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'Das, was eigentlich Musik': Richard Wagner's reception of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 28, Op. 101

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Bust statue of Beethoven by Hugo Hagen (1818–71) based on the life mask by Franz Klein of 1812

In a diary entry for 14 November 1882, Cosima Wagner records Richard as making the following observation about Beethoven's Piano Sonata no. 28, op. 101: 'the first movement of this A major sonata is an excellent example of what I mean by unending melody. That is what music really is.'[1]

It is a received historical commonplace that Wagner's profound level of engagement with and response to the music of Beethoven was one of the primary energising forces behind his entire creative oeuvre. In his first extant letter of 16 October 1830 the 17-year-old Wagner describes to the publisher Schott how 'for some time past I have made Beethoven's last, glorious symphony the subject of my deepest study'; ten years later he writes from Paris in the novella 'A Pilgrimage to Beethoven' ('Eine Pilgerfahrt zu Beethoven') how 'to this day I can scarcely grasp my happiness at thus being helped by Beethoven himself to a full understanding of his titanic last symphony';[2] in the eponymous essay 'Beethoven' of 1870, the mature Wagner, then engaged in bringing the *Ring* towards completion, made Beethoven the subject of what was to be the most significant aesthetic statement of his later years when he described the composer as 'having penetrated the innermost nature of music'.[3] These three examples from the beginning, middle and towards the end of Wagner's creative life can be multiplied many times over. There have been several studies devoted to the subject: Klaus Kropfinger's classic 1974 monograph *Wagner und Beethoven* remains indispensable;[4] more recently Christopher Alan Reynolds' *Wagner, Schumann and the Lessons of Beethoven's Ninth* offers striking new perspectives on Wagner's reception of the Ninth Symphony.[5] This is all well-trodden, not to say over-familiar, musicological ground; what, if anything, remains to be discovered about Wagner's reception of Beethoven?[6]

Completed in the summer of 1816, the Piano Sonata no. 28 in A major, op. 101, is the first of the group of last five piano sonatas which, along with the Ninth Symphony, the *Missa Solemnis* and the late string quartets, form the core of what is commonly (and often misleadingly) termed Beethoven's third creative period. The sonata as a whole shows formal convention giving way to expressive function in a way that is increasingly characteristic of Beethoven's late style. The first movement follows a broadly identifiable sonata paradigm, but only in outline as the familiar points of structural articulation (exposition, secondary theme, development, recapitulation etc.) are disguised by continuous lyrical flow and metrical displacement. Contrast is more a result

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1 'das, was eigentlich Musik'. *Cosima Wagner: Die Tagebücher 1869–1883*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, 2 vols. (Munich, 1976–7), 14 Nov. 1882.

2 *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, Volks-Ausgabe, 16 vols. (Leipzig, n.d. [1911–16]) [SS], i.111; *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, tr. and ed. William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols. (London, 1892–9; facsimile repr. 1993-5) [PW], vii.42–3 (tr. modified).

3 There were, of course, wider cultural and political agendas nourishing this essay which I have written about elsewhere. See Roger Allen, *Richard Wagner's 'Beethoven' (1870)* (Woodbridge, 2014), 78–9, and more generally 1–28.

4 Klaus Kropfinger, *Wagner und Beethoven* (Regensburg, 1974); tr. by Peter Palmer as *Wagner and Beethoven* (Cambridge, 1991).

5 Christopher Alan Reynolds, *Wagner, Schumann and the Lessons of Beethoven's Ninth* (Oakland, CA, 2015).

6 For a concise summary see Sanna Pederson in *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, ed. Nicholas Vazsonyi (Cambridge, 2013), 50–53.

of thematic and textural evolution rather than identifiable thematic difference. Significantly, this is one of Beethoven's works where from the first printed edition onwards performance directions are given in German as well as the customary Italian.[7] The first movement is headed 'Etwas lebhaft und mit der innigsten Empfindung' (Somewhat lively and with the deepest feeling); similarly, the expressive slow movement is given the proto-Wagnerian direction 'Langsam und sehnsuchtvoll' (Slow and full of longing). These German terms do not appear in the autograph manuscript source, where the more familiar Italian terms *Allegretto ma non troppo* and *Adagio, ma non troppo, con affetto* are used.

