates above it on the high octave A-flat. . . . The structural importance of F resumes, however, in later passages in A-flat Major: it becomes the registral peak of the second group in the recapitulation, and the mysterious transition to the coda also stresses F as a melodic goal."[36] Kinderman's fine structural analysis of the sixth scale step F underscores the importance of the symbol of the melody "unfolding to the sixth."

Before proceeding to the second theme, I should note that the basic shape 1-2-3-4-5-6-5 is also the basis for the melodies at the beginning of two other sonatas. Beethoven first used it in the opening eight-measure phrase of the theme of the first movement of the other Sonata in A-Flat Major, Opus 26, composed in 1800/01 and dedicated to Prince Carl von Lichnowsky. Here it is much more elaborate than in Opus 110, preceding the basic shape with the addition of the rise from 5-1 (and 1-7-6-5-1), and ending it 6-(2)-5-(1)-4-3-2. See Example 5. (The beauty, again, is not in the shape, but its composing-out.) A remarkably similar but simpler version of this shape appears as the *Adagio cantabile* introduction to the Sonata in F-Sharp Major, Opus 78, dedicated to Therese von Brunswick and composed in 1809. See Example 6. Here the shape is 5-1-2-3-4-6-5; it ends, like Opus 110, with a cadenza-like elaboration of the 6-5 interval, moving to and around the second move to the sixth with thirty-second notes. Again, it is the elaboration of the basic shape and the addition of other elements (such as the pedal point in Opus 78) that reveal the subtleties of the composer's art.

We see an equally subtle version of another basic shape in the second theme of the first movement of Opus 110, as can be seen in Example 7. Here, now in an even higher register of the pianoforte, Beethoven writes a melody based on the descending fourth A-flat to E-flat in E-flat Major (the second key area).[37] The music is wonderfully diffuse because of the harmonies, or more appropriately, the lack of important chord tones in some implied chords. The basic shape, nonetheless, is a variant of Cooke's 5-(4)-3-(2)-1, a shape that "will naturally convey a sense of experiencing joy passively, i.e. accepting or welcoming blessings, relief, consolation, reassurance, or fulfillment, together with a feeling of 'having come home.'"[38] Beethoven went to some trouble, however, to undercut this feeling and make it appear to be unattainable. He avoids the first note of the five-note pattern, weakens the sense of tonal arrival, and most importantly adopts a texture of a pair of falling voices that are tightly interwoven. When the little descending fragment is repeated, he adds a series of cascading dissonant sigh motives in both hands, heightening the sense of unattainable *amabilità*. This second theme is one of the most skillfully and imaginatively conceived moments in all of Beethoven's music. (That he does not linger in these overlapping sighs in two voices is characteristic.)[39]

Another way to characterize the entire first movement is to hear it as a depiction not of unattainable *amabilità*, but of, in Cooper's turn of phrase, "happiness and blessedness." In such a reading, the sigh motives of the second theme do not symbolize lack of fulfillment, but are sighs of pleasure; the assertive closing material of the exposition suggests confidence; the development section depicts not an exile from Eden or aimlessness, but merely intimate ordinary kinds of unsettledness; and the extremely subtle return of the recapitulation further undercuts the formation of large-scale tension. Such a reading would also



Example 6. The melody of mm. 1-4 of the first movement of the Sonata in F-sharp Major, Opus 78, underlaid with scale degrees

Example 7. Harmonic reduction of the second theme of the first movement of Opus 110 underlaid with scale degrees in E-flat Major (mm. 20-21; the pitches are not in their notated registers)

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Example 8. The opening of mm. 1-16 of the second movement of Opus 110, overlaid with scale degrees in F Minor

insist on noting that the sigh motives of the second theme are *eliminated* in the recapitulation, replaced by the two voices moving *at the same time* in a string of parallel thirds.

However one interprets the first movement, one must confront the question of how a performer is supposed to play *con amabilità,* with affection, amiably. It seems to me that this direction applies not to a performance technique per se, but to the state of mind of the performer. Just as Beethoven will instruct the performer to feel (or imitate the feeling of being) *Ermattet, klagend* (weakened / spent, complaining / lamenting) in the third movement at m. 116, here he instructs the player to engage a frame of mind envisioning a tender and loving, an amiable, relationship. The opening of the sonata with its carefully articulated approach to the sixth scale step represents this feeling. If I am right about the first theme, the second theme, in my reading, symbolizes both the sense of incoming pleasure felt with and about the "other" and simultaneously the knowledge that such love or affection is somehow incomplete or unattainable (symbolized most clearly by the sharp overlapping dissonant sigh motives in both hands).

