# PART II
# THE PROGRESS IN MUSIC

# IV The *B minor Piano Sonata* S. 178
## The meaning of progress

> Kretzschmar kehrte danach gar nicht mehr vom Pianino zum Rednerpult zurück. Er blieb, uns zugewandt, auf seinem Drehsessel sitzen, in der gleichen Haltung wie wir, vorgebeugt, die Hände zwischen den Knien, und führte so mit wenigen Worten seinen Vortrag über die Frage zu Ende, warum Beethoven zu Opus 111 keinen dritten Satz geschrieben. […] Ein dritter Satz? Ein neues Anheben – nach diesem Abschied? Ein Wiederkommen – nach dieser Trennung? Unmöglich! Es sei geschehen, daß die Sonate im zweiten Satz, diesem enormen, sich zu Ende geführt habe, zu Ende auf Nimmerwiederkehr. Und wenn er sagte: «Die Sonate», so meine er nicht diese nur, in c-moll, sondern er meine die Sonate überhaupt, als Gattung, als überlieferte Kunstform: sie selber sei hier zu Ende, ans Ende geführt, sie habe ihr Schicksal erfüllt, ihr Ziel erreicht, über das hinaus es nicht gehe, sie hebe und löse sich auf, sie nehme Abschied, – das Abschiedswinken des vom cis melodisch getrösteten d-g-g-Motivs, es sei ein Abschied auch dieses Sinnes, ein Abschied, groß wie das Stück, der Abschied von der Sonate[1].

1 Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus, Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 2007, p. 85.

## Introduction

In this chapter an analysis of Lizts's *B minor Piano Sonata* is provided. As the main focus is on the aesthetic issues, then the historical vicissitudes and the compositional stages will only be dealt marginally. Those who would seek to explore these matters in greater depth could refer to the works by Rey Longyear, Sharon Winklhofer, Michael Heinemann, Kenneth Hamilton, and Maria-teresa Storino, and many others, who have analysed these aspects in a more exhaustive fashion. Therefore, the genesis of the work is taken for granted, in order to focus on some musical and aesthetic features that were only touched upon elsewhere. Anyway, in many cases, it will clearly be impossible to avoid references to the manuscript of the *Sonata*.

After this brief preamble it is necessary to explain the path through which the chapter about Liszt's most famous piano work was developed. This clarification is necessary in the sense that it is always difficult to approach the *Sonata* and to analyse it, due to the vast amount of literature that already exists about it, because there are too many ways in which this work could be approached, and, above all, because there are so many different and at the same time valid analyses of it. These analyses create what could possibly be called an "interpretative chaos", whose explanation is the main aim of the chapter. For these reasons, a complete account of the *Sonata* is impossible, since it would cover the space of several volumes. Therefore, the work will be analysed following the four subsequent points:

1. The chronological problem: The *Sonata* was written during the Symphonic poems period, namely in the middle of Liszt's activity as programme-music composer; but it does not show any programme or evocative title, unless the same name "*Sonata*" is the programme. It is an anachronistic work anyway, since Liszt's declared intention was to «briser ma chrysalide de virtuosité et de laisser plein vol à ma pensée»[2] ;
2. The dedication to Schumann, the relationship to his *Fantasie* op. 17, the relationship with Schubert's *Fantasie* op. 15 D.760 "Wanderer Fantasie", and the relevance of Beethoven's sonatas. These elements support the interpretation of the title "*Sonata*" as the programme of the work. It is the musical application of the ideas Liszt expressed in several writings: the ancient masters showed the path, but it is the task of modern composers to find new means of expression (new forms);
3. Analysis of the *Sonata* between Newman, Longyear, Winklhofer and Walker. The *Sonata* will be analysed first as a multi-movement work, then as a sonata-form.

2 Liszt, Franz, *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Alexander Grossherzog von Sachsen*, letter dated 8 October 1846 p. 8.

From the complexity of the form and the several diverse analyses of the work, the necessity of a theoretical answer emerges, which make it possible;

4. The answer involves the idea of progress, and that in two ways: on the one hand, it is possible to see the progress of music acting in the work itself, and, on the other hand, one has to take into account the theoretical progress of music. Both movements involve the idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit*.

To provide an analysis of the B minor Piano Sonata, after so much has already been written, is certainly an arduous task. When one decides to approach the work starting from a historical and aesthetic point of view especially, which could appear to be marginal compared to the density of Liszt's work. Furthermore, showing from the very beginning that the main aim is to answer the question concerned with the meaning of progress in the Sonata, could give rise to the idea that one is going to answer to the necessity of a new analysis of the Sonata in a vague and superficial manner. Nevertheless, the four points outlined above illustrate a well-defined programme: contextualize the Sonata among Liszt's production, and try to provide a new interpretative edge, walking through the analysis made by Walker, Newman, Longyear, and Winklhofer. Concerning the theme of with the dedication to Schumann – which many musicologists often stress as a key point of view on the work – and the chronological position of Liszt's work, are relevant, but not so fundamental to the overall comprehension of Liszt's masterpiece. Regardless, both themes are put on the table in order to create a preamble in which the climate, both cultural and psychological, in which Liszt composed his Sonata is placed under investigation. If the first three points strictly concern the analysis of the Sonata, the last one is an attempt to bring to light those aspects which on one side represent a real innovation in the field of musical language, and on the other are a clear manifestation of what one might call a "the unfolding of progress" in the music itself; namely, music does not simply progress following a historical line, but it also progresses in the exact moment of its unfolding. As it will emerge, this approach could be seen as a radicalised version of Adorno's theory on the ageing of musical materials. According to this new view, the musical material is ageing in the work itself, and it is exactly for this reason that it is necessary to submit the musical material to continuous variations3. It could be suggested that Adorno's idea

3 This is the same idea, which lies behind the continued revisions Liszt brought about to his compositions, namely to conform them to new compositional models, to new psychological states, to new performances, to new scholars, etc.

of the "duration of the new" is brought here to its extreme, to the paradox[4]: music becomes old at the time of its own unfolding. The last point of the investigation on the Sonata is set in order to comprehend Liszt's awareness of this dynamic. The theme is strictly related to the notion of the self-awareness in history (Selbst-Geschichtsbewusstsein). In turn, this concept is related to the role of artists in society, and, consequently, to a precise idea of progress. Then, if in the previous chapters Liszt's theoretical ideas emerged on music in society, and his philosophical guides, here how these views influenced his conception of music and his compositional practice will emerge; in the background there are some musical theories which make this possible. Then, the Sonata and its multiple interpretations are justifiable both philosophically and musically without bringing the 20th century into the debate.

## Some preliminary observations

The fact that Liszt wrote his piano masterpiece, his largest one, possibly the work with the most complex structure, and, the fact that he wrote it without any kind of relationship with a (specific) literary reference or evocative title, and in the middle of his activity as a symphonist, and in this specific case as a programme-music composer, appears to be somewhat contradictory. Why did Liszt feel the necessity to give life to a pure instrumental work for the piano, when his symphonic poems were bringing him great satisfaction? Just after the completion of the *Sonata,* Liszt wrote what seemed to be a greeting, even temporarily, to his beloved instrument to his friend, the critic Luis Köhler: «Mit diesen Sachen [Sonata, Scherzo und Marsch, Années de Pèlerinage] will ich einstweilen mit dem Clavier abschlissen, um mich ausschliesslich mit Orchester-Compositionen zu beschäftigen und auf diesem Gebiet mehreres zu versuchen, was mir schon seit längerer Zeit eine innerliche Nothwendigkeit geworden»[5]. Liszt dedicated a lot of

4 In his *Ästhetische Theorie* Adorno dedicated a paragraph to this topic *The new and its duration*, where he wrote that «The category of the new produced a conflict. Not unlike the seventeenth-century *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, this is a conflict between the new and duration. Artworks were always meant to endure; it is related to their concept, that of objectivation. Through duration art protests against death; the paradoxically transient eternity of artworks is the allegory of an eternity bare of semblance. Art is the semblance of what is beyond death's reach. […]». Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Athlone Press Ltd, London, 1997, p. 27.

5 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated April or May 1854, Vol. I, p. 153.

time during the Weimar years to revisit and republish his already written works, as in the case of the two volumes of *Années de Pèlerinage* (Swiss and Italie), or the two piano concertos, instead of composing new and original music. According to Redepenning «von den 768 Titeln, die dieses Werkverzeichnis aufführt, sind nur 350 den Originalen zugeordnet. Strenggenommen ist diese Werkgruppe sogar noch viel kleiner, denn viele Titel sind als Eigenbearbeitungen (mit dem Anspruch von Originalwerken) zwei- bzw. dreimal in dieser Rubrik genannt»[6]; but what is relevant here is that this phase of "revisiting works" came to an end around 1854: «Man kann hier durchaus von einer „Werkphase" sprechen, denn zwischen 1854 und 1860 entstehen fast keine Bearbeitungen fremder oder eigener Werke»[7]. Conversely, as it will emerge in the subsequent chapter, after the Weimar period Liszt went through a phase of low creativity. Then, the *Sonata* seems to appear out of nowhere, written, accordingly to the first critics, furiously in about one year. Liszt never modified a note, except from the finale and some other small details, which had already been changed during the work on the *Sonata* itself. Then, he published it in 1854 without any further afterthoughts. Furthermore, it is possible to state that the *Sonata* works as his testament concerning the piano. Using the words of Newman «this work marked the end of much of his important writing for piano»[8] – maybe it is the testament of the so-called *Glanzperiode*, and not of the entire category of the piano works. It is worth noting that during the same years Liszt was improving his orchestration skills. In any case, according to more recent analysis, the *Sonata* needed more than a year to be completed, as reported both by Hamilton[9] and Szász[10], and its incipit (*Ur*-motive) already dates back to 1849[11]. Furthermore, the manuscript

6 Redepenning, Dorothea, *Das Spätwerk Franz Liszt: Bearbeitung eigener Kompositionen*, p. 11.

7 Redepenning, Dorothea, *Das Spätwerk Franz Liszt: Bearbeitung eigener Kompositionen*, p. 15.

8 Newman, William S., *The Sonata since Beethoven*, p. 364.

9 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: sonata in B minor*, p. 1. «Although he had made at least two preliminary sketches of themes for the Sonata – one of the opening two motifs in 1851, another of the beginning of the *Andante sostenuto* in 1849 – it is likely that the main compositional work was started in the latter part of 1852».

10 Szász, Tibor, *Towards a New Edition of Liszt's Sonata in B minor,* p. 67. «Sharon Winklhofer derived her statement that the Sonata sketch "dates from the second week of January 1851" from page 74 of the bound sketchbook into which Liszt wrote "Eilsen, 2 me semaine de Janvier 1851."».

11 Szász, Tibor, *Towards a New Edition of Liszt's Sonata in B minor,* p. 69. «Winklhofer stated that Arthur Hedley still possessed in 1967 a notebook page on which Liszt wrote down in 1849 the *adagio* theme of the Sonata. Hedley's statement has been corroborated by Szász, who discovered in 1982 that the entire melodic material of the Sonata's *Andante sostenuto* theme (triple *piano*, mm. 331–338, subsequently *Quasi Adagio*, double and triple *forte*, mm. 394–401) was based on an original Lied by the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna of Russia (1786–1859)».

shows signs of several revisions (*Annex II* and *III*), but it is still true that after its publication Liszt never came back to this work.

Let's proceed in an orderly fashion with the examination of the dedication to Schumann, because it is directly connected with the programmatic interpretation of Liszt's work. In 1839 the latter dedicated to the Hungarian pianist his *Fantasie* op. 17 (composed in 1836)[12]. Liszt himself was very proud of this dedication, since he thought that Schumann's composition was worthy of mentioning among the masterpieces of German music, and he really wanted to praise Schumann with a work of a similar value. Schumann dedicated his work to Liszt because Liszt, in the role of critic, wrote in 1837 a «long and highly favourable article about Schumann's keyboard works»[13] in *La Revue et gazette musicale*. Consequently, the dedication was a *hommage musicale* to thank Liszt for his article. However, knowing Liszt's nature, it is very probable that he desired to return the dedication with a piece of the same level, which could potentially affect Schumann in the same way that his *Fantasie* op. 17 had on him. Schumann had to wait 15 years to receive Liszt's answer. Unfortunately, at that time Schumann had already been admitted to a mental asylum in Endenich. Therefore, he could neither listen to the *Sonata*, nor know that it was dedicated to him. Furthermore, at this time the dedication to Schumann was intended more as a gesture made to try to fix their personal troubles, than to celebrate him. In 1847 the relationship between Liszt and Robert and Clara Schumann entered into a crisis, as he took Schumann's side in a legal controversy between Friedrich Wieck (Clara's father) and the German composer. All these elements are the reasons why we do not possess any comment on the *Sonata* from Schumann. Nevertheless, Clara Schumann gave us a sample of the coldness, not to say the aversion, with which the *Sonata* was received in some musical circles. In May 1854 Clara made an entry in his diary: «Liszt sandte heute eine an Robert dedizierte Sonate und einige andre Sachen mit einem freundlichen Schreiben an mich. Die Sachen sind aber schaurig! Brahms spielte

12 It is worth noting that the *Fantasie* was originally titled *Sonata* with the subtitle *Ruinen, Trophaeen, Palmen*, and intended to be a contribution to the Beethoven monument in Bonn. The change of mind could be a sign of the respect and the fear with which the Romantic Generation looked to Beethoven's sonatas and symphonies; in this respect William Newman wrote in his *The Sonata since Beethoven* that «The devotion to, even idolatry of, Beethoven's sonatas was extraordinary throughout the era. It began as early as 1800, in his own lifetime, with the transmitters mentioned earlier [Ries, Czerny, Moscheles, Cramer, and Hummel], and soon spread to France, England, and other countries by way of the publishers, though not yet public performers». Newman, William S., *The Sonata since Beethoven*, p. 12.

13 Walker, Alan, *Schumann, Liszt and the C Major Fantasie, Op. 17: A Declining Relationship,* p. 161.

sie mir, ich wurde aber ganz elend. […] Das ist nur noch blinder Lärm – kein gesunder Gedanke mehr, alles verwirrt, eine klare Harmoniefolge ist da nicht mehr herauszufinden! Und da muß ich mich nun noch bedanken – es ist wirklich schrecklich»[14]. Eduard Hanslick wrote about the *Sonata* unmercifully, too. The critic listened to the work in Vienna during a piano recital of Hans von Bülow in 1881. After first a positive, or better perhaps, a neutral statement «es ist mir unschätzbar, dieses wenig bekannte und fast unausführbare Stück jetzt in vollendetem und authentischem Vortrage gehört zu haben», he continues:

> Anderen freilich läßt sich durch Worte keine Vorstellung von diesem musikalischen Unwesen geben. Nie habe ich ein raffinierteres, frecheres Aneinanderfügen der disparatesten Elemente gehört, nie ein so wüstes Toben, einen so blutigen Kampf gegen alles, was musikalisch ist. Anfangs verblüfft, dann entsetzt, fühlte ich mich doch schließlich überwältigt von der unausbleiblichen Komik, ide in diesem Krampfhaften Ringen nach Unerhörtem, Colossalem liegt, in diesem athemlosen Arbeiten einer Genialitäts-Dampfmühle, die fast immer leer geht. […] Den einen Ruhm muß man der Lisztschen „Sonate" lassen, daß ihresgleichen in der gesammten Musik-Literatur nicht wieder vorkommt. Da hört jede Kritik, jede Diskussion auf. Wer das gehört hat und es schön findet, dem ist nicht zu helfen[15].

To grasp the warmth with which the *Sonata* was welcomed, it can be useful to quote the review the critic Gustav Engel made in the columns of the *Spener'schen Zeitung*, where he was no less merciful. He listened Liszt's masterpiece from the hands of von Bülow too, during a recital in Berlin in 1857, and reacted with the following words:

> Die zweite Nummer des Concerts war eine Sonate von Liszt (H moll). Sie hat das Eigenthümliche, daß sie aus einem einzigen, sehr ausgedehnten Satz besteht. Gewisse Hauptthemata bilden den Mittelpunkt des Ganzes; unter ihnen ist das erste von einer Beschaffenheit, daß man fast daran schon allein den Charakter des Werkes erkennen kann. Auf harmonischen und rhythmischen Überschwenglichkeiten, die mit der Schönheit nicht das Mindeste mehr gemein haben, ruht das Gebäude; schon das erste Thema ist als entschieden unkünstle-

14 Diary entry by Clara Schumann dated 25 May 1854. Cited after Litzmann, Berthold, *Clara Schumann. Ein künstlerleben. Nach Tagebüchern und Briefen*, Vol. 2: *Ehejahre 1840–1856*, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1905, p. 317; also cited in Kube, Michael, *Vorwort zu F. Liszt h-Moll Klaviersonate*, Bärenreiter, 2013, p. IV.

15 Hanslick, Eduard, *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuose der letzen fünfzehn Jahre. 1870–1885*, Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, Berlin, 1886, p. 317.

> risch zu verwerfen; doch ist freilich das, was uns im Laufe der Entwickelung geboten wird, noch viel schlimmer. Von vernünftigem, harmonischem Zusammenhang ist oft gar nicht mehr die Rede; man muthet uns zu, an dem willkürlichen Nebeneinanderstellen von Tonarten Gefallen zu finden; die Melodien, welche hie und da erscheinen, haben ein so gespreiztes Wesen, daß dadurch aller Reiz vernichtet wird; höchstens in den Clavierfiguren, die sehr reichlich verwandt sind, läßt sich Originalität und Geschmack erkennen. Um an Werken dieser Art Gefallen zu finden, muß man auf Alles, was in der Natur und in der Vernunft der Sache liegt, vollständig Verzicht leisten; es ist kaum möglich, sich weiter von der Gesetzmäßigkeit zu entfernen, als es hier geschehen ist. Herr v. Bülow spielte das Werk übrigens in jeder Beziehung vollendeter Meisterschaft, sowohl was die Überwindung der immensen technischen Schwierigkeiten betrifft, als in der Mannigfaltigkeit der Klangwirkungen.[16]

It is very interesting to note that not one of them listened the work from Liszt's own hands, except for Brahms, who had this great honour in Weimar in 1853, and who, according to the anecdote, fell asleep even though he was sitting in a very uncomfortable chair. Anyway, we have no idea of the way in which von Bülow or Brahms played the *Sonata*. For that reason, every comment about it could just be metaphysical speculation. However, on the other hand, the words of the critics presented the *Sonata* to the musical world. Birkin reports in his book *Hans von Bülow – a Life for Music* that the great pianist became furious when he read these reviews. First of all, he wrote to Engel, also sending him a copy of the *Sonata*, and he offered him a private performance of the work, complete with a step-by-step analysis of the composition[17]. The critic ignored him, and the pianist, although Liszt himself tried to calm him down, decided to start a "crusade against the philistines" and gave an uncountable number of concerts in order to defend and to spread throughout Europe the music of the Hungarian pianist[18]. It is clear, beyond this little parenthesis concerned with the vicissitudes of Clara Schumann and Hans von Bülow, that Schumann's *Fantasie* op. 17 was an enlightening composition for Liszt. The words "*an Robert Schumann*" which appear upon the title *Sonata für Pianoforte von F. Liszt*, on the copy addressed to

16 Engel, Gustav, *Bericht über eine Claviersonate von Franz Liszt*, in Bülow, Hans von, *Briefe und Schriften*, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1898, Vol. 3, pp. 65–66.

17 Bülow, Hans von, *Briefe und Schriften*, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1898, Vol. 3, p. 67. «Wie dem sein mag: ein gedrucktes Exemplar liegt für Sie zum Abholen bei mir bereit. Ich darf es Ihnen nicht *aufnöthigen*; ich kann es Ihnen nur anbieten. Zugleich bin ich bereit, Ihnen das Werk ebensowohl nochmals vorzuspielen, als musikalisch zu analysieren».

18 Birkin, Kenneth, *Hans von Bülow, a Life for Musik*, p. 106–107.

Schumann, are not just a little homage to the German composer, but are something akin to a clear declaration of a debt of inspiration[19]. Heinemann wrote that «So wäre denn die Widmung der h-Moll-Sonate an Robert Schumann als Zeichen nicht nur langjähriger freundschaftlicher Verbindung […], sondern auch einer weitestreichenden Übereinstimmung in der Beurteilung kompositorischer Fragen – mit einer unverkennbaren geschichts-philosophischen Implikation – zu werten»[20]. Indeed, concerning the structural and formal construction of these two works, both compositions are very far from being able to be described using the conventional terms of the sonata form. Probably Liszt's *Sonata* would be very different without the *Fantasie* op. 17. To conclude this brief examination devoted to the history of mutual dedication, it is useful to list a series of piano compositions written by Liszt between 1836 and 1853[21]:

1836 Grande Valse di Bravura
1836–1853 Années de pèlerinage, Pre mière et Deuxième Année
1837 Après une Lecture de Dante. Fantaisie quasi sonate (revisited 1849)
1838 Grandes Études
1838 Études d'exécution trascendante d'après Paganini
1838 Grand Galope chromatique
1839 Valse mélancolique
1839 tre sonetti del Petrarca
1840 Mazeppa
1840 Réminiscences de Robert le diable
1840–1841 Réminiscences de Don Juan
1841–1843 Réminscences de la Norma
1842 Fantasie über Themen aus Figaro und Don Juan
1842 Petite Valse favorite
1847–1852 Harmonies poétiques et religieuses
1848 Trois Études de Concert
1848 1. Ballade in Des-Dur
1849–1850 Six Consolations
1850 Valse-Impromptu
1849 Grosses Konzertsolo
1849 Après une Lecture de Dante
1849 Totentanz
1850 Fantasie und Fuge über den Choral «Ad nos ad salutarem undam»
1850 Trois Caprices-Valses
1851 two Polonaises
1851 Scherzo and March
1851 12 Etudes d'exécution transcendante
1851 (1849?)–53 B minor Piano Sonata

19 On the original manuscript there is no dedication to Schumann; more than that, there is no dedication at all. The only words written on the first page of the first *folio* are the title written in French: *Grande Sonata / puor le Pianoforte / par F Liszt / terminé le / 2 Février 1853.* According to William Mason, one of the Liszt's pupils, the master dedicated one of his copies *für die Murlbibliothek* (the library of the Weimar circle), but it is possible that this copy was conceived for the students of the circle of Weimar.