As William Kinderman observes in his celebrated study *Beethoven*, 'few of Beethoven's pieces exerted such a strong spell on the Romantic composers as this A major sonata. Mendelssohn imitated it in his Op. 6 Sonata; Wagner found in its opening movement the ideal of his 'infinite melody'.[8] Theodor Adorno goes further and wonders whether the first movement of op. 101 might be the model for the Prelude to *Tristan*.

> *After practising the Piano Sonata Op 101.* – Is the first movement the model for the prelude to *Tristan*? Quite different in tone, as if the [incomparably condensed] sonata form had become a lyric poem, entirely subjectivized, spiritualized, stripped of the tectonic. And yet, not only on account of the quavers and 6/8 rhythm, but because of the structural importance of the chromatic (derived from the alternating dominant in bar 1) and an element which is difficult to grasp – sequences of longing – especially in the development after the F sharp entry [bar 41].[9]

In this respect, the remark Wagner made towards the end of his life regarding op. 101 is instructive and invites further interrogation. Firstly, what did he mean by 'unending' or 'infinite' melody, and how might this be evident in the first movement of op. 101? Secondly, to what extent do the form and musical processes in the first movement of op. 101, as identified by Kinderman and Adorno, inform Wagner's later compositional practices, as evident, for example in the *Einleitung*, or Prelude, to Act I of *Tristan und Isolde*?

'Unending' or 'infinite' melody is one of those familiar Wagnerian mantras which, like the equally problematic concept of the 'Total Work of Art' (Gesamtkunstwerk), have accrued multiple layers of meaning with repeated usage. Wagner's contemporaneous detractors used it as a stick with which to beat him by equating it with what they regarded as the unmelodic character of his vocal lines and the overall distended proportions of his operas. Wagner himself used the actual term only once: in the 1860 essay 'Music of the Future' ('Zukunftsmusik'), written as a simplified exegesis of the theories

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7 See also Piano Sonata no. 26, op. 81a, 'Das Lebewohl', and Piano Sonata no. 27, op. 90.

8 William Kinderman, *Beethoven* (New York, 2009), 218.

9 The argument of this article was initially suggested by the entry in Cosima Wagner's diary cited above, first encountered in the course of researches in preparation of my edition of Wagner's essay 'Beethoven' (1870). In the discussion following an early presentation of these ideas at a symposium, held in September 2017 at the Hochschule der Künste Bern, the Hungarian musicologist László Stachó pointed out that Theodor Adorno had made a similar connection. I am most grateful to Dr Stachó for bringing this to my attention. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music. Fragments and Texts*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford, CA, 1998), 126.

set out in the Zurich essays of a decade earlier, he writes that 'it is the musician who brings the great Unsaid to sounding life, and the unmistakeable form of his resounding silence is *endless melody* [*unendliche Melodie*]'.[10] It should be noted that in common practice 'unendliche' is translated interchangeably into English as both 'unending' and 'infinite', but in English the two terms are not precisely synonymous and have different nuances of meaning: 'unending' implies linear progression whereas 'infinite' may also imply a spatial dimension.[11] In broad terms, however, 'unending melody' (being the most literal translation) can be taken as a definition of Wagner's ideas of dramatic expression where the musical realisation is a continuous discourse of motivic ideas driven by the poetic impulse rather than the demands of formulaic musical syntax: i.e. where, as in the first movement of Beethoven op. 101, conventional treatment of material gives way to the expressive function of that material. A good example may be found in the continuous development of the motivic fragments that accompany the routine exchanges between the Masters as they gather for the Song School in *Die Meistersinger* Act I, Scene 2, a process that has much in common with the Baroque technique of *Fortspinnung,* or 'spinning out'.[12] Equally, as Thomas Grey observes, 'unending melody' may be taken as a paradigm of the continuous linear development and avoidance of strong cadences that can be seen in the later operas, and most especially in *Tristan.*[13]

Structural parallels between the *Allegretto ma non troppo* of Beethoven op. 101 and the *Tristan* Prelude become evident through a comparison of the overall musical design of the two movements. Before considering this in detail, it is worth observing the general point that the Prelude to Act I of *Tristan* is designated by Wagner in his autograph and in most printed editions as *Einleitung* rather than the more familiar *Vorspiel.* The same term is used again for the instrumental introduction to Act II; thereafter in Act III, he simply heads the act *Dritte Aufzug, Erste Szene,* without making any distinction between the instrumental introduction and the beginning of the dramatic action. *Vorspiel* translates into English as 'before the play', whereas *Einleitung* means 'Introduction', or more literally, 'leading in'. This is crucial to understanding Wagner's musical construction. The instrumental introduction to *Tristan* literally 'leads in' and is fully integrated into the musical design of not only the first act but the opera as a whole. For the purposes of this article, however, we will continue to use the familiar term Prelude.