The theme of unfulfilled affection is of course a predominant, if not the main, subject of much romantic music and literature. In that sense, we may wish to think of the first movement of Opus 110 as having a similar content as the song cycle "To the Distant Beloved," which celebrates and laments at the same time. In the middle of the first poem of the cycle, the narrator pledges, "Singen will ich Lieder singen, Die dir klagen meine Penn!" ("I will sing, sing songs of lamenting that tell you of my distress").[40] Opus 110's combination of *amabilità* and "Klagender Gesang" parallels the content of Opus 98, though the song cycle concludes with the image of *attainment* through the medium of the songs being sung ("Dann vor diesen Liedern weichet, Was geschieden unß so weit, Und ein liebend Herz erreichet Was ein Liebend herz geweiht!"; "Then, thanks to these songs, what so far parts us will recede, and a loving heart will attain what a loving heart has blessed!").

Unattainability is also the focus of the second movement of Opus 110. Its opening, as can be seen in Example 8, is based on a modified version of yet another basic shape, 5-(4)-3-(2)-1 in F Minor (a key associated with sorrow, anguish, lament). Cooke describes the affect of this shape in the following way: "we have a phrase which has been much used to express an 'incoming' painful emotion, in a context of finality; acceptance of, or yielding to grief; discouragement and depression; passive suffering; and the despair connected with death."[41] Beethoven uses all five tones of the pattern, and extends it to a sixth with the addition of the leading tone. There are at least two ways to connect this material to the first movement. We can consider it an inversion of the rising 1-2-3-4-5-6-5 basic shape that formed the backbone of the opening of the first movement, or we can regard it an extended version, in minor mode, of the four-note stepwise descending second theme. The first connection makes more sense to my ears. Having depicted the feeling of *amabilità* in the first movement through a major-key melody that rises from the tonic to the sixth scale step, Beethoven now inverts *both* the mode and the span of a sixth, landing not on the minor tonic but its leading tone. (Are the two staccato notes in m. 3 somehow a counter to the *appoggiato* marks of m. 3 of the first movement?) As Behrend describes it, the second movement's leading theme "is somewhat fierce, and is not an expression of Beethoven's gay humour, when he is on good terms with life, but, as a German interpreter rightly says, it is 'grim and forbidding.'"[42]

The grimness is somewhat diverted by the leading tone, which surprisingly directs us toward C Major, converting the descending minor 5-4-3-2-1 shape to the major 5-3-1 of C Major, which ends the phrase with the rising 1-2-3 shape in C Major (think of the power of the 1-3-5 shape at the beginning of the Finale of the Fifth, similarly used to cancel the affect of a minor mode).[43]

Several authors have proposed that Beethoven based the second movement on two popular songs, "Our cat has had kittens" and "I'm a slob, you're a slob."[44] This idea, first proposed by A. B. Marx in 1859 and included in Martin Cooper's book on Beethoven's late period (where he endorses it as an example of "that Dutch vein of humour"), has won favor in some circles. For example, William Kinderman argues that Beethoven's use of the melodies may be explained by "his interest in humorous parody" and by his "assimilation of the lowly, droll, and commonplace into the work, where such material proves complementary to the most elevated of sentiments."[45] As much as I respect Kinderman and as much as I believe that Beethoven was attracted on other occasions to humor and parody (such as the Diabelli Variations), I think A. B. Marx started us off on the wrong path: it is an accidental and meaningless connection. I do not believe that Beethoven intended us to think either of kittens or slobs on the heels

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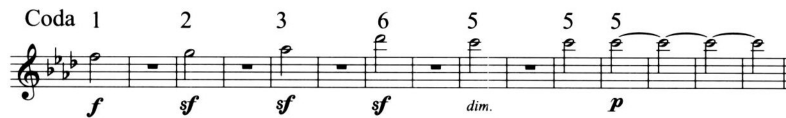

Example 9. The melody of the coda to the second movement of Opus 110 overlaid with scale degrees in F Minor

of the heartfelt first movement. To my mind, the second movement, by inverting the basic shape of the theme of the first movement and changing the mode from major to minor, continues the narrative of unfulfilled yearning. Beethoven biographer Barry Cooper agrees: "The theme of the second movement should be heard as an inversion of these rising scales [of the first theme]; too much has been made of its chance resemblance to a folksong set by Beethoven in 1820, which surely has no intended connection."[46] Furthermore, the theme of the opening second movement (5-4-3-2-1-7) is clearly transformed into the painful "Lamenting Song" of the last movement, where we are even more surely not meant to reflect on slobs or kittens.

If we interpret the second phrase (mm. 9-16) as being in F Minor (the overall key of the movement), we note that the melody falls into the basic shape 2-3-4-5-6-4-3, which is the *minor*-mode form of the first theme of the first movement with alterations at the close. However, by the time we arrive at the third scale step, the movement cadences not in F Minor, but back to A-flat Major (the relative major and the key of *amabilità).* The middle section of the sonata, with its rhythmically dissociated left hand, provides a welcome if furtive contrast to the back and forth tonal conflicts of the first section.

