



Beethoven's Op. 81a and the Psychology of Loss

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ABSTRACT: Two interpretations of the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 81a, are offered. According to one interpretation (inspired by Bach's *Capriccio on the Departure of His Beloved Brother*), the movement depicts Beethoven's struggle against Rudolph's intended departure. According to the second interpretation the movement depicts an internal struggle, and in particular, the vacillation between denial and acceptance characteristic of the psychology of loss.

[1] A curious tendency encountered among the numerous existing commentaries on Beethoven's piano sonata in E-flat major, Op. 81a, is to downplay the significance of the work's representational trappings. To be sure, Beethoven himself has warned against taking descriptive titles too literally when he qualified his "Sinfonia caratteristica" as *Mebr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei*.⁽¹⁾ Yet I doubt that any commentator on Op. 68 has voiced an opinion comparable to Walter Riezler's, who states that "the superscriptions . . . intended for the first and last movements of [Op. 81a] . . . today sound faintly comic, and Beethoven himself can hardly have meant them to be taken too seriously."⁽²⁾

[2] While Riezler represents an admittedly extreme case, his uneasiness with the sonata's extra-musical pretensions is shared by other commentators. Wilibald Nagel, for example, who does not rank Op. 81a among Beethoven's outstanding masterworks, accounts for its popularity by referring derogatorily to its descriptive titles. "The outwardly apparent has the quickest impact on the general public," Nagel explains, "in general, and specifically in the arts."⁽³⁾ Even a commentator as Carl Dahlhaus, who never questions the sonata's artistic merits, prefers to emphasize its qualities as "absolute" music (its "formal" aspect), at the expense of its qualities as program music (its "narrative" aspect). "The sadness at Archduke Rudolph's departure and the joy at his return," says Dahlhaus, ". . . are not by any means made more explicit by the painting of details during the course of the musical development; rather, they become more remote as the 'formalization' proceeds. As the formal elaboration of the motives grows more refined, and the relationships between them are made increasingly distinct, so the reference to extraneous reality fades and dissolves."⁽⁴⁾ Indeed, Beethoven's famous admonition *Mebr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei* has been put to good use in this respect, for it seems to relieve the analyst from the burden of proposing some *specific* representational interpretation of the music, not counting the (seemingly) transparent instances of pictorialism.⁽⁵⁾

[3] Why is Op. 81a, Beethoven's "grosse charakteristische Sonate,"⁽⁶⁾ apparently a problem for many commentators? A number of commentators (though probably not the more recent ones) have quite possibly formed the erroneous impression

that the public display of affection from one man to another that the work exhibits is inappropriate, if not downright perverse.⁽⁷⁾ However, a less loaded explanation also exists. As Anton Rubinstein has pointed out, “in the first movement, . . . the character of the Allegro, after the introduction, does not throughout give expression to the usual idea of sorrow at parting.”⁽⁸⁾ Faced with such a (seemingly) glaring contradiction between title and content, commentators may have simply felt compelled to downplay the former’s significance.

[4] The present essay is an attempt to resolve the problem of musical representation in Beethoven’s Op. 81a by evoking the psychological notion of loss. The notion of loss, and in particular the related idea of an inner struggle between denial and acceptance, makes it possible to view the virile, energetic Allegro of the first movement as representationally wholly appropriate; as a result, there is no need either to question the validity of Beethoven’s inscriptions, or to resort to his famous admonition as a convenient smokescreen. At the same time, sufficiently specific connections between Beethoven’s music and the emotional realm can be drawn to offer a significant alternative to pictorialism. Although much of what follows concerns the sonata’s first movement only, an interpretation of the entire sonata shall be suggested as well.

The Meaning of the Interrupted Lebewohl-Motto

[5] Any representational interpretation of Op. 81a may well begin with the disruption, both textural and harmonic, that the left-hand’s entry in measure 2 inflicts upon the right-hand’s Lebewohl-entity initiated one measure earlier (**Example 1**). Leonard Meyer believes that “this [deceptive] cadence further defines the ethos of the motto, bringing ‘the eternal note of sadness in’ and perhaps suggesting that the parting is not final.”⁽⁹⁾ Indeed, as Meyer subsequently points out, Beethoven’s placing of the horn figure at the *beginning* of the composition rather than the end, where it more typically belongs, is already deviant.⁽¹⁰⁾ However, I believe there is more to the left-hand’s interference with finality than Meyer suggests.

