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Stephen Husarik

# Switching Colors on Beethoven's Broadwood Fortepiano

## Variation 4 of the Piano Sonata, Opus 111<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Despite Heinrich Schenker's groundbreaking analysis, William Drabkin's impressive examination of the sketches and recent analytical overviews by William Kinderman, the variation movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 32 in c minor, Opus 111 remains only partially understood. A re-examination of this work in terms of timbral effects audible on the original instrument for which it was composed suggests an overall three-part dramatic division corresponding to the form of a resurrection drama where a theme lives, dies and returns in apotheosis. This conclusion is based upon sound recordings made on Beethoven's original Broadwood fortepiano located in Budapest and similar instruments in Bonn and California. Research into Beethoven's manuscripts and sketches support the conclusions presented in this paper.

**Schlagworte/Keywords:** Beethoven; dramatic envelope; Dramatische Kurve; fortepiano; Klangfarbe; opus 111; timbre

## Introduction

While there is universal agreement about the form of the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 32 in c minor, Opus 111, its splendid variation movement remains only partially understood. Numerous critics and editors from Adolph Bernhard Marx<sup>2</sup> to Donald Francis Tovey<sup>3</sup> offer conflicting views about the number of variations in the set and/or the formal relationships of its parts. Heinrich Schenker's groundbreaking analysis identified a rhythmic continuity in the first three variations, but assessed the remaining variations with anecdotal

1 This paper was presented at the Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie Conference in the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien, Hannover, Germany on Saturday, October 1, 2016.

2 Adolph Bernhard Marx even reads a funeral procession into the second movement of opus 111 as noted in Newman 1988, 269.

3 Tovey 1931, 276–279. There are at least twenty-five creditable essays written about this sonata and an equal number of editions containing editorial remarks of greater or lesser merit.

remarks.<sup>4</sup> In his impressive examination of the sketches, William Drabkin imposed sonata form over the second half of the movement, but did not identify a second group.<sup>5</sup> Scarcely few studies have mentioned Opus 111 in light of the keyboard instrument for which it was composed. The fourth variation, for example, calls for specific pedal registrations available on Beethoven's Broadwood fortepiano that no longer exist on modern pianos; performing the work on later instruments is essentially an act of musical transcription. Formal aspects of the Opus 111 piano variations thus merit re-examination in terms of timbral effects observable on the original instrument for which the work was composed and also through insights gained from Beethoven's letters and sketches.

### Variations 1–3: Air and Doubles

Essentially a theme (arietta) with five variations, the second movement of Opus 111 breaks down into two large sections in terms of its compositional procedures and smaller sections in terms of its timbre. A binary division occurs at Variation 4 (measure 128, Henle, 65) where Beethoven switches from an English air and doubles technique to “developing variation” style.<sup>6</sup> Application of special pedal registrations at this point on the composer's Broadwood fortepiano<sup>7</sup> further separate the final two variations from each other—where the arietta is at first liquidated, but then later restored. The resulting three-part overall dramatic envelope corresponds to the form of a resurrection drama where a theme lives, dies, and returns in apotheosis. The form of the Opus 111 variations is thus more than a simple apotheosis.

Beethoven often employs a unifying head motif in his works. Indeed, he became famous for the most iconic head motif of all time, the short-short-short-long motif that begins his Symphony No. 5 in c minor.<sup>8</sup> Opus 111's opening two-note trochaic (long-short) head motif achieves a similar goal: it serves as a focal point for the first

4 Schenker 1971.

5 Drabkin 1977, 211 (see footnote 10 below for related updated publications).

6 Frisch 1984, 2. The label “developing variation” originated with Arnold Schoenberg and is here operationally defined to indicate material from one variation that is developed in a succeeding variation using procedures such as inversion, fragmentation, augmentation and displacement.

7 Thomas Broadwood fortepiano owned by Ludwig van Beethoven, Inventory Number 1887.41.28. Budapest: National Museum of Hungary.

8 Swafford 2014, 181.



difference between Opus 111 and Opus 57 is that the strict rhythmic diminution found in the first three variations focuses only upon a trochaic head motif. Beethoven's notation of this rhythm has triggered continuing discussion over the years.