The second movement's coda, nonetheless, somewhat brutally (though not with a fortissimo) ends with the heavily accented minor form of the 1-2-3-4-5-6-5 shape (here skipping the fourth and fifth steps to create a 1-2-3-6-5-5-5); see Example 9. The Picardy third of the last chord (F Major) at first appears to promise some relief, but instead prepares the B-flat Minor of the opening of the last movement. (Edwin Fischer noted that at least one famous performer emphasized this dominant function: "Rubinstein used to tie the last left hand F in the Scherzo to the Adagio."[47])

The final movement begins on the same F that began the coda in the melody and was the apex of m. 4 of the first movement, here reinterpreted in the "gloomy" and "mournful" key of B-flat Minor. The opening gesture is 5-5-6 in minor, followed by a descending seventh leap to the leading tone. (See Example 10.) This dramatic opening, no doubt a response to the coda of the second movement, leads first to the *Recitativo.* Here the repetitions of the pitch A in m. 5 form an extremely enigmatic moment, the most difficult to interpret in the entire sonata. One of the most intriguing explanations comes from William Kinderman, who suggests that "this gesture might be regarded as the vision of a distant goal, a premonition of the ascent into the high register at the conclusion of the sonata."[48]

Another possibility suggests itself in Beethoven's employment of a perplexing notation that he uses both in m. 5 of the *Recitativo* (twelve times on the high A with tied sixteenth and thirty-second notes) and in the return of the *Gesang* (six times in mm. 125-26 with tied sixteenths). Beethoven uses a similar notation, also in off-beat locations within and across measures, at the beginning of the second movement of the Sonata for Cello and Pianoforte, Opus 69, and at m. 28 of the *Grosse Fuge.* The enigmatic notation, named *Bebung* and "repeated-note slur," has no commonly agreed-upon meaning; from my perspective, its appearance and recurrence in Opus 110 suggests that it is a symbol for a rare kind of perturbation and restlessness.[49]

I do not believe that Beethoven intended us to think either of kittens or slobs on the heels of the heartfelt first movement.

Example 10. The melody of the opening of the third movement of Opus 110 underlaid with scale degrees in B-flat Minor

However one understands what the *Recitativo* is meant to say to us in its vocal impulse, it leads somewhat abruptly to the *Complaining / Lamenting Song.* This lament is constructed of a rhythmically dragging form of the same shape we encountered at the beginning of the second movement: 5-4-3-2-1-7 in A-flat Minor (see Example 11).[50] This thematic link not only helps to clarify the content of the second movement, but also moves the sonata to its next stage: from amiability to struggle to lament and complaint. The throbbing left hand, which appears first as a curtain or introduction, is strongly reminiscent of the accompaniment in the *Beklemmt* intrusion in Beethoven's famous Cavatina in the String Quartet in B-flat Major, Opus 130, composed three years later — in both cases the rhythms makes the melody falter and stagger.

The only answer to such sorrow, it seems, is a return to the opening basic shape and the opening key (the consoling A-flat). Tovey poetically notes that "the deep sorrow of the Arioso has found relief in the quiet discipline of a contemplative fugue on a noble and terse theme worked out in grand style and coming to its natural climax without disturbance."[51] The fugue — described

Example 11. The Gesang of the third movement of Opus 110 underlaid with scale degrees in A-flat Minor

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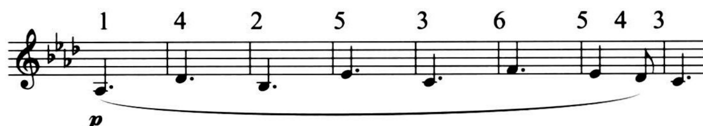
by Kenneth Drake as "restoration"[52] — begins with a subject built on the first four measures of the sonata, but without the first pitch C of the melody. (See Example 12). The similarities have been noted on many occasions, as in John Cockshoot's statement that the fugue subject is "obviously planned on the same outline as the opening theme of the first movement,"[53] or William Kinderman's "The intervallic structure of the fugue subject in the finale ... is already latent in the opening four measures of the [first] movement."[54] This return functions as an implicit recall, similar to the explicit returns of the first themes of the first movement "in or just before the final movement" of the Cello Sonata, Opus 102, no. 1, the Pianoforte Sonata, Opus 101, and *To the Distant Beloved.*[55] Through the texture of the fugue, it is a consolation that must be *ausarbeitet* – worked out, earned (just as, on a much more aggressive scale, the Finale of the Fifth Symphony must be earned through the fugato passages of the third movement). Beethoven thus uses fugue here, as he does in the *Hammerklavier* and the *Grosse Fuge,* to communicate — or is it to process? — a metaphysical struggle.



Example 12. The fugue subject at the beginning of the first fugal section of the third movement of Opus 110 overlaid with scale degrees in A-flat Major

The return of the lamenting song must then be heard as a sobering collapse, a loss of "forze." The strength required to recapture the memory of *amabilità* is insufficient; the narrator is exhausted. When the fugue returns, it perhaps reveals a symbol of its weakened state — the subject is turned upside down. Beethoven did not even find it necessary to supply a dynamic marking. "Little by little" coming to life, the subject, after sixteen measures, soon rights itself. The "new life" is symbolized in part by the appearance of the subject in rhythmic diminution (the note values are halved and then halved again). Beethoven pushes the ultimate climax to the last five measures of the movement. The repeated sforzandos of mm. 201-06 give way to fortissimo in m. 207, and the whole sonata seemingly ends in victory.

