NOTES ON MUSICAL DRAMATURGY
IN CHOPIN'S SECOND PIANO SONATA
(an analytic sketch)

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The idea of musical dramaturgy seems clear to everybody. The term is widely used in musicology to characterize the flow of musical events in the texture of great works of music. It opens a way to construct bridges leading to extra-musical fields of association. However there is no firm unilateral definition for it, in a way as triads, sixth chords and many other items of the "flesh" of music are defined in textbooks. Its nature remains rather metaphorical than technical..

A century ago, Heinrich Schenker wrote: "For what is the fundamental purpose of the turns and tricks of the cyclical form? To represent the destiny, the real personal fate, of a motif or of several motifs simultaneously. The sonata represents the motifs in ever changing situations in which their characters are revealed, just as human beings are represented in a drama... the motif lives through its fate, like a personage in a drama".[1]

Thirty years later, explaining the phenomenon of fundamental line he offered another metaphor inherently related to the first one: "Since it is a melodic succession of definite steps of a second, the fundamental line signifies motion, striving toward a goal, and ultimately the completion of the course. In this sense we perceive our own life impulse in the motion of the fundamental line, a full analogy to our inner life".[2]

Two great theoreticians simultaneously elaborated on the idea of *musical process* as a temporal phenomenon. While Boris Asafyev contemplated and described the phenomena of I – M – T (*Initio, Motus, Terminus*) in musical process mainly within the horizontal foreground progression of events, Schenker discovered, systematized and explained the multidirectional progression of events constituting the outgrowth of full foreground text from an *Ursatz* through transformations in the middleground. Both of them operated the notion of a goal aimed motion.

Moreover one may perceive a kind of parallelism between Schenker's idea of prolongation resulting in organic conjunction of events unfolding in the depth of middleground structural levels, that are temporally distant in the foreground, and Asafyev's concept of "arch system" of sounds complexes when a response to any of them may come out at a distance but not in a directly adjacent succession.[3]

To close the introductory establishing "the point of departure" for my discussion I have to remind one of Schenker's fundamental ideas that to a great extent corresponds with Asafyev's understanding of musical dramaturgy. "The *goal* and the course to the goal are primary. Content comes afterward: without a goal there can be no content. In the art of music, as in life, motion toward the goal encounters obstacles, reverses, disappointments, and involves great distances, detours, expansions, interpolations, and, in short, retardations of all kinds. Therein lies the source of all artistic delaying, from which the creative mind can derive content that is ever new. Thus we hear in the middleground and foreground an almost dramatic course of events".[4]

A challenging attempt to penetrate into the internal world of voice leading in the 1st movement of Chopin's Sonata in B♭ minor, in order to find out whether the events in the middleground and background participate in creating a specific field of extra-musical psychological and emotional associations, in common practice colloquially denoted as "contents", has brought me to astonishing conclusion that the behavior of the Sonata's fundamental structure manifests analogy with the internal life of the virtual *musical personage* in the drama of Chopin's sonata.

It goes without saying that the interaction of foreground events producing overall emotional impression deserve due attention and consideration. Characterizing the main themes of 1st movement a prominent Russian scholar Igor Belzah, in his comprehensive monograph, stated that "Most probably, it is not contrast that one should discuss but rather the fact that the simple and elevated melody supplements the first theme, interrupting the torrent of perturbing images with the images of 'melodious meditation'. It was the name of *sepolcros* that were composed in the first half of XVIII century".[5]
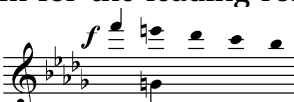
It is not my intention, to describe and interpret details of foreground texture. It is unnecessary as, in this respect, *everybody knows everything*. However one should pay tribute to the insightful observation of Wayne C. Petty. After a detailed description of events resulting in an interrupted cadence concluding the *Grave* opening passage, he explained that "Chopin thus builds into the basic idea of his *agitato* theme all the energies and implications of the failed cadence out of which that basic idea directly grows – hence its anxious character". And the Author draws our attention to the fact that "The potency of this opening gesture makes us listen for that missing cadence, but nowhere in the first movement do we ever here it. Only much later, at the beginning of the Funeral March, does Chopin supply the specific tonic chord suppressed when the *doppio movimento* interrupted melodic closure".[6]