[6] Several commentators have suggested a possible connection between Beethoven’s Op. 81a and Bach’s “Capriccio on the Departure of His Beloved Brother” (BWV 992), apparently composed when Bach was only nineteen years old on the occasion of his brother Johann Jacob’s departure to join the retinue of the King of Sweden.⁽¹¹⁾ Kenneth Drake’s observations are most illuminating in this regard. Noting that Bach conceived his first movement as depicting the attempts of the brother’s friends to deter him from embarking on his journey,⁽¹²⁾ Drake presents examples from both Bach and Beethoven where “. . . melodic continuity and harmonic movement are held back, display vacillation, and are postponed . . .”⁽¹³⁾ Surely, though, the quintessence of held-back harmonic movement in Beethoven is the deceptive cadence of measure 2, which Drake fails to cite. It thus appears that Beethoven’s movement is not so much a depiction of the sorrow of parting, as is commonly assumed; rather, like Bach’s, the movement depicts (or at least begins by depicting) an instinctive reaction of any human being to a projected departure of someone he or she deeply cares for: *preventing that someone from executing the pain-afflicting plan*. This, I believe, is the meaning of the left-hand’s interference with finality in measure 2, signified (as Meyer and others have rightfully observed) by the right-hand’s Lebewohl-motto.

[7] In light of Bach’s capriccio, in other words, the first movement of Op. 81a may be interpreted as depicting an external struggle, namely, Beethoven’s struggle against Rudolph’s intended departure. As in the fourth movement of Bach’s work, where the friends realize that the brother’s departure is inevitable and bid farewell, by the end of Beethoven’s movement the struggle against Rudolph’s projected departure subsides, and leave-taking takes place. However, I believe that even greater insight into Beethoven’s work may be gained by applying a variant of the same idea. According to this variant, which I shall pursue through the remainder of this essay, the struggle depicted in the first movement is *internal*: Beethoven’s subconscious *denies* what his conscious self already knows, namely, that the Archduke’s departure is imminent. This idea of an inner struggle, however, is more properly introduced through a brief psychological digression.⁽¹⁴⁾

The Psychology of Loss

[8] From a psychological and psychiatric standpoint, parting from someone we love is a particular case of a more general type of traumatic experience known as “loss.” As Judith Viorst has observed, “we begin life with loss.”⁽¹⁵⁾ More typically, however, loss is associated with such events as the loss of a bodily organ; divorce; and of course, death, be it of a family member, close friend, or a political or spiritual leader.

[9] The psychology of loss probably manifests itself most clearly in the extreme case of one's own impending death. In her highly influential book, *On Death and Dying*, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has proposed that dying patients pass through a progressive series of more or less pre-determined psychological states that include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.⁽¹⁶⁾ Although the rigidity of Kübler-Ross's five-stage theory has been put to task, the importance of denial as a defense mechanism in a loss situation has not, so far as I am aware, been challenged.⁽¹⁷⁾ For example, one of Kübler-Ross's critics, Edwin Shneidman, asserts that "one does not find a unidirectional movement through progressive stages so much as an alternation between acceptance and denial . . . This interplay . . . between understanding what is happening and magically disbelieving its reality, may reflect a deeper dialogue of the total mind, involving different layers of conscious awareness of 'knowing' and of needing not to know."⁽¹⁸⁾

[10] In interpreting the first movement of Op. 81a as representing the "alternation between acceptance and denial" characteristic of the psychology of loss, it is perhaps significant to note that Archduke Rudolph's departure is not the only loss that Beethoven has suffered in 1809, either just before or during the period he composed the sonata. On February 19, for example, Beethoven's physician Johann Adam Schmidt died. The death of Dr. Schmidt, "with whom he developed a strong personal bond,"⁽¹⁹⁾ may have reactivated in Beethoven the trauma connected with one of his most painful losses, namely the loss of his hearing.⁽²⁰⁾ The suicidal impulses connected with that loss are well documented in the famous "Heiligenstadt testament" of 1802. "Lebt wohl," writes Beethoven in the testament, and in the postscript he adds: "so nehme ich denn Abschied von dir"; reverberating in Op. 81a, the words "Lebewohl" and "Abschied" thus acquire a particularly poignant quality.⁽²¹⁾

[11] On March 21, Julie von Vering, a woman to which Beethoven seems to have been attracted, died at age nineteen after marrying his friend Stephan von Breuning.⁽²²⁾ This particular loss is perhaps symbolic of a more general one, namely Beethoven's self-imposed sacrifice of marital happiness for the sake of artistic freedom. Finally, on May 31, Joseph Haydn died. Haydn was possibly a father figure for Beethoven, and thus his death may have carried significant psychological undertones.