20 Heinemann, Michael, *Liszt, Klaviersonate h-Moll*, p. 13.

21 This list, although rearranged, is taken from Searle, Humphrey, *The Music of Franz Liszt*, pp. 163–169.

In 1836, Liszt was in his "travelling Virtuoso" period. That could be a further explanation for the delay of his dedication to Schumann. He felt himself an uncultivated composer and he had to learn more. From this point of view, the concerts of the young virtuoso assume another function. They are no longer the performances of a talented pianist, or at least not only, but they are an educational moment, for at least two reasons: 1) outwardly, because Liszt, according to his social view, was instructing the public; 2) inwardly, because he was educating himself by analysing and studying the works of the ancient masters. So, his compositions are both virtuoso pieces composed to amaze the public at his concerts, and at the same time – and in some cases mostly – they are a study in compositional technique. For example, most of his *Études* use the A-B-A form, or its variations; the sonata form finds application in many works, as in the *Après une Lecture de Dante*, or in the *Grosses Konzertsolo*; the variation technique is present in most of the works, above all in his *Totentanz*. Then, under this light, the list of his piano compositions becomes a path in which the form becomes more and more complex and larger, and the *Sonata* appears then the most natural result of the merging of all these techniques. Unity in the multiplicity, namely the principle which lies at the basis of the idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit*, which Liszt was discovering exactly during the years 1834–1854. However, this point will be explored later. Before entering into an analysis of the *Sonata*, it is necessary to stress its chronological position among Liszt's productions. He reported on the manuscript the date of the completion of the work: 2 February 1853. Since 1848, the year in which he decided to settle down in Weimar, Liszt dedicated a lot of time to an exhaustive review and rethought of his previous works, instead of creating new original piano compositions. His aim was to update them, entering into a sort of never-ending vortex of continuous improvement. These reviews can therefore be seen as evidence of the dialectical process between musical material and history: during his development as composer, Liszt improved his compositional skills, and he wanted to update the form of his works; at the same time he acquired new ideas, both on music and on society, which obliged him to modernise his works, because they no longer responded to the question of the *Ideal der Zeit*. This never-ending process of improvement presents the idea of progress, and since Liszt was part of the Fortschrittspartei, his music consequently had the need to represent this same progress. But there is something more than propaganda and the adherence to an ideal behind this. There is a fundamental aesthetic question regarding the self-subsistence of the artwork through time. This question assumes a peculiar significance during the first half of the 19th century, namely the period which declared the end of the so-called Kunstperiode. According to Heine the

artistic period began at Goethe's cradle and ended at his coffin (1832)[22]. Heine's old prophecy underlines this point exactly, i.e., the contradiction between the modern demand for precise answers and the old response from an art which is still bound to the past. Art at the beginning of the 19th century starts to lose its cohesion, and consequently it does not appear in unity anymore. Even if the poet saw in Liszt's music a sign of decay, and his virtuosity as a perfect representation of the noise of the "railways society" of the 19th century, it is actually an attempt to answer this fundamental aesthetic question. The quotation from Mann's Doctor Faustus in the opening page of this chapter shows how the idea of the end of the *Kunstperiode* affected the musical world, expressing in superlative prose the adornian idea of the end of the art. After Beethoven it was impossible to create a self-subsistent artwork, where the term applies to a work which fully matched the *Ideal der Zeit*, namely an artwork which is in unity with society – an artwork written in a fully comprehensible language for society[23]. An artwork that immediately possesses a meaning to the listeners. Contrary to what is usually stated, this bond between art and society was not completely broken at the beginning of the 19th century, but it was simply society which was developing so extremely fast during this period. Therefore, the answer to this demand for velocity and advancement can only be an aesthetic of progress; namely the composer, if he wants to save his artworks from the action of the time, and from inevitable decay, has to re-work them incessantly. From this point of view, the never-ending process of improvement under which Liszt rethinks his works is undoubtedly modern, and it is evidence of his self-awareness of his position in history. Art is not once and for all, but it is "in progress", and, as it will emerge in the following sections, Liszt recognised this movement and tried to reproduce it, and to involve this

22 Heine, Heinrich, *Französische Maler. Gemäldeausstellung in Paris* 1831, in *Heinrich Heine Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, Hoffmann und Campe, Hamburg, 1973, Vol. 12/1, p. 47. «Meine alte prophezeyung von dem Ende der Kunstperiode, die bey der Wiege Goeth es anfing und bey seinem Sarge aufhören wird, scheint ihrer Erfüllung nahe zu seyn. Die jetzige Kunst muß zu Grunde gehen, weil ihr Prinzip noch im abgelebtenm alten Regime, in der heiligen römischen Reichsvergangenheit wurzelt. Deßhalb, wie alle welken Ueberreste dieser Vergangenheit, steht sie im unerquicklichsten Widerspruch mit der Gegenwart. Dieser Widerspruch und nicht die Zeitbewegung selbst ist der Kunst so schädlich; im Gegentheil,diese Zeitbewegung müßte ihr sogar gedeihlich werden, wie einst in Athen und Florenz, wo eben in den wildesten Kriegs- und Partheystürmen die Kunst ihre herrlichsten Blüthen entfaltete».

23 This is of course the "progressive-party" point of view. The work of Brahms is the most eminent example, that a self-subsistent artwork in the middle of the 19th century was still possible. This is not the place to discuss the role of Brahmsian production in the history of music. It suffices here to state that the 19th century was an epoch of profound transformation, during which the arts lost their deepest relation with society.

movement in his music through a new compositional technique. Nevertheless, in the last chapter it will emerge how this "aesthetic of progress" brings to a complete rupture the relationship between art and society, because at the end of the 19th century the principle of unity in the multiplicity lost its adherence to the theoretical background, and therefore to society. In this process it lost its own possibility to be "unity", and so multiplicity become the fragmentation of unity into many isolated singular entities.

## On the question about the programme of the *Sonata*

During those same years in which Liszt's productions for piano were less prolific, original works appeared instead for orchestra[24]. In 1853, Liszt had already concluded, or he was about to conclude his symphonic poems *Ce qu'on entend sur la montaigne*, *Tasso*, *lamento e trionfo*, *Les Prelude*, *Prometheus*, *Mazeppa*, *Festklänge*, and *Heroïde funèbre*. With the year 1854, six years after he settled down in Weimar, Liszt had already composed seven of the twelve symphonic poems[25]. Furthermore, during these same years, or at any rate not later than 1855, he also drafted his *Orpheus* and *Hungaria*, in addition to his *Eine Faust Symphonie* and to the *Dante Symphonie.* For that reason, it appears legitimate to ask ourselves the reason why Liszt felt the necessity to compose a sonata, namely a pure instrumental work, while he was in the middle of his creative phase as a symphonist. It existence of just a manuscript and the few annotations and changes within it, suggest that the *Sonata* was composed as the result of an improvisation[26], then it could be possible to think of it as a violent outburst caused by a prolonged absence from the keyboard. This suggestion could serve to justify why the *Sonata* does not have any programme, but, for the reasons already disclosed, this can hardly be true. A composition that is the

24 The orchestral works that appeared at the beginning of the 1850s, namely the symphonic poems, underwent the same treatment, namely they passed through several reviews before finding their final form.

25 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated April or May 1854, Vol. I, p. 154. Liszt wrote that «7 von den symphonischen Dichtungen sind gänzlich fertig und abgeschriebene. Bald sende ich Ihnen die kleinen Vorreden, welche ich denselben beifüge, um den Standpunkt der Auffassung bestimmter zu bezeichnen».

26 Storino, Mariateresa, *Franz Liszt. La Sonata in si minore*, p. 30. «La *Sonata* comparve all'improvviso, quasi frutto di un atto creativo estemporaneo, preceduta dalla sola scrittura di alcune idee musicali in un quaderno di appunti del 1851».

result of improvisation would be more similar to the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*, or to the *Grand galop chromatique*, namely a relatively short piece of music with a simple linear structure. It is a hard task to think of Liszt's half hour, very complex 760 measures *Sonata* as the result of an improvisation. Anyway, it is probable that, as it was common during the Romanticism, at least the basic idea of the work is a result of improvisation. Probably, the first motivic cell was drafted in 1851, while the basic idea of the *andante* had already been drafted in 1849[27]; but the thematic, structural, motivic, and harmonic work that the *Sonata* clearly displays, all these aspects show us that Liszt surely spent more than the time of an improvisation on his work to refine every single note of his masterpiece. Winklhofer, in her analysis of the work, notes that Liszt used different inks and pencils, and she discovered three different work levels: 1) the first one is the skeleton of the *Sonata* itself; 2) during the second stage Liszt added the dynamics and the expression marks; and 3) at the last stage he introduced some modification into the introduction, the substitution of the finale, and finally the title with date and signature: *Grande Sonata / pour le Pianoforte / par / F Liszt / terminé le / 2 Février 1853* (See *Annex I, II, III*). To conclude, it is more plausible that the *Sonata* is the result of a very long meditation on the form, and on the further possibilities offered by the use of the expanded tonal system. If one looks again at the list of his piano compositions above, it clearly appears that he had been working on the sonata form and on the motivic (or thematic) transformation technique for a very long time. This *Sonata* is hence the encounter/clash between this period – during which he experienced new ways to compose, but also new kinds of timbre and harmonic combinations – and the application of these findings to the large forms. The fact that he decided to use the piano and not the orchestra is quite a simple matter to resolve: Liszt had much more affinity and familiarity with the keyboard than with the orchestra, and it is therefore unsurprising that he tested his advancements with the piano first. It is interesting, perhaps banal, to underline how strong his relationship was with his beloved instrument:

> Vous ne savez pas que me parler de quitter le piano, c'est me faire envisager un jour de tristesse; un jour qui éclaira toute une première partie de mon existence, inséparablement liée à lui. Car, voyez-vous, mon piano, c'est pour moi ce qu'est au marin sa frégate, […] plus encore peut-être, car mon piano, jusqu'ici, c'est moi,

27 This information emerged after the analysis of Sharon Winklhofer on the manuscript of the *Sonata*. See Winklhofer, Sharon, *Liszt's Sonata in B minor*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1980, p. 93.

> c'est ma parole c'est ma vie; c'est le dépositaire intime de tout ce qui s'est agité dans mon cerveau aux jours les plus brûlants de ma jeunesse; c'est là qu'ont été tous mes désirs, tous mes rêves, toutes mes joies et toutes mes douleurs. […] et vous voudriez, mon ami, que je me hâtasse de le délaisser pour courir après le retentissement plus éclatant des succès de théâtre et d'orchestre? Oh! non. En admettant même ce que vous admettez sans doute trop facilement, que je suis déjà mur pour des accords de ce genre, ma ferme volonté est de n'abandonner l'étude et le développement du piano lorsque j'aurai fait tout ce qu'il est possible, ou du moins tout ce qu'il m'est possible de faire aujourd'hui[28].

Aside from the fact that this open letter to Adolphe Pictet of 1838 contains the aesthetic programme of Liszt's piano music – «ma ferme volonté est de n'abandonner l'étude et le développement du piano lorsque j'aurai fait tout ce qu'il est possible» –, it is no coincidence that the year after the appearance of the *Sonata*, Liszt gave birth to another masterpiece, this time composed for orchestra: his *Eine Faust-Symphonie in drei Charakterbildern (nach Goethe)*. Both these compositions share the same structural form, and the same compositional technique. Before moving on, it is necessary to open a parenthesis related to this symphony, concerning the identification of the *Sonata* with a precise programme. According to many scholars, the problem arose from this argument: «Se Liszt aveva così tante volte affermato i diritti della musica a programma, e con efficacia e lucidità aveva accompagnato la quasi totalità delle sue composizioni, se non con un programma, almeno con un *titolo evocativo*, come poteva aver ideato il suo capolavoro senza alcuna premura per l'ascoltatore?»[29]. Hence, for a long time, and still today, many musicologists think that the *Sonata* arose in the same way as its "little" sister, the *Après une lecture du Dante* sonata. «L'assunto di base è che se Liszt compose una sinfonia e una sonata dedicata a Dante, non poteva non aver composto un corrispettivo per pianoforte della *Faust-Symphonie*: l'eroe goethiano come motivo ispiratore di una sonata era d'obbligo, Liszt non aveva reso noto il titolo della *Sonata* in si minore, né aveva precisato la fonte letteraria, poiché gli adepti della scuola neotedsca ne avrebbero rintracciato il legame senza suggerimento alcuno»[30]. Now, if what Storino here describes happened, why do we have so many different interpretations of this work? Why didn't Lina Ramann mention the programme in his *Liszt-Pädagogium*? Unfortunately, there is no evidence of what Storino suggests, even if

28 Liszt, Franz, *Pages Romantiques*, p. 135.
29 Storino, Mariatersa, *Franz Liszt. La sonata in si minore*, p. 60. Italic is mine.
30 Storino, Mariatersa, *Franz Liszt. La sonata in si minore*, p. 61.

the idea of a *Goethe-Sonata* lies at the basis of many interpretations, as it will emerge later. Nevertheless, if one analyses Storino's reasoning with the strict rules of the logic, one should label all the musical analyses of the *Sonata* which involve a Goethe-programme with the locution *non sequitur*. Namely, from the premise according to which both a *Dante Sonata* and a *Dante* and a *Goethe Symphony* exist, it does not logically follow the conclusion for the necessity of the existence of a *Faust Sonata*. Some scholars have gone so far as to identify the different themes of the *Sonata* with the intricate vicissitudes of Goethe's Faust, while the *Faust-Symphonie* presents just three descriptive portraits (Faust, Gretchen, Mephistopheles). For that reason, some musicologists suggested the title *Après une lecture du Goethe*[31] for the *Sonata*. Moreover they identified, for example, the repeated D of the third theme (m. 14) as the sarcastic laughing of Mephistopheles, while its transformation (mm. 153–154) is described as the gentle laugh of Gretchen. Following these examples, it is now time to analyse the three main programmatic interpretations, which were imposed upon the *Sonata* over the years:

1. The biographical interpretation, founded by Peter Raabe, according to which this Sonata is a musical autobiography, which narrates Liszt's successes and failures, his loves and enmities. Hamilton suggests that this interpretation «[…] tells us nothing beyond the one thing that we already know for sure – that the sonata was composed by Liszt and not a computer»[32]. It is believed that Hamilton's statement exhausted all the possible objections to this interpretation.
2. The second could be defined the eschatological interpretation. This theory was elaborated for the first time by Tibor Szász, who saw in the contrasts between the various parts of the Sonata a struggle between God and Lucifer (Good and Evil), who fight for the human soul[33]. This theory is based upon the Bible and on the book Paradise Lost by Milton. Paul Merrik elaborated on a theory related to the one just presented; he started from the similitude between the so-called *Grandioso Theme* (mm..105 ff) and the *Crux fidelis* theme, that Liszt used in his symphonic poem *Hunnenschlacht* to represent Christianity, to give an explanation in a religious key. For example, under the light of this interpretation, the slow

31 S. Ott, Betrand, *An Interpretation of Liszt's Sonata in B Minor*, in *Journal of the. American Liszt Society,* Nr. 10, 1981, pp. 30–38.

32 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor*, p. 29.

33 Szász, Tibor, *Liszt's Symbols for the Divine and Diabolical*. This is of course a simplified version of the theory. Szász exposes an insightful analysis of the *Sonata* and explains how its motives can be related to the theme of the «Lucifer-Satan duality» (p. 49), and to the overall Biblical imagery.

section can represent just one thing, namely the redemption of man after the fall. The so called eschatological interpretations are, of course, very suggestive, but they do not enrich any aspect of the *Sonata*; actually, the contrasts between the first theme, generally associated with a male character, more impetuous, and the second theme, associated with a female character, sweeter than the first one, could connect almost every sonata ever written to the struggle between good and evil – one could even state that this contrast represents the *conditio sine qua non* of music itself, where music is the counterpart to silence.

3. The last interpretation is that already discussed above, according to which the programme of the Sonata is in some way related to the theme of Faust (by Goethe).

Of course, these programmatic interpretations are all interesting, and they certainly grasp some peculiar feature of the *Sonata*. It is nevertheless possible to state some objections to these arguments, in order to analyse the work purely from a musical point of view:

1) It is believed that the title *Sonata* is itself very evocative, since this term brings with it almost the entire history of music. As Rosen writes, «much of the history of music from 1749 to 1828 can be written in terms of developing and changing sonata techniques»[34]. Consequently, to ascribe the word *Sonata* after Beethoven is a clear sign of Liszt's great historical awareness. Just using this term was a risk for a musician, because at that time those who decided to compose sonatas risked being a simple imitator of the master of Bonn, or literally applying the rules elaborated by Reicha, Marx, and Czerny, or, on the contrary, to bring about excessive innovations, and therefore to remain unappreciated. «When sonata form did not yet exist, it had a history – the history of eighteenth-century musical style. Once it had been called into existence by early nineteenth-century theory, history was no longer possible for it; it was defined, fixed, and unalterable. Except for a few small and unimportant details, sonata form will be for all eternity what Czerny said it was»[35]. The form dies – i.e., cannot be transformed any more, as Rosen points out – in the exact moment in which the theory fixes its rules. Using the sonata form in the 19th century was an attempt to progress with the genre for Liszt, an attempt to give back to the sonata form its history. From this Hegelian perspective on the sonata form it emerges in all its strength the distance between the theory and the compositional practice, a theme which was dear to Liszt, and to which he

34 Rosen, Charles, *Sonata Forms,* p. 366.
35 Rosen, Charles, *Sonata Forms,* p. 365.

devoted some reflections in his Berlioz essay. The topic is related again to the theme of historical awareness. Hamilton seems to be the only one who relates it to the *Sonata*. In his analysis he wrote that «no Romantic composer was more aware than Liszt of the *sonata tradition* and its relevance to the formal structure of his larger works. If this has taken a long time to be recognised, it is because thoughtless repetition of Identikit formas was anathema to Liszt. His sonata forms are not still-born Reicha/Czerny clones»[36]. Again, it is undeniable that Liszt did not tolerate the "identikit formas", but the main reason for his use of the sonata form has historical causes. In his social view, the "identikit formas" – which anyway were not "formulas" in the beginning, as they were the living results of the compositional practice – were good for the ancient masters during ancient times, but they did not respond to the questions of the modern era. The musical language has to change alongside society, in order to reach the previously explained *Ideal der Zeit.* Surely, Liszt was not the only composer who noted the troubles related to the problem of form. This problem was a big deal for all the Romantic Generation, and the sonata form is the form which embodies this issue the most. In 1839, Schumann had already noted that: «Es ist lange her, daß wir über die Leistungen im Sonatenfach geschwiegen. Von außerordentlichen haben wir auch heute nicht zu berichten. […] Sonderbar, daß es einmal meist Unbekannte sind, die Sonaten schreiben, sodann, daß gerade die älteren noch unter uns lebenden Komponisten, die in der Sonatenblütezeit aufgewachsen, und von denen als die bedeutendsten freilich nur Cramer und Moscheles zu nenn wären, diese Gattung am wenigsten gepflegt. Was die ersteren, meist junge Künstler, zum Schreiben anregt, ist leicht zu erraten; es gibt keine würdigere Form, durch die sie sich bei der höheren Kritik einführen und gefällig machen könnten; die meisten Sonaten dieser Art sind daher auch nur als eine Art Spezimina, als Formstudien zu betrachten; aus innerem starken Drang werden sie schwerlich geboren»[37]. The problem of the form and the necessity of innovation and transformation would, from now on, be one of the most relevant themes for the aesthetic of music. With the 19th century musicians began to perceive their works as an outcome of social process – namely, they were acting in history, as all other human beings – and then to relate their compositions and their life conditions to society. These

36 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor*, p. 48. (Italic is mine).
37 Schumann, Robert, *Sonate für das Klavier*, in *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Vol. I, pp. 394–395.

theories found their best application in the 20th century in the social view of Adorno, who, speaking about the weight of musical material used these words:

> Die Annahme einer geschichtlichen Tendenz der musikalischen Mittel widerspricht der herkömmlichen Auffassung vom Material der Musik. Es wird physikalisch, allenfalls tonpsychologisch definiert, als Inbegriff der je für den Komponisten verfügbaren Klänge. Davon aber ist das kompositorische Material so verschieden wie die Sprache vom Vorrat ihrer Laute. Nicht nur verengt und erweitert es sich mit dem Gang der Geschichte. Alle seine spezifischen Züge sind Male des geschichtlichen Prozesses. Sie führen die historische Notwendigkeit um so vollkommener mit sich, je weniger sie mehr unmittelbar als historische Charaktere lesbar sind. Im Augenblick, da einem Akkord sein historischer Ausdruck nicht mehr sich anhören läßt, verlangt er bündig, daß seinen historischen Implikationen Rechnung trage, was ihn umgibt. Sie sind zu seiner Beschaffenheit geworden. Der Sinn musikalischer Mittel geht nicht in ihrer Genesis auf und ist doch von ihr nicht zu trennen[38].

It is believed that the same argument Adorno used to defend the historical heritage of a chord, of musical material, can even be applied to the forms and genres. In Adorno's view, the material undergoes an ageing process, because of the dialectical movement between the music and the composers, that make it sound false if used in the wrong way. The composer's task is to understand this *Tendenz*. It is not necessary to explain here Adorno's theories – it would take too long –, but the quotation above, is sufficient to illustrate the main thesis of this section, that the word "Sonata" brings with it a huge historical heritage, the largest part of which is represented by Beethoven's works. For the Romantic Generation, Beethoven was a giant whose achievement were impossible to surpass. Therefore, a complex of inferiority was a typical psychological condition of those composers who tried to write sonatas or symphonies at the beginning of the 19th century. This condition was amplified by the critics, who compared every new work in these fields to Beethoven's achievements. The Romantic Generation had to deal with this complex of inferiority, and, if Beethoven was for Liszt «a pillar of cloud to guide us by day, a pillar of fire to guide us by night»[39], for the majority of composers he appeared as Goliath, a giant impossible to defeat. Hence, the sonata form is itself the programme. To analyse, listen, and play the *B minor Piano Sonata* is to assist in the unfolding,

38 Adorno, Theodor W., *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, pp. 36–37.

39 See footnote 127 at p. 87.

and at the same time in the renovation, and in the end of the sonata form itself. For all these reasons, it is possible to answer the musicologists, who say that the *Sonata* does not possess any "evocative title", they have to reconsider the idea that the word "sonata" is the most evocative title possible.

2) Liszt was very precise in his work, especially when he had to assign a title or a programme to his works. The vicissitudes related to the programme of the *Dante Sonata* are in this sense very explicative. Therefore, it is believed that if he had wanted to assign a programme to his *Sonata*, and especially to let us know it, he would have done so. This means that Liszt himself might have been inspired by a literary work or another extra-musical element, yet, even if this was really the case, it was simply his intention not to give us the programme. Furthermore, there are historical facts which support the view of a *Sonata* without any programme. Hamilton underlines that Lina Ramann asked Liszt directly about the origin of this extraordinary work, and he denied any kind of relationship between the *Sonata* and any *specific* literary programme – where the word "specific" can be read as a confirmation of what was discussed in point 1 above. This second argument against the programmatic interpretation of the *Sonata* could be closed by citing from Dömling, who stated that «Die *Dante-Sonata* hat sozusagen ein „Programm", die *h-moll-Sonate* keines, aber nichts unterscheidet die beiden Werke kompositionstechnisch und in der Formkonzeption voneinander. Die Interessante Formidee und der innere Reichtum der Musik, der aus dieser Formidee Gestalt ist, ist das Entscheidende, ein Reichtum an Umformungen und Variante, die ein ‚poetisches Subjekt', ein inneres ‚lyrisches Ich' der Musik offenbaren»[40]. In this way Dömling gives back to music its *per se* value, saving it from the hegemony of words.