In terms of musical dramaturgy, the events present the outset of the whole plot of the piece. Procrastinated resolution generates internal tension accumulating great energy that will discharge at the moment when the Funeral March begins. In terms of semiotic approach, the temporal coincidence of the postponed resolution of the dominant and the beginning of the Funeral March, to my opinion and sensation, bear the quality of a sign, an index denoting that all activities, hopes, dramatic efforts of the imaginary hero of the musical plot, right from the very beginning, were doomed to come to final grievous failure.
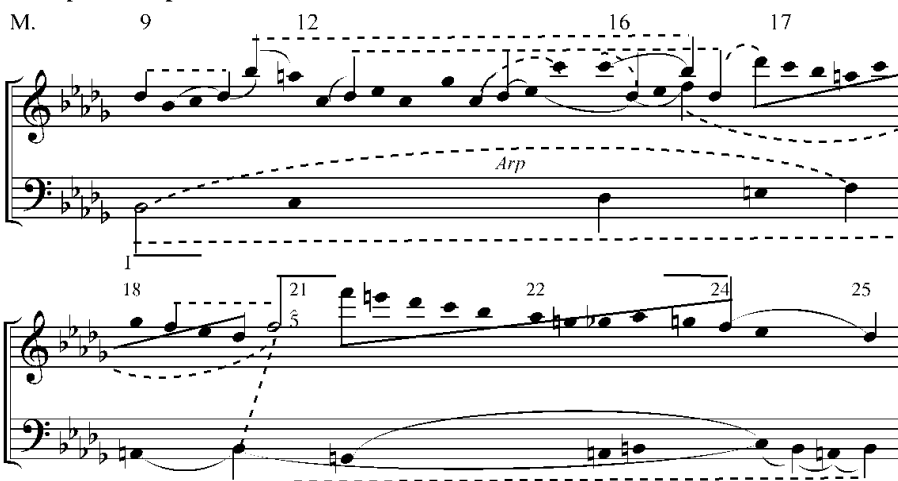
The interpretation, so far, is based on the sequence of events in the foreground. And it seemed interesting to investigate the events in inner layers of voice leading, in order to find out whether they take part in creating the content of the piece as an extra textual phenomenon.

"Romantic art is an instinctive art. The artist cannot explain how he has created the masterpiece, for in a very real sense it is a product of nature working through genius". [7] Neither can the virtual hero involved in the turns of musical dramaturgy of the Sonata explain the reasons of his behavior. His fate is predetermined by his "own life impulse in the motion of the fundamental line, a full analogy to our inner life". Therefore my main task is examining the discrepant and complicated character of motion of the fundamental line governing the fate of the imaginary musical personage. I do not claim for comprehensive analysis as purely cognitive theorizing for the sake of theorizing. My graphs are aimed at urging the aural imagination of a performer to trace the challenging process of fundamental line's "self-identification", as the natural basis governing and defining the unique course of expressively significant events on the foreground

In the foreground, two pitches, at first, compete in their strife for the position of a primary tone. In the antecedent, the D♭ ($\hat{3}$) occurs on a stronger metrical position. In the subsequent, the B♭ ($\hat{8}$) is stressed by notated accents and the weight of chords. However, in measure 18, the F ($\hat{5}$) inconspicuously presents its claim for the leading role of primary tone. Preceded by an octave

leap, the expressive exclamation , in m. 21, opens an octave linear progression prolonging the F and alluding signification of an emotional outburst backing the claim. The contradiction between the "claim of a personage in musical dramaturgy" and local structural position of an accented neighbor in voice leading, in the background, reinforces an invisible clash of personages in musical dramaturgy and starts the process of the F's self-establishing as the primary tone in the life of the fundamental structure of the piece.

Example 1 is supposed to portray the course of events

Example 1. Chopin. Sonata in B♭ minor. 1st mvt.

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in the foreground as related to their meaning in the middleground. Generally speaking, in the graphs the main principle of *Urlinie Tafel* is utilized.

Example 2. Chopin. Sonata in B♭ minor. 1st mvt.