[12] Before turning to a more detailed analysis of the first movement, I should like to briefly consider the entire sonata from the present psychological perspective.

[13] Psychoanalysts have noted a connection between loss and creativity. Hanna Segal, for example, states that ". . . when the world within us is destroyed, when it is dead and loveless, when our loved ones are in fragments, and when we ourselves in helpless despair, it is then that we must re-create our world anew, reassemble the pieces, infuse life into dead fragments, re-create life."⁽²³⁾ George Pollock has turned this idea into a thesis termed "the mourning-liberation process," according to which "the successful completion of the mourning process results in creative outcome."⁽²⁴⁾ Applying this idea to Beethoven's sonata, one may regard its first movement as depicting loss; the second mourning; and the third personal renewal. Thus seen, the sonata becomes a vehicle to one of Beethoven's favorite topics, namely the death of a hero and his subsequent resurrection.⁽²⁵⁾ Indeed, there may be special significance to Beethoven's choice of the "heroic" E-flat major as the sonata's key.

The Denial-Acceptance Axis: Three Representative Stages

[14] The idea of a struggle between conscious awareness and subconscious denial is incorporated, I believe, into the pianistic fabric of the first movement. The sonata begins with the *Lebewohl*-motto in the right hand (see again Example 1). Like the word that Beethoven writes above it, the motto is essentially a conventional pattern, the significance of which may be accessed by purely intellectual means.⁽²⁶⁾ Thus the right hand may be seen as embodying Beethoven's conscious, rational side, the side that understands (to borrow Shneidman's phrase) "what is happening." The left hand—traditionally carrying darker connotations (cf. the Latin *sinistra*)—assumes under the same interpretation Beethoven's subconscious, emotional side: it contradicts the right-hand's realistic stance (in "magical disbelief," to paraphrase Shneidman again), with its striking entry on the downbeat of measure 2. In other words, the thought of Archduke Rudolph's departure, while rationally valid (see the right hand), is at this stage emotionally unacceptable (see the left hand).⁽²⁷⁾

[15] It is most illuminating to turn in this connection to the movement's ending. In measure 243, following what may be

regarded as the movement's structural cadence, the left hand begins a descent in whole-notes from great E \flat ; contra-G, reached in measure 248, is confirmed as the goal of this descent in measures 250 and 252. Since the initial great E \flat is held in the inner voice as pedal, upon reaching contra-G the descending sixth is expressed vertically as the dyad G-E \flat , the same dyad that concludes the Lebewohl-motto in measure 2 (whole-notes are typically associated with the Lebewohl-idea in the Allegro). The right-hand counterpoints the left-hand's descent with an ascending scale figure whose high-point is an appoggiatura C; after resolving twice to B \flat in half-note rhythm (measures 248 and 250), the appoggiatura figure is rhythmically expanded into whole-notes in measures 252–53 (see **Example 2**). Now, the combination of an octave C in the right hand with a minor-sixth G-E \flat in the left amounts in measure 252 to an exact exchange of parts between the hands in relation to measure 2. Attributing the same psychological content to each hand as in measures 1–2, and given that the dyad G-E \flat is now taken by the left hand, and moreover is placed low in the bass register, one might say that the painful idea of Rudolph's departure has been by this stage accepted by Beethoven's psyche, down to its innermost, deepest strata. With an exquisite ironic touch, the note C, so strikingly disruptive when taken by the left hand in measure 2, is turned in measures 248–53 by the right hand into a harmless appoggiatura. ⁽²⁸⁾

[16] Between these two extreme stages of downright denial (measures 1–2, and their chromatically intensified repetition in measures 7–8) and equally unconditioned acceptance (measures 243–55), several intermediate stages, I believe, may be detected. In the following section I shall consider the bridge sections (exposition and recapitulation), the development section, and, of course, the highly important and deservedly celebrated coda. Here I should like to consider the second subject, which seems to represent a stage lying comfortably near the middle of our imaginary denial-acceptance axis. To facilitate comparison with the movement's beginning and end, I shall consider the second subject as it appears in the recapitulation, that is, in the home-key of E \flat major.