The *Tristan* Prelude, and in particular its opening bars, is probably the most extensively analysed and widely discussed piece in the entire literature of western music, closely followed by the late Beethoven piano sonatas. It can sometimes be difficult to

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10 SS (note 2), vii.130; *Three Wagner Essays,* tr. Robert L. Jacobs (London, 1979), 40.

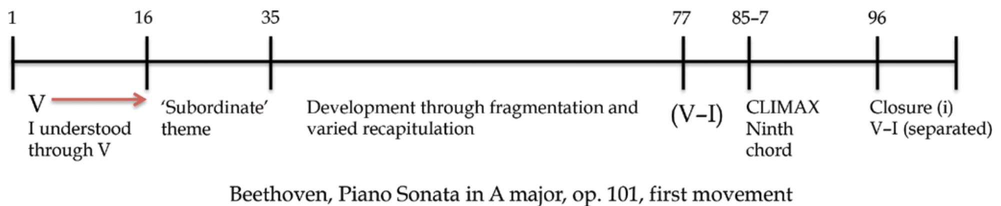
11 See, e.g., *Muret-Sanders Enzyklopädische Wörterbuch* (Berlin, 1900).

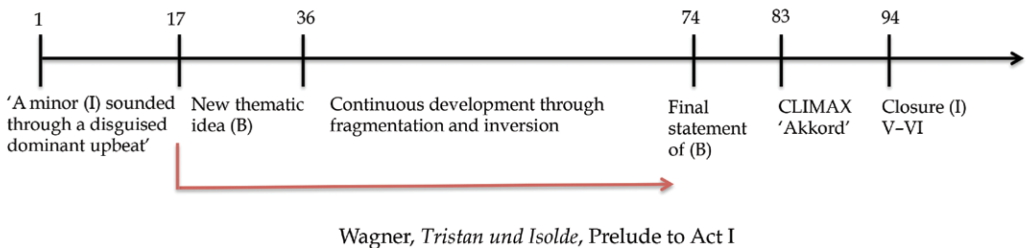
12 For more on 'Fortspinnung', see Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1996), esp. ch. 3, 'The Ideal Ritornello', 59–102.

13 Thomas Grey, 'A Wagnerian Glossary', in *The Wagner Compendium*, ed. Barry Millington (London, 1992), 233–4. See also Thomas Grey, 'Endless Melody', in *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia* (note 6), 115–16 and *Wagner's Musical Prose* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. 278–80; for an investigation of the provenance of the term, see Fritz Reckow, 'Unendliche Melodie', in *Handwörterbuch der Musikalischen Terminologie*, ed. Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht and Albrecht Riethmüller (Wiesbaden, 1972–2005). A critique of Reckow's thesis may be found in Kropfinger, *Wagner und Beethoven* (note 4), 100–14. In the course of his argument, Kropfinger includes mention of Wagner's reference to Beethoven's op. 101.

navigate such a welter of material. A clear account, which avoids excessive use of analytical terminology, may be found in chapter 4 of Roger Scruton's book-length study of the opera, *Death-Devoted Heart*.[14] For present purposes, the analysis of the *Tristan* Prelude by the music theorist Ernst Kurth (1886–1946), sometime Professor of Music Theory in the University of Bern, may be taken as a starting point. Kurth, also cited by Scruton, is a theorist not widely known in the English-speaking world. Alas, unlike his better-known near-contemporary Heinrich Schenker, not one of his books has been translated in its entirety, although the distinctly metaphysical character of the German prose may to some extent account for this. This analysis is taken from Kurth's *The Crisis of Romantic Harmony in Wagner's 'Tristan'*, and is included in English translation in the Norton Critical Score of the *Prelude and Transfiguration*, edited by Robert Bailey.[15]

In order to gain further purchase on Wagner's remarks about op. 101 it is instructive to take four points from Kurth's analysis and retrospectively map them on to the Beethoven sonata movement. Firstly, the matter of the overall musical design. The first point to notice is the similarity of dimension and distribution of musical material between Beethoven's sonata movement and Wagner's Prelude.





Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A major, op. 101, first movement; Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde,* Prelude to Act I. Linear comparison of primary tonal and thematic events

The above line diagram shows how the primary musical events occur at corresponding points in the linear structure of both Beethoven's sonata movement and Wagner's

[14] Roger Scruton, 'The Music of *Tristan*' in *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's 'Tristan und Isolde'* (New York, 2004), 75–117.

[15] Ernst Kurth, *Romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagner's 'Tristan'* (Bern, 1920), 286–96; *Wagner*, *Prelude and Transfiguration from 'Tristan and Isolde'*, ed. Robert Bailey (New York, 1985), 196–204.

Prelude. Kurth sees the *Tristan* Prelude as a tonally closed arch form (i.e. beginning and ending in the same key) in an implied though unstated tonic key of A minor. 'The Prelude to the first act of *Tristan*, taken as a whole, can be regarded as a tonally complete structure, even though in its closing bars it turns from the primary tonality of A minor to C minor. Apart from this final modulation leading into the first scene with its new key intact, tonal unity is present up to bar 94.'[16] Similarly, in the Beethoven sonata movement the tonal argument could be said to conclude at a corresponding point with the perfect cadence over the bar line between bars 95 and 96, although even here Beethoven weakens the sense of harmonic closure through metrical displacement and the insertion of rests.

Ex. 1 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A major, op. 101, first movement, bars 91–102, showing the fractured perfect cadence (bass notes E to A separated by rests in bar 96)

Secondly, the pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim describes the Prelude to *Tristan* as 'an obvious example of sound evolving out of silence'.[17] Similarly, but in more technical terms, Kurth describes the opening 15 bars as 'a disguised and greatly relaxed dominant upbeat', through which the underlying tonic (A minor) is withheld and understood in its absence.[18] (In non-technical language, the tonic is the fundamental tonal centre; the dominant the most closely related tonal centre rooted on the fifth degree of the scale, in this case E.) This might more simply be described as a preparatory intake of breath.

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16 Kurth, *Romantische Harmonik*, 286; *Wagner*, *Prelude*, ed. Bailey, 196.
17 Daniel Barenboim, *Everything is Connected: The Power of Music* (London, 2009), 9.
18 Kurth, *Romantische Harmonik*, 295; *Wagner*, *Prelude*, ed. Bailey, 203.

Langsam und schmachtend.

Ex. 2 Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Prelude to Act I, bars 1–18

To Kurth, these bars 'by themselves show a special kind of development and constitute one of the largest-scale ideas in all tonal music'. In the case of Beethoven op. 101, the opening 16 bars can also be heard not only as an example of linear development and cadential avoidance but also in Kurth's terms as 'a disguised and greatly relaxed dominant upbeat'.

The pianist and scholar Robert Levin has said that Beethoven's op. 101 is music that has 'no beginning';[19] or, as Daniel Barenboim puts it with reference to the slightly later Piano Sonata in E major, op. 109 (1820), 'one has the feeling that the music began earlier – it is as if one steps on to a train that is by now in motion'.[20] As in the *Tristan* Prelude we see from the outset of op. 101 that the tonic key (A major) is withheld and understood through its dominant (E major). Op. 101 begins in a tonally ambiguous manner over a dominant pedal (E). The tonic is implied (see for example the internal inverted and rhythmically displaced tonic pedal A in the alto register in bars 3 and 4), but not directly stated; all the time the tonal pull is towards the dominant key of E major through the use of interrupted cadences until a perfect cadence, or full close, in the dominant (E major) is finally achieved at bar 25 and given additional expressive traction through the

[19] Lecture, Hochschule der Künste, Bern, 13 Sep. 2017 (see note 9).
[20] Barenboim, *Everything is Connected* (note 17), 9.

Etwas lebhaft und mit der innigsten Empfindung
Allegretto, ma non troppo

cresc. *mf* *dimin.*

cresc. *dim.*

cresc. **p** *cresc.* **p** *cresc.*

sf **p** *espressivo e semplice* **sf**

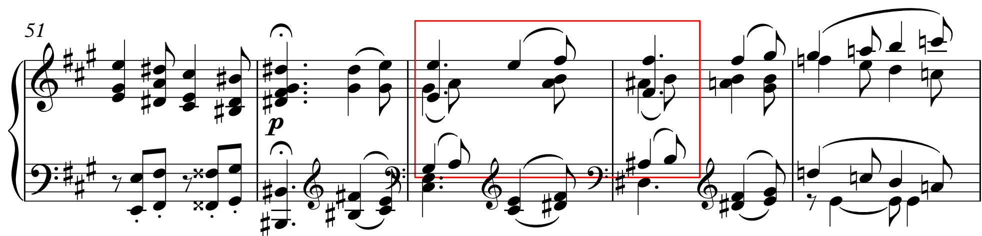
pp

Ex. 3 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A major, op. 101, first movement, bars 1–34. Compare bars 1–15 with Kurth's description: a 'disguised and greatly relaxed dominant upbeat'.