Example 2 reflects the next stage of competition described above. In the subsequent phrase gradually acquiring the function of transition to the second theme, the B♭ is stressed. One can perceive how the three tones claiming for the position of the primary tone are "equalized in their rights" participating in the wide arpeggiation of the tonic triad. In measures 34 – 37 the descending sixth linear progression from the D♭ in the capacity of a consonant skip is "comparable to pointing of the finger" – as Schenker happened to metaphorically describe the events of this kind. It points at the F. And the descending linear progression F – B♭ is the first of this kind in a series of events reflecting the strife of fundamental line $\hat{5}$ - $\hat{1}$ for gaining its leading role in the dramaturgy of inner voice leading.

Complexity of the process can be seen (heard) in the combination of two interwoven fourth linear progressions in the bass line representing the deeply concealed mechanics of the D♭'s tonicization. Whereas the fifth linear progression and the coupling of F, in course of tonic triad arpeggiaion, manifest the profound unity and coherence of the two parts of the exposition, i.e. of the two themes.

Example 3 pictures the co-existence of two interpretations of fundamental line. In the sketch **A** the $\hat{3}$ version prevails. The linear progressions manifesting potential prolongation of F, in the foreground voice leading, are subdued to prolongation of D♭. The sketch **B** is supposed to visualize the extensive prolongation of F in the melody irrespective of its local belonging with D♭ harmony. The $\hat{5}$ - $\hat{4}$ - $\hat{3}$ progression in the upper voice making final cadence of

Example 3. Chopin. Sonata in B♭ minor. 1st mvt.

exposition is typical of closing expositions of sonatas in minor key.

Example 4. Chopin. Sonata in B♭ minor. 1st mvt.

The closing section as it is reflected in **Example 4** is featured by sophisticated prolongation of tonicized D♭ major triad under a series of auxiliary arpeggiations in the foreground. However the F prolonged in the highest register, in course of register transfer, enforces its prominence on the very surface of texture, in the succession of three concise linear progressions of the third stressing the rivalry of the two tones. The final appearance of the F in the exposition is featured by its subordinate function of an unresolved appoggiatura to the fifth of D♭ major triad yearning for downward resolution. However it proceeds upwards into the F♯ opening the development section presenting a dramatic shift in the musical plot.

Example 5. Chopin. Sonata in B♭ minor. 1st mvt.

In the first wave of the development (**Example 5**) one may perceive the victorious energy of centrifugal forces of musical motion. Both competing tones are deprived of their ambitious self establishing efforts. The general content of the passage, in the background, can be expressed with a simplest graph illustrating the open character of the passage.

Example 6. Chopin. Sonata in B♭ minor. 1st mvt.

The second wave of development section comes as an arena where dramatic clash among forces of different order take place. In right hand part, the thematic rhythmic formula ♩♪ 𝄾 ♪ ♩♩ is presented 14 times in a varied succession, the statements separated by fourth rests. The event may be psychologically alluded with high tempered anxiety or exasperation. Broad leaps in the left hand part conceal a fourth linear progression I – V leading to dominant bridge that gener-
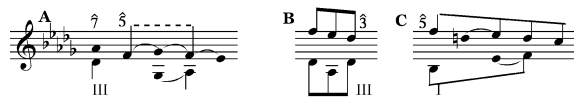
ates centripetal energy, an urge to reach tonic as the final goal. The V is prolonged by the lower neighbor E♭ that, in its turn, is prolonged by a sophisticated arpeggiation. The **Example 6** illustrates the tumultuous phase of musical dramaturgy bringing forth the triumph of F in the capacity of $\hat{5}$ as the primary tone of the fundamental line opening the recapitulation.

It is this dialectical interplay of simultaneous nervous foreground pulsation of rhythmically fragmented melody, in the, in the right hand part, and middleground broad linear progression in the, in the left hand part, in the foreground fragmented by leaps. The background essence of the passage can be reduced to following scheme:

The reprise in challenging – it accommodates only the second theme. The fact poses the question: why? Attempts to find an answer in scrutinizing the foreground text result in explanations not convincing enough. I happened to come across an explanation based on the idea that the first theme has been exhaustively worked out making its repetition unnecessary. And therefore Chopin arbitrarily dropped it. To my opinion the answer should be sought for in the events in the middleground and background. The plot of music dramaturgy, i.e. the competition of D♭ and F is closed at the point where the recapitulation enters firmly establishing F as the primary tone.