[17] The second subject consists of two four-measure groups, measures 142–45 and 146–150, the second of which is essentially a transposition down an octave of the first. In each four-measure group the Lebewohl-motive is stated twice: in whole-notes at the beginning of the group, and in quarter-notes near the end (in measure 145 the quarter-note motion G–F is not followed by an E \flat due to the new beginning on G in measure 146).

[18] Weakened resistance to the idea of departure is suggested, I believe, in the disruption of closure on the downbeat of measure 150: a weakened version of the deceptive cadence of measure 2 (see **Example 3a**). Indeed, the augmented $\frac{5}{4}$ chord E \flat –G–C \flat of measure 150 (first half) is analogous to the VI and \flat VI chords of measures 2 and 8: a sixth G(\flat)–E \flat in the upper voices is accompanied by C(\flat). Unlike measures 2 and 8, however, where C(\flat) is given to the bass (resulting in a consonant, root-position triad), in measure 150 C \flat is given to an inner voice, which lends it a much less stable quality; and sure enough, stability is soon restored, for in the second half of the same measure the disruptive C \flat is revealed as a “mere” upper neighbor to B \flat . If one isolates measures 2 and 8; measure 150; and measure 252 from the rest of the movement (**Example 3b**), one sees an interesting process by which C(\flat) “migrates” from the bass, first to an inner voice, and ultimately to the top voice. Since the three positions of the C(\flat) are progressively less threatening to the stability of the accompanying G(\flat)–E \flat dyad, the process as a whole makes a fascinating analogue to a gradual psychological transition from a state of denial to one of acceptance. ⁽²⁹⁾

[19] But why, one may ask, is closure disrupted on the downbeat of measure 150, rather than (say) measures 144 or 148, that also conclude a statement of the Lebewohl-motive? The answer, I believe, concerns register. Observe the return to the one-line register in measures 149–50, actually the first time in the Allegro that the motto (upper part only) is heard in its original key *and* register. Register is an important issue in the movement, given the obvious way in which the motto imitates the sound of two natural horns (thus the Lebewohl-motto, in a strict sense, is *register-specific*, an idea to which I shall return in connection with the coda). All the same, I am inclined to view the left-hand's biting, syncopated dissonances accompanying the right-hand's Lebewohl-motive in measures 142–44 and 146–48 as yet another manifestation of (weakened) resistance to the idea of departure.

The Bridge Sections, Development, and Coda

[20] Generally in this sonata, there is a tendency to avoid sharp formal boundaries, and thus the traditional categories of first subject, transition, etc., must be applied with some caution. For example, a large-scale harmonic cycle T–S–D–T overlaps the

onset of the Allegro in measure 17, where the sonata's first subject would seem to begin.⁽³⁰⁾ Note that measure 21 contains the first stable tonic chord in the movement, not counting the harmony implicit in measure 1. Since measure 25, also containing a root-position tonic, merely initiates a varied repetition of measures 21–24, I shall take measure 21 as the bridge-section's harmonic point of origin. In what follows I shall propose that much of the bridge section is based on an enlargement of the Lebewohl-motive G–F–E \flat in the upper voice. A comparison with the parallel passage in the recapitulation should help confirm such a reading.

[21] **Figure 1** compares measures 21–50 (exposition) with measures 114–42 (recapitulation) at a background level (there is no Lebewohl-motive at this level). Note that while a soprano progression, G–F, is common to both passages, the accompanying bass progression is quite different. In the exposition, the underlying bass motion is of a rising second E \flat (I) to F (V/V); the half-diminished \flat chord of measure 36 provides an important melodic and harmonic link between these two referential events. In the recapitulation, on the other hand, the bass rises a fifth from E \flat (I) to B \flat (V); here the half-diminished \flat (measure 128) is part of the rising-fifth progression.