Figure 2: Opus 111, movement no. 2, trochaic sequence in the first three variations

Expressed in time signatures of 6/16 and 12/32, the trochaic head motif follows an irregular path of subdivision to avoid having its rhythms proliferate too quickly (Figure 2). The resulting notation perplexed some critics:

Put two scorpions and a pigeon in the time signature if this is your whim, but do not put there what is not in the measure [...]. You who understand this, explain to us, how there can be, in the second variation in 6/16, six sixteenth notes in each measure plus six thirty-second notes?<sup>11</sup>

When Wilhelm von Lenz complained about Beethoven's unconventional notation, he was evidently unaware—as many critics are today—that time signatures could be used to focus a player's attention on the most meaningful level of activity in music.<sup>12</sup> Since the most meaningful rhythms of the first three variations in Opus 111 relate to its trochaic head motif, Beethoven's notation of 6/16 in Variation 2 indicates that there are six trochaic motifs (or triplets) at the level of the sixteenth note, and his 12/32 notation in Variation 3 indicates that there are twelve trochaic motifs (triplets) at the level of the thirty-second note.

Few musicians would dispute the serious overall character of this movement; but Beethoven obviously had no premonition of what popular writers today refer to as boogie-woogie in Variation 3. The acceleration of the head motif through systematic diminution in 12/32, with cascading head motifs and syncopations, produces an almost jazz-like humoristic relief in Variation 3 that sets the stage for a serious de-personalization of the arietta in Variation 4.<sup>13</sup>

11 Lenz 1855, 2.

12 Caplin 2002, 661.

13 Most editions of Opus 111 assign measure number 128 to the end of Variation 3. Since the remaining portion of Opus 111 is through-composed, this analysis uses continuous measure numbering through to the end. Thus, Variation 4 begins at measure 129, the "cadenza" begins at measure 171, the final reprise begins at 195, and a codetta begins at 225. Urtext Henle measure numbers are also supplied.

## Variation 4: Thematic Nullification

Up to the end of Variation 3 at measure 128 (Henle, 64), Beethoven's music proceeds along standard rhythmic lines as an air and doubles in eight-measure periods; the second half of the movement, however, is composed in a contrasting developing variation style.<sup>14</sup> Divided into mathematically-proportioned segments rather than common eight-bar units, the beginning of Variation 4 up to the beginning of the final reprise (measure 195 / Henle, 130) is divided with a sudden high trill at measure 170 (Henle, 106), or the so-called Golden Section (approx. 62%). Beethoven labels this entrance "cadenza" in his sketches.<sup>15</sup> If one gauges the distance between the beginning of the final reprise at measure 195 (Henle, 130) to the end of the work at measure 242 (Henle, 177), another high trill at measure 225 (Henle, 160) corresponds to a Golden Section division, as well. Beethoven labels this entrance as "coda" in his sketches.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, two homologous variations are perceptible within the second half of the movement—one an episodic variation (4) having a "cadenza" at measures 129–194 (Henle, 65–130) and another concluding variation (5) with a coda at measures 194–end (Henle, 130–end); these two written out variations partner with the first half of the variations to create the three-part dramatic envelope of a resurrection drama. The midpoint of this dramatic arrangement begins at measure 129 (Henle, 65) in Variation 4 where the characteristic head motif of the arietta is removed and the theme is presented in two highly ornamented strains.

Audible in the background, but stripped of its identifiable rhythms, the arietta is heard over a droning pedal in a manner that Beethoven himself would describe as a "musical skeleton" or framework (Figure 3).<sup>17</sup> Only the barest outlines of the arietta are heard among the pedal points of this lush accompaniment and the music takes on an episodic character. Since pedal registrations on Beethoven's Broadwood fortepiano enhance this episodic character, let us pause here to examine some mechanical influences of the composer's instrument on Opus 111 as a whole.

14 Frisch 1984.

15 Sketches. *Artaria* 201, [35]-29/4–8 showing an early stage in the genesis of Beethoven's "cadenza." Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz at <http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN834593823>.

16 *Ibid.* [50]-44/1

17 Anderson 1961, 1169. ["Musikalisches Gerippe" could be translated as musical framework and is found in a Beethoven letter to B. Schott's Söhne, dated January 22, 1825].