The three sketches illustrate that, in the exposition, the F comes on the second beat, after the A♭ opens the second theme. Within the piece as a whole we see a leap from $\hat{7}$ to $\hat{5}$ (sketch A). But, at the point, one can perceive the tonicization of III affirmed by intensively articulated D♭ major triad. Moreover the tonicized D♭ major triad is widely unfolded by local secondary fundamental structure embracing the whole section. And the F becomes $\hat{3}$ as its primary tone (sketch B). However in the deep middleground it makes just a linear progression of the third prolonging the $\frac{\hat{3}}{\text{III}}$ combination. And the very beginning of the recapitulation (sketch C) displays $\hat{5}$ as the primary tone supported by I in the bass.

Example 7 demonstrates how a succession of four descending linear progressions of the fifth energetically perform boundless prolongation of the F and thus proclaim its triumph as the primary tone. The fifth linear progression models the fundamental line $\hat{5}$ - $\hat{1}$ and finally proves the ruling role of the version of fundamental structure.

However there is an important peculiarity in the way of closing the linear progressions. The lines begin in the upper voice and end in an inner voice, with the cover tone F beginning another linear progres-

Example 7. Chopin. Sonata in B♭ minor. 1st. mvt.

upper voice and end in an inner voice, with the cover tone F beginning another linear progres-

sion. And this event signifies the final outcome of inner musical dramaturgy in the piece while all events that follow never come to a definite $\hat{2}$ - $\hat{1}$ closing formula.

The explanation of this kind of "premature" end in the inner dramaturgy, as it seems to me, cannot be reached in the premises of strictly formal contemplating foreground events. Moreover, neither can it be reached remaining in the realm of purely musical facts. To my opinion, it is the field of psychological associations where explanation can be found. The two layers of musical events – the extraneous thematic interrelation and development and the dramatic events in the inner voice leading – represent two spheres of the life of the imaginary hero of overall musical dramaturgy in the Sonata: a clash between personal aspirations, activities, struggle for achieving goals desired and the uncontrollable will of destiny. The "will of tones" commanding the events in the foreground, middleground and background reflect the interaction of an imaginary *Ego* and objective reality.

Highly impressive is the further development of the musical plot. The two keys of the second movement – the B♭ minor and G♭ major – (leaving alone the foreground dramaturgy) represent, in the background of the whole cyclic work, the two adjacent neighboring tones prolonging and anticipating the F as the primary tone.

It is the Funeral March where both the D♭ and the F become the $\hat{3}$ of fundamental lines in D♭ major and B♭ minor respectively. And yet the F though swallowed, on the foreground, by the torrent of chromatic figuration, regains its position of $\hat{5}$ as primary tone, in the fourth movement (see example 145-1 in Schenker's Free Composition).

The comprehensive analysis of multilevel musical dramaturgy of the cyclic piece as a whole remains beyond the filed of the goal pursued in this brief analytic sketch.

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[1] Heinrich Schenker. Harmony. Edited and annotated by Oswald Jonas. Translated by Elisabeth Man Borgese. Paperback edition 1980. p. 12-13.

[2] Heinrich Schenker. Free Composition (*Der freie Satz*). Translated and edited by Ernst Oster. P. 4.

[3] Boris Asafyev. Musical Form as Process. Book two. Intonation. Moscow. 1947. p. 28. *Musikal'naya forma kak process. Kniga vtoraya. Intonatsiya* In Russian.

[4] Heinrich Schenker. Free Composition. P. 5.

[5] Igor Belzah. Chopin. Moscow. 1968. p. 269. (In Russian).

[6] Wayne C. Petty. Chopin and the Ghost of Beethoven. The *19th-Century Music*. Volume 22, No. 3. (Spring, 1999). P. 287.

[7] Beekman C. Cannon, Alvin H. Johnson, William G. Waite. The Art of Music. A Short History Musical Styles and Ideas. Seventh printing. 1968. P. 344.

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