[22] In **Figure 2** lower-level details are added. Note that in both passages Beethoven composes a large scale voice-exchange between soprano and bass: G–F–E \flat (the Lebewohl-motive) in the soprano is set against E \flat –F–G(\flat) in the bass (I read an implied F in the bass in both the exposition and recapitulation underneath the same F-major \flat chord). Nonetheless, these two voice exchanges have an altogether different effect. Although in both exposition and recapitulation registral unity is lacking, in the recapitulation we have a single underlying key (E \flat major), a smooth harmonic progression connecting two stable harmonic events (I and I 6), and a more-or-less unified texture (the texture changes abruptly with the half-diminished sonority of measure 127, where a new subphrase begins). In the exposition, on the other hand, there is no single underlying key, and the harmonic progression is anything but smooth (especially in measures 34–5); moreover, the progression ends with an unstable, dissonant event (the half-diminished sonority), which functions on the surface as a new beginning more than an end. As a result, although a large-scale Lebewohl-progression (G–F–E \flat) unifies the upper voice, this unity is undermined by several factors, and especially by the dissonant, explosive event in measure 35. Thus the bridge section in the exposition may be interpreted as representing another instance of denial, denial that assumes a decidedly angry, even violent character.

[23] I find the development section, harmonically one of the most daring Beethoven ever composed, rather enigmatic. Nonetheless, from the rhythmic, textural, and pianistic standpoints the development seems to coalesce around the contrast between long notes (representing the Lebewohl-idea) in the right hand, and a restless “anapest” rhythm, clearly derived from the first subject, in the left hand (measures 73–90; 94–108). I would suggest that this contrast once again represents an inner struggle between acceptance (right hand) and denial (left hand). In measures 98–103, in particular, the anapest rhythm in the left hand is identified with the note C, thus linking the first subject with the left-hand's entry in measure 2.

[24] Measures 181–97 of the coda (see **Example 4**) is one of several passages in the movement that employ the Lebewohl-motive in imitation between the hands (in all of these passages the right hand leads while the left hand follows).⁽³¹⁾ In the coda, the imitated Lebewohl-motive corresponds rhythmically to the original Lebewohl-motto of measures 1–2 (tonally, however, only the contour of a descending third is preserved). Here, as in the earlier passages, it is significant that the left hand does not contradict the right hand, but to the contrary, confirms its (quasi) Lebewohl-pronunciations through imitation.

[25] The Lebewohl-idea in its original form dominates the remainder of the coda. It is interesting to compare measures 197–201 with the second subject (specifically, measures 146–50), from which they obviously derive (**Example 5**). Except for register (measures 197–99) or rhythm (measures 200–201), the Lebewohl-idea in the right hand assumes in measures 197–201 its original form (in measures 146–50, by comparison, the sense of a horn-duo is lacking). Note further that unlike measure 150 there is no deceptive ending in measure 201—i.e., no (weakened) denial—and moreover, the left hand in measures 197–99 accompanies with florid counterpoint, rather than syncopated dissonances (cf. measures 146–47), the right-hand's cantus-firmus-like motto. However, lack of denial is not quite the same as acceptance. When the right and left hands exchange parts beginning in measure 201 (a type of imitative technique), the left hand is “unable” to follow the right-hand's previous example and leaves the Lebewohl-motto consistently incomplete (**Example 6**). The entire passage is repeated

beginning in measure 209, as if to give the left hand a second chance; this is of no avail, however.⁽³²⁾

[26] Given the left-hand's apparent difficulty in "pronouncing" the entire Lebewohl-motto in its original form, a step-by-step, "repeat-after-me" type of learning process follows (measures 223–31). The motto is broken into its component parts, i.e., "second horn" and "first horn"; following the right-hand's example, the left hand imitates the second-horn part first, and only then attempts, for the first time in the entire movement, the entire motto in two parts (**Example 7**). Surprisingly, however, precisely as the left hand is finally about to succeed, the right hand enters with a rhythmically distorted version of the motto. The right hand's entry, initiating the celebrated imitative passage that superimposes tonic and dominant harmonies, does not seem to make much sense in view of the present interpretation. Why should the right hand, which presumably represents Beethoven's conscious, rational side, interfere with the left hand at this critical juncture, that is, interfere with the process by which Beethoven's emotional, subconscious side learns to accept the painful reality of Rudolph's departure?