3) The scepticism concerned with the research of a programme to relate to this work, derive from the point of view according to which this kind of exercise, based upon hypothesis and suppositions, subtract energies from the musical analysis of the *Sonata*. Anyone is free to think that this work truly possesses a programme, if it is necessary in order to reach a better sense of unity for its constituent parts during a performance. Furthermore, it could be useful for teachers to relate a composition to an extra-musical work, with pedagogical intent. Unsurprisingly, this is exactly what Liszt did, writing indications as *Paukenschläge*, or associating the second motive to the defiant character of Bee-

40 Dömling, Wolfgang, *Franz Liszt*, p. 132.

thoven's Coriolan[41]. As already seen in *Chapter II*, all these indications are to be related to a metaphorical view of music, which is precious when the aim is to describe its general character, or to bring a student to a better understanding of a passage, and, consequently, to a better timbre/expression. On the other hand it is worth remembering that the programme is something extremely relevant, but only when it is provided by the composer himself, as Liszt wrote to George Sand: «ist es nicht unnütz und vor allem nicht „lächerlich" – wie man so häufig zu sagen beliebt –, wenn der Komponist in einigen Zeilen die geistige Skizze seines Werkes angibt und, ohne in kleinliche Auseinandersetzungen und ängstlich gewahrte Details zu verfallen, die Idee ausspricht, welche seiner Komposition zur Grundlage gedient hat»[42]. Consequently, it is believed that continued and exhaustive research for extra-musical elements in the *Sonata* remains a metaphysical exercise, as no one can possibly confirm or deny these references. The Master is the master of his own works, and for that reason, to apply programmes to instrumental compositions can be seen as disrespectful to a composer's work, because that would mean «den Zauber zerstören, Gefühle entweihen, feinste Gespinnste der Seele durch das Wort zerreißen»[43].

4) Lastly, it is necessary to discuss the relationship between the *B minor Piano Sonata* and the *Faust-Symphonie*. Similarities, that exist between the two works, are attributable more to the new compositional technique, instead of to a common programme. With the *Faust-Symphonie* and with the *Sonata*, Liszt successfully applied his thematic variations technique to the large forms. Hence, the two works are based on the same theoretical background, and they use the same new harmonic achievements (diminished harmonies, augmented triads, etc.) as functional elements – in place of the traditional tonal and thematic connections – between the motivic cells. Even the beginning of the *Faust symphony* which presents all the 12 pitches of the chromatic scale, and which is often regarded as a first example of twelve-tone technique[44], is nothing more

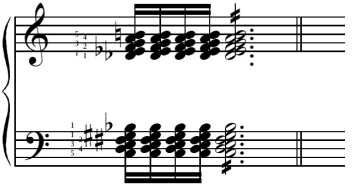
41 Ramann, Lina, *Liszt-Pädagogium*, Serie V., Nr. 16, p. 3. « […] muß wie ein dumpfer Paukenschlag erklingen […]. Bezüglich derselben äußerte (in Pest) der Meister gegen Stradal, daß ihm Beethovens "Coriolan"-Ouverture vorgeschwebt habe: "*Warum soll ich Euch meine Leiden zeigen? Ich trage sie in meinen Innern und verschließe sie stolz von Euch*"».

42 Liszt, Franz, *An George Sand*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II, p. 130.

43 Liszt, Franz, Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie, 1855, p. 52.

44 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years,* p. 329. «The symphony begins with a slow introduction which contains two of Faust's principal themes, revealing him as magician and thinker, respectively. Appropriately, the first theme offers us a magical glimpse into the future of music, one of the first conscious twelve-note rows in musical history». And in the footnote Walker continues: «a brief inspection of the "tone-row" shows that it consists of three

than the result of the radicalisation of chromaticism and of the intense use of augmented triads, about which Liszt wrote, with just a touch of irony, that:

> «les exercices élémentaires des Méthodes de Piano actuelles […], devront être remplacés par celui-ci,
>
> 
>
> lequel formera aussi la base unique de la Méthode d'harmonie, tous les autres accords, usités ou non, ne pouvant s'effectuer que par le retranchement *arbitraire* de tel ou tel intervalle»[45].

This aspect of Lisztian research, that of alternative harmonic systems will be dealt with later on. For now, it is relevant to restate that Liszt faced the sonata form several times throughout his life. Already in 1825, when he was fourteen years old, he composed three sonatas and a piano duo. These works are now lost, but musicologists agree that this doesn't represent any great loss. Liszt himself, who was used to reworking his early compositions, never made any effort to preserve them. In any case, after these first attempts, Liszt dealt with the sonata form many times without giving these works the title of s*onata*. Only in 1837 (1849 for the second version), did Liszt use again this term with his *Après une lecture du Dante*, but he even underlined that it was (after all) not a "true" sonata, but a *Fanatasia quasi sonata.* The connection with Beethoven op. 27 No. 2 is pretty obvious – a sonata which does not fit the classical sonata form scheme, although it is dedicated to Haydn. Therefore, Liszt's work is a clear sign of his study of Beethoven's works, and it is therefore a further element to support the idea that the title *Sonata* could be seen as the real programme

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augmented triads. It has been conjectured that Liszt was attracted to the tonal ambiguities of the augmented chords by the theories of C. F. Weitzmann, a Berlin musician whose book *Der übermäßige Dreiklang* was published in 1853. In September of that year, Weitzmann sent Liszt an unsolicited copy of his book and at the same time sought Liszt's permission to dedicate to him his next book, on the diminished seventh chord. The two men became friends and used to play whenever Liszt's travels took him to Berlin. The pair often discussed the theoretical basis of the harmonic system».

45 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated summer 1860, Vol. 1, p. 363.

of the *B minor Piano Sonata*. During the time in which Liszt did not compose sonatas, he spent a lot of energy spreading Beethoven's sonatas among the audiences of his recitals, and studying the piano works of the master. This is a clear sign of a deep relationship with Beethoven, and especially with the issues that his works, particularly those of the late period, had given rise to. This relationship is proven by a letter that Liszt sent to Wilhelm von Lenz, in which he discussed the division of Beethoven's life into three periods, affirming that he preferred to divide it into two periods: «la première, celle où la forme traditionnelle et convenue contient et régit la pensée du maître; et la seconde, celle où la pensée étend, brise, recrée et façonne au gré de ses besoins et de ses inspirations la forme et le style. Sans doute en procédant ainsi nous arrivons en droite ligne à ces incessant problèmes de l'*autorité* et de la *liberté*»[46]. That is also a pertinent statement concerning Liszt's idea of *form*, according to which the ideas govern the form, and not vice versa. It is very curious that Liszt did not quote from Adolf Bernhard Marx in this letter, in addition to ignore him in his Berlioz essay. The theorist wrote that «Form ist die Weise, wie der Inhalt des Werks – die Empfindung, Vorstellung, Idee des Komponisten – äusserlich Gestalt worden ist, und man hat die Form des Kunstwerks näher und bestimmter als die Aeusserung, als das Aeusserlich – Gestaltwerden seines Inhalts zu bezeichnen»[47]. But the problem of form will be discussed later on during the analysis of the *Sonata*. Here it is relevant to give emphasis to the relationship between Liszt and Beethoven, because it is a matter of the utmost importance. From the letter Liszt wrote to von Lenz, it emerges that Liszt was not just a mere performer of Beethoven's compositions, but that he dedicated great attention and profound reflections to them. In the same letter, Liszt tells us his idea of the historical role of Beethoven's production, defining the master as «la colonne de nuée et de feu qui conduisit les Israélites à travers le désert – colonne de nuée pour nous conduire le jour, – colonne de feu pour nous éclairer la nuit "afin que nous marchions jour et nuit". Son obscurité et sa lumière nous tracent également la voie que nous devons suivre»[48].

The relationship between Liszt and Beethoven is so strong, that Liszt's *Sonata* can be considered a direct consequence of what the master of Bonn did. It can be considered the 33rd Beethoven sonata. For that reason the *B minor Piano Sonata* is ideally still related to the beginning of the 19th century, namely it is a self-subsistent work. To support this point of view there is the fact that

46 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, *von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated 2 December 1852, Vol. I, p. 124.
47 Marx, Adlof Bernhard, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, Vol. 2, p. 5.
48 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, *von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated 2 December 1852, Vol. I, p. 123.

the *Sonata* represents the only "closed case" in the entire production of Liszt. There are two reasons to consider it as the only "closed case": 1) Liszt was probably proud and satisfied with his work. Furthermore, he was too busy with the symphonic poems during the Weimar period to come back to this work and to rework it. After Weimar his music took on other directions, and it would therefore be anachronistically a new version of the *Sonata*; 2) on the other hand, it represents a treatise written with notes instead of words. Liszt spent many years studying and analysing Beethoven's Sonatas, and he spent many years experimenting with this form before using it. When he thought that he could master the form, he gave birth to a work that had to write a new chapter in the history of the genre, a work that had to surge as a model for the future generations. From this point of view, the *Sonata* is a work that can be related to the first twenty years of the 19th century – namely when art was still speaking an immediately understandable language – as a *per se* artwork, as the last Lisztian traditional composition. Practically it represents the "second death" of the sonata form, and at the same time a new conception of the genre itself, but one that Liszt never used by this name again, in his lifetime.

During the analysis that follows it will emerge that the *Sonata* was not just a *coup de génie*, but it was the outcome of a long research process – a process which is the backbone of Liszt's entire production. From this point of view, the *Sonata* represents a turning point, more than an arrival point. Hereafter, a huge number of new ideas and compositions arose – and for that reason it is to be regarded as a turning point –, but at the same time it represents the end of his virtuoso pianism, buried in a marble grave represented by the *Sonata*. In summarizing the elements presented up to this point, it is necessary to underline again that Liszt was more comfortable with notes than with words. For this reason, instead of writing a heavy and undefined treatise concerning his musical researches, he preferred to write what can be described, taking the words of Paul Bekker as a «[…] kritischer Essay, geschrieben nicht in Worten und Begriffen, sondern in Klängen und über alle verstandesmäßigen Darlegungen hinausweisend durch die Kraft der Intuition, des schöpferischen Sehens»[49]. However, a treatise written with notes and not with words was necessary for another reason, too: Liszt was sure that if he had written a treatise, then princess Sayn-Wittgenstein would have corrected his "uncertain" prose, enriching it with her bombastic language full of useless details. The world had to wait a further year, until 1855, to see Liszt's ideas put on paper with his essay *Berlioz*

49 Bekker, Paul, *Schönberg, Erwartung*, in *A. S. Zum fünfzigsten Geburtstage*, *13. September 1924*, in *Sonderheft der Musikblätter des Anbruch*, Wien, 1924, p. 275.

*und seine Haroldsymphonie*, which represented both an homage to Berlioz, and an aesthetic defence of both his programme music and his new compositional technique. With this essay Liszt proved that Friedrich Schlegel was correct when he wrote that musicians often have «mehr Gedanken in ihrer Musik als über dieselbe»[50]. The essay, as it emerged during its analysis, is of course full of thoughts on music and theoretical explanations, but they are expressed more to affect the reader emotionally as opposed to rationally. It is exactly for this reason that the *Sonata* is so relevant among Liszt's productions. On the basis of its comprehension and analysis, it is not only possible to better understand the previous compositions, but it is also possible to explain, in a theoretical and critical way, all further works – as they find their theoretical foundation here.

The fact that Liszt never came back to his *Sonata* in order to change it, represents another feature that make this work unique among his productions. As already suggested, the manuscript presents three different levels of writing[51], but they are all ascribable to the period 1851–53. The revisions Liszt made on the manuscript did not deeply change the work, and that means that the overall structure of the *Sonata* was already clear in his mind from the first draft, «assuming we do not find a bundle of hitherto unknown sketches in some dusty Weimar attic»[52]. This *modus operandi* represents a singularity, an event which happened just once. And precisely because it is an exception, from it some issues arise: for one, Liszt had the habit of continuously reworking his previous compositions in order to upgrade them, following the inner necessity to reach an unattainable ideal of perfection; for another, it is strange that his masterpiece was conceived and composed in such a short time and without any

50 Schlegel, Friedrich, *Athenäum-Fragmente*, No. 444. The phrase is taken out of context It is relevant to underline that Schlegel affirmed exactly the opposite. The whole passage declaims: «Es pflegt manchem seltsam und lächerlich aufzufallen, wenn die Musiker von den Gedanken in ihren Kompositionen reden; und oft mag es auch so geschehen, daß man wahrnimmt, sie haben mehr Gedanken in ihrer Musik als über dieselbe. Wer aber Sinn für die wunderbaren Affinitäten aller Künste und Wissenschaften hat, wird die Sache wenigstens nicht aus dem platten Gesichtspunkt der sogenannten Natürlichkeit betrachten, nach welcher die Musik nur die Sprache der Empfindung sein soll, und eine gewisse Tendenz aller reinen Instrumentalmusik zur Philosophie an sich nicht unmöglich finden. Muß die reine Instrumentalmusik sich nicht selbst einen Text erschaffen? und wird das Thema in ihr nicht so entwickelt, bestätigt, variiert und kontrastiert, wie der Gegenstand der Meditation in einer philosophischen Ideenreihe?».

51 Liszt used two different pens, black and red. With the black one he wrote the *Sonata* and with the red one he made the first level of corrections (phrasing, dynamics, accents); then with a red pencil he made the second corrections level, probably made at the piano, since they concern fingering and some indications for the correct performance of the *Sonata*.

52 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor*, p. 49.

reconsiderations or corrections. In this respect Hamilton wrote that if «many of the symphonic poems went through several complete versions before publication, [and] the revisions sometimes drastically altering the formal design», with the *B minor Piano Sonata* «[Liszt] seemed to have been relatively little doubt or hesitation over even the most complex element of its structure: the accommodation within a sonata form of a slow section and fugal "scherzo"»[53]. This is evidence that confirms that Liszt was thinking and experimenting with the sonata form for a very long time, and that with this work he meant to bring an end this research path with the piano. His late piano works (from Rome to the end) certainly bring about some innovations both in the harmonic, timbric, and in the compositional technique field; but it is possible to state that these were just improvements on the principles and findings already discovered during the Weimar period. All these elements, alongside an intensified introspection, which brought the expression of the subjectivity to its extreme level, represent the perfect link between the late compositions to the findings of the first part of the 20th Century (it is easy to think about the compositional technique and the sound affinity between works such as *Nuages gris*, *La lugubre Gondola*, *Unstern*, and the *Bagatelle sans tonalité*, and the works of the 20th century of Schönberg, Debussy, Scriabin, etc.). However, one does not have to make the mistake of thinking about Liszt as a man from the future. Everything he did was perfectly consistent with the theories of the 19th century. Trying to reach the *Ideal der Zeit* made Liszt the embodiment of the *Zeitgeist* of that epoch.

## The sources of Liszt's new conception of the sonata form

This section is devoted to the influence of the "ancient" masters on Liszt's mind. The investigation will be limited to some examples and it will only be concerned with the sonata forms. As already seen, the composer who influenced Liszt the most is without any doubt Beethoven, who was the guiding light for Liszt, which made any progress possible. However, as Heinemann pointed out, it is impossible to narrow it down to just one Beethoven's sonatas that influenced Liszt more than others. Furthermore, Beethoven used the sonata form in almost all of his compositions, from his symphonies, to his concerts, from his chamber music, to his solo instrument compositions. For that reason it would be impossible to identify just one work as the source of Liszt's inspiration. It is however possible

53 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor*, p. 49.

to reduce the focus to two sonatas, which were certainly a source of great inspiration for Liszt, namely the opus 106, and the opus 111. If the *Hammerklavier* was one of Liszt's favourite and therefore often appeared in his concert programmes, there is no account that Liszt played the sonata in C minor. This is a curious and inexplicable fact, but it is sure that Liszt knew the score of this work, and that he had analysed it. In fact, it is possible to find a great number of correspondences between it and Liszt's B minor work. The Hungarian composer took many ideas from the sonata form used by Beethoven: the variation technique, the fusion of the movements into one, the motivic transformations, etc. Some works of Beethoven are always cited as the source of inspiration for Liszt's *Sonata*, such as the piano sonatas op. 106 and 101, or the Ninth Symphony. The op. 111 is cited less often, but it is possible to find many similarities. For this reason, its first movement deserves more attention here, and from a comparison of the two works it is possible to state the following: 1) both works begin with a seventh interval, and this interval is the cell from which the rest of the movement arises. Both in Beethoven and in Liszt's compositions an interval creates its own continuation; 2) both works have an introduction which simultaneously works as an exposition – it is of course hard to speak about an exposition when the motivic material is an interval; 3) both works use the motivic transformation to create its continuation; 4) both works use a fugato as development section; 5) the recapitulation begins both in Liszt and in Beethoven before the end of the development, creating problems in the identification of the end/beginning of the sections; 6) the tonality of the second thematic group is the only clear link with the classical sonata form scheme. Moreover, both the two works are highly tonally unstable, but this feature is of course the result of the extensive use of seventh and diminished seventh harmonies, which were quite a common device during the 19th century, and it cannot therefore be mentioned among the innovations. The relationship between Beethoven's last sonata and Liszt's work deserve more attention and a closer analysis, which are not the aims of this dissertation. The relationship between Liszt and Beethoven is outlined here enough to bring to light that the innovations brought about by Liszt's *Sonata* did not appear out of nowhere, but they have illustrious predecessors.

Among the illustrious predecessors it is impossible to avoid mentioning Franz Schubert, who, with his *Wanderer Fantasie*, deeply influenced Liszt, who, in turn, arranged a transcription for piano and orchestra of this work in 1851. Therefore, the *Fantasie* D.760 is undeniable evidence of the prominent role of Schubert's work in Liszt's conception of his *Sonata*. The *Wanderer-Fantaise* is relevant for at least two reasons, of which the first is a musical one, the second a theoretical one: 1) Schubert wrote a composition whose form is surely atypical: a) the four movements of the sonata are condensed into one, large movement,

whose sections are still identifiable (Allegro, Adagio, Presto, Finale); b) it is a cyclical composition, in which every movement is based on the transformation of the basic material; c) the slow movement is a theme with variations – whose similarities with Beethoven's *Arietta* from the op. 111 seem to have been ignored; d) the tonal structure of the work privileges the major third instead of the tonic-subdominant-dominant relations – the first movement is in C, the second in E, the third in A♭, the fourth again in C. Liszt was probably fascinated by this work exactly for the augment triad relationship which lies in the background[54]. 2) There is even a theoretical reason, which arises from the name *Fantasie*. It is curious that Schubert gave the title of *fantasy* to his most innovative and complex sonata form work. But it was the year 1822, and this kind of revolutionary structure would hardly be accepted as a *Sonata*. But this example presents an idea of the climate of the beginning of the 19th century, where the sonata form was intended as a precise and very well defined form, and of the historical value of the battle against authority engaged by Liszt when he decided to entitle his work *Sonata*.

Therefore, unsurprisingly some years later, in 1836, Schumann erased the title *Sonata* from his *Fantasie* op. 17, which deserves a closer analysis here, since, as previously stated, it is dedicated to Liszt, and it is ideally the work which inspired Liszt's own *Sonata*. In 1835, the Beethoven committee asked for musical offers in order to raise money to build a monument to the composer. Schumann replied to this invitation by composing a sonata, whose original title was intended to be *Obolen auf Beethovens Monument: Ruinen. Trophaen, Palmen. Grosse Sonate für das Pianoforte. Für Beethovens Denkmal*, and which was supposed to have contained quotations from Beethoven's works. Only, Schumann completed his piece in 1838, and during these two years he decided to change the title from *Sonate* to *Fantasie*, and to erase the subtitles. Moreover, the only crystal-clear quotation from Beethoven's work which survived through this operation is taken from the last Lied from the *An die ferne Geliebte*, and it is more an homage to Clara Schumann – the relationship between her and Robert was going through a difficult phase, and this troubled period is the reason of the rift between him and Liszt – than to Beethoven. Nevertheless, this work was extremely relevant for Liszt too. Probably the slow section of the first movement would be where one has to search for the key point of this composition, and consequently the place where Liszt found his inspiration. Marston wrote on the subject:

54 The relevance of the augmented triad in Liszt's music will be analysed in *chapter V* and *VI* of this dissertation.

> As for the issue of form, analysts have been much exercised by the relationship to the whole of the *Im Legendenton* section. To the extent that this separately titled section is in a different key, metre and tempo to the rest of the movement, it appears to form an independent interlude; but closer study reveals that it grows out of the preceding music. It is precisely this quality of ambiguity, the capacity *to bear multiple meanings*, which distinguishes so much of the material of the first movement and makes it such a rich and fascinating – yet problematic – object of study[55]

Two things are extremely relevant in this quotation: 1) the slow section originates from the preceding music; 2) the ambiguity of the passage, and its multiple meanings. Both these aspects are present in Liszt's *Sonata*, and not as marginal characters. Quite the opposite, the ambiguity is the main character of Liszt's *Sonata*, as it will emerge later on. However Marston, speaking about the whole *Fantasie*, points out a general principle of the sonata form, which was changing under the hands of some composers such as Schumann or Liszt:

> It is useful to think more generally of the sonata form structure in terms of a distinction between *stability* and *instability*. That is, the recapitulation is more stable than the exposition, in that it is free from tonal polarity developed there. Similarly, exposition and recapitulation are both more stable than the development, the tonal events of which are the least predictable of all. Tonal stability and instability tend to be matched in the thematic or melodic organization: the exposition and recapitulation generally present stable, identifiable thematic units which are fragmented – rendered unstable – in the development[56].

From this quotation it seems clear that something was changing in the conception of the functional centre of the sonata form. In this *Fantasie*, the sonata form scheme is fully operative, but instead of using tonal relationships – the tonic-dominant relationship – Schumann used the character of the sonata form, namely the stability-instability relationship. It is possible to state that this is a kind of abstraction operation, in the sense that the main features of the sonata form are no more relevant, while the thinner aspects of the scheme become more pregnant. In this specific case Schumann preferred to use, according to Marston's analysis, the stability-instability relationship typical of the classical sonata form, and he elected to choose this relationship as the main feature of his work. But, if in the traditional conception of the sonata form this relationship

55 Marston, Nicholas, *Schumann Fantasie* op. 17, p. 43. Italic is mine.
56 Marston, Nicholas, *Schumann Fantasie* op. 17, p. 47.