rarely used but structurally significant expression marking, *semplice*. As in the *Tristan* Prelude, avoidance of the tonic is essential to Beethoven's compositional process in the first movement of op. 101. There is no tonally defining perfect cadence in the governing tonic key of A major until bar 77; even then the *piano* dynamic seems almost apologetic and hardly indicates a teleological point of arrival. The climactic point of the movement comes later on the rhythmically displaced dissonance over a tonic pedal at bar 86 (see Ex. 5). This is three bars later than the climactic point of the *Tristan* Prelude which occurs on the strong beat of bar 83; but within the overall dimensions of the movement happens at a corresponding point in the musical design.

Thirdly, in the *Tristan* Prelude development of the musical material continues at bar 17 with the introduction of the cello motif, described by Ernest Newman as the 'Look (or Glance)' motif.[21] This forms the second main musical idea. If a subordinate theme, or second subject, may be identified at all in the Beethoven sonata movement it can be said to occur at a corresponding point at bar 16 (see Exx. 2 and 3). Although they begin on different scale degrees, it is notable that these two themes have a similar initial melodic contour: i.e. rising through a 3rd then falling a 7th. Moreover, in both the Beethoven and the Wagner examples they occur after what, following Kurth, may be identified as an extended dominant preparation in which explicit reference to the tonic is withheld.

Fourthly, the extent to which chromatic voice leading, so characteristic of the musical syntax of *Tristan* from the very opening bars, also pervades the texture of the first movement of Beethoven's op. 101 is significant. In the first two bars the treble and tenor voices are in contrary motion, the tenor part falling through chromatic semitones in an inversion of the rising upper voice of *Tristan's* opening (see Ex. 3). In bars 9 and 10 we can even see the so-called 'Tristan' motif itself, G sharp, A natural, A sharp, B natural, rising in the bass line; and in bars 52–4 it is embedded in octaves in the inner voices.



Ex. 4 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A major, op. 101, first movement, bars 51–5, showing the chromatically ascending 'Tristan' motif embedded in octaves within the texture

Towards the end in bar 89 of the Beethoven movement there is a striking anticipation of the harmonic language of *Tristan*, especially in the second half of the bar with its progression in semitones through successive augmented 6th chords, leading on the first beat of bar 90 to a delayed resolution of a second inversion tonic chord, with its implied dominant function.

[21] Ernest Newman, *Wagner Nights* (London, 1949), 222.

Ex. 5 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A major, op. 101, first movement, bars 85–90, showing the metrically displaced climactic point at bar 86 and the chromatically descending bass and successive augmented 6th chords in the second half of bar 89, anticipating the harmonic language of *Tristan* (see Ex. 7)

One final point. It may seem to be a banal statement of the obvious, but both the first movement of Beethoven's op. 101 and the Prelude to *Tristan* are notated in 6/8, or compound duple time: i.e. two dotted crotchet beats in a bar. Readings of the *Tristan* Prelude with six solid quaver beats in a bar are now so ubiquitous that it is all too easy to overlook the underlying hypermetrical dotted crotchet pulse as defined by the duple time signature. In other words, two dotted crotchet beats in a bar rather than six quavers. There is some evidence that earlier performances of *Tristan* were much more fluid in approach; an especially notable example is the 1928 recording of the Prelude with Wagner's own rarely performed concert ending conducted by Richard Strauss.[22] Strauss, let it be remembered, experienced the opera under the direction of its first conductor Hans von Bülow, and later commented that his performance of the *Tristan* Prelude was yet another thing he owed to the teaching given by von Bülow.