In summary then, the sonata is built of melodies based on a remarkably limited set of basic shapes – the opening 1-2-3-4-5-6-5 shape in major mode is inverted and transformed to the minor for the beginning of the second movement. The original 1-2-3-4-5-6-5 shape is also presented in a varied minor form as response and coda. The third movement's major melodic building blocks are the *Gesang's* inverted minor form taken over from the beginning of the second movement and the fugue's slightly altered version of the first movement's opening theme. In his Beethoven biography, Barry Cooper makes these same points in a concise and useful manner: "The main themes of all four movements (if we regard them as four) begin with a phrase covering a range of a sixth ... Moreover, the first and fourth have similar contours reaching up to the sixth of the scale (F), while the Arioso theme begins with a direct transformation of the opening of the second movement, both descending gradually from the dominant. The note F, which forms the peak of the first phrase of the sonata, plays an important role in the rest of the work."[56] The basic shape identified by Deryck Cooke, which he described as being commonly used by composers to express "an absolute happiness that can never be fully experienced in civilized human life," is thus the sonata's building block.

Meaning is thereby constructed and construed from a close reading of the music's symbols. In Opus 110 we are pointed toward an understanding of the sonata by Beethoven himself, who conveyed in written words at crucial passages the signposts of his meaning. These descriptions are reinforced by Beethoven's use of the keys in their commonly-accepted meanings and by his use of selected seminal basic shapes long ago developed as part of music's symbolic language.

IV. Conclusion

What, finally, is Opus 110 about? What emotional journey does it trace? To borrow from Quantz, what "mixture of ideas from beginning to end" does it present "in accordance with the purpose of [the] piece"? In my reading, the question the sonata addresses and reflects on is one of how to deal with the loss of a person for whom one feels or felt great affection.[57] To fully appreciate that loss and the depth of feeling it occasions, Beethoven "sings" to us of that *amabilità* in the first movement. By reversing both the mode (major to minor) and inverting the basic shape (ascending to descending sixth), the beginning of the second movement suggests loss; the continuation depicts struggle, and the coda a incontrovertible statement that the subject of pleasure and affection is irrevocably lost. The complexities of the last movement mirror the complex gamut of human reactions one feels when coming to terms with great loss. The two despairing sections seem to be balanced with the two fugal sections, which represent the consolation of memory (or the struggle to remember) and the awakening of new life.

I wonder, though, if we have thought deeply enough about what the concluding fugal section is meant to tell us? It would be a mistake, in my opinion, to read it as any kind of simple victory, even if we only allow it to be the depreciated value of moving ahead after great loss (Behrend describes it as "a victory over sad memories and haunting visions").[58] I rather agree with William Kinderman when he writes that the "end of the sonata presents a precarious victory, barely sufficient to counteract powerful forces of dissociation, and it does not linger to celebrate its triumph, as do the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies and (to a lesser extent) the *Hammerklavier* Sonata."[59]

When summarizing the sonata's meaning, some writers have even gone so far as to omit mention of the "precarious" ending. Remarkably, Behrend, for example, writes that "one may venture to sum up that mood [of the sonata] in one word: *memories.* There is about the whole of it something soft and transfigured — as there is sometimes about memories; at the same time, because it is the utterance of a stricken man who feels the advance of years, there is a tender melancholy, a plaintive resignation at the sad 'never more'; at the bitter thought that the past is irrevocably gone."[60]

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Perhaps we should not be surprised when one of Beethoven's most intimate sonatas treats loss as its subject, because loss — either through death or distance — was a persistent companion to the composer since his childhood. On December 24, 1773, his grandfather Ludwig, the sole successful and stabilizing force in the family, died seven days after Beethoven's third birthday. When Beethoven was eight, his sister Anna Maria Franziska (baptized on February 23, 1779) died only a few days old. When Beethoven was twelve, his two-and-a-half-year-old brother Franz Georg died on August 16, 1783. His mother died on July 17, 1787, when Beethoven was sixteen. In a letter of September 15, 1787 to Dr. Joseph van Schaden, Beethoven described his sense of loss: "she was such a good mother to me, deserving to be loved, my best friend, oh! who was happier than I when I could still utter the sweet name mother, and it would be heard, and to whom can I speak it now?" That same year, on November 26, 1787, another sister, Maria Margaretha Josepha, died at the age of eighteen months. Beethoven's abusive and alcoholic father died on December 18, 1792, not long after the twenty-one-year-old composer had arrived in Vienna.