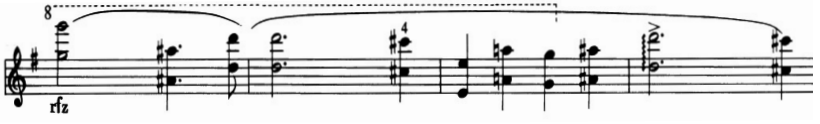
is still a harmonic one – i.e. the exposition is stable, because it is in the area of the tonic, the development is unstable, because it is the moment in which the composer can freely explore distant tonalities, and the recapitulation is the most stable moment, because it is entirely composed on the tonic – during these years of transition the dualism of stable-unstable was detached from its harmonic relations, and it therefore assumed new features. An example of this new conception is the *Im Legendenton* section, which appears totally unrelated to the first and the third sections of the piece, tonal unstable, and it is presented in a stable C minor key. This passage appears to be problematic for musicologists, who elaborated three possible interpretations of this passage. The movement *Im Legendenton* could be sees as: 1) an interlude; 2) a strange development section; 3) or as a second movement of a sonata. Following these three different interpretations it is possible to see the *Fantasie* as a *Lied* form (A-B-A'), or as a three movement sonata condensed into one (Allegro-Adagio-Allegro). In any case, it is not the aim of the present section to state once and for all whether Schumann's work is intended to be as a three movement sonata or as a *Lied*. The aim here is to point out the ambiguity that arises from the passage *Im Legendenton* and which creates a link between this work and Liszt's *Sonata*. Schumann's first intention was to compose a sonata, but in this he faced the problem of the entire Romantic Generation: Beethoven. So, to go further and to preserve the sonata form, many composers hid its structure inside *fantasy* compositions, which assured them more formal freedom. But this formal freedom, based on the sonata form scheme, gives rise to sections which are ambiguous, because they cannot be entirely explained with the vocabulary of the sonata form, as they bring with them the formal structures of different sections, movements, and sometimes of sonata-like genres. This terminological ambiguity creates then many different interpretations. Nevertheless, these works show an internal coherence, which is only explainable through the idea of *Mehrdeutigkeit*, and it was exactly the direction that Lisztian musical research took during the 1830s.

The last illustrious predecessor to the *B minor Piano Sonata* which deserves to be mentioned here is Liszt himself. As already suggested, the *Sonata* did not undergo the revision process which almost all of Liszt's works were subjected to. This is explainable historically – during the Weimar years Liszt was focusing on the orchestral compositions, and after this experience his aesthetic preoccupations changed, and they were no longer related to the kind of pianism expressed by the *Sonata* – and musically – Liszt used the sonata form several times, hiding it in numerous works which are not labelled sonatas. One of these works is the *Großes Konzertsolo* S. 176 (1849–1850), which represents a sort of preliminary work to the *Sonata*. The two works are so similar that Arnold writes «that it is intriguing to speculate how it would have been received without the Sonata in

the picture. Surely, the *Grosses Konzertsolo* would then be considered one of Liszt's most important keyboard compositions»[57]. Aside from these speculations, Arnold identifies the similarities between the two works, and sums them up as follow:

> The similarities between the two works are conspicuous. Both use the same terminology for comparable events in the works: Allegro energico, Andante sostenuto, Grandioso, and Stretta. The second theme of the Sonata also appears regularly in the Grosses Konzertsolo and is used similarly, beginning in m. 46. The Grandioso themes are both heroic and short-lived with similar denouements. Both Andante sostenuto sections are lyrical, but more importantly, almost motionless in their beginnings. The original ending of the Sonata before Liszt revised it was also in the same mold as that of the Grosses Konzertsolo. Needless to say, both large-scale works require extraordinary virtuosity and display intriguing formal plans, working both as sonata form and as a multi-movement structure[58].

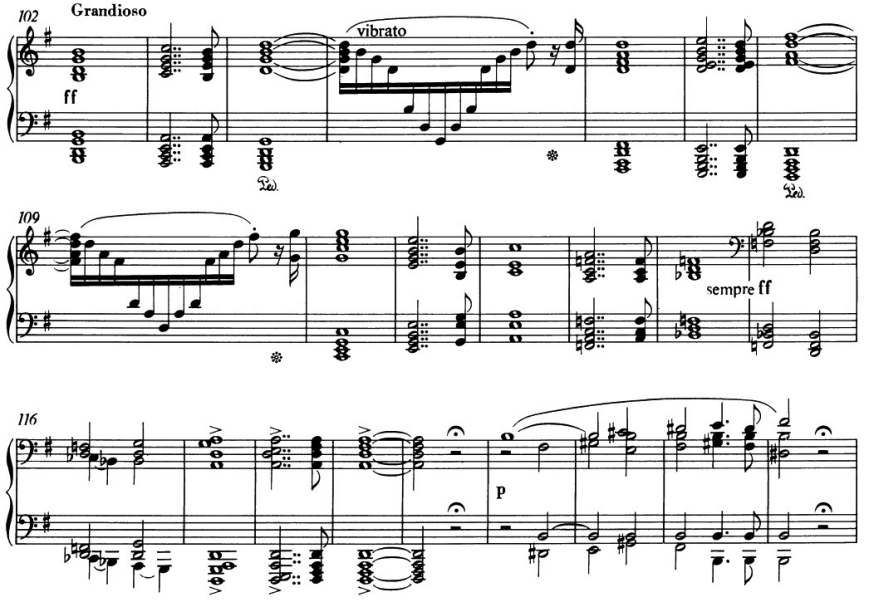
The reason why the manuscript of the *B minor Piano Sonata* has such a small number of corrections and so few afterthought notes or signs is easily explained: Liszt had a draft under his eyes, and he just had to modify and to develop the ideas he had already experimented with. The resemblance between some of the material is incredible. For example, the second motivic cell of the *Sonata* is already present in the *Großes Konzertsolo* (Example 1):



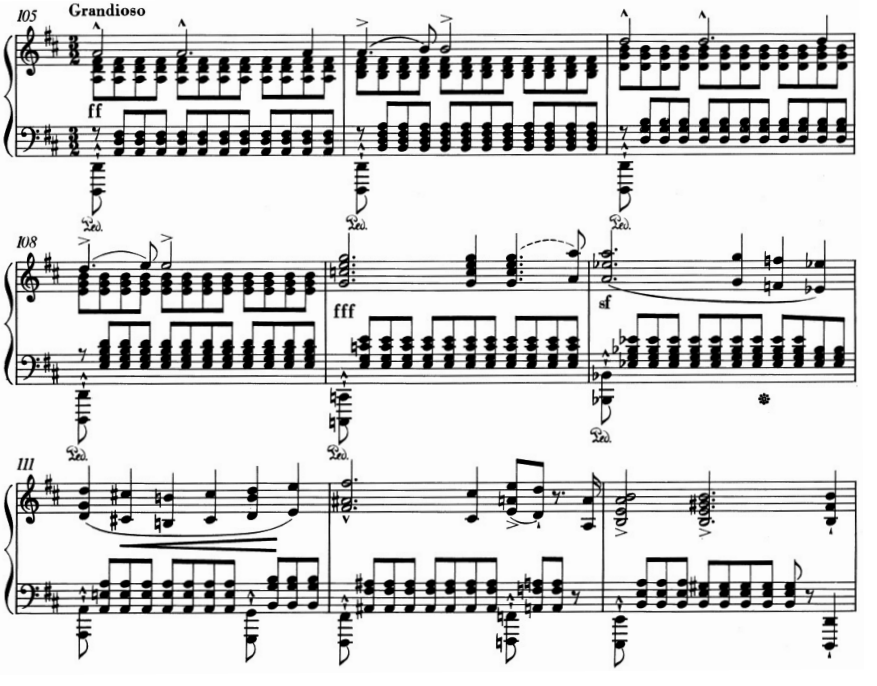

Example 1 – Großes Konzertsolo, mm. 53–56 (Cfr. Example 8)

Other similarities are to be found in the *Grandioso* theme (*Example 2a* and *2b*), and in the *finale* – if confronted with the original version of the finale of the *Sonata* (*Annex II* and *III*). It is not a coincidence that the *Großes Konzertsolo* was composed in 1849–50, namely when some of the themes of the *Sonata* had already been drafted. Liszt's own production represents a source of inspiration for Liszt himself. This view is perfectly consistent with the idea of progress according to which everything that lies in the past is a human achievement, which is to be used as a starting point for new advancements.

57 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 111.
58 Arnold, Ben, *The Liszt Companion*, p. 112.




Example 2a – Großes Konzertsolo, Grandioso theme, mm. 102–124




Example 2b – B minor Piano Sonata, Grandioso theme, mm. 105–113

## An analysis of the *Sonata*[59]

> Ich zum Beispiel habe, offen gestanden, meinen Schülern zeitlebens niemals ein Wort über den „Sinn" der Musik gesagt; wenn es einen gibt, so bedarf er meiner nicht[60].

### Introduction

It is not easy to find the right point of view from which one can begin an analysis of the *Sonata*, because, in order to furnish a complete account of it, it would be necessary to approach it from several points of view simultaneously. Even if an operation of this kind were possible, it would be too risky, because it would be impossible to follow all the paths at the same time, and consequently one would lose the unity, the inner coherence of the individual paths. Nevertheless, a holistic approach seems to be the «most profitable one», as Tanner suggests, because «the Sonata is meant to be more than the sum of its analysis»[61]. This assertion, and its related perspective, are the point of view which is given precedence in this section. However, if Hamilton and Tanner pointed out that the *Sonata* truly possesses structural and harmonic ambiguities without giving them a theoretical explanation, the aim here is to point out that the ambiguities respond to a precise aesthetic idea of artwork, and that this idea is sustained by many 19th century theories, and that behind them lies the previously discussed change of the social and philosophical paradigm. Firstly, however, a more traditional approach is necessary. That is the reason why the *Sonata* is analysed here first as a multi movement work, and then as a first movement form. Of course, before entering these complex matters, it is necessary to provide a brief introduction. In the middle of the several ambiguities which surround the work, there is an undeniable fact, that after many decades of analysis there is still no common agreement concerning with the way in which it is possible to divide the *Sonata* in sections, as can be discerned at first glance from the following table:

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59 The musical analysis which follows is based on the score of the *Neue Liszt Ausgabe* (NLA) published in 1983, Serie 1, Vol. 5 (s. bibliography). Both the Lehman Manuscript and the first edition of the sonata (Breitkopf & Härtel, 1854) are priceless sources of information for the philological work; for the analysis in this dissertation, even if sometimes the manuscript is quoted, the NLA edition was preferred, since it is already the result of this philological work, and it is the reference edition for the Lisztian works anyway.

60 Hesse, Hermann, *Das Glasperlenspiel*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main., 1971, p. 125.

61 Tanner, Mark, *The Power of Performance as an Alternative Analytical Discourse: The Liszt Sonata in B Minor*, p. 173.

| William Newman | Rey Longyear | Sahron Winklhofer | Alan Walker |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cyclical form in four movements | Cyclical form in three movements | First movement form | Cyclical form in four movements |
| Exposition<br>bb. 1–330<br>I movement (in the form of an incomplete sonatina) | Introduction<br>bb 1–7<br>Exposition<br>bb. 8–178<br>I movement (continue in the development section) | Exposition<br>bb. 1–204 | Introduction<br>bb. 1–31<br>Exposition<br>bb. 32–330<br>I movement<br>'Allegro' |
| Development<br>bb. 331–525<br>II movement 'Andante' (bb. 331–459)<br>III movement<br>'Scherzo'<br>(bb.460–525) | Development<br>bb. 179–459<br>I movement<br>(until b. 330)<br>II movement<br>(bb. 331–459) | Development<br>bb. 205–452<br>(She identified a slow section inside) | Development<br>bb. 331–532<br>II movement<br>'Andante'<br>(bb. 331–458)<br>III movement<br>'Fugato' (bb. 459–532) |
| Recapitulation<br>bb. 525–681<br>IV movement (in the form of an incomplete sonatina) | Recapitulation<br>bb. 460–649<br>III movement | Recapitulation<br>bb. 453–649 | Recapitulation<br>bb. 553–681<br>IV movement<br>'Allegro' |
| Coda<br>bb. 682–760 | Coda<br>bb. 650–760 | Coda<br>bb. 650–760 | Coda<br>bb. 682–760<br>'Prestissimo' |

Table 1 – Formal schemes of the Sonata[62]

The problem here is strictly related to the idea of *form*, as Liszt explained in a letter to Luis Köhler. This same letter is the cause of the many programmatic interpretations. Since the form is unclear, and since Liszt tells us that he followed "feelings and inventions", consequently one tends to explain the ambiguities one encounters in Liszt's compositions with the help of extra-musical elements. As it will emerge, this path could lead to relevant misinterpretations.

> Es ist mir eine sehr angenehme Genugthuung, dass Sie, lieber Freund, einiges Interesse an den Partituren gefunden. Wie denn auch andere über die Dinger

62 The table is taken from Storino, Mariateresa, *Franz Liszt. La sonata in si minore*, p. 77.

> aburtheilen mögen, so bleiben sie für mich die nothwendige Entwicklungsstufe meiner inneren Erlebnisse, welche mich zu der Überzeugung geführt haben, dass *Erfinden* und *Empfinden* nicht so gar *vom Übel* in der Kunst sind. Allerdings bemerken Sie ganz richtig, dass die *Formen* (welche nur zu oft mit den *Formeln*, ja selbst *Floskeln* von selbst ganz respectablen Leuten verwechselt werden): „Hauptsatz, Mittelsatz, Nachsatz etc. sehr zur Gewohnheit werden können, weil sie so rein natürlich, primitiv und am leichtesten fasslich sein müssen". Ohne gegen diese Ansicht die mindeste Einwendung zu machen, bitte ich nur um die Erlaubnis, die Formen durch den Inhalt bestimmen zu dürfen, und sollte mir diese Erlaubniss auch von Seiten der hochlöblichen Kritik versagt werden, so werde ich nichtsdestoweniger getrost meinen beschiedenen Weg weiter gehen. Am Ende kommt es doch hauptsächlich auf das *Was* der Ideen und *Wie* der Durchführung und Bearbeitung derselben an – und das führt uns immer auf das *Empfinden* und *Erfinden* zurück, wenn wir nicht im Geleise des Handwerks herzukrabbeln und zappeln wollen[63].

This idea of form as prison to the creativity of the genius is a common idea of the entire Romantic Generation;. Already in 1835, Schumann wrote in his article about Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* that:

> Die Form ist das Gefäß des Geistes. Größere Räume fordern, sie zu füllen, größern Geist. Mit dem Namen „Symphonie" bezeichnet man bis jetzt in der Instrumentalmusik die größten Verhältnisse. Wir sind gewohnt, nach dem Namen, die eine Sache trägt, auf diese selbst zu schließen; wir machen andre Ansprüche auf eine „Phantasie", andre auf eine „Sonate". Bei Talenten zweiten Ranges genügt es, daß sie die hergebrachte Form beherrschen: bei denen ersten Ranges billigen wir, daß sie sie erweitern. Nur das Genie darf frei gebaren[64].

From the two quotations it is possible to infer that the composers of the Romantic Generation thought that it was their duty to free the content and consequently to expand the form. It is then undeniable that under Liszt's hands the sonata form was transformed into something that was no longer perfectly recognizable. Trying to constrain the *B minor Piano Sonata* into the classical sonata form would be equivalent to pretending that the day after Columbus reached the Americas, the Middle Ages were finished and the Modern Era began.

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63 Franz Liszt, *Franz Listz's Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom*, letter dated 9 July 1856, Vol. I, p. 225.

64 Schumann, Robert, *Symphonie von H. Berlioz*, in *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Vol. I, p. 70.

Boarders, categories, and generalisations, are of course useful in defining the general features of an epoch as well as of a musical genre, but when one analyses a precise subject in the details, they become chains. For this reason, the words written by Thomas Mann, alias Theodor Adorno, and quoted at the beginning of the chapter, far from being anachronistic, are useful in remembering the climate in which the Romantic Generation was working. The sonata, both as a genre and as a form, died after Beethoven. Of course, this does not mean that it is no longer at the composer's disposal – otherwise it would be impossible for the composers after Beethoven to create works using the title *sonata* – but it is dead in the sense that Beethoven had exhausted all the possibilities of the use of this genre and form in that precise way. Adorno's point of view is that of the musicologist of the 20th century, who analysed the evolution of the sonata form a posteriori. When Beethoven was active as a composer, there was no sonata form, intended as a fixed formal scheme to follow during the compositional process, just conventions. Here another problem arises, namely the contradictions between theory and compositional practice. The theorists of the 19th century created a category named "Sonata", and they decided a posteriori, analysing the compositions of Haydn, Mozart, and the first Beethoven, that this genre possessed some characteristics, and then they committed these rules to paper. The problem with this operation, which is perfectly legitimate as a historical study of the compositional practices of the 18th and 19th centuries, lies in the fact that the treatises the theorists wrote were not just a sum of the main features of the sonata form in the past, but they pretended to teach a new generation of composers *how* to compose. And the titles they gave to their theoretical works are very representative of their intentions[65]. The problem is that these rules are not even able to explain the sonatas composed by Mozart or Haydn. How can they be suitable for Liszt's works? It is clear that, in this case, the theorists worked against the compositional practice and with their rules they prevented the possibilities of this genre to evolve. As already stated, the sonata form died because the theorists committed these rules to paper, depriving it of its history. Paradoxically, Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven were freer than Liszt, or Schumann to compose sonatas because in their time the rules of the sonata form had not yet been fixed. Luckily some composers decided to follow their *Empfindung*, and expanded the range of possibilities of this form. It would not do to devote too much time here to clarify and retrace

65 See, for example A.B. Marx, *Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, A. Reicha, *Cours de composition musicale ou traité complet et raisonné d'harmonie pratique*, F.J. Fétis, *Traité complet de la théorie et de la pratique de l'harmonie*.

the path taken by Beethoven in order to "destroy" the sonata form, but as a momentary conclusion, one can affirm that Beethoven's piano sonata No. 32 Op. 111 in C minor ideally represents the end of the genre, which had then reached its final aspiration. The only possible way to compose other sonatas is to try to find other ways. Beethoven himself, with a quasi-aesthetic gesture, had already shown the direction in which one has to look to proceed. Liszt had the courage to follow his suggestion and attempted other ways to compose sonatas, and with his 1853 work he achieved exactly that. At the same time, he offered to his contemporaries and to the composers of the future new points of view on the sonata form. Of course, he was not the only one who tried to go further. The entire Romantic Generation confronted itself with the problem of tradition and of cultural heritage, and it was somehow balanced between the coldness of the classical forms – which were unable to contain the expansion of the tonality – and the flame of the "new" – which, on the other hand, brought much bizarreness with it. Liszt, speaking about Schumann, described the composer's situation during this epoch:

> Wie könnte man Schumann gegenüber verkennen, daß er, anstatt zu suchen, zu wagen, zu erobern, zu erfinden, vielmehr dahin strebte, seinen durchaus romantischen, zwischen Freud' und Leid schwebenden Sinn, seinen in seinem Innern oft dumpfe, trübe Tonalitäten annehmenden Hang zum Bizarren und Phantastischen mit der klassischen Form in Einklang zu bringen, während sich gerade diese Form mit ihrer Klarheit und Regelmäßigkeit seinen eigenthümlichen Stimmungen entzog! Trotzdem suchte, wagte, erfand er, wenn auch weniger in freier Selbstbestimmung, als aus fatalistischem Zwang. Denn der echte Künstler wird durch die innerste Nothwendigkeit dahin getrieben, seine Form nach den Konturen seines Gefühls zu modeln, sie mit dessen erheiternden oder verdüsternden Farben zu durchdrungen und mit der Stimmhöhe seiner inneren Saiten in Einklang zu bringen[66].

It was surely no mean feat for the composers to keep their balance on this thin line, and this brought inner conflict: «In diesem Kampf *mit sich selbst* muß er [Schumann] viel gelitten haben»[67]. Liszt seems to be very sure about him and his relationship to the ancient masters; but in the same essay on Schumann

66 Liszt, Franz, *Robert Schumann*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Lina Ramann, Vol. IV, p. 113.

67 Liszt, Franz, *Robert Schumann*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Lina Ramann, Vol. IV, p. 113. This passage is relevant for two reasons: 1) Liszt gives us an account of the troubles he went through, and 2) with the words "Kampf mit sich selbst" he creates a link with his Berlioz essay, clarifying the opening words "Im Reich der Ideen giebt es innere Kriege". See *Chapter III* of this dissertation.

one can read the following passage, which could be read as autobiographical: «Auf seinen schönste Blättern lassen sich Blutspuren, wie aus einer weitklaffenden Wunde, nachweisen. An manchen Stellen hört man ihn gleichsam im Zank mit seinem Genius»[68]. It was of course a dialectical struggle, and, as in any dialectical process, the moment of *Aufhebung* brings the composers to unknown territory. A new land was discovered, and its rules were yet to be written. This is what Liszt was facing with his *Sonata*. For the same reason, here a terminological question arose: the words used to describe the sonata form were coined for a world that did not exist anymore. For this reason, its vocabulary was not enough to explain the new forms. Before entering into the analysis of the sonata, it is necessary to recall again the aforementioned letter Liszt wrote to Luis Köhler. There he said that *feelings* and *inventions* constitute the basis of a composer's work. These are the necessary ingredients to give rise to new ideas and to break the chains of form (intended as formulas). That is the reason why during the following analysis the formal scheme of the sonata form is always taken into account, but as it is used by Liszt in a more flexible manner – and for that reason it is not so easily recognizable, and consequently there are no clear boundaries between sections and movements – the division of the *Sonata* in movements and sections are here provided as a suggestion, as a possibility among others, created to facilitate the analysis and consequently to make the section easily identifiable. «The *ambiguity* is an essential part of its richness and originality. In this respect it is a true successor not only to the late sonatas of Beethoven, but also to the piece for which it was reciprocally dedicated, Schumann's Fantasy»[69]. The ambiguity becoming a compositional principle finds here its practical and theoretical manifesto, and it would be a procedural mistake not to acknowledge it.

## The multi movement structure

As previously discussed in the four points listed at the beginning of the chapter, the first analytical approach to the *Sonata* follows the multi-movement scheme. From a glance at *Table 2*, it appears clear that it is not easy to precisely identify the beginning and the end of each movement. The interpretation according to which the work is formed by four movements seems to be more consistent

68 Liszt, Franz, *Robert Schumann*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Lina Ramann, Vol. 4, p. 113. It is impossible not to think of the *B minor Piano Sonata* as privileged terrain for this battle.