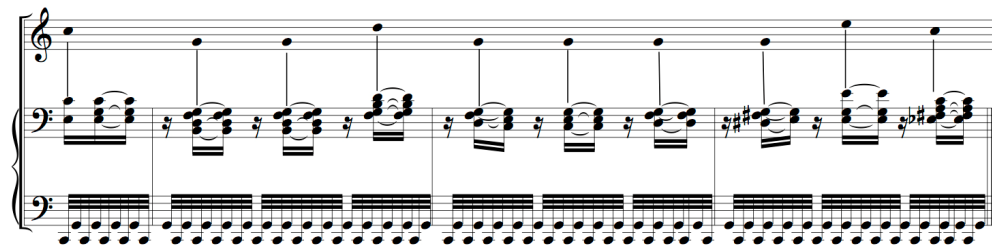


Figure 3: Opus 111, movement no. 2, measures 129–131 (Henle, 65–67), Beethoven’s arietta identified as a “musical skeleton”

### Variation 4: Registration Changes

Thomas Broadwood met Beethoven in Vienna during 1817 and, greatly impressed by the composer, sent him a fortepiano the following year that offered distinctive registration possibilities. Clearly delighted with the instrument, Beethoven played it frequently and wrote a letter of thanks to Broadwood saying “I will regard it as an altar upon which I will offer to god Apollo the most beautiful sacrifices of my spirit.”<sup>18</sup> The fortepiano followed him through several residences to his Landstrasse apartment where he composed Opus 111 in the winter of 1821.<sup>19</sup> Beethoven’s Broadwood has a range of six octaves from CC to c<sup>4</sup> with a missing E flat<sup>4</sup> in the top octave that prevents an exact recapitulation at measure 115 (Henle, 115) and measure 132 (Henle, 132) in the first movement of Opus 111. Notably this same E flat is missing at a climatic cadence of trills at measure 184 (Henle, 119) in the second movement—suggesting perhaps that Beethoven was acknowledging the pitch constraints of his instrument.<sup>20</sup>

18 Anderson 1961, 755.

19 *Ibid.*, 932. In a letter of December 21, 1821, Beethoven writes: “I can see you from Landstrasse.” Beethoven’s Hauptstrasse No. 60, Landstrasse address is confirmed in Smolle 1972, 70. Beethoven’s fortepiano eventually came to rest in his apartment on Schwarzspanierstrasse where it remained until his death. It was then purchased and given as a gift to Franz Liszt who later willed it to the National Museum of Hungary—one of the fortepianos consulted in this research. A number of other surviving Broadwood instruments from the same time period are essentially identical to this instrument including those at Beethovenhaus, Bonn and the American Beethoven Center, Palo Alto California, also consulted in this research.

20 Winston 1993, 147–151. Winston provides a stimulating account of the restoration of Beethoven’s original Broadwood fortepiano.

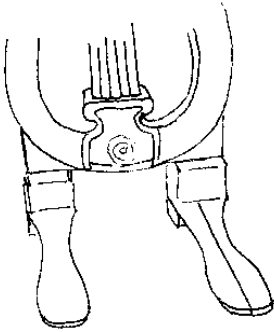


Figure 4: Beethoven's original (1817) Broadwood fortepiano, Hungarian National Museum (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum), Budapest [Inventory Number 1887.41.28]. *Una corda* pedal (left) and split damper pedal (right)

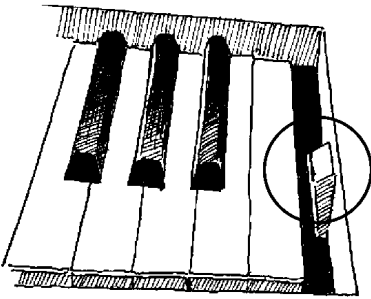


Figure 5: 1817 Broadwood fortepiano control switch for *una/due/tre corde* action. Beethovenhaus, Bonn

Three-stringed throughout, his fortepiano has a split damper pedal on the right side, and an *una/due corde* (one/two-string) pedal on the left (Figure 4). Since the split damper pedal permits resonances on either half of the keyboard (with a division at middle C), it may be no coincidence that each strain of the arietta in Variation 4 appears alternately in the upper or lower half of the keyboard. The harp-like sounds in the upper registers notes need only a touch of right damper pedal to sound acoustically perfect on Beethoven's Broadwood because the full damping mechanism overwhelms high sounds with resonances from lower strings if it is depressed any longer than a fraction of a second. Interestingly, however, when one depresses the right side of the damper pedal while playing lower notes, fascinating spectral resonances are released into the upper strings that are not recorded in any available performance of Opus 111. Perhaps it is no coincidence, therefore, that each part of Variation 4 is located on the right or left side of the keyboard—suggesting that the composer was addressing the unique coloristic possibilities when one applies a split pedal to the opposite side of the keyboard on which notes are played.