The patterns of loss continued there. In the summer of 1799 his passionately loved friend Karl Amenda, whom Beethoven addressed with the familiar "Du," returned to Courland from Vienna, thereby becoming in effect a "distant beloved" (though their relationship was to the best of our knowledge platonic in nature). In 1801 Beethoven pledged to Amenda, "A thousand times comes to my mind the best human being whom I have ever met, yes, certainly, of the two people who possessed my whole love, and of whom one still lives, you are the third — the memory of you can never be extinguished —"[61] In 1802 the crisis over his loss of hearing and all that this loss entailed — including Beethoven's consideration of suicide — found poignant expression in the Heiligenstadt Testament. In 1803 the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, whom Beethoven had loved two years earlier (but not considered marrying), was wedded to Count Gallenberg; in a letter of November 16, 1801, Beethoven had described her as "a dear enchanting girl who loves me and who I love."[62] By 1807 Beethoven's passionate friendship with the Countess Josephine Brunswick — a woman he called "the only beloved," "my all, my happiness," and "angel of my heart"[63] — had become an impossibility (at least on her side). In 1810 she married Baron Christoph Stackelberg after bearing a daughter out of wedlock in 1809. On July 6 and 7, 1812, Beethoven wrote the famous letter to the Immortal Beloved, in which he began by noting that this love could only exist through sacrifice, through not demanding everything, and ended by resolving "to stray about in the distance." The letter's tone of resignation and ambivalence was predictive, as the two never "reached our goal of living together."[64]

In 1814 Prince Karl Lichnowsky died, whom Beethoven once correctly described as "one of my most faithful friends and one of the most loyal patrons of my art."[65] On November 15, 1815, Beethoven's brother Kaspar Karl died of tuberculosis when Beethoven was forty-four, naming Beethoven as co-guardian of his nine-year-old nephew Karl. That same year Beethoven suffered a break in his close friendship with his childhood friend Stephan von Breuning, a break that would last during a terrible decade. In 1816 Prince Franz Joseph Lobkowitz, the dedicatee of the Third, Fifth, *and* Sixth Symphonies and another generous patron and friend, died. On March 31, 1821, only a few months before Opus 110 was written, the Countess Josephine von Brunswick passed away, a woman to whom he had once effusively pledged, "My heart can only — cease — to beat for you — when — it no longer beats — beloved J[osephine]."[66] As Beethoven had lamented in a letter to Franz Gerhard Wegeler in 1810, "o so schön ist das Leben, aber bey mir ist es für immer vergiftet —" ("oh how beautiful life is, but for me it is always poisoned").[67]

The detailed litany of loss recounted here is given not to link Opus 110 to any one loss or any one person, or to suggest in any way that Beethoven's music is a kind of private cipher concealing the identity of a loved one. (The historical record shows that Beethoven was opposed to making public any private associations between his music and individuals.) Rather, in accordance with eighteenth-century aesthetic theory by which music should reveal to an audience the universal "passions of the soul," Opus 110 transcends Beethoven's individual circumstances to convey the universal responses to loss.

Another great artist, Virginia Woolf, touches on these same themes of remembering and loss in her novel *The Years,* published in 1937.[68] In a scene from 1917 in which her characters are settling into the drawing room after an air-raid in London in WWI, Eleanor asks Nicholas:

"'But how ...' she began, '... how can we improve ourselves ... live more ...'" — she dropped her voice as if she were afraid of waking sleepers —'...live more naturally ... better ... How can we?'

'It's only a question,' he said — he stopped. He drew himself close to her — 'of learning. The soul ...' Again he stopped.

'Yes — the soul?' she prompted him.

'The soul — the whole being,' he explained. He hollowed his hands as if to enclose a circle. 'It wishes to expand; to adventure; to form — new combinations?'

'Yes, yes,' she said, as if to assure him that his words were right.

'Whereas now,' — he drew himself together; put his feet together; he looked like an old lady who is afraid of mice — 'this is how we live, screwed up into one hard little, tight little — knot?'"[69]

Woolf obliquely addresses the same human dilemma as Beethoven: dealing with the passing years and inevitable loss, they ask what strategy we should adopt in the face of the loss of individuals who have helped defined our very being, and in the loss of what we have dreamed of and later remembered about those individuals. Writing about *The Years* and Woolf's previous novel, *The Waves,* critic Alice van Buren Kelley argues that Woolf develops the supposition that "the life of the individual becomes a pattern of effort, vision, loss of vision, and renewal of effort."[70] In the last movement of Opus 110 Beethoven, profoundly intimate with effort, vision, and loss, struggles to convince us to renew our effort to unscrew ourselves from the lament of our retracting "hard little knot."

" A thousand times comes to my mind the best human being whom I have ever met, yes, certainly, of the two people who possessed my whole love, and of whom one still lives, you are the third — the memory of you can never be extinguished —"

— Beethoven

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Notes

1 I would like to thank the attendees at the conference in Greensboro for their comments and reflections on this paper. In addition, the comments of Susan Kagan, William George, and Thomas Wendel were invaluable.

2 The autograph is marked "Decemb. 25, 1821"; the final "1" covers up the original "2." The date on work on the sonata is taken from William Kinderman's important article, "Integration and Narrative Design in Beethoven's Piano Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 110," *Beethoven Forum* 1 (1992): 116. I highly recommend this perceptive and thoughtful study.

3 Donald Francis Tovey, *A Companion to Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas* (London: Associated Board, 1931), 263.