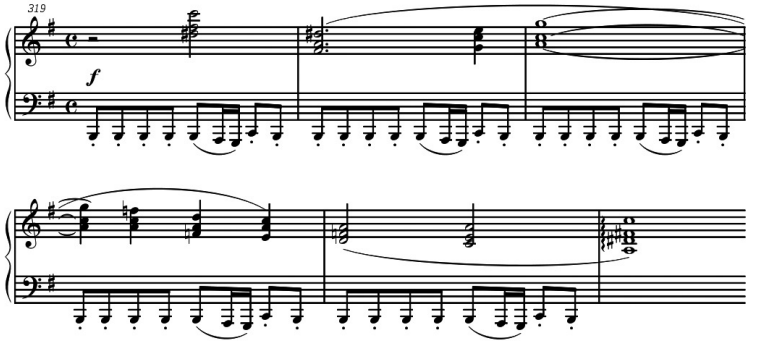
69 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: Sonata in B minor*, p. 47. Italic is mine.

with the overall structure of the work. But at the same time, it is impossible to state that Longyear's analysis is wrong. First of all, because his arguments are supported by the solidity of the analysis; secondly, because the different interpretations are perfect examples of the ambiguity of the form. However, for the present analysis it is assumed that the *Sonata* consists of four movements: *Allegro*, *Andante*, *Allegro energico* (*Fugato*), *Allegro*. The third movement is seen by Newman as a *Scherzo*, but, as Hamilton notes, it depends on the will of the pianist to perform it as a *Scherzo*, and on the will of the audience to hear it as a *Scherzo*. Hamilton immediately clarifies two aspects that emerge from his statement: 1) both interpretations are good and consistent – this point of view is key in the present chapter; 2) it is not a matter of the utmost relevance to identify this section as a *Scherzo*. One cannot do anything but confirm this first point. The *Sonata* and its sections can be interpreted in many ways and every interpretation, if it is of course adequately supported by the analysis, is consistent with the ambiguity of the form. On the other hand, one is forced to disagree with the second observation, because, while it may be true that this case is not a crucial one, even the smallest of nuances between the different interpretations can add something to the *Sonata*, enriching our knowledge and perception of it. As it will later emerge, the emphasis on ambiguity and on the multiple interpretations is necessary to bring to light the philosophical idea which lies behind the possibility of the birth of ambiguous forms.

| | I movement | II movement | III movement | IV movement | Coda |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Newman | 1–330 | 331–459 | 460–525 | 525–681 | 682–760 |
| Longyear | 1–330 | 331–459 | 460–649 | / | 650–760 |
| Walker | 1–330 | 331–458 | 459–532 | 533–681 | 682–760 |

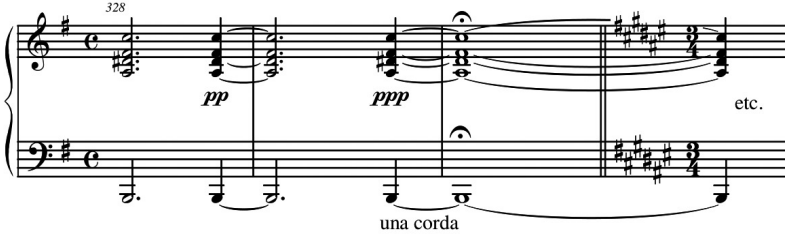
Table 2 – The multi-movement sonata

*Table 2* shows that there is general agreement in identifying the first movement, that a little disagreement arises with the second movement, and that the third and the fourth movement create more trouble for the musicologists – first of all with the Longyear's analysis according to which there is no fourth movement. The first movement *Allegro* begins at m. 1 and ends at m. 330, with a double bar line. It is built as a cyclical movement; at its end, a few measures before the beginning of the *Andante sostenuto*, the timbre and the atmosphere of the opening measures (*Lento assai*) are recreated through the use of the third motivic cell as a tonic pedal, and the second motivic cell in the treble line (*Example 3*).



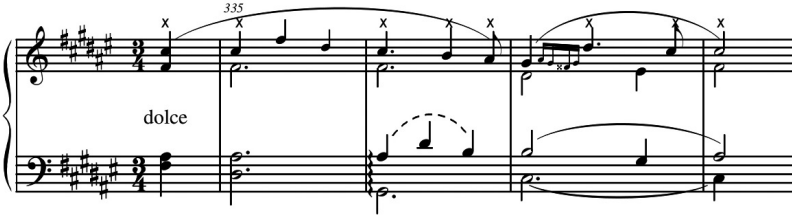

Example 3 – B minor Piano Sonata, mm. 319–324

Here the second motivic cell is not only rhythmically modified, but it is even harmonized for augmentation (*Example 3*), and it ends with a repeated A-C-D♯-F♯ chord (*Example 4*). This chord could be understood as a ninth chord based on the left-hand note B (B-D♯-F♯-A-C), or as a diminished seventh chord (D♯-F♯-A-C). So, the final part of this section works simultaneously as a continuation, because the chord, if interpreted as a ninth based on B, works as the IV grade of F♯ – tonality which is confirmed in the subsequent four bars –, but, if the chord is interpreted as a "simple" diminished seventh chord, it is understood as a reference to the diminished seventh chord of the beginning, from which it is just a half step lower – the second motivic cell at the beginning is based on the A♯-C♯-E-G diminished chord. In this sort of recapitulation of the opening material, Liszt ignores the first motivic cell. This compositional procedure can be seen as a sign of ambiguity. Liszt creates a sort of recapitulation, which lead the listener to wait for the first motivic cell, and then, possibly, a conclusion or a development. Leaving the recapitulation "unfinished" creates a problem in interpretation, which will be investigated further during the analysis of the *Sonata* as a first movement form.



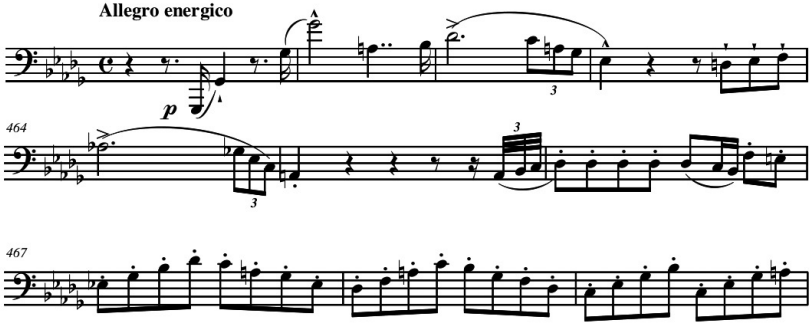

Example 4 – B minor Piano Sonata, mm. 328–330

The second movement begins at m. 331 with the *Andante sostenuto* which exposes a new thematic idea in the first four measures, and then (m. 334) it turns into a transformation of the third motivic cell, with the motive hidden in the treble voice of the melodic line (*Example 5*; the motive is marked with an "X").




Example 5 – B minor Piano Sonata, mm. 335–338

This is the beginning of a slow section which contrasts with the climate and the agitated rhythm of the first movement, but it is nevertheless based on the three motivic cells exposed in the first seventeen bars of the *Sonata.* In this section they are transformed, varied, and exposed in a more intimate way that creates a sense of suspension. Just like the first one, the second movement is cyclical too. The climate of the end recalls the beginning of the section (till m. 459). Furthermore, it ends in the same key, F♯, which is the dominant of B minor. Here it again recalls the sound of the first motivic cell with its descending scales, this time build upon the dominant of B. The first motivic cell exposed at his dominant gives the idea of a recapitulation. But Liszt, who is working "against" the fixed *formulas* interpreted enharmonically the F# as G♭, and instead of the recapitulation he gives rise to the third movement *Allegro energico* in B♭ minor (*Example 6*).




Example 6 – B minor Piano Sonata, mm. 460–469

The third movement is written as a *Fugato*, that, as already said, can also be interpreted as a *Scherzo* section. The source of this construction can be found in Beethoven's piano sonata op. 110, where a fugue arises from the slow movement, and works as connective material between it and the final section. In Liszt's *fugato* passage, the motivic cells two and three work as subject, followed by some modulating arpeggios. As shown in the aforementioned *Table 2*, Newman and Walker disagreed on the identification of the end of this movement. According to Newman the *Fugato* ends at m. 525, while Walker identifies the end with m. 532. This is a clear example of the "mobile boundaries" between sections, and of the consequent ambiguity of the form. The differences between the two interpretations are a matter of primary relevance, as from them the different conception of the form emerge from the two musicologists: Walker adheres more to the "fixed rules" of the sonata scheme, stating that the *fugato* ends with a double bar line and a change in key signature, and therefore that the fourth movement begins with a restatement of the opening material. Newman, instead, proposes an alternative interpretation, which places the end of the third movement 5 measures before the double bar line. In the present analysis, Walker's interpretation is preferred, as it seems more consistent with the division of the work into movements. On the other hand, Newman's interpretation is preferred in the analysis of the work as a sonata form, as it will emerge later. For now, it is sufficient to point out that a more elastic form, such as that used here by Liszt, creates ambiguities. The double bar line of m. 530 and the following exact reprise of the musical materials of the beginning (m. 30–ff) from m. 531, are elements, which invites the establishment there of the beginning of the fourth movement. On the other hand, the double statement of m. 25 in m. 523 and m. 525 cannot be ignored. Are they or are they not already part of the fourth movement? An attempt to answer this question will be provided in the analysis of the sonata as a sonata form. In any case, these ambiguities, far from being a weak point, are the treasure of the form. They assume different meanings depending on the point of view from which one looks at them. Therefore ambiguities, the word possessing a mildly negative connotation, creates multiple interpretations, which are anything but negative. Consequently, the form acquires different meanings, namely ambiguity is intended as polysemy.

The fourth movement begins with this modulating bridge between measures 523–532, which create a sort of "grey area", which is neither the third nor the fourth movement, but it is at the same time a part of both. Walker decided that the fourth movement starts at m. 532 (533?), because there the literal re-exposition of mm. 30–53 begins (see *Annex VI*). The first statement which declares the beginning of the fourth movement is the exposition in the dominant area (of B minor) of the opening material. This passage creates a lot of dilemmas, as

its interpretations are built on the different definitions of the beginning of the *Sonata*, namely whether or not it possesses an introduction – in the case of an affirmative answer, one has to define the boundaries of the introduction too. This particular problem will be discussed later on, as the opening measures of the *Sonata* are a real musicological battlefield. Anyway, an interpretation according to which the fourth movement begins at m. 531 is the preference here, where a double bar line clearly separates the two sections (m. 530). The fourth movement ends, according to Walker and Newman at m. 681, and on m. 682 the coda section begins. Longyear states that the coda begins at bar 650. In this instance, Longyear's interpretation is preferred, as Liszt wrote at m. 650 *Stretta quasi presto*, which clearly alludes to a conclusive (coda) section. Furthermore, it begins in D♯, which is the major third of B minor, and it ends on F♯, before the beginning of the *Andante sostenuto* in B major. This interpretation offers then a precise scheme of the coda, which is more consistent with the overall structure. Furthermore, it follows the modulation scheme B-D♯-F♯, namely a scheme that follows the modulation to the third. Liszt preferred this option to the more traditional modulation to the IV or the V grade. And this aspect is a further link with Schumann's *Fantasie*, where the composer used the same strategy. Surprisingly, Liszt was less advanced in this case than his German colleague, and he preferred a modulation to the major third – whose final movement ends on the dominant – to a more modern augmented triad progression as Schumann did. However this coda, which also includes the finale (mm. 729–760), creates some interpretation problems which will be dealt in the next section. Concluding, it is possible to sum up what has emerged up to this point, and therefore to divide the *Sonata* into four movements: *Allegro* (mm. 1–330), *Andante* (mm. 331–459), *Fugato* (mm. 460–530), *Allegro* (mm. 531–760). Again it's worth emphasising that the suggested division is not fixed conclusively, but it is based more on some of the musical and edition parameters (tonalities, double bar lines, change in time indication, etc.) which Liszt inserted in his work. Anyway, it is worth underlining that the analysis of this work as a multi-movement sonata creates few problems if compared to the analysis of it as a sonata form.

## The sonata form structure

After the analysis of the *Sonata* as a multi-movement work, it is now time to investigate it as a first-movement form. It is here where the greatest problems arise, starting from the very first bars. Before entering into the analysis, it is necessary to recall *Table 1* and to take a last glimpse at the different interpretations of the *Sonata* both as a multi-movement, and as a sonata form work. In

some cases, the sections coincide with the movement, as with Newman, who sees mm. 1–330 both as the exposition and as the first movement. Though looking at *Table 3* below, the confusion that has already emerged appears even more clearly.

| | Newman | Longyear | Winklhofer | Walker |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Introduction | / | 1 – 7 | / | 1 – 31 |
| Exposition | 1 – 330 | 8 – 178 | 1 – 204 | 32 – 330 |
| Development | 331 – 525 | 179 – 459 | 205 – 452 | 331 – 532 |
| Recapitulation | 525 – 681 | 460 – 649 | 453 – 649 | 533 – 681 |
| Coda | 682 – 760 | 650 – 760 | 650 – 760 | 682 – 760 |

Table 3 – The Sonata as first movement form[70]

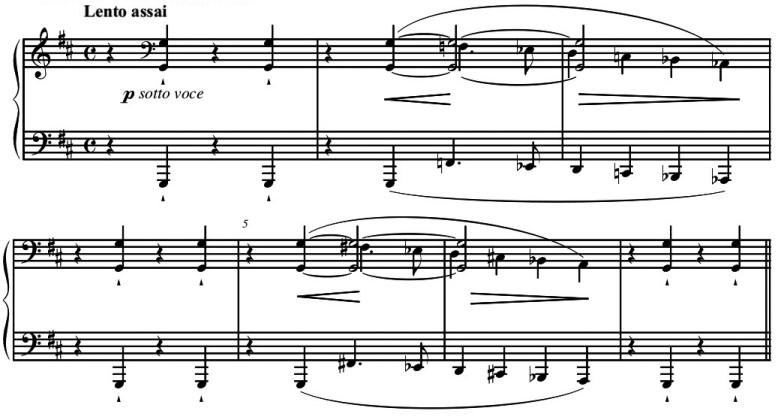
During the analysis which follows, alongside the more traditional harmonic analysis and the necessary confrontation with the *double function theory*[71], it is suggested what could possibly be described as a sort of expanded double function theory – a theory which is a key point of this dissertation – to introduce the concept of symbol. The idea of the symbol as the theoretical background upon which the *Sonata* is built – at least because it is the necessary condition for an ambiguous conception of the form – is not an imposed construction. Quite the opposite, it is the theoretical justification of its ambiguity, and it directly emerges from the idea of progress. The relationship between these two concepts will be clarified in the conclusion of this chapter.

The idea of the double function is extremely simple: The *B minor Piano Sonata* has a structure that could be analysed both as a multi-movement work, and as a sonata form. The theory of an expanded double function exploits the idea of the double meaning of the *Sonata*, and applies it to the single sections. Consequently, a section (or a part of it) could be seen as something else, namely a part of another section, or as a part of two sections at the same time. The introduction, whose analysis immediately follows and which represents the most problematic point in the analysis of the *Sonata*, works both as the introduction, and as (a part of) the exposition. This is the idea of ambiguity one has to have in mind during analysis of this work.

70 See *Table 5* later in this chapter for further examples.

71 Newman, William S., *The Sonata since Beethoven*, p. 376. «The double structural function in this work results largely from three innovations and makes three modes, corollarial compromises […]».

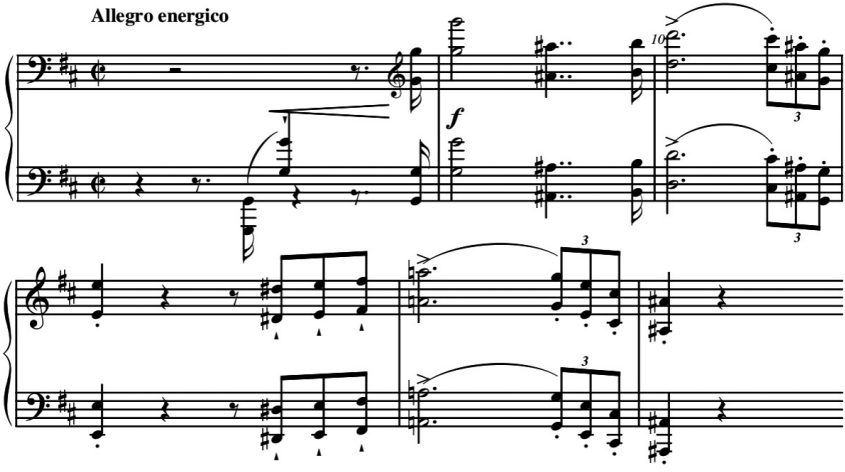
## Introduction




Example 7 – B minor Piano Sonata, first motivic cell, mm. 1–7

In the analysis which follows it is assumed that an introduction section exists, even if some clarification of this statement is necessary. More difficult is to identify its borders. Generally speaking, it is possible to identify this section with the first 31 measures, and this for many reasons. The material used to build this section is the same material that is used and varied during the entire sonata. The variation technique constitutes the ground of the entire composition. Usually, in the classical sonata form the material of the introduction is not used as thematic material for the sonata. For example, Beethoven in his last piano sonata built an introduction – although it cannot be numbered among the typical ones – which works as a long modulating bridge that leads to the key tonality. The material of this introduction is not used to compose the continuation of the sonata, except for one element, the seventh chord. Beethoven was probably the first composer who opened the doors to the modernity, and to involve harmonic features into motivic-thematic material. What had, for more than a century, constituted the functional centre was changing. In terms of the logic of music, themes and tonalities were no longer the only functional centres at a composer's disposal. So, in Beethoven's op. 111 the connection between the introduction and the exposition is not melodic, but harmonic. Consequently, since the entire work is built on and around the seventh chord, it is hard to speak about the two sections (introduction and exposition) as two well defined and "independent" entities, as if they were categories. With Liszt this intuition becomes even more apparent. In his *Sonata*, one does not just have to look for themes or keys as meaningful formal points, because they were substituted by

other features. In this specific case the functional centre of the *Sonata* is the smallest unit in music: the second interval.

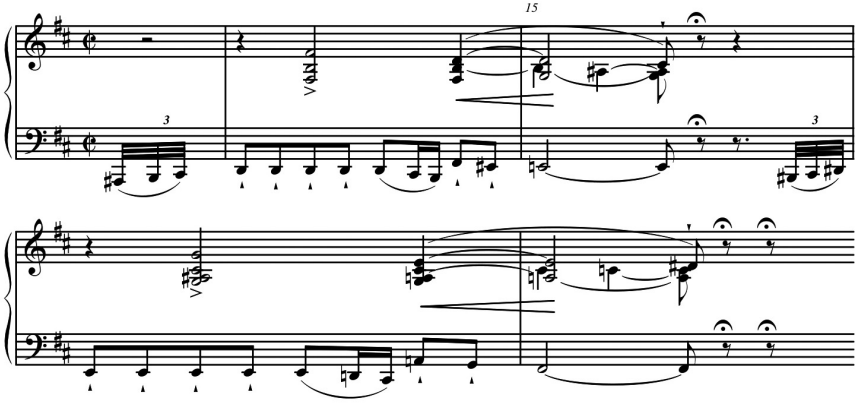



Example 8 – B minor Piano Sonata, second motivic cell, mm. 8–13

The first motivic cell (*Example 7*) – which is very often morphologically described as a sequence of repeated Gs followed by an ascending seventh jump and a descending scale which brings back to the repeated Gs – is actually based on the second interval and its inversion. According to this view, the first measures consist then of a seventh interval (G-F/F♯), and a second interval (G-A♭/A♮). And it is from these two elements that the second motivic cell arises (*Example 8*). This second cell is both the continuation of the seventh jump – creating then this sequence: m. 2 G-F♮; m. 5 G-F♯; m. 8 G-G – and of the second interval – creating this sequence: mm. 2–3 G-A♭; mm. 5–6 G-A♮; m. 9 G-A♯. In m. 9 the augmented second is expressed in its inversion, and then used to create the diminished seventh chord A♯-C♯-E-G which, as previously stated, is a key chord in the work, and upon which the third motivic cell is built (*Example 9*). So, strictly speaking, the real introduction should be mm. 1–3, since this section already contains the material used to build the rest of the *Sonata*[72]. It is also true however that morphologically the three motivic cells are

72 This process can be described using a 20th century term, i.e. *Entwickelnde Variation* – more than an anachronistic definition, the term assumes here the character of a provocation. If the *Entwickelnde Variation* as a compositional process was identified by Schönberg in the

different, and since they are used in the development of the *Sonata* as thematic material, it comes quite spontaneously to think of mm. 1–17 already as part of the exposition, instead of an introduction. Furthermore, mm. 18–24 are a modulating bridge which leads to a passage built on a variation of the second motivic cell. It is strange that the variation of the thematic material coincides with the beginning of the exposition – from mm. 32 on, the second and the third motivic cells are used to create a theme.



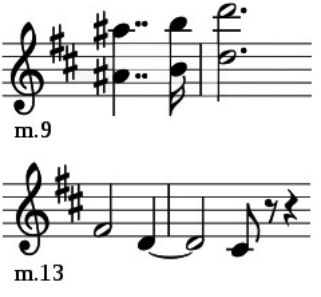

Example 9 – B minor Piano Sonata, third motivic cell, mm. 13–17

At this point it is necessary to introduce what in the brief introduction of this chapter was called the expanded double function. According to this idea it is possible to analyse mm. 1–31 both as the introduction and as part of the exposition. The interpretation changes when the point of view changes: 1) if one considers the changes in the rhythm and tempo, the tonal instability, the rhapsodic passages of mm. 18–24, and of mm. 25–30, and the fact that the tonic (B minor) appears for the first time in m. 30 in its first inversion, but only in m. 32 in its root position. For this reason, mm. 1–31 have to be regarded as the introduction of the *Sonata*; 2) if one considers that the three motivic cells, with all their harmonic relations and implications, constitute the thematic material of the entire piece, then mm. 1–31 have to be regarded as part of the exposition. This is a direct consequence of the ambiguity, which does not mean chaos, but it does mean that different interpretations are allowed, and

analysis of the works of Brahms, it is also true that too often the name of Liszt is excluded from the pool of composers considered the fathers of this technique.

that they are all consistent, because they are caused by the change in point of view from which the *Sonata* is analysed. It is like in poetry, where the overall meaning of a lyric, passage or line may be clear, but can also allow for multiple, acceptable interpretations. However, it is worth emphasising again that all interpretations are acceptable, even if some are preferable to others. For example, if one identifies the introduction as mm. 1–7, it is not only because of the double bar line or the change in the tempo signature. It is because this section already contains all the musical material of its continuation, even if it appears to be a separated section, both in its character and in its structure. This interpretation, supported by Gut and Longyear, is perfectly consistent, even if Hamilton reminds us that multi-tempo introductions were quite the usual for Liszt (*Eine Faust-Symphonie*). But for the purposes of this dissertation, it is necessary to consider these first seven bars as strictly related and bound to the following ones, with which it constitutes a united section. According to the aforementioned expanded double function theory mm. 1–31, if seen from the first perspective described above (the change in rhythm and tempo indication, tonal instability, etc.), constitute the introduction, even if an atypical one, which already contains thematic material.