Beethoven scholars and performers generally agree that the *pp* (*pianissimo*) scored at measure 129 (Henle, 65) in Variation 4 of this sonata indicates *due corde* or two-string pedaling. The criterion for choosing *due corde* rather than *una corda* registration comes from the manuscript of Piano Sonata, Opus 110 where Beethoven carefully specifies all three registrations in handwriting. Since the Opus 109, 110 and 111 sonatas were specifically written for this particular Broadwood instrument, the pedaling is presumed to be comparable in all three.<sup>21</sup> Knowing this, a performer can set that registration ahead of time—just as any organist might do when preparing stops on a church organ for performance. The entire keyboard shifts to the right when the left foot pedal is depressed and a control stop on the right side of the keyboard checks the movement (Figure 5) so that a performer can play continuously in either three-string (*tre corde/tutte le corde*), two string (*due corde*) or one-string (*una corda*) mode. These color changes have enormous implications for the perception of form in Opus 111.<sup>22</sup>

Registration effects were quite important to Beethoven and he often fussed about them. When negotiating a fortepiano purchase he wrote to his friend Nicholas Zmeskall in November 1802 that “I insist that it shall have the tension of one string [*una corda*—If he won’t agree to these conditions, make it quite plain to him that I shall choose another [instrument] [...].”<sup>23</sup> The composer obviously wanted to buy instruments that supported color changes as witnessed by his ownership or rental of at least fourteen different instruments with variable registration during his lifetime.<sup>24</sup>

Lacking certain harmonics and having a shorter decay character, notes generated on one- and two-string sets (*una/due corde*) sound almost harp-like, distant and thin by comparison with standard three-string fortepiano notes. When performed on Beethoven’s Broadwood, for example, the soprano melismas at measure 136–144 (Henle, 72–80) and 153–163 (Henle, 89–98) have an unforgettable,

21 Completed one month before Opus 111, the Piano Sonata in A flat, Opus 110 uses all three pedal designations, from *una corda* and *due corde*, to *tutte le corde* [three strings] in the third movement.

22 Unlike the notes of monochromatic modern pianos with strings of varying thickness and number that overlap each other, Beethoven’s Broadwood is parallel strung throughout, without overlap, and the sounds are much clearer (if distinctively different) in each registration.

23 Anderson 1961, 82.

24 Rosenblum 1991, 40. In view of the fourteen or more instruments upon which Beethoven composed music over the years, the conclusions drawn here about Opus 111 do not necessarily apply to the composer’s other compositions.

otherworldly sound—especially if the selected string sets are used jointly with the right side of the damper pedal as suggested by some of Beethoven's contemporaries.<sup>25</sup> The sensation of thematic nullification is particularly enhanced when such altered timbres are applied to Variation 4 of Opus 111. As a result, Beethoven's theme and five variations gives the impression of three contrasting sections of music: 1) an air and doubles in full registration, 2) a muted middle section in two-string registration, and 3) a final reprise in full registration. Such color changes on the fortepiano were lost over the years as the instrument was replaced by monochromatic pianos; indeed, fortepiano differentiations such as these are impossible to achieve on a modern piano.<sup>26</sup>

### Variation 4 and 5: Developing Variations

Putting aside Broadwood pedal registrations, let us return to the second strain of Variation 4 where musical ideas are advanced using developing variation style. Depersonalization of the arietta continues at a very soft dynamic level in the high register at measure 136 (Henle, 72) of Variation 4 (Figure 6) with standard rhythmic subdivisions. Each note of the arietta is expanded with an upper and lower *mordent* (i.e., a note plus its upper or lower neighbor) and each *mordent* is further elaborated with still another *mordent*. Reading from the bottom up in Figure 6b, therefore, each arietta note is heard as an implied eighth-note, with its subdivision into a *lower mordent* expressed as three dotted sixteenths, and those notes subdivided into three *upper mordents*, or three groups of thirty-second notes.