4 Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. Edward R. Reilly (New York: Schirmer, 1966), 23. The original title in translation is *Essay of a Method for Playing the Transverse Flute, Accompanied by Several Remarks of Service for the Improvement of Good Taste in Practical Music* (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Voss, 1752). The italics have been added.

5 Quantz noted that "The good effect of a piece of music depends almost as much upon the performer as upon the composer himself," 120.

6 I am quoting these passages in the translation of Carol MacClintock in her *Readings in the History of Music in Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 339-40. A complete English translation is available in *School of Clavier Playing by Daniel Gottlob Türk*, trans. Raymond H. Haggh (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

7 Quantz, 125.

8 Quantz, 120.

9 Quantz, 125-26.

10 This definition of subjective is taken from the third edition of *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*.

11 Wilhelm von Lenz, *Beethoven et ses Trois Styles. Analyses des Sonates de Piano*, 2 vols. (Paris: A. Lavinée, 1855), 1: 163. Lenz goes on to say, "Cet adagio est bien plutôt un monde des morts, l'epitaphe de Napoléon en musique, *adagio sulla morte d'in eroe!*" ("this adagio is a world of death, Napoleon's musical epitaph, *adagio on the death of a hero!*"; see p. 163). Adolph Bernard Marx saw the movement as an "echo" of Beethoven's realization that "the bond of love to Julia Guicciardi had been severed. ... The first movement pictures to anyone who brings a heart to music, most decidedly a song of lamentation and self-denial." See his *Introduction to the Interpretation of the Beethoven Piano Works*, trans. Fannie Louie Gwinner (Chicago: Clayton F. Summy Co., 1895), 115.

12 Carl Czerny, *Ueber den richtigen Vortrag der sämtlichen Beethoven'schen Klavierwerke*, ed. Paul Badura-Skoda (Vienna: Universal, 1963), 43; *On the Proper Performance of All Beethoven's Works for the Piano*, ed. Paul Badura-Skoda (Vienna: Universal, 1970), 39. The English language publication is a facsimile of the edition published by R. Cocks & Co., London. The translation here is my own.

13 See his *Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas*, trans. Stanley Godman and Paul Hamburger (London: Faber and Faber, 1959 [German edition: 1956]), 62-63. Fischer did not identify the copy other than to say that "There is in Vienna a manuscript of Beethoven's which contains a few lines from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Beethoven's undoubted hand: the passage after Don Giovanni has killed the Commendatore."

14 Edwin Fischer makes the interesting comment that "The Adagio with the two fugues foreshadows the 'Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit,' from Op. 132." See his *Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas*, 114.

15 William Behrend, *Ludwig van Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas*, trans. Ingeborg Lund (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1927), 181. Sketches for these bagatelles appear in Landsberg 8/2 on XIII/13-XIV/18 and XIV/23-XV/2. Douglas Johnson, Alan Tyson, and Robert Winter argue that these sketches were not made until June 1824: see their *Beethoven Sketchbooks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 295. The tempo *Andante amabile* is written above the appearance of what Harry Goldschmidt labeled the "Josephine" motive. He argued that the *Andante favori*, WoO 57, the original slow movement of the Waldstein Sonata, begins with a four-note dotted-note motive that is repeated that symbolizes "Jo-se-phi-ne." This same motive appears in a striking form in the sixth bagatelle of Opus 126. See Goldschmidt, *Um die Unsterbliche Geliebte [Beethoven-Studien 2]* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1977), 298 (and the pages preceding and following). It is certainly possible to become fixated with this motive and find it in pieces where it seems a stretch; however, in the case of Opus 126, no. 6, I think the comparison does indeed point to a connection of some type between the works. As will be seen below, Opus 110 and Opus 126, no. 6 are linked in the use of the pattern 5-6-5 and the use of the terms *amabilità* and *amabile*.

16 James F. Warner, *A Universal Dictionary of Musical Terms* (Boston: J.H. Wilkins & R.B. Carter, 1842), ix.

17 Published by S.T. Gordon in New York. This definition occurs on p. 17.

18 Hermann Mendel, *Musikalisches Conversations-Lexikon* (Berlin: L. Heinmann, 1870), 1: 188. I am grateful to Jürgen Fischer of Tutzing, Germany for his assistance in locating this source.

19 Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1876, p. 24.

20 The quotations in this essay are from the first edition, first published in 1981 and reissued by the University of Rochester Press in 1996. A second revised edition has just been announced by the University of Rochester Press, June 2002.

21 Rather than providing bibliographic citations for this literature here, I recommend that those interested in further study look up the subject "key symbolism" in the Beethoven Bibliography Database, accessible at no charge on the web. Citations for the articles and books contain brief descriptions of the contents.

22 My translation; Anderson letter no. 405 (in the original French, but with errors); Brandenburg no. 623 (in the original French text as written out by Oliva). A complete English translation of the letter is found in *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, ed. Elliot Forbes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 554-55. Anderson has "peut naturel." The letter is at the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn (Slg. H.C. Bodmer Br 258).