The *Sonata* arises from silence, from which two repeated Gs appear – which, according to the *Liszt pädagogium* are to be played as *Paukenschläge*[73] – followed by a descending phrygian scale. This three measure figure is immediately repeated, but this time the descending scale follows the model of the Hungarian one (*Example 7*)[74]. The tonal ambiguity is the first element that is recognised by our ears: a sonata whose tonality is B minor opens with a polarization of G. Liszt is creating an introduction/exposition based on the sixth grade of the B minor scale. After these scales, we hear another two Gs, which suddenly explode with an octave jump into an *Allegro energico* with *f* indication (*Example 8*), which contrasts with the *p sottovoce* of the beginning, and with which the




Example 10 – B minor Piano Sonata, relation between motivic cell 2 and 3

73 S. footnote 41.

74 As already seen, the two descending scales, which are often ignored in analyses, are a relevant part of the thematic material, and they appear in key moments of the composition. Therefore, they deserve more attention than they usually receive. The relevance of the descending scales will emerge later in the analysis of the so-called *Grandioso Theme*.

second motivic cell begins. This is based on the diminished seventh chord A♯-C♯-E-G, that is, as already seen, a natural continuation of the second/seventh intervals of the very first measures. Another relevant element of this second thematic cell are the dissonances of the accented notes (D and A) in respect to the diminished seventh chord. Here Liszt suggested to his disciples to think of the adventure of Coriolan by von Collin, and relate it to the words «Warum soll ich Euch meine Leiden zeigen? Ich trage sie in meinen Innern und verschließe sie stolz von Euch»[75].

This suggestion gives the second motivic cell a dramatic (in a theatrical sense) tone. This theme ends on an A♯ in octave (m. 13). With the same note the third motivic cell begins (*Example 9*), the so-called "Hammerschlag" theme[76], of which the treble line is based on the inversion of m. 9 (*Example 10*), and it ends with the second inversion of the A♯-C♯-E-G seventh chord. The third motivic cell ends with the A-C-D♯-F♯ diminished seventh chord, followed by a double crown, that works as a theatrical pause on stage. It is as if Liszt told us that these are the players, and after this pause the play can begin. From m. 18 to m. 25, in an *agitato* section, Liszt shows us his virtuosity in a series of arpeggios that modulate until the E♭ chord. With this chord Liszt starts the variations of the second motivic cell, inserting arpeggios and modifying the rhythm for reduction. Then, the third motivic cell appears in the left hand, working as a dominant pedal upon which we hear the tonic chord in its second inversion and which leads to a trill in the bass, which, finally, falls with a descending semiquaver quadruplet to the tonic in its root position (m. 32).

These first 32 measures, independently if one looks at them as the introduction or as the exposition, are so interconnected and interdependent that it is impossible to clearly separate them. Even the division into three motivic cells of mm. 1–17 could be seen as a stretch, since the real glue of the entire work is an interval from which everything springs forth. In any case, the B minor chord of m. 30 already represents a valid example of the fusion between sections. It is the first occurrence of the tonic, but it appears before the beginning of the exposition, and it creates a problem in interpretation of this chord, since it does not represent either the beginning of the exposition, nor the end of the introduction. It is something in between, a sort of "no man's land", where

75 S. footnote 41.

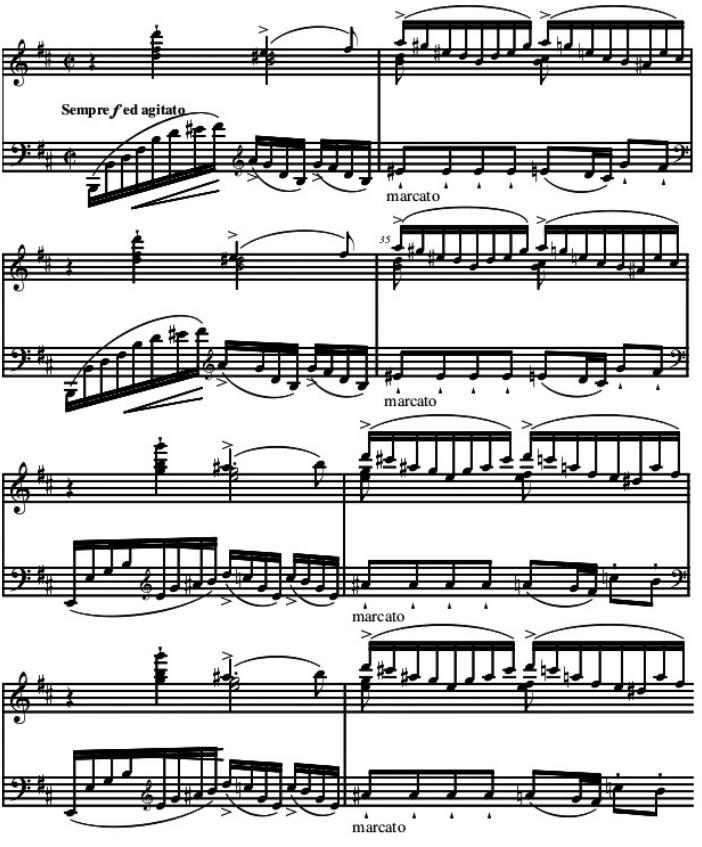
76 Liszt, Franz, *Franz Liszt's Briefe, Von Paris bis Rom,* letter dated 8 June 1854, Vol. I, p. 157. «Ihr so perspicaces Herausfinden meiner Intention des 2ten Motives der Sonate [musical example] im Gegensatz zu dem früheren Hammerschlag [musical example] hat mich wahrscheinlich dazu verleitet».

the sections are combined, related and bent together. The problem with the analysis of the *Sonata* is that one has to remember all these elements in order to find out the functional elements Liszt used during the development of the work, measure for measure. Clara Schumann was correct when she said that the *Sonata* has «kein gesunder Gedanke mehr, alles verwirrt, eine klare Harmoniefolge ist da nicht mehr herauszufinden!»[77]. She was correct, because here themes and clear harmonic concatenations are things that belong to the past, and they are intentionally ignored precisely for this reason. To fully appreciate and understand this work one must analyse it, starting a sort of hunting game looking for all the recurrences of the motivic material (chords, intervals, etc.), which are hidden in a masterly manner within the contrapuntal construction. Furthermore, the *Sonata* changes begore our eyes every time we changed our point of view of it, or when we change the key element through which we analyse it (motives, themes, chords, keys, etc.). All these elements made this composition a sort of work in progress, something impossible to complete. That not only means that the material progresses during the unfolding of the *Sonata* itself, but that the *Sonata* progresses with us and changes through time.

### Exposition

The exposition (mm. 32–330) is, for the reasons that already emerged during the analysis of the introduction, not actually an exposition, as it begins with a contrapuntal variation of motivic cells two and three. This element confirms the idea of the expanded double function: Liszt exposes his material in the introduction; this section works simultaneously as the first part of the exposition – if analysed from another point of view – since the "real" exposition is actually built on a variation of the material already exposed. However, there is in any case a point of view that confirms that m. 32 is the beginning of the exposition. If mm. 1–31 displays many features typical of the introduction – multi tempo, tonal instability, irregular metre –, the exposition shows the traditional phrase construction, exposing the material in a (2+2)+(2+2) structure (*Example 11*), of which the second repetition exposed the material a fourth higher.

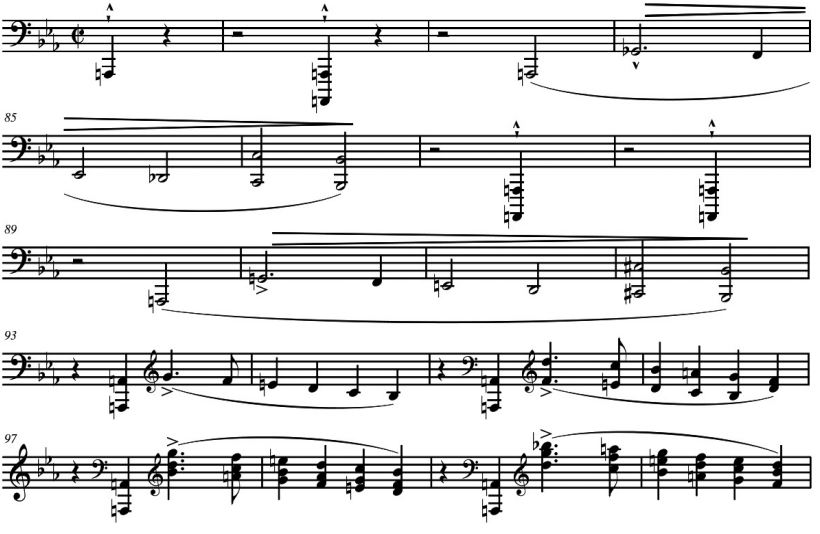
77 See footnote 14.




Example 11 – B minor Piano Sonata, (2+2 )+(2+2) structure, mm. 32–39

After this episode another modulating bridge begins, of which its last part (mm. 51–54) is based on the sevenths of motivic cell one and two. Here, it becomes clear in which sense Liszt used chords and intervals as functional centres. This bridge leads to the second motivic cell (*ff*) in B♭ major, in which the seventh interval is reduced to a minor sixth (D-B♭). This thematic area, that seems to be just a brilliant canon variation of the second motivic cell in octaves, is a modulating bridge in itself. It starts from the B♭ major of bar 55, then it descends to G minor (m. 61) – tonality which recalls the beginning – and ends on the E♭ of m. 58. This modulating bridge is built on the same material of the beginning, but here the diminished seventh chord A♯-C♯-E-G is transformed into the E♭-G-B♭ major triad (melodically exposed), a tonality which is harmonically reached at m. 67, where the second theme is exposed in

E♭ major on *fff*. From this passage it emerges that even the distant tonality of E♭ major – a key tonality in the *Sonata*, which is used to create a contrast with the dark atmosphere of the other motivic cells – derives from the intervals of the beginning, proving once more the unity of the multiplicity. The passage of mm. 55–81 is related to m. 25, and it represents its expansion, since it is based both on the second motivic cell, and on the E♭ chord.



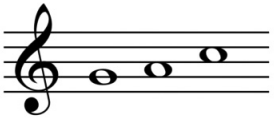

Example 12 – B minor Piano Sonata, variation on the first motivic cell, mm. 82–100

From m. 71 Liszt begins an octave episode that brings us to the reappearance of the first motivic cell in the bass, sustained by an A pedal in the right hand. This time the cell is exposed for augmentation and it is exposed one tone higher. The original scale shows the G-A/A♭ seventh relationship, while here the seventh relationship is represented by the A-G♭/G♮. *Example 12* shows how Liszt inverted the appearance of the seventh: while in the original first motivic cell he used first a minor seventh interval, and then a major one, in the episode of mm. 81–92 he reversed the relationship, using first the major and then the minor seventh interval. This gives a sense of returning to the beginning to the passage, another sign that the harmonic relations constitute the real functional centres of the work. The A pedal, that seems to be a moment of tonal stability, actually creates a tritone relationship with the previous tonality of E♭, increasing the sense of instability. From m. 93 the first cell is exposed four times for reduction (*Example 12*). The fourth time (m. 101) it is exposed on a variation

of the original A♯-C♯-E-G diminished seventh chord, which here it becomes a $V^7$ of D major, tonality in which the second thematic group, the *Grandioso theme* (mm. 105–ff), is exposed. Hence, to create these first 104 measures Liszt used the same theoretical principle which lies at the basis of the sonata form, namely the centrifugal and centripetal forces, proving in this way that every "new" is actually something old used in a new way, and that the sonata was still an alive and fecund genre. The formal structure of these measures can be summarised as follows:

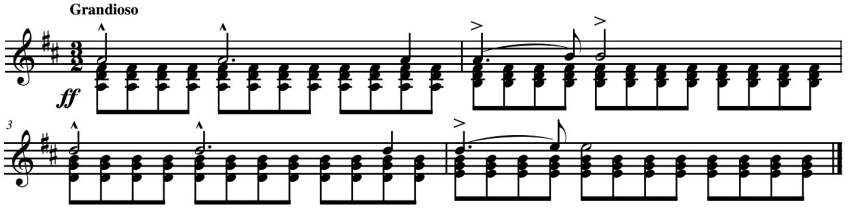
| mm. 1–7 | mm. 8–13 | mm. 14–17 | mm. 25–31 | mm. 32–39 | mm. 55–81 | mm. 82–104 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motivic cell 1 | M.c. 2 | M.c. 3 | M.c. 2+3 | M.c. 2+3 | M.c.2 | M.c. 1 |

According to this scheme, the first 104 measures describe the departure and the return of the first motivic cell. Consequently, it is not just the *Sonata* and its sections that can be described as cyclical, but some parts of some sections can even be regarded in the same way. In fact, the *Grandioso theme* is introduced by a *molto crescendo* passage, which actually begins in the previous section, which begins with a $V^7$ of D major. It touches first a minor ninth of G♯ (A-B-D-F-G♯), then a diminished seventh chord on A (A-C♮-D♯-F♯) which creates tonal ambiguity, and again it finally reaches the dominant seventh chord (A-C♯-E-G). Even if hidden in a tonally ambiguous passage, this modulation leads us, with an unexpected and welcomed $V^7$-I cadence, to the second thematic group in D major (m. 105), which probably represents one of the few links, or at least one of the most evident ones, to the classical sonata form (*Example 13*).



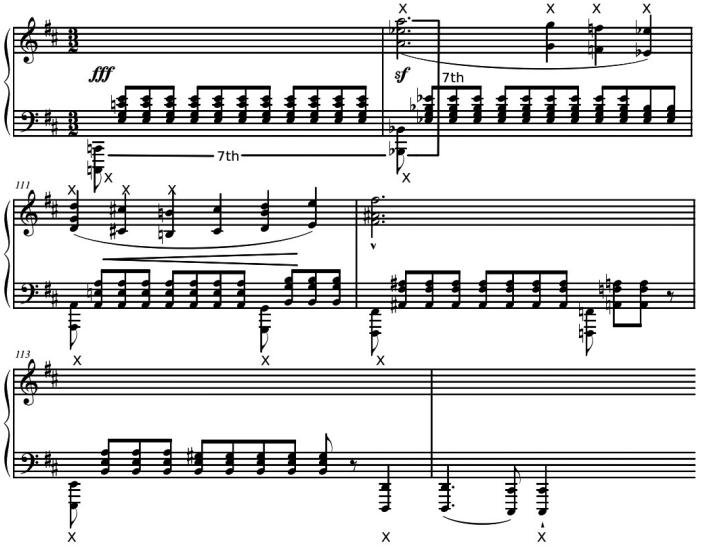
Example 13a – Crux fidelis motive

The second thematic group, the so-called *Grandioso theme*, reflects the classical sonata form scheme, because it presents its material in the relative major of B minor, and its character contrasts with the atmosphere of the first thematic group. At the same time it presents a more regular structure with its (2+2)+6. The left hand plays the D major chords on a tonic pedal. This is one of the few places where Liszt clearly shows us the tonic. But even this passage, which seems to be a clear and bright section in the middle of this sea of innovations, is actually related to the beginning, since at its triumph moment (m. 109) it is broken by the entrance of the first motivic cell in the left hand. The new thematic material is sustained by the old one, in this way creating a relationship between the two, and consequently an obstacle in the path of the programmatic interpretations, as it will emerge later on.




Example 13b – B minor Piano Sonata, Grandioso theme, right hand, mm. 105–108

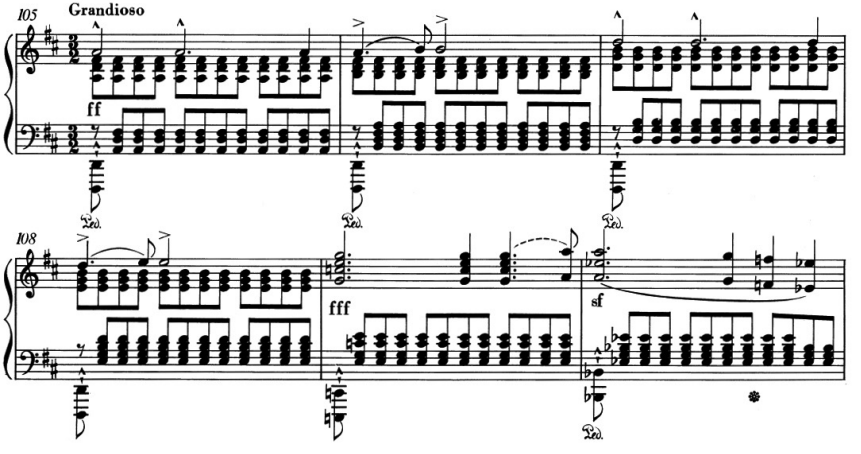
The right hand then plays the *Crux fidelis*[78] theme (based on the Gregorian motif, s. *Example 13a*) from m. 105 sustained by chords (*13b*), and then, at m. 110 it gives rise to a varied form of the first motivic cell, played in canon with the left hand in a sixth relationship (*Example 14*). Furthermore, at bar 110 the B♭ of the left hand could be seen as the head note of the first motivic cell played by the right hand, although they are played together, creating a harmonic seventh relationship instead of a melodic one.




Example 14 – B minor Piano Sonata, left and right hand relationship, mm. 109–114

78 Crux fidelis is the Gregorian plainchant associated with the Solemn Adoration of the Holy Cross on Good Friday.

Before moving on, a further analysis of this *Grandioso* passage is necessary. This passage is very often related to the Good, as opposed to the Evil motive of the beginning. First of all, it is worth noting that the *Crux fidelis* motive, the symbol of Christianity, was already used by Liszt on many other occasions, and not always in the same way[79]; secondly, the ostinato chords of the right hand are a continuation of the A pedal begun in m. 82, which is in turn a derivation of the third motivic cell, the Evil motive[80] – this passage can even be read, according to its tonal progression, as a salvation process, from the tonal instability to the tonal stability –; thirdly, the *Crux fidelis* motive turns into the first motivic cell, the cell of the fall.



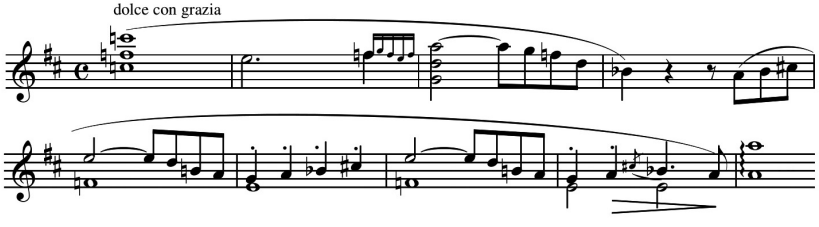

Example 15 – B minor Piano Sonata, Crux fidelis and first motivic cell relation, mm. 105–110

The eschatological interpretation of this passage falls apart for this last argument: the D pedal of the left hand is actually both the head of the first and of the third motivic cell, exposed per augmentation (*Example 15*). When the pedal reaches

79 According to Serge Gut, for example, in the symphonic poem *Hunnenschlacht*, Liszt used the *Crux fidelis* in a motive that recalls the theme of the *Walkürenritt*, creating in this way a strange relationship between Nordic mythology and Christianity. From this strange use of the *Crux fidelis* doubts rise about its univocal interpretation as the symbol of the Christian faith. For an analysis of the *Cross motif* and its appearances in Liszt's music s. Szász, Tibor, *Liszt's Sonata in B minor and a Woman Composer's Fingerprint,* pp. 2–4.

80 Szász, Tibor, *Liszt's Symbols for the Divine and Diabolical*, p. 50 (s. the example 15.4 at p. 77). «[…] the evenly spaced, sharply marked chain of repeated note symbolize the already fallen devil known as Satan, […]».

m. 109 it reveals its true nature with the second interval – which is, as already pointed out, the interval upon which the beginning is built, and that in this case must be understood as a seventh – followed by the descending scale. The *Crux fidelis* motive occurs just four times in the whole *Sonata*[81], and it is always sustained by the first motivic cell (except in mm. 700–703); namely, following the eschatological interpretation, the theme of Good is strictly related to that of Evil – and that could be a sign of the eternal battle between the two forces, but it could even be seen as the idea of contrast in general, since one can think about the two contrasting forces as a representation of the first and the second theme of classical sonata form, or as the concept of progress and tradition, or as any other pair of opposites –, but the Evil themes are never contrasted, or sustained by the Good motive. It is not the aim of this dissertation to present a last word about the programmatic interpretations of the *Sonata*, but it is believed that, since Liszt did not attach any programme to the work, it would be better to analyse this work without any reference to any hypothetical programme.



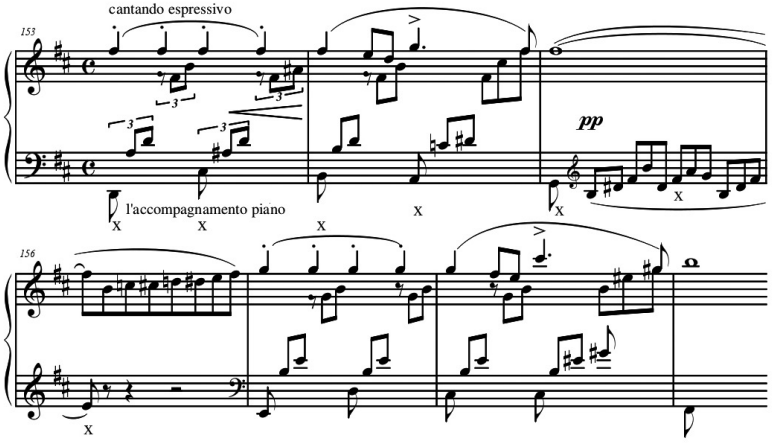

Example 16 – B minor Piano Sonata, second motivic cell variation, mm. 125–133

Even in this more relaxed climate of the Grandioso it is relevant to note the seventh interval. The *Crux fidelelis* theme begins first on A, and then it is repeated a fourth higher. The third repetition of the theme, that turned then into a descending scale, started a fourth higher than the second repetition. This 2+2 phrase begins on A, passes through D and ends on G. This passage creates a seventh relationship, which is built again from the notes G and A. Until this point, just the beginning of the *Sonata* was an object of analysis, but it is already possible to state that the thematic and the motivic connections are not enough to understand the work. The functional centres are to be searched

81 It occurs another two times at mm. 297–300 and mm. 302–305, but here it has lost its "grandioso" character, since it is exposed in a *ff pesante*. It seems to be its last attempt to fight before final defeat.

for elsewhere. However, like all the innovations, Liszt did nothing new but use old material in a new way. There is a clear example of this procedure at m. 120. Here, Liszt repeats the second motivic cell at the same pitch as the beginning, and that gives the listener the idea of a repetition of the exposition as in the classical sonata form. Hamilton underlines that even Chopin, who surely was not worried about the rules of classical form, felt himself unable to avoid this element in his sonatas[82]. But the repetition is suddenly varied through the reinterpretation of the A♯ as B♭, and a new section marked *dolce con grazia* begins, which is based on the second motivic cell. Because of its rhythmic and harmonic transformation, the cell is quite unrecognisable here (*Example 16*). Liszt wanted to prove us his ability with the contrapuntal technique, and he delighted in hiding the motivic cells in the most unsuspicious of places. After this 6+6 bars construction based on the second motivic cell (mm. 125–138), Liszt creates a little coda in the left hand using the second motivic cell as material, which turns into the third in m. 141. This chromatic passage leads us to the *cantando espressivo* section, again in D major. This passage (*Example 17*) is sometimes seen as a new theme, even if it is believed that this interpretation is hardly explainable, since Liszt has no reason to present a new motivic cell here. This point represents just the beginning of a modulating and virtuoso section, that leads to a *recitativo*-like passage (mm. 197–204) and then to the end of the exposition. What is sometimes seen as new thematical material is actually the transformation of the third motivic cell per augmentation. The "hammer motive" goes through the D major *Grandioso*, and emerges transformed. This transformation could be used to sustain the eschatological interpretation: the *Grandioso theme*, the theme of Good, is so powerful that is able to transform the Evil theme. But a closer analysis reveals that, again, the left hand plays the first motivic cell (marked with X in *Example 17*) with its seventh jump (D-C♯), and with its descending scale which creates the second interval (D-E). Aside from the programmatic interpretation, what is more relevant in this passage is that Liszt wants to guide the listener through these motivic transformations. For this reason, he used the third motivic cell first in a recognizable manner (mm. 143–148), before hiding it in a *cantabile* passage, where it is quite unrecognisable to the listener.