25 Ibid., 142, Starke 1819, 16.

26 Some professional technicians sand down the two left ridges on each hammer of the modern piano to emulate this historical *una/due corde* effect, but the sound is difficult to copy. It should be noted, nevertheless, that many fine performances of Opus 111 have been achieved on modern instruments such as Artur Schnabel in "Artur Schnabel plays Beethoven Piano Sonata No.32, Op.111." Online Internet [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_p\\_gwqkiGs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_p_gwqkiGs)], May 11, 2011; or Annie Fischer in "Beethoven - Piano sonata no. 32 op.111 - Annie Fischer," Online, Internet [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PYIphGXCEk>], July 7, 2013. The anecdotal *due corde* registrations found in recordings of Andrass Schiff, Paul Badura-Skoda and Melvyn Tan on Beethoven's original Broadwood piano are of insufficient length to compare with the large-scale effects of Opus 111. The only available recorded performance of this full sonata on an historic instrument is *Beethoven Piano Sonatas*. Tom Beghin, et. al., piano solo. New York: Claves, CD 50-9707/10, Disc No. 9—listed as LC 3369. It should be noted that Beghin uses a moderator stop in his recording of Variation 4 of Opus 111 and there is no moderator on Beethoven's original Broadwood fortepiano.

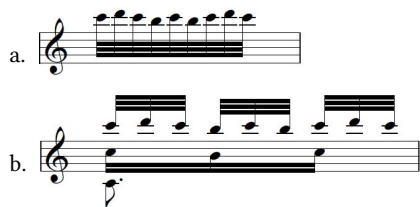


Figure 6: Opus 111, movement no. 2, measure 136 (Henle, 72), two views of an ornamental melisma: a) Variation 4 melisma; b) Variation 4 melisma expressed in three layers of rhythm

One nine-note ornamental cluster thus contains three layers of rhythm for each note of the arietta. Disguised by melismatic rhythm and lacking its characteristic trochaic rhythm, the arietta dissolves into the background as accompaniment. Since the listener has no idea that the melismas themselves will become counterpoint later in the final variation, curiosity and wonderment are aroused rather than any expectation for musical development—even when a melismatic fragment is dramatized conspicuously at the top of grand arpeggios in measures 168–169 (Henle, 103–105). Limited to one half of the keyboard and performed with *due corde* registration, the arietta disappears into accompaniment, which then becomes foreground.

After several minutes of thematic nullification, the music is interrupted by a sudden high trill on the second degree of the scale (measure 170, Henle, 106) to mark off what Beethoven labels as a “cadenza” in his sketchbooks. If the main point of Variation 4 is to de-personalize the arietta, then its “cadenza” is designed to completely degrade the theme. In the process of dissolution a trill is extruded from one of the arietta’s appoggiaturas in anticipation of its use in the final variation.<sup>27</sup>

Recognized as one of the most daring examples of prestidigitation in piano technique, the “cadenza” contains a technical achievement for which Beethoven gained fame as a performer—a double trill executed in one hand. Even more daring, the double trill is coupled to a third trill and pedal point in the left hand to produce a four-voiced shimmering appoggiatura on the dominant of E-flat major. Beethoven provides an abridged version of this passage (*ossia*) in his final manuscript of the work.<sup>28</sup> Ambitious keyboardists know, however, that technical display is as important as anything else in a successful performance of Opus 111 and they generally play the music as written.

27 Sketches. *Artaria* 201, [35]-29/4-7.

28 Autograph manuscript. *Artaria* 198, [37]-33/8. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz at [http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN80000013&PHYSID=PHYS\\_0037&DMDID=DMDLOG\\_0002](http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN80000013&PHYSID=PHYS_0037&DMDID=DMDLOG_0002)

Beethoven's sketches show that the "cadenza" was a complete idea in the earliest stages of composition; it marks a turning point in the journey of the theme from variation to nullification in the movement—or from life to death, to extend our analogy. Couched in a sixteen-measure period, Beethoven's modulating "cadenza" is identifiable as a rudimentary form of the arietta that suffers annihilation when its four voice parts are absorbed into episodic trills (Figure 7). If the main point of Variation 4 is to de-personalize the arietta, then its "cadenza" is designed to completely nullify the theme, thus satisfying the requirements of a resurrection drama.