23 Barry Cooper, 20-21.

24 Steblin discusses Beethoven's views on the keys on pp. 145-47, apparently taking Beethoven at his word about the quality of A-flat. Cooper too appears to accept Beethoven at face value, 21. In his dissertation on the meanings of the keys as they were used in *Fidelio*, Bruce Claussen also argues that A-flat was used because it was a funereal key, noting that in his view A-flat's dark qualities make it the right key to express Florestan's lament in "In des Lebens Frühlingstagen ist das Gluck von mir geflohn!" and that it is also used in the arietta "In questa tomba oscura." WoO 133. See his *Beethoven and the Psyches of the Keys* (PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 1988), 189.

25 W. Wright Roberts, "Key Quality," *Music & Letters* 11 (1930): 58.

26 Roberts, 65.

27 Roberts, 59.

28 *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by His German Contemporaries*, ed. Wayne Senner, Robin Wallace, and William Meredith, trans. Robin Wallace (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), vol. 2: 103.

29 These definitions of barbarous are taken from *The American Heritage Dictionary*

30 Owen Jander, "The Prophetic Conversation in Beethoven's 'Scene by the Brook,'" *Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993): 517-18.

31 Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 113.

32 See Cooke, 151-56.

33 The definition is from J.A. Hamilton, *A Dictionary of 3500 Italian, French, German, English, and Other Musical Terms* (Boston: O. Ditson, 1865), 14. The same definition occurs in Türk's *School of Clavier Playing*, 111, with further directions on p. 343.

34 Eight sonatas have first movements in triple meter: five of these are quick tempos (Opus 10, no. 1; Opus 28; Opus 31, no. 3; Opus 79; and Opus 90); one is a moderately quick tempo (Opus 54, "In Tempo d'un Minuetto"); and two are in moderate speeds (Opus 26 at an "Andante" and Opus 110 as an "Moderato cantabile molto espressivo").

35 Drake, *The Beethoven Sonatas and the Creative Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 105.

36 Kinderman, "Integration and Narrative Design," 119-20.

37 To my ears, this descending fourth recalls the descending fourth that simultaneously ends the first phrase and begins the second (see mm. 4-5).

38 Cooke, 130-33.

39 William Kinderman also views the sonata's first movement in a similar way, but for a very different reason: "The basic character of the first movement, accordingly, is that of unfulfilled yearning; the music hints at more than it can encompass." Kinderman's argument is based on the fact that the fugue subject is latent in the first theme, and that as in the Ninth Symphony, "this subject must first be discovered and then allowed to fulfill its potential." See his "Integration and Narrative Design," 117.

40 The translation is taken from the important article by Joseph Kerman, "An die ferne Geliebte," reprinted in his *Write All These Down* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 173-206. The translation occurs on pp. 174-76.

41 Cooke, 133.

42 Behrend, *Ludwig van Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas*, 183. The German author is unidentified.

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43 I am not the first to argue that there are similarities between the sonata and the Fifth Symphony. In a brilliant and thought-provoking article, Elaine Sisman writes, "The increasingly triumphant energy of the final fugue emerges as the goal of the sonata, in a way comparable to the Fifth Symphony, whose third movement is also recalled in the fourth; indeed, if the A-flat major fugue cannot end without first cycling back to the Arioso dolente, the Fifth Symphony finale cannot even recapitulate (that is, *start* the ending) without the same power that brought the finale theme to light in the first place" (p. 79). See her "Memory and Invention at the Threshold of Beethoven's Late Style," *Beethoven and His World*, ed. Scott Burnham and Michael Steinberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 51-87.

44 "Unsa Kätz häd Katzln ghabt" and "Ich bin lüderlich, du bist lüderlich."

45 Kinderman, "Integration and Narrative Design," 121-22; A.B. Marx, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Leben und Schaffen* (1859; fifth edition: Berlin: Otto Janke, 1901), 2: 416; Martin Cooper, *Beethoven: The Last Decade* (), 190-91.

46 Barry Cooper, *Beethoven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 287.

47 Fischer, *Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas*, 115.

48 Kinderman, "Narrative and Integrative Design," 125.

49 William Newman has a fascinating discussion of, and argument concerning, this effect in his *Beethoven on Beethoven / Playing His Piano Music His Way* (New york: Norton, 1988), 295-99.

50 Though Tovey argues that the similarities between the first theme of the first movement and the fugue theme have a "special meaning," he misses the point on the similarities between the opening theme of the second movement and the *Gesang:* "The resemblance of the 1st bar of the Arioso to the 1st figure of the Scherzo is less likely to have a special meaning; if we stake our faith on that, we may as well go further and find cryptographic evidence that Beethoven's later works were written by Spohr" (see his *Companion*, 265). Tovey, occasionally nervous about forthright discussions of meaning, is illogical here; if anything, the connections between the second and third movements are much more direct and overt than those between the first and third. He misses the point.

51 Tovey, *Companion*, 267.

52 Drake, *The Beethoven Sonatas*, 112.

53 John Cockshoot, *The Fugue in Beethoven's Piano Music* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 97-98. Cockshoot also points out that the fugue subject "also resembles the striding outline which opens Variation V of the finale of the Sonata in E, Op. 109 ... The setting of the *Et expecto* in the Mass in D is also very similar in shape" (109).