The influences on the multivalent *Tristan* style were many and various. In his book *The Sorcerer of Bayreuth,* Barry Millington makes a convincing case, well supported by documentary evidence, for Bülow's now forgotten orchestral fantasy *Nirvana* as a possible source for the upward rising chromatic phrase in bars 2–3 of *Tristan;* yet, as we have seen, whilst not in any sense negating Millington's point, the same motif is also present in the interior voicing of Beethoven's op. 101.[23] In his novel *Doctor Faustus* (1947) Thomas Mann suggests with particular reference to Chopin's Nocturne in C sharp minor op. 27 no. 1 (composed between 1833–6), that 'there are quite a few things in Chopin which, not only harmonically but also in a general psychological sense more than anticipate Wagner, indeed surpass him'. In this case it is clear that Mann is referring to the enharmonic shift between bars 48–9 which leads to a prolonged series of fluid harmonic mutations and intensification over a dominant pedal in preparation for the return via a reverse enharmonic shift at bar 81 of the tonic C sharp minor at bar 84. 'That surpasses in despairing beauty of sound all the *Tristan* orgies.'[24] Particularly

22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTZKAMxSEUk> (accessed 18 Apr. 2019).

23 Barry Millington, *Richard Wagner: The Sorcerer of Bayreuth* (London, 2012), 197–8.

24 See Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus,* tr. H. Lowe-Porter (London, 1949), 143 (end of ch. 16). Note that there is an error in Lowe-Porter's English translation which refers to Chopin's C sharp minor Nocturne as op. 27 no. 2. Mann's German text and the later English translation by John E. Woods correctly cite Chopin's C sharp minor Nocturne as op. 27 no. 1. See Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus* (Frankfurt, 1947), 192; *Doctor Faustus,* tr. John E. Woods (New York, 1999), 153.

Fryderyk Chopin (1810–49),
portrait by Eugène Delacroix, 1838

notable here is the dominant 7th chord on the last beat of bar 48 which changes function to act as an augmented German 6th, thus resolving by a semitone to the second inversion of A flat major on the first beat of bar 49. This leads over an extended dominant pedal to the resolution on to D flat major, then via an enharmonic shift to the tonic C sharp minor at bar 84, as mentioned above. This type of tonal flux is characteristic of the *Tristan* style, as seen for example in the transition between Act III, Scenes 2 and 3 (bars 1421–28), yet anticipates the composition of the opera by more than twenty years.

Ex. 6 Chopin, Nocturne in C sharp minor, op. 27 no. 1, bars 47–53

Ex. 7 Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde,* Act III, bars 1421–28. The chord indicated changes function from a dominant 7th to a German 6th, resolving to the second inversion of C sharp major, then via an enharmonic shift to D flat major. This corresponds to the equivalent harmonic progression in the Chopin nocturne discussed above.

In the fragmented aphorism cited earlier, Adorno makes no mention of the structural parallels evident in a comparison between Beethoven's sonata movement and Wagner's Prelude; but he does note the coincidence of the 6/8 rhythm, of the 'chromatic' as a point of structural definition, and the harmonically ambiguous opening on the dominant. The 'sequences of longing' identified as beginning at bar 41 of the sonata may be a case of Adorno retrospectively applying to the Beethoven movement terminology familiar from Wagnerian discourse associated with *Tristan*, but the point is persuasive.

Ex. 8 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A major, op. 101, first movement, bars 41–6, showing Adorno's 'sequences of longing' and Beethoven's 'terraced' dynamics

It may be noted that in the same passage Beethoven's dynamic 'terracing' between *forte* and *piano* with corresponding changes of register in the bass have their direct counterpart in Wagner's antiphonal exchanges between the lower strings and the upper woodwind through what might be termed a process of development by motivic fragmentation in the corresponding passage in the *Tristan* Prelude (see especially bars 36-42).

Ex. 9 Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Prelude to Act I, bars 36-42. Note the antiphonal exchanges between lower strings and woodwind, corresponding with Beethoven's terraced dynamics and Adorno's 'sequences of longing' seen in Ex. 8.

It is important not to make exaggerated claims for any of these observations. What is significant is the way in which the various elements were transformed in the crucible of Wagner's creative imagination into something wholly original. In their treatment of musical material both the Beethoven sonata movement and the *Tristan* Prelude do not follow syntactical convention but are paradigms of musical form as process rather than architecture. As the doyen of English writers on Wagner Ernest Newman succinctly puts it: 'The Prelude is a perfect example of musical form at its most consummate, not a

The celebrated music theorist Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935) in about 1919

schematic mould imposed on the "thematic material" from the outside, but a form that has come into being simply as the outcome of ideas.'[25] This description could equally well apply to the first movement of Beethoven's A major piano sonata, op. 101.