Figure 7: Opus 111, movement no. 2, measures 171–185 (Henle, 106–120), Beethoven's "cadenza," illustrating assimilation of the arietta by trills

The passage begins with a single high trill at measure 171 (Henle, 106) that is joined by several statements of the head motif followed by a string of dotted quavers on D—reminiscent of the middle portion of the original arietta. The trill on D is reinterpreted from  $\hat{2}$  in the key of C, to  $\hat{7}$  in the key of E flat by lowering its upper neighbor and joining that to a chorus of trills on the dominant seventh of the new key. Since the arietta is no longer recognizable amid these arrhythmic trills, it effectively ceases to exist for a moment. Time seems to stand still as the tune dissolves into the pedal points, yields to fragmentation, and expires. As Charles Rosen noted, "the power to suspend motion, seeming to stop the movement of time [...] became one of Beethoven's most personal traits [in his late style works] [...]."<sup>29</sup>

29 Rosen 1972.

Sometimes at the climax of his works Beethoven's music modulates to a new key in order to dramatize a formal articulation or to show the theme in a new light, as in his Flute-Piano Variations, Opus 105, No. 4, where the music moves to C flat (flat VI) at the end before returning to home key in E flat. Beethoven's Opus 111 variations are treated similarly. The triple trills merge into a single trill that ascends an E flat major scale in metrical longs and shorts, reminiscent of the trochaic metrics in the second half of the arietta. Having reached the extreme range of Beethoven's Broadwood piano, the music falls back from an E flat major cadence as if to acknowledge a missing E-flat at the upper end of his instrument. Five closing notes of the arietta then descend sequentially through a C-minor scale—whose root movements perhaps reference the second half of the first movement theme—to arrive at a reprise of the arietta at measure 195 (Henle, 130) in home key and *tre corde* pedal registration.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 8a: Transcription of Beethoven sketchbook, *Artaria 201*, [51]-45/7-9 showing Beethoven's intention to insert a melisma from Variation 4 melisma into the middle voice of the final reprise at measure 195 (Henle, 130) with the words "in zwischen" beneath. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz. <http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN834593823>

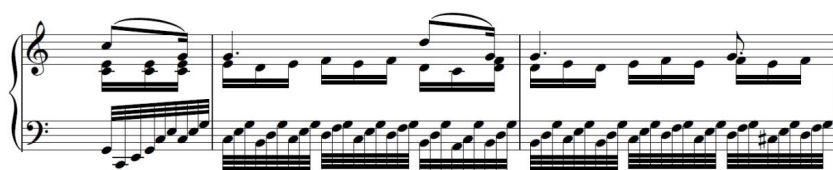


Figure 8b: Published score, with transformed melisma in alto and bass (measures 195-196, Henle, 131-132)

<sup>30</sup> The cadential figure in this sequence appears throughout the work and is discussed in a fictional novel, *Doctor Faustus*, by non-musician Thomas Mann. A commentary on the influence of Theodor Adorno on Mann's text is found in Kinderman 2007, 106.

Preceded by a fourth variation lasting six minutes and comprised of acoustical suppression and thematic nullification, the richly ornamented arietta theme returns in full registration with a strength one might experience in the recapitulation of a sonata form. Significantly, this final reprise is enhanced with material from the previous variation in developing variation technique. Having nullified the arietta (or main character) in Variation 4 and extinguished it in the "cadenza," the final dramatic reprise (or thematic resurrection) is reinforced with melismas from Variation 4 (Figure 8b). Moving in parallel tenths in the alto and bass parts, the rhythmically transformed and augmented melismas provide a unique example of material from one variation developed in another, or developing variations to use an expression borrowed from Arnold Schönberg.<sup>31</sup>

In one of his sketches, Beethoven writes "in zwischen" [in between] on a voice part to indicate that the soprano melisma from Variation 4 should appear in augmentation between the soprano and bass of the final reprise as shown in Figure 8a and 8b.<sup>32</sup> He eventually settled upon its placement in the alto and bass parts of the final published work. Since the melisma in his sketch was originally fashioned out of *mordents* derived from the arietta itself, the final reprise is heard as the arietta against a variation of itself, or as heterophony. The effect is further enhanced by duplicating the added voice part at the interval of the tenth to create double, or compound heterophony.