82 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: B minor Piano Sonata*, p. 42.




Example 17 – B minor Piano Sonata, second motivic cell variation in D major, mm. 153–159

The same technique is used by Liszt at mm. 161–164, where a theme derived from the second motivic cell leads us to a long variation based on theme three (mm. 165–173). The transformation of the second cell is built upon a bass of E and B♭, which creates then a tritone relationship (mm. 161–163). The tritone, the so-called *diabolus in musica*, used soon after the *crux fidelis* theme creates a strong opposition between these two sections, and it could be seen as further evidence against the eschatological interpretation. Furthermore, it seems that the supporters of the eschatological interpretation of the *Sonata* were unaware of this opposition. Aside from this Good-Evil opposition, it is relevant to point out that the *Sonata* is full of these subtle relationships, that are impossible to hear while listening. In order to fully comprehend the work, it is necessary to analyse it. Without this passage it would be impossible to grasp all these relationships, which constitute the functional centres, and the entire *Sonata* would lose its pregnancy. Under this light, the programmatic interpretations try to identify a programme in order to use it as if it was the functional glue of the work. This kind of operation deprives the work of its value per se. Moreover, the programmatic operations sustain Clara Schumann's view. The work has no harmonic and thematic concatenations; it is pure noise, but it describes the adventure of Faust or the eternal fight between Good and Evil. Namely, the music alone makes no sense, but if one attaches to it a programme, then it acquires a meaning. But it acquires the meaning of the extra-musical source, preserving its musical incoherence. It is not the intention here to deny the pregnancy of some of the programmatic interpretations, but it is to emphasise

that they should not be used to give coherence to the music. The rest of the exposition is a continued variation of the second and the third motivic cell in different tonalities for augmentation or reduction. There is another episode that is worth noting, the trills of mm. 197–200 and 201–204. These trills bring the music to two little recitatives, but the most important thing is that they represent the end of the rhythm and of the obsessive repetition of motivic cells two and three. They are a pause that serve Liszt to prepare the acrobatic prosecution of the music that starts at bar 205.

Before moving to the analysis of the last part of the exposition, it is necessary to make a brief digression on bar 205, because here some musicologists, such as Winklhofer, see the beginning of the development. This interpretation is bolstered by the identification of the *recitativo*-like measures with a coda, a caesura in the musical speech which prepares the acrobatic entry of the second motivic cell of mm. 205 and *ff*. But this *recitativo*-like passage is actually a bridge between the *agitato* section, which is very irregular both in the construction and in the harmonic sense, and the return to the *allegro energico*. This section is not a development, as its acrobatic progression leads to the real *recitativo* section (m. 301). Then, after this relaxing bridge of mm. 197–204 Liszt uses the second motivic cell in the right hand with a more regular structure, exposing twice a 2+2+4 structure, followed by a 2+2+8 structure with the second motivic cell played by the left hand. These two episodes are strictly related, and the *recitativo* section followed by the recapitulation, clearly identify the end of the exposition with m. 330, where the atmosphere of the beginning is evoked. Furthermore, the *Andante sostenuto* which begins at m. 331, exposed, finally, a new motive, which is neither related to the three motivic cells, nor to the *Grandioso theme* – even if, as previously stated, mm. 335–338 contain traces of the third motivic cell (*Example 18*; the motivic cell is marked X).

The last relevant passage of this section starts at m. 289, where the second cell is presented in F minor in octaves, and, with a modulating passage leads us to the *recitativo* section that begins in C♯ major. The last two quadruplets (m. 296) are intended enharmonically, as the preparation for the new tonality in which the *Grandioso theme* briefly reappears. This section is built upon a double 2+2+1 structure. The first four bars are built upon the fourth motivic cell (the *Crux fidelis* theme), while the other measures of this construction are a free *recitativo* based on the retrograde of the second motivic cell. The mm. 311–330 have already been described above in the analysis of the *Sonata* as a multi-movement work.

Development

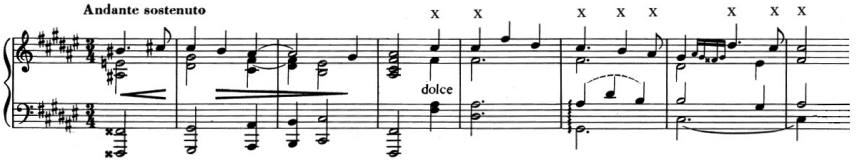
As for the two former sections, there is also no agreement concerning the development. While Longyear and Winklhofer see a huge development section, respectively between mm. 179–459 and mm. 205–452, Walker, Newman and Heinemann see a smaller section, respectively between mm. 331–532 and mm. 331–525. As has already emerged, it is believed that these last three interpretations are preferable, since the changes in m. 331 – new tempo, new key signature, and a new melodic motive (m. 331, s. below) – seem to be more consistent with the beginning of a development section. Furthermore, what precedes this measure is a sort temporary conclusion on the B minor tonic. What happens thereafter is a rhapsodic transformation of the musical material, a procedure common to almost all developmental sections. Hamilton, who agreed with Winklehofer, wrote that «Newman's view is more difficult to accommodate», because «bars 205–331 have all the characteristics we would normally attribute to development sections: tonal instability, thematic fragmentation and sequential treatment of themes. To be sure, Liszt uses all these techniques at other points in the sonata, but the one thing that might allow us to call bars 205–331 a recapitulation – a firm return to the tonic – is lacking»[83]. From this quotation a problem arises. Hamilton identifies mm. 205–331 as a part of the development because the passage, the recapitulation, lacks a "firm return to the tonic". The question is: where is it possible to find a firm return to the tonic in the *Sonata*? As there is no affirmation of the tonic in the exposition, there is no confirmation of the tonic in the recapitulation. However, there are other formal elements. In this case, what returns at the end of the exposition is the atmosphere of the beginning. Consequently, what creates a recapitulation is not the motivic, but the harmonic material. In addition to that, the passage of mm. 297–306 with its *ff pesante* and its *recitativo* passages hardly fits a development, since it works more as a preparation for it. Furthermore, with Beethoven the development section had already acquired a different meaning, namely brevity and stability. The stability-instability-stability principle described by Marston as the main feature of the sonata form, is still operative, even if it is inverted. In Liszt's *Sonata*, as well as in the last piano works of Beethoven, the exposition and, consequently, the recapitulation are more unstable than the development, because the feature of the sonata form which survives is not the tonalities relationship, but the general character. Therefore, the development remains a contrast section, and the only way to contrast a highly unstable section is to create a more stable development.

83 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: B minor Piano Sonata*, pp. 43–44.

Liszt could not quote directly from the introduction just before the development. For that reason, he closed the section with a passage based on the second and third motivic cells. Furthermore, he added a sense of conclusion, writing the only one *una corda* (*ppp*) of the entire work (m. 329), which recalls the *p sotto voce* of the first measures. Consequently, it is possible to state that mm. 205–330 are a sort of recapitulation. Against this view, Hamilton affirms that there is further evidence that this passage has to be regarded as a development, namely "the tonal instability, the thematic fragmentation and the sequential treatment of the themes". Even if the musicologist notes that in other points of his writing, it is worth underlining that these are features that this work displays from the very first measures until the end. In conclusion, on the one hand Hamilton says that this section possesses all the characteristics of a development, such as "tonal instability thematic fragmentation and sequential treatment of themes"; and on the other Heinemann wrote that in the *Andante sostenuto* section «die Harmonik ist häufig bis an die Grenzen des tonalen System ausgereizt – mitunter ist in der Multivalenz gereichter verminderter Septakkorde die Fixierung der für einen Abschnitt fundierenden Tonart kaum noch möglich. […] Worauf jedoch die Aufmerksamkeit gelenkt werden kann, sind Gegensätze innerhalb des Expositions-Teils und gerade insofern vermag das „andante sostenuto" Funktionen von Durchführung zu übernehmen»[84]. Two points of view and two scholars who affirm the opposite of the other. But the ambiguity of this connective passage allows both approaches. Regardless, for the purpose of this dissertation, Heinemann's interpretation is endorsed, as he grasps and points out the most relevant peculiarity of this passage, namely the *Multivalez* of the diminished seventh chord. Ambiguity is the key concept of this work; though it is not just formal ambiguity, but above all tonal. It is therefore unsurprising that the recapitulation is still tonally ambiguous, because Liszt was mining the tonal system at its heart, and it is clear that in this process tonal stability has to be avoided exactly there, where it is more recognisable: exposition, and recapitulation. If Liszt had written a recapitulation in the tonic area, the entire work would have lost its value. The entire *Sonata* is a *promenade* between distant tonalities, diminished and unresolved harmonies, augmented harmonies and tritones. Hence, stating that a passage cannot be a recapitulation because it does not affirm the tonic seems to be a very weak argument. Last but not least, the B pedal in the left hand, makes this passage relatively stable, even if the right hand plays a seventh chord (C-D♯-F♯-A), which is left unresolved until mm. 332. Consequently, according to Walker's and Newman's

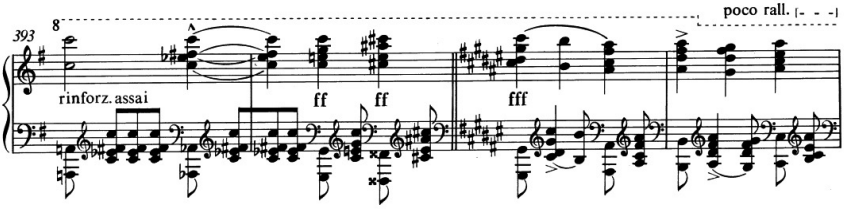
84 Heinemann, Michael, *Liszt Klaviersonate h-Moll*, p. 44.

view, the development begins with the *Andante sostenuto*, with a new theme which immediately appears to be based on the third motivic cell (*Example 18*; the cell is marked with an "X").



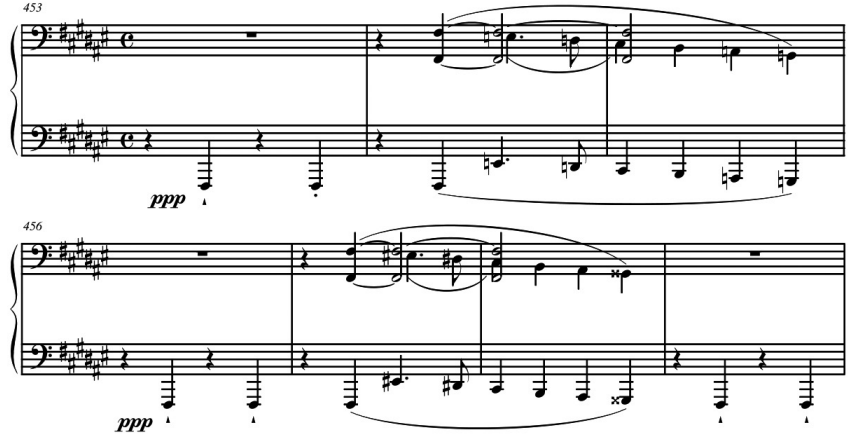

Example 18 – B minor Piano Sonata, development, mm. 331–338

This first episode ends with a *Quasi adagio*, followed by a *dolcissimo, con intimo sentimento*, where the transformation of the third motivic cell is presented in A major (mm. 349–ff). Here the tonality is a little more stable: from the A major of the third motivic cell, Liszt creates a *dolcissimo* passage that moves on the third grade of A, C♯, which is in turn used as the dominant of F♯, tonality in which he proposes the *Grandioso theme* (m. 363). This time it is exposed without the *grandioso* character, and in *mf* instead of *ff*, as if it was a reminiscence. The *grandioso theme* is sustained, as in its original manifestation of mm. 105–ff, by chords from which (m. 367) emerge the descending scale of the first motivic cell. The trill on the F♯, the treble voice of a diminished seventh chord, leads to the G minor tonality, where the fourth theme is presented again. The second occurrence of the *Grandioso theme* (m. 376) is presented here in the same tonality as the beginning, and it creates a highly dramatic passage. In this *crescendo molto* section (mm. 382–ff), the head of the second motivic cell is played in the lower register of the piano, and the last configuration of the fourth motivic cell is played in the higher register (mm. 385–391). It creates a contrasting passage, under which the ostinato chords increase the sense of anxiety of this moment. The tension continues to increase until m. 395–396, where Liszt suddenly reaches the climax of the *Sonata* on a *fff* where the fifth motivic cell (the *Andante sostenuto* theme) reappears. This moment is read as evidence of the fact that the development begins at m. 331. Liszt uses a "new" theme here to introduce the section, and with this material he reaches the most intense point of the *Sonata*, exactly in the middle of the development. From now on his aim is to return home.




Example 19 – B minor Piano Sonata, Climax, mm. 393–396

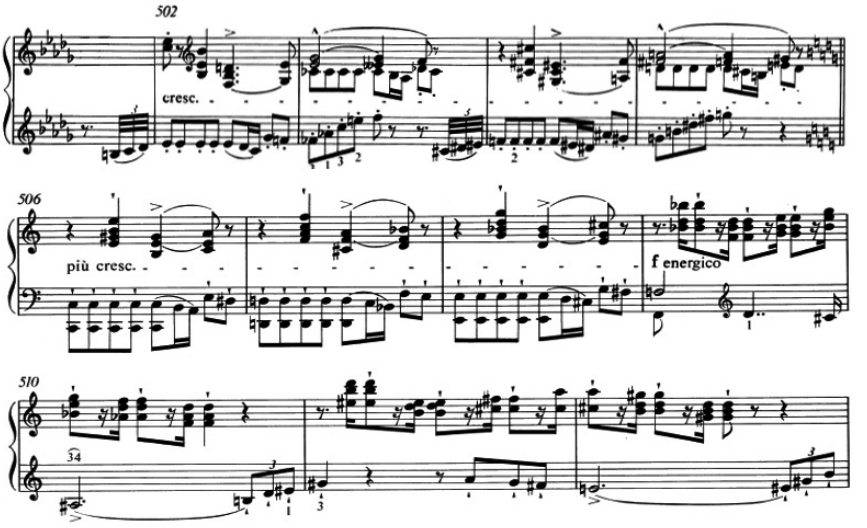
It is still matter of debate whether or not this passage represents the climax of the *Sonata*, and even if the work truly possesses one; but this is certainly the only moment in the entire work in which a prolonged section of tension explodes into a *fff* passage, which releases this tension, and gives rise to a *dolce* passage built on the theme of the *Andate*, sustained by a perfectly tonal arpeggio in F♯ major (mm. 397–ff), namely the dominant of B minor. These measures are very well described by Storino, who writes: «*Ex abrupto* un esile arpeggio di fa diesis spegne il fuoco sonoro; il porto era solo una visione onirica»[85]. This time the A*ndante* theme does not lead to the transformation of the third theme, but to a passage of sextuplet in the right hand, while the left hand outlines the descending scale of the first motivic cell. At m. 433 the third motivic cell returns in a modulating passage, which ends with a sort of recapitulation (*Example 20*).




Example 20 – B minor Piano Sonata, false recapitulation, mm. 453–459

85 Storino, Mariateresa, *Franz Liszt. La sonata in si minore*, p. 100.

The *Paukenschläge* on F♯ and the descending scale recalls the beginning of the *Sonata*. Here the classical sonata form scheme is respected: a dominant recapitulation seems to bring the listener back to the first theme and then to the recapitulation of the themes in the tonic area. Nonetheless, after a few measures, it clearly appears that what is going on is not a recapitulation, but a three-voices fugue. Consequently, this episode is not intended as a recapitulation, but as an illusion of a recapitulation. Liszt used this expedient to introduce the fugue – which, in this context, is to be read as a "new beginning", as a new transformation idea, as a last form of variation (proving that this transformation technique involves every element of the musical discourse) of the material of the beginning – which is based on the second (mm. 460–465), and on the third (mm. 465–467) motivic cell. The first motivic cell does not serve as a conclusion, but as an introduction to recreate the sequence of the motivic cells, in order to give rise to the last part of the development: the fugato section (see *Example 6*). The fugue was already a matter of investigation in the analysis of the multi-movement sonata, though briefly. Here a closer analysis of it is necessary. The subject of the fugue is built on the second and the third motivic cells. The first voice enters at m. 461, the second voice at m. 470, and the third voice at m. 480. The counter subject (begins in m. 467) is a sequence of staccato quadruplets. At m. 493 the fugue ends its movement at the head of the second motivic cell, which is obsessively repeated three times, and finally it is completed in m. 500. At m. 502 Liszt creates something really interesting, which presents us with the idea of the forthcoming recapitulation: all the material is varied and blended: the left hand plays the second part of the subject of the fugue (third motivic cell), and the beginning of the counter subject; the right hand plays both the second and the third motivic cells, following the same scheme of mm. 32–ff, before stopping at the head of the second motivic cell. From m. 506 the rhythm becomes more obsessive with the appearance of the *Hammerschlag* in the left hand in octaves, and then explodes in the *f energico of m.* 509, where the second theme is played in the right hand in a rhythmic variation which recalls the opening of the *Dante sonata*, while the same cell is presented in specular form in the left hand (*Example 21*).




Example 21 – B minor Piano Sonata, variation of the fugue, mm. 502–512

The *Rinforzando* of m. 513 and the increasing tension clearly show that we are reaching the fundamental point in this development section. Before reaching this point, Liszt has another trick to employ. At m. 513 he repeats the theme of the left hand a fourth lower, the theme of the right hand a fourth higher, and this feature gives the listener the idea that a new fugue is going to start, but suddenly, at m. 523, he alludes to the exposition on an *ff*. This is an anticipation, a sort of a recapitulation before the recapitulation, which is in turn only reached at m. 531, preceded by a set of descending scales and a set of quadruplets that abruptly fall to the F♯ in the lowest octave of the piano.

### Recapitulation

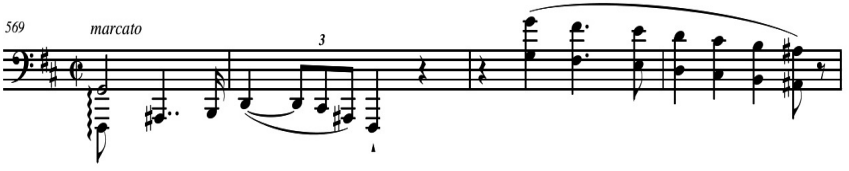
As in the classical sonata form scheme, the first part of the section is a literal repetition of a part of the exposition. In this case mm. 531–554 are an exact copy of mm. 30–53. But the exact beginning of the recapitulation is anything but clear. Walker and Gut identify it with m. 533. It appears to be the best choice, since the tonic reappears there, and because the exposition section begins exactly in the same way. Nevertheless, mm. 531–532 still represent a problem. They are the repetition of mm. 30–31, which for Gut are part of the exposition, while for Walker they are part of the introduction. This latter view seems to be more consistent, since mm. 30–31 are part of the introduction, and they are consequently used to

introduce the recapitulation. Gut's view is more problematic. If mm. 30–31 are part of the exposition, and not such a relevant one, why are they quoted here? Furthermore, if the exposition begins at m. 9, why does the recapitulation begin with a literal quotation of mm. 32–ff? The recapitulation seems to confirm the idea of the beginning of the exposition at m. 32. But such clear evidence appears somewhat unusual for this work, and a closer analysis reveals that the beginning of the recapitulation is more ambiguous than it appears. According to the idea of the expanded double function, it is possible that a section is actually part of two different sections. Consequently, mm. 531–532 possess the same ambiguity and the same role of mm. 30–31, and it is therefore possible to state that Liszt used them in this place for two reasons: 1) to recreate a clear and easily identifiable introduction to the recapitulation; 2) to recreate the same "grey area" of the beginning, in order to emphasise the unity of the sections. However, the matter is unsolved, and it is possible to identify another reason for Liszt's procedure. As already pointed out, several times during the development Liszt inserted elements which can be interpreted as the beginning of the recapitulation. It is as if the recapitulation had been broken into several parts, and that these fragments were then inserted into development. Somehow the listener experiences the feeling of the recapitulation several times during the unfolding of the work. For that reason, it is possible to state that the recapitulation begins before the end of the development. This technique is anything but new. Liszt took it to the extreme here. Beethoven had already used this expedient when he «begins the recapitulation of opus 111 before the harmony has resolved to I»[86]. Then, as Beethoven did in his last sonata (*Annex V*), Liszt had already outlined the recapitulation in m. 523 and in m. 525, before exposing the thematic material in the tonic area. Under this light it is possible to analyse mm. 531–532 as a last hint at the recapitulation, before the recapitulation itself (*Annex VI*). At m. 554 Liszt used a varied version of m. 53, where the quadruplets instead lead to the B♭ major with the second motivic cell, lead to a E♭ major chord – the relevance of the E♭ tonality was already pointed out at the beginning of the analysis. This chord is followed (mm. 555–581) by a reinterpretation of mm. 81–104. Under the chords in the right hand, the first motivic cell resounds in the left hand, which turns from the E♭ major to E minor. The first motivic cell dialogues with the second.

It is now necessary to open a very brief parenthesis on the descending scale of the first motivic cell, as too often it is seen as a melodic movement which has very little relevance in the *Sonata*. The first motivic cell, which is of course

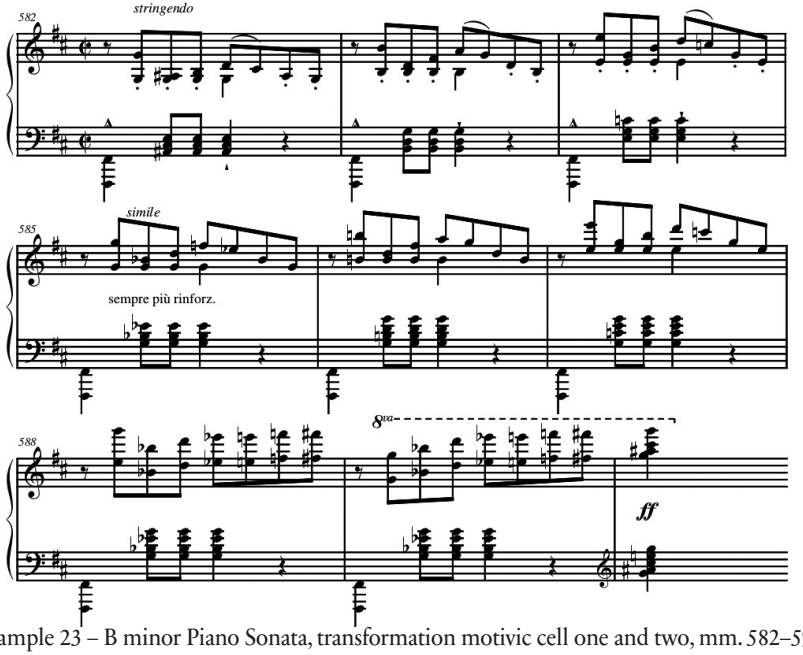
86 Rosen, Charles, *Sonata Forms*, p. 99. The last two bars of the retransition could be regarded as part of the recapitulation itself. See *Annex V.*

the source of all other ones, is not reducible to its harmonic functions, namely the second-seventh interval. It possesses a descending scale too, which is a functional element. If one does not recognise the relevance of this movement, then its several occurrences during the unfolding of the *Sonata* were completely inexplicable, as in the case of *Example 22*.