Newman's notion of 'form coming into being as the outcome of ideas' takes on the character of a Wagnerian 'deed of music made visible' in the orthography of the autograph manuscripts of both Beethoven's op. 101 and the *Tristan* Prelude. Heinrich Schenker's remark that 'Beethoven's powerful, direct, one might say "tone-physical [ton-körperliches]" thinking presents him with a way of writing that is sensually convincing also to the eye of the reader' applies in equal measure to both Beethoven and Wagner.[26] In the Beethoven movement the strong sense of linear flow apparent in the rise and fall of the lines and carefully notated phrasing builds ineluctably towards the climactic chord on the last quaver of bar 86 which is subsequently tied over the bar line and held throughout the widely spaced bar 87 onto the first beat of bar 88.[27] Beethoven's notation thus gives the climactic point of the movement a powerfully visible as well as aural dimension, a feature not reproduced in modern performing editions

25 Newman, *Wagner Nights* (note 21), 225.

26 Heinrich Schenker, *Piano Sonata in A major Op. 101*, Beethoven's Last Piano Sonatas: An Edition with Elucidation, iv., tr. and ed. John Rothgeb (New York, 2015), 4–5.

27 See <http://hz.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/8/84/IMSLP51292-PMLP01485-Op.101_Manuscript.pdf> (accessed 24 Feb. 2019).

Beethoven's autograph score of the Piano Sonata in A major, op. 101, first movement, bars 86–8

(even that of Schenker) where the bar is spatially compressed.[28] In the case of the *Tristan* Prelude, every note, phrase and dynamic marking is carefully crafted in Wagner's copperplate script, eloquently described by Thomas Mann as 'scattered groups of precise Gothic notes [which] signify something ultimate, supreme, profoundly precious'.[29] It is surprising therefore that in contrast to the otherwise meticulous penmanship the bar lines are randomly drawn freehand; they are irregularly spaced, often fractured, and frequently meander across the page at some distance from the perpendicular.[30] It is visibly evident that in Wagner's mind the metrical divisions are artificial and coincidental to the natural flow of the musical ideas; or, as Roger Scruton puts it, 'the bar line crystallises, so to speak, from the melody that flows across it'.[31] Wagner's orthography here brings to mind the pithy aphorism attributed to Sir Thomas Beecham: 'Forget about the bars. Look at the phrases, please. Remember that bars are only the boxes in which the music is packed.'[32] Nowhere is the wisdom of that observation more apparent than in the opening pages of the autograph score of *Tristan und Isolde.*

It is beyond question that Wagner's assimilation of Beethoven's music, particularly at the time of the composition of *Tristan* when his musical imagination was working at white heat, was a subtle, subliminal and even subconscious process. In short, Beethoven was fundamental to Wagner's musical DNA. There can be little doubt that Wagner would have been thoroughly familiar with the later Beethoven piano sonatas through his close association with such leading piano virtuosi as Liszt and Hans von Bülow. Whether or not he consciously used the first movement of Beethoven's op. 101 as a template for the *Tristan* Prelude, or took the opening rising semitone motif from Beethoven's chromatic voice leading, can only remain a matter of conjecture; but, as we have seen, the direct structural and thematic correspondences between the two movements are there and hiding in plain sight for all to see and hear. We must make of them what we will.

Thus a direct comparison between these two movements, each in themselves part of a greater whole, demonstrates but one way in which Wagner, in his own words,