As the final variation unfolds, the arietta is surrounded by numerous sigh motifs and grinding ornamental lower notes in what sounds like a vast human confession. Extended down a chain of thirds, it reaches another high trill marking off a Golden Section (at measure 225, Henle, 160)—its final appearance in the coda. Having reached a pedal-like trill at measure 226 (Henle, 161), the arietta is again supported by transformed melismas from Variation 4 and rendered in an established Baroque-style figure identifiable as 'paragoge'. Dietrich Bartel defines this figure as "a cadenza or coda added over a pedal point at the end" whose purpose is to increase passion.<sup>33</sup> Beethoven's use of such tried-and-proven Baroque rhetorical devices ensures a maximum effect at the conclusion of the movement. As well, trills dancing above and below the arietta produce a technical display that

31 Frisch 1984.

32 Sketches. *Artaria* 201, [51]-45/7-14. Schenker 1971, 99 transcribes this passage, but leaves out the sub-text where Beethoven scrawls the words "in zwischen" (referring to the melisma of Variation 4) beneath the notes.

33 Bartel 1997, 344.

inspires a sense of awe in the listener. It is very difficult to aurally assess how with one hand a player swaps a trill above and below the arietta while playing an accompaniment in the other. Indeed, the technical displays alone in this sonata movement sound as amazing as its compositional manipulations.

Associations for music in high registers are celestial, not earthly, and elevation of the arietta into the heights among dancing trills and transformed melismas confirms the impression of an apotheosis; however, this is not the gradual apotheosis as one might hear in an earlier work such as Opus 57. The Opus 111 arietta theme has lived, died and been revived within the dramatic envelope of a three-part resurrection drama. Totally nullified and liquidated in Variation 4, it returns one last time with *due corde* pedaling—especially in the upper register of Variation 5—sounding as if the arietta has arisen to Heaven.

## Conclusion

When Opus 111 was first performed on Beethoven's fortepiano in a small apartment two centuries ago,<sup>34</sup> those present heard the music with far greater clarity and coloristic effect than audiences who hear the work performed today. Coloristic changes lost by the replacement of the fortepiano with modern monochromatic pianos mean that present-day audiences do not have the same chance of hearing the work's thematic development lead as effectively to its final apotheosis. The true formal nature of Opus 111 thus emerges best on the instrument for which it was written—Beethoven's own Broadwood fortepiano. As well, what distinguishes the Opus 111 variations from earlier works containing thematic apotheosis (such as the Piano Sonata Opus 57) is the lack of thematic nullification. Apotheosis is one thing, but to achieve the dramatic envelope of resurrection drama, a theme must be suitably nullified as it is in Variation 4 of Opus 111.

In stark contrast to the first movement where musical ideas are dynamically punctuated, the second movement of Opus 111 illustrates how a grand return is possible in even the most restrained movement by combining contrasting timbres and developing variation technique. What appears to be foreground material in Variation 4 becomes accompaniment in Variation 5, and the subsequent heterophony in the final reprise unfolds as logically as do the petals of a lush, beautiful

34 Dorfmueller/Gertsch/Ronge 2014, 712. The earliest documented semi-public performance was by Carl Czerny in February, 1824.

flower. Perhaps the separation of this movement into a three-part resurrection drama may explain why Beethoven saw no need to add a third movement to his sonata when asked about it by his factotum Anton Schindler.<sup>35</sup>

Lacking modern technical vocabulary and access to the original instrument upon which it was first performed, one can easily understand why commentators have characterized the music in terms of Beethoven's personal life struggles, parallel literary narratives, or philosophical contexts to the music.<sup>36</sup> Hans von Bülow probably best explained the totality of Opus 111 as a fusion of Beethoven's personal life and work in terms of *Samsara/Nirvana* (i.e., resistance/resignation).<sup>37</sup> Bellicose and imperious in its first movement, the second movement teems with such understated complexity that any listener might wonder about its intent. Does the overall character of this second movement offer some parallel description of life's difficulties in dramatic terms—life, death and resurrection? Perhaps one should keep in mind that the actual message of this music was intended for an elite circle of Beethoven's close friends two centuries ago on a special polychromatic instrument. As distant admirers and spectators today we can only marvel at the intrinsic compositional manipulations that somehow are still able to suggest that dramatic envelope despite the coloristic limitations of modern performing instruments.

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35 Thayer 1967, 692.

36 Jaedtke 2000 (*Beethovens letzte Klaviersonate Opus 111: analytische, geistesgeschichtliche und psychologische Aspekte des Spätwerks*). As the title suggests, this modern text includes much more than philosophical discussion.

37 *Beethoven Sonatas for the Piano: Book 2*, ed. by Hans von Bülow and Sigmund Lebert. New York: G. Schirmer, 1923, p. 658.



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