54 Kinderman, "Integration and Narrative Design," 117.

55 See Sisman's article on these works cited above. She makes a fascinating point about Opus 110 on p. 79: "In the sonata op. 110, the return of the Arioso dolente and fugue are part of the same movement, they exist in the present, so that their cyclic sweep, however close in technique and emotional tone to fantasia, is localized to recurrence rather than recollection."

56 Barry Cooper, *Beethoven*, 287.

57 In this regard, I should note that Marie-Elisabeth Tellenbach has argued for many connections between Opus 110 and Josephine Brunswick (her candidate for the Immortal Beloved), who had died on March 31, 1821, a few months before the sonata was begun. See her *Beethoven und seine 'Unsterbliche Geliebte' Josephine Brunswick* (Zürich: Atlantis, 1983), 260-66. Although I do not believe that Beethoven considered A-flat to be primarily a funereal key (see the discussion above), is it merely a coincidence that the other sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 26, contains a funeral march in A-flat and that Opus 110, also in A-flat, contains lamenting music and was written months after Josephine's death?

58 Behrend, *Ludwig van Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas*, 186.

59 Kinderman, "Integration and Narrative Design," 145.

60 Behrend, *Ludwig van Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas*, 181.

61 My translation. The original is "Tausendmal kömmt mir der beste der Menschen, den ich kennen lernte, im Sinn, ja gewiß unter den zwei Menschen, die meine ganze Liebe besaßen, und wovon der eine noch lebt, bist Du der Dritte — nie kann das Andenken an Dich mir verlöschen —"; *Ludwig van Beethoven / Briefwechsel Gsamtausgabe*, ed. Sieghard Brandenburg, 7 vols. to date (Munich: Henle Verlag, 1996), Brandenburg no. 66, 1: 84. Some translators try to smooth over the phrasing. Emily Anderson translated the passage as "A thousand times there occurs to my mind the best of all human beings whom I have ever met. Why, certainly, of the three people who have possessed all my affection and one of whom is still living, you are the third — My memory of you can never die —" See *The Letters of Beethoven*, ed. and trans. Emily Anderson, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1961), Anderson no. 52, 1: 62-63. Anderson writes, "No doubt Beethoven is referring to Lorenz von Breuning who had died in April, 1798, and to his elder brother Stephan who returned to Vienna in the spring of 1801." Brandenburg writes that, "Perhaps Franz Gerhard Wegeler, to whom the long confessional letter of May 29, 1801 (Letter 65) is directed, is intended. The other friend could have been Lorenz (Lenz) von Breuning, who died on April 10, 1798." Another possibility is that the one identified as dead was his mother, whom he called "his best friend."

62 "... die mich liebt, und die ich liebe ..." Letter of November 16, 1801 to Franz Gerhard Wegeler. The German text is found in *Beethoven / Briefwechsel Gesamtausgabe*, Brandenburg no. 70, 1: 89.

63 The first three descriptions ("der einzig Geliebten," "mein Alles meine Glückseeligkeit") appear in a letter estimated by Sieghard Brandenburg to be from the first quarter of 1805: see Brandenburg no. 214, 1: 247. The fourth ("Engel meines herzens") from a letter estimated to have been written at the end of May 1805; see Brandenburg no. 221, 1: 255.

64 The translations are from Virginia Beahrs, "'My Angel, My All, My Self': A Literal Translation of Beethoven's Letter to the Immortal Beloved," *The Beethoven Newsletter* 5 (1990): 34-36.

65 The quote ("einer meiner treuesten Freunde und beförderer Meiner [sic] Kunst") is from a letter of January 16, 1807 to Breitkopf & Härtel. See Brandenburg no. 209; 1: 243.

66 "das meinige kann nur — au[f]hören — für sie zu schlagen — wenn — es gar nicht mehr schlägt — geliebte J." See Brandenburg no. 216, which he dates as March/April 1805, 1: 250.

67 Brandenburg no. 439. The letter is dated May 2, 1810.

68 Jean Guiguet writes about the portrayal of loss in *The Years:* "In the opinion of the sensible, clear-headed Kitty ... 'The years changed things; destroyed things; heaped things up — worries and bothers; here they were again.' This, formulated as prosaically as possible, is what the novel is trying to show, what the constantly changing, constantly renewed sea of *The Waves* has already told us with infinitely more mysterious, more moving voice, and surely with far more truth diffused through its poetic imprecision. Half knowing others, half known by them — and half known by readers — the characters are pivots around which is coiled the thread of days, events, things and other people. As a result of the crossing of these threads, of their momentary coincidence, each individual comes to wonder, like Maggie: 'Am I that, or am I this? Are we one, or are we separate?'" See Jean Guiguet, *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*, trans. Jean Stewart (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 310.

69 Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1937), 319.

70 Alice van Buren Kelley, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf / Fact and Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 200, 223.

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