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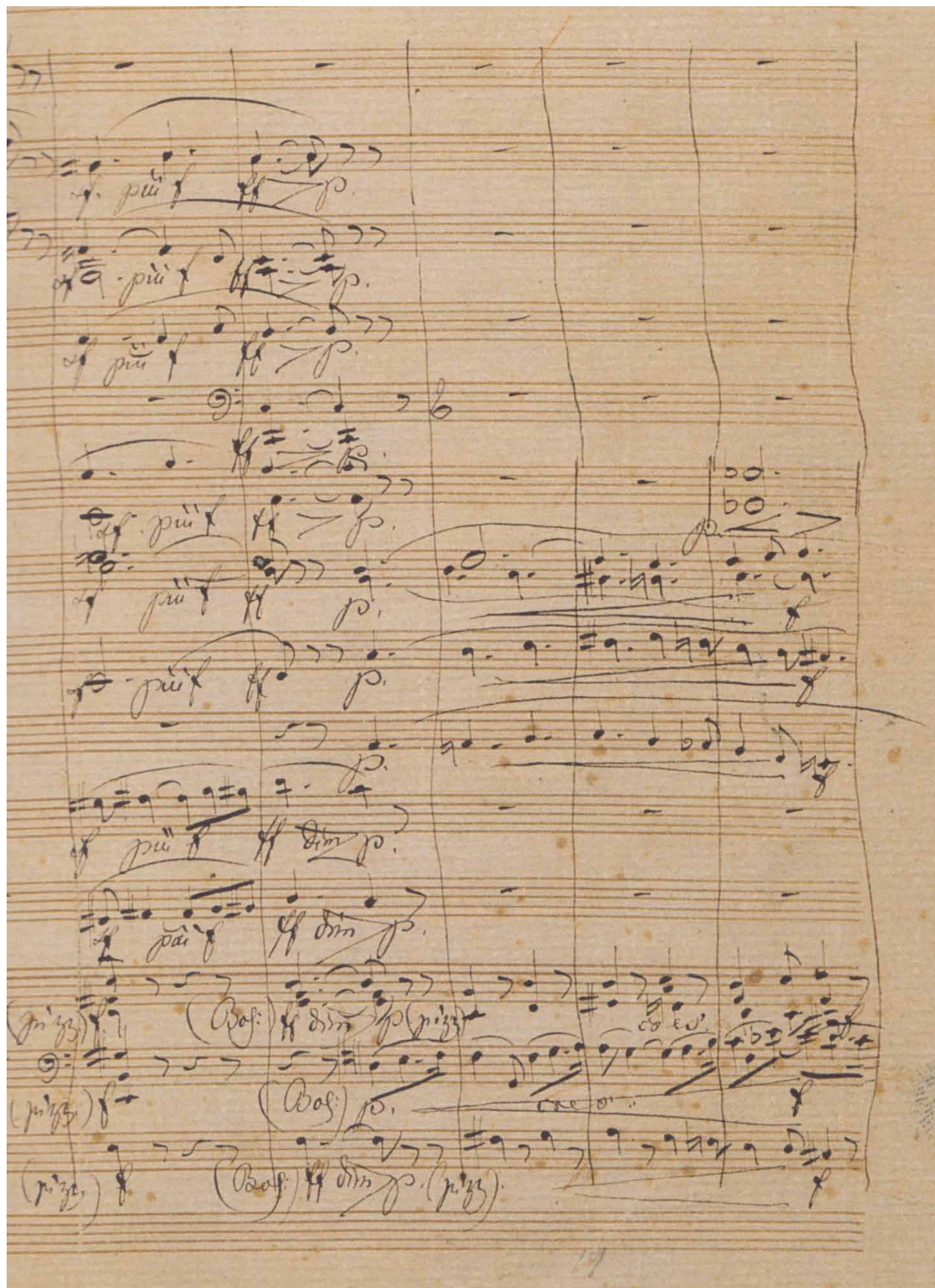
[28] E.g. Ludwig van Beethoven, *Complete Piano Sonatas*, ed. Heinrich Schenker (New York, 1975), ii.497.

[29] From 'German Letter (VI)' in *The Dial* (New York), Oct. 1925, as cited in *Thomas Mann Pro and Contra Wagner*, tr. Edmund Blunden (London, 1985), 80.

[30] Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Autograph: Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung Bayreuth, Bärenreiter Facsimile (Kassel, 2012), 1–9.

[31] Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart* (note 14), 92.

[32] Harold Atkins and Archie Newman, *Beecham Stories* (London, 1978), 18.



Wagner's autograph score of *Tristan und Isolde,* Prelude to Act I, bars 16–20

'channelled into the bed of music drama the great stream which Beethoven sent pouring into German music'.[33] As he subsequently says in his essay 'Beethoven' of 1870: 'It was the achievement of our great Beethoven, whom we must constantly regard as the true epitome of the musician, that by means of these forms he penetrated the innermost nature of music in such a way as to cast the inner light of the visionary outwards again, and thus once more showed us these forms only in accordance with their inner meaning.'[34] To return in conclusion to Wagner's remark cited at the outset, perhaps we can now see a little more clearly what he might have meant when he described the first movement of Beethoven's op. 101 as 'what music really is'.

[33] Wagner, 'Zukunftsmusik', SS (note 2), vii.97; 'Music of the Future', *Three Wagner Essays* (note 10), 19.

[34] Allen, *Richard Wagner's 'Beethoven'* (note 3), 78–9.