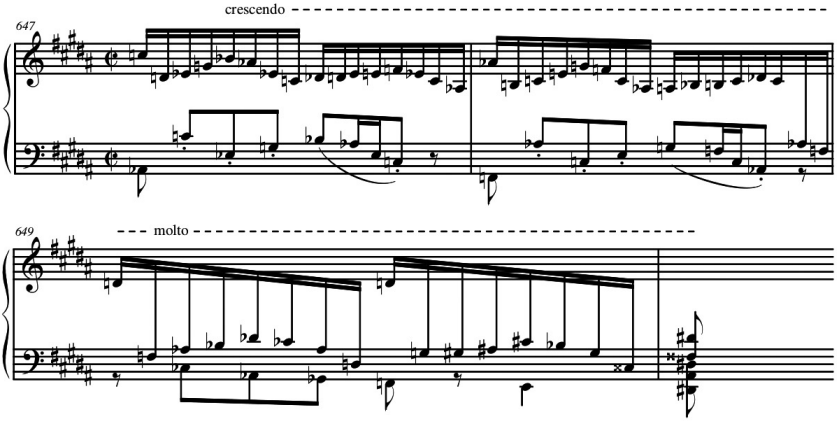

Example 22 – B minor Piano Sonata, dialogue between motivic cell one and two, mm. 569–572

This game between the first and the second motivic cell leads to the *Paukenschläge* (m. 582), which are used in order to create a dominant pedal that promises the B minor. The only thematic element on this pedal is the second motivic cell, although it is quite unrecognisable, since it has lost its characteristic dotted rhythm, and it is here reduced to simple quadruplets (*Example 23*).




Example 23 – B minor Piano Sonata, transformation motivic cell one and two, mm. 582–590

At m. 590 an octave episode with a *precipitato* section begins. At the end of this passage (m. 595), Liszt uses an obsessive repetition of the third motivic cell, which leads to the B major. If he had followed the classical sonata scheme, at this point he would use the B minor tonality. From m. 600 to m. 604 the *Crux fidelis* theme reappears, based on a tonic pedal. As he did in mm. 105–114, here (mm. 604–609) the first motivic cell reappears in the left hand too, even if the *grandioso* chords are substituted by more sober crochet arpeggios. The *Sonata* goes on following more or less the same structure as the exposition. At m. 616, the third motivic cell in B major creates a *cantando espressivo* passage, that leads through a chromatic descending scale to a varied form of the second motivic cell, as it happened in mm. 161–164. Exactly as during the exposition, at this point Liszt uses the third motivic cell and its variations (mm. 628–ff), alternating it between the right and the left hand. From m. 642 the right hand plays a set of scales in a *pp* brilliant passage, while the left hand plays an obsessive repetition of a variation of the second motivic cell. This passage, which leads to the *Stretta (quasi presto)* (m. 650), ends on a D♯ chord, that is the enharmonic interpretation of the E♭ tonality, that Liszt uses in the last bars of this passage (mm. 647–649; *Example 24*).



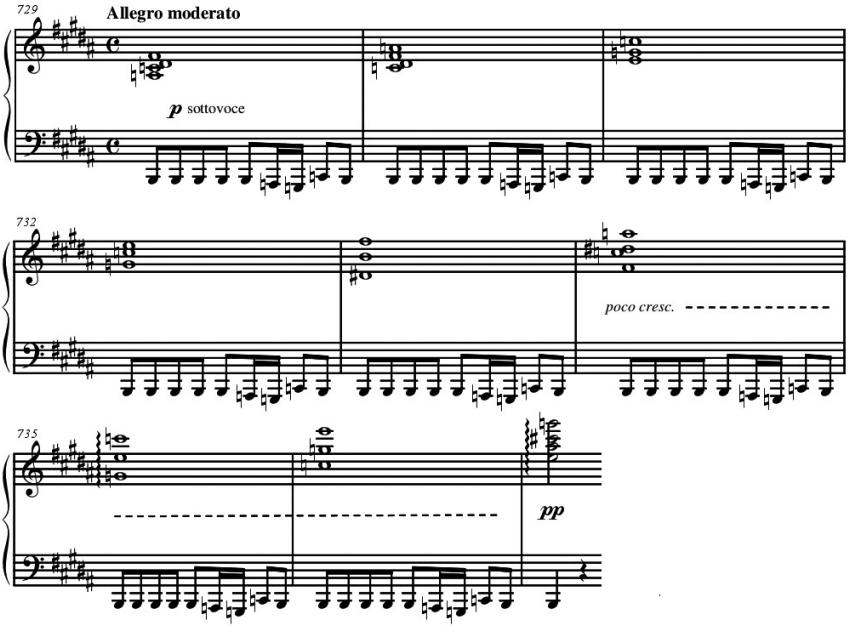

Example 24 – B minor Piano Sonata, modulation to the III grade of B, mm. 647–650

As previously stated, the E♭ is a key tonality in this *Sonata*, and it always precedes or ends relevant passages. Furthermore, the D♯ is the third grade of B, and the modulation to the III grade of the scale is a feature that Liszt would use successfully in many of his later compositions, where this kind of modulation would be preferred to the more traditional modulation to the IV or the V.

## Coda

Even with the coda, a section that should be easily identifiable, problems of interpretation arise. As *Table 5* shows, there is no agreement with regard to the beginning of this section either. Newman and Walker identify it with m. 681. Longyear and Winklhofer with m. 650. Dömling and Rouard with m. 729. Gut with m. 711. Dömling and Rouard fix the beginning of the coda at m. 729 (*Allegro moderato*), because they probably did not know that it belongs to the new finale that Liszt composed to substitute the virtuoso first version (*Annex III*). Consequently, stating that the coda begins at m. 729 means cutting off a piece of the finale Liszt conceived as a whole, and for this reason it is believed that other solutions are preferable. According to Newman and Walker the coda begins at m. 682. This measure, which is marked *Prestissimo*, marks the beginning of a faster section. It is unclear the reason why they excluded the *Presto* of m. 673, where the first theme is presented again. Therefore, the identification of the coda with m. 682 is formally correct, but in turn it excludes the entire section marked *Stretta quasi presto* (m. 650), whose agogical indication formally identifies the beginning of this quicker tempo passage. It is believed that Liszt intended the mm. 650–710 as the coda section – and the original finale was the perfect conclusion of these "virtuoso years" pages. Another problem arises with m. 710 and its crowned rest, which clearly divides the *Stretta* from the *Andante sostenuto*. The *Stretta* ends with an F♯ chords; the original finale was a statement of B. Together they were the most classic V-I cadence. Liszt probably thought that such an innovative work could not end with such a naïve finale, and thus he decided to compose a new one. As a consequence of this afterthought, this cadence remained unresolved. Liszt probably did not change this first *Stretta* in order to give the listener the idea of safe harbour. He even restated the *Crux fidelis* theme. But then, instead of an energetic statement of B major, Liszt placed a crown, and he used the dominant of B as the tonic of the *Andante* section. It is true that this new F♯ passage leads to B, showing then a V-I cadence, but it is also true that here (m. 729) the chords of the right hand make the tonality anything but clear, leaving the perfect cadence unresolved. Consequently, when Liszt erased the original finale, he created a double coda: the first in mm. 650–710, more energetic and clearly pointing to the tonic, and the second in mm. 711–760, which is a negation of the first one, tonally unstable and pointing to the silence from which the *Sonata* arose. In the last segment of the *Sonata* (mm. 729–760), a listener hears all the motivic cells in reverse order: cell 3 in mm. 729–736; cell 2 in mm. 737–742; cell 1 in mm. 749–753. This reminiscence of the beginning emphasises even further the cyclical form of this work.

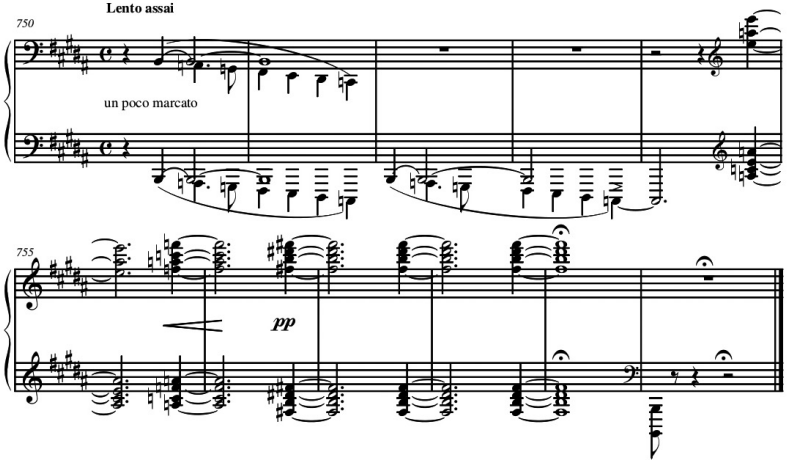
The long finale is therefore divided into two codas, or a coda plus a finale section, exactly because the manuscript prescribes doing so, and because what happens in mm. 729–760 is something really unique, of which mm. 711–728 are the preparation. In the *Allegro moderato*, the left hand plays the third motivic cell in B minor eight times, while the right hand plays a set of diminished seventh chords related to the second motivic cell, which finally reappear in a varied form in m. 737, and die in m. 743 (*Example 25*).




Example 25 – B minor Piano Sonata, B pedal, mm. 729–737

From m. 744 the B major chord is interrupted by the G and the G♯ of the left hand. These Gs clearly recall the beginning of the *Sonata*, even if rhythmically varied. Since Beethoven's sonata op. 111 was the main reference during the analysis, it is possible to suggest one last link between the two works: the G♯ that emerges in the first half of m. 747 of Liszt's work, sounds like a farewell, exactly as does the C♯ at the end of Beethoven's C minor sonata. From m. 750 the first motivic cell is exposed starting from B, first at the unison, then the left hand alone. Between mm. 755–756 resound the famous tritone cadence: an F major chord in its first inversion, turns into a B major in its second inversion. The *Sonata* ends with a lonely B played in the left hand in the lowest octave of the piano (*Example*

*26*). It is of course highly symbolic to end a work with such a theatrical gesture, that is to say: it is not possible to go further because there are no lower notes[87]. The music encounters its physical limits. Liszt brings the music back to silence – where at the beginning, music arose from it – but it is not the same silence as that the beginning. It has turned into a pregnant moment, which will give rise to further music, but whose destiny of silence has already been written.




Example 26 – B minor Piano Sonata, First motivic cell and tritone cadence, mm. 750–760

The measures which close the *Sonata* are the real *coupe de génie*. As stated previously, this last page of music was composed to substitute a previous finale, that was brilliant and magnificent. In a few words, it was typical of the Liszt of the so-called "virtuoso years". Luckily, Liszt changed his mind and he composed the most beautiful finale possible. If he had not changed his mind and composed an alternative finale, it would have been pretty clear that the coda is in mm. 650–760. But with the new finale two coda coexists: the first exhausts the brilliant and the *grandioso* character; the second brings the listener back to the climate of the beginning. Thanks to the harmonic concatenations the latter does not sound like the beginning, but as the result of a process that has created something else, something that Hamilton describes as «the most

87 The *Neue Liszt-Ausgabe*, from which the musical examples are taken, reports in the last measure an octave ($B_1 + B_0$). The Lehman Manuscript of 1853 reports a lonely $B_0$.

inspired tritone cadence ever composed»[88]. Earlier in this section it emerged that the mm. 711–760 are the negation of the former coda. Now it is possible to state that these measures are the conclusion of a process, they are an end. Using the citation at the beginning of this chapter, the sonata «selber sei hier zu Ende, ans Ende geführt, sie habe ihr Schicksal erfüllt, ihr Ziel erreicht, über das hinaus es nicht gehe, sie hebe und löse sich auf, sie nehme Abschied»[89]. In this sense Liszt's *B minor Piano Sonata* is the only closed case among Liszt's productions. When he composed this finale, he felt that he had nothing more to say in this genre, concerning the piano music, and then the term "sonata" disappeared from his vocabulary. What Thomas Mann perfectly described with his magnificent prose, could be translated, and then this finale was the *Aufhebung* moment of a dialectical work. In the *Sonata* everything is in contrast with something else, and these contrasts are abolished here. At the same time, even if the sonata form experienced here a "second death", the dialectical process cannot be stopped, and the Lisztian work therefore represents the beginning of something new, it is the first term of a new dialectical process. Liszt successfully applied the idea of progress to music.

## The role of the symbol

After the analysis of the *Sonata*, it is necessary to make some observations about it, in order to explain which role the symbol plays in the theoretical justification of the formal ambiguity of this composition. Hence, what follows are some general observations which arise quite spontaneously from the analysis of the *Sonata* itself. Further elements about the relationship between form and content in Liszt's piano works will emerge in the next two chapters. For now, it is relevant to point out how both the concepts of ambiguity and of symbol are strictly related to the idea of progress. Because it is this last concept, whose main features were already outlined in *Chapter II* (change of paradigm), which makes the emergence of the symbol as a philosophical horizon possible, in which the idea of ambiguity (multiplicity) finds its place. After the musical analysis, it is now necessary to come back to the theory. During the analysis of the *Sonata*, both as multi-movement and as first movement form, the problem of the multiple interpretations emerged in all its strength. If during the

88 Hamilton, Kenneth, *Liszt: B minor Piano Sonata*, p. 47.
89 See footnote 1.

analysis a musical justification was provided for the different points of view on the sections, now it is necessary to find for them a theoretical justification. Looking at *Table 5* seems clear that it represents a problem, and no one would deny it. It is surprising how much energy has been spent by musicologists in attempt to provide a final word about the correct interpretation of the *Sonata*. They were so focused on the structure of this work that they took it as a model of *Formproblem*, without noting that it is a false problem. Or better, it is a problem when one approaches it with the form in mind that the theorists had conclusively affixed to it. But, as already pointed out, that is not what Liszt did. He was following the "living form" and not the rules. Liszt dealt with the sonata form as if it were not yet set in stone. Consequently, if one expects to find there the categories created by the theorists, then one is looking in the wrong direction. Because here the form is open and ambiguous and, above all, it cannot be fully described by the theoretical vocabulary. If one approaches the *Sonata* from this point of view, then the problem of the form disappears, or, at least, it ceases to be a problem. This last section is therefore an attempt to solve what could possibly be called the primigenial problem.

| | Introduction | Exposition | Development | Recapitulation | Coda |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dömling | 1–7 | 8–346 | 347–? | 460–728 | 729–760 |
| Dommel-Diény | 1–7 | 8–170 | 171–532 | 533–710 | 711–760 |
| Gourdet | – | 1–178 | 179–330 | 522–640 | 711–760 |
| Longyear | 1–7 | 8–178 | 179–459 | 460–649 | 650–760 |
| Newmann | – | 1–330 | 331–525 | 525–681 | 682–760 |
| Rouard | 1–31 | 32–? | ? | 533–? | 729–760 |
| Walker | 1–31 | 32–330 | 331–532 | 533–681 | 682–760 |
| Winklhofer | – | 1–204 | 205–452 | 453–649 | 650–760 |
| Zuckerman | 1–7 | 8–277 | 278–459 | 533–672 | 673–760 |
| Gut | 1–7 | 8–170 | 171–532 | 533–710 | 711–760 |
| Bettoni | 1–31 | 32–330 | 331–522 | 523–649 | 650–760 |

Table 5 – Synoptic representation of the various analyses of the Sonata[90]

Following this path, it even becomes possible to keep together all the different interpretations, both musical and programmatic. Of course, the solution outlined here does not pretend to solve the problem of the form once and for all. Anyway, it is believed that the following proposal can furnish new theoretical material, from which new analytical approaches to the *Sonata* can occur. *Table 5* above clearly shows the "interpretative chaos" that surrounds the *Sonata*. In the history of music, it is not unusual to have more than one possible interpretation of a work, especially when one deals with modern music: but this huge amount – there are many other interpretations than those listed in

*Table 5* – is undoubtedly something strange for a romantic work. The most common approach to the matter is try to answer the question "who is right and who is wrong?". It is the most common reaction when one confronts themself with a huge amount of conflicting data. One tends to answer the question by following their own sensibilities, and this leads to identification of the *correct interpretation*. But, after this first partisan phase, one notes that a different answer can be found. Consequently, it is possible to identify two different and opposite approaches to this chaos: 1) it is possible to defend one's own personal interpretation against the others, or it is possible to became a partisan of one of the previously existing ones; 2) it is possible to state that they are all at the same time possible and valid.

As already stated, the first option has the advantage of being immediate – in its etymological meaning of not-mediate – but it has the disadvantage of quite automatically leading to a condition of general warfare. One has to defend the "chosen interpretation", namely the best one, against the others. After a while it becomes clear that this is a dead-end. That does not mean that one has to deny the existence of an interpretation which is closer to one's personal sensibility, but it does mean that the "chosen interpretation" is neither the only possible one nor the best one. Once one realises that the interpretation of musicologist X is the most suitable for us, but that, at the same time, the interpretations of scholars Y and Z are plausible too, then one realises that what is needed is an explanation of this phenomenon, and not its denial – consequently, one does not have to defend his interpretation against the others, but, quite the opposite, the diverse points of view are the premises, the justification, of the existence of all the individual interpretations. Furthermore, another argument can be raised against the theory of the best interpretation, namely that no one has the authority to state that experienced musicologists such as Gut, Walker, or Longyear, or any other, are wrong or right. This operation is first of all problematic, as all these interpretations are well documented and justified through musical analysis. Furthermore, this approach involves the *ipse dixit* fallacy, and, as Liszt was fighting both against the dull academics and the *formulas*, then it is believed that this approach should be discarded. Secondly, this perspective does not solve the problem, because becoming a partisan of this or that interpretation does not mean that the opponent's interpretations disappear. They are still there, even if one considers them incorrect or if one simply does not consider them as valid. But no serious analysis would ignore such a relevant element. So, it is possible to approach the matter from another point of view, namely to state that all these different interpretations are *at the same time* possible and valid.

Of course, accepting these numerous different interpretations as plausible creates theoretical problems, which need to be answered with a theoretical

explanation, or, at least, to be described by a concept able to justify them all. As has already emerged, it is believed that the only concept able to embrace several different interpretations at the same time without emptying the meaning of the subject is that of *symbol*. The general features of this concept were outlined in *Chapter II*. Here it is sufficient to remember that the symbol is ambiguous for its own nature. For that precise reason it can embrace different meanings and different explanations, which are all consistent with the subject and whose sum cannot exhaust the meaning of the symbol. Quite the opposite, every new interpretation is a step further toward better comprehension. But the *Sonata* can be regarded as a symbol for two other reasons: 1) its sections (introduction, exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda), or part of them, are at the same time something else, namely they have simultaneously more than one function, and there is more than one explanation. For example, the introduction can be described using as reference all the introduction ever written in the history of music, but it would be still remain something which one cannot describe using the vocabulary of the category "introduction". Here probably lies the core of the problem, namely the terminological one: how can one describe something whose essence is not definable with the vocabulary at our disposal? It would be necessary to present a continuous chain of explanations whose aim is to clarify themselves word for word – of course, it is always possible to use these terms as "open"; using "open concepts" can certainly turn, for example, the category of "introduction" into something more inclusive, but it would still be necessary to produce a "chain of explanations" to clarify in which sense the word is used. Furthermore, when (as in the case of the *B minor Piano Sonata*), a section works both as introduction and as a part of the exposition, which one of these two terms – even in their "open" use – should one use? The terminological problem should involve a rethinking of the vocabulary of music theory. And this point brings us to the problem of the difference between compositional practice and theory, which brings us to a point where the terminological matter is related to the idea of progress itself. On one hand, music and its languages are progressing, and consequently the vocabulary elaborated to explain it needs to change with it, if it wants to continue to understand the phenomenon. The biggest problem is that the theory can analyse, and then explain, a phenomenon once it has happened. So, the theory comes always *a posteriori*. On the other hand, progress, as a straight temporal line, shows us objects which are under the influence of time (i.e. historical objects), namely they are evolving objects, because their perceivers live in history too. The music of Liszt tried to reproduce this movement, and therefore his *Sonata* changes with every interaction that we have with it, every time showing us some new features in a never-ending process. It is here relevant

to point out the difference between the musical time and the historical time of a composition. The time in the *Sonata* (the musical time) is cyclical – even if, as already pointed out, its inner movement is dialectical, and then it would be better to define its time as a spiral, an evolving line. The historical time of the *Sonata* is a straight line, which goes from its conception towards the feature through its historical transformations and interpretations (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*), and it involves all the historical actors; 2) the second meaning is still related to the concept of progress. On the one side, the *Sonata* looks back to the past, to Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, but even Schubert and Schumann. From this point of view the *Sonata* has to be regarded as the outcome of a long sedimentation process, exactly as the open to the past character of the symbol. At the same time, it is open to the future, not just because it is always open to accept new interpretations, but also because, since it acts in history, it will constitute a new tessera of the sedimentation process from which new sonatas will emerge. It is open to the future because its existence guarantees the same possibility of its continuation as a genre.

Concluding, as it is emerged during this chapter, the ambiguity of the form is strictly related to the idea of progress. Because it is the progress itself, as it was defined during the 19th century, which permits relationships between past and future with an open form which is able to accept the multiple occurrences both of the former and of the latter. But the form itself, even if it is open and ambiguous, remains a limit which imprisons the fantasy of the composer. It remains something that the composers, exactly as the tonality, have to exceed. However, where the tonality can be exceeded quite easily, music without a form is more difficult to imagine. Consequently, after the ambiguity of the form, Liszt faced the impossibility of music without a form. In the two chapters which follow, it will emerge how Liszt tried to solve the matter working in two directions: 1) on the one side he used even more simple forms (A-B-A), with which more freedom was guaranteed; 2) on the other side the ambiguity transfers from the form to the harmonic field. But, as it will emerge, these boundless freedoms would turn into captivity, above all formal captivity, since it is the last element which can still guarantee musical expression – namely, the form becomes more rigid, because only it can promise a sort of formal unity to a harmony which is now completely free from any obligation. Somehow Liszt became a formalist.