[27] In answering this difficult question, let me begin with some purely musical considerations. As commentators have not failed to observe, the superimposed harmonies of measures 230–34 result from a logical compositional process by which the durational distance that separates statement (right hand) from imitation (left hand) is shortened from two measures to one. A glance at **Example 8**—a hypothetical version of measures 229–35—reveals that the motto's rhythmic distortion serves a number of purposes (in Example 8 the distortion is revoked). First, by shifting the motto's initial dyad to an unaccented position in the measure the overall dissonant effect is weakened; second, the distortion calls for only two pairs of horns (as opposed to more than two pairs in Example 8), and moreover, preserves the one-to-one correspondence between the horn-pairs and the pianist's hands; third, the upbeat entry in measure 230 clarifies the hypermeter; and finally, the distortion ensures that the right hand is still heard as the leader, even as the imitative texture becomes considerably more dense.

[28] It is this last point, I believe, that gives us a clue towards solving the question posed earlier. Note that since the right hand states the Lebewohl-motto in its original register in measures 227–29 (see again Example 7), the left hand is forced to imitate one octave lower. But register, we have already noted, is integral to the motto's identity. *The left hand must state the Lebewohl-motto in its original register in order for acceptance to be complete.* The right hand's surprising entry in measure 230 reflects, as it were, this last minute realization: an important ingredient is still missing so as to make the left-hand's Lebewohl-statement an authentic token of acceptance. Indeed, in measures 232–34 the right hand states the (distorted) motto an octave higher than before; following the right-hand's lead the left hand makes the corresponding adjustment, thus finally stating the Lebewohl-motto in its "correct" registral position (measures 233–35).

[29] Note the exquisite touch by which the right hand begins yet another Lebewohl-statement, in a still higher register, on the last beat of measure 234. As if suddenly realizing its mistake, the right hand aborts the attempted statement; a rest on the downbeat of measure 235 prevents a dominant/tonic clash similar to measure 231 from taking place. The imitative passage that follows in measures 235–38 (**Example 9**) serves to confirm, as it were, the state of equilibrium that has been finally achieved within Beethoven's psyche: both rationally and emotionally, the idea of Rudolph's departure has been absorbed.⁽³³⁾ Following the brief codetta, measures 243–55, which further confirms that loss has been indeed accepted (review the discussion in paragraph 15), we enter a new psychological phase, mourning, in the second movement.

[30] "Written from the heart," states Beethoven in the sketches to Op. 81a. Perhaps the present essay should give a new meaning to this simple yet touching phrase. Transcending its immediate, personal context, Op. 81a depicts with uncanny insight the inner workings of the human psyche as it copes with one of the most basic signatures of the human condition: the experience of loss.

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Footnotes

1. See Gustav Nottebohm, *Zweite Beethoveniana* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970; orig. ed. Leipzig, 1887), pages 375 and 378.

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2. Walter Riezler, *Beethoven*, trans. G. Pidcock (New York: Vienna House, 1972; orig. German ed. 1938), pages 81–82.

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3. “Das Äusserliche wirkt wie überall so ganz besonders in der Kunst auf die Menge am raschesten ein.” Wilibald Nagel, *Beethoven und seine Klaviersonaten*, vol. 2 (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer, 1905), page 164; see also pages 182–83. W. v. Lenz has also expressed misgivings concerning the pictorial aspect of Op. 81a. For a valuable summary of various evaluations of the sonata, see Christoph von Blumröder’s article in Albrecht Riethmüller, Carl Dahlhaus, and Alexander L. Ringer (eds.), *Beethoven: Interpretationen seiner Werke*, vol. 1 (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 1994), pages 626–28. My thanks to Mr. Ephraim Wagner for his expert linguistic advice with regard to the translated German passages included in this essay.

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4. Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to his Music*, trans. by Mary Whittall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pages 39–40. Carl Czerny [*On the Proper Performance of all Beethoven’s Works for the Piano*, ed. by Paul Badura-Skoda (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1970), page 61] remarks that Op. 81a, “. . . when properly played, may, and indeed should, interest even those who are willing to enjoy it as pure music, without regard to the titles.” See also the remarks of Charles Malherbe, cited in Jacques-Gabriel Prod’homme, *Les Sonates pour Piano de Beethoven* (Paris: Delagrave, 1938), page 202, and Jürgen Uhde, *Beethovens Klaviermusik*, vol. 3 (2nd ed., Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980), page 272.

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5. See Nagel, page 163; Donald Francis Tovey, *A Companion to Beethoven’s Pianoforte Sonatas* (London: Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 1931), page 189; Prod’homme, page 201; Eric Blom, *Beethoven’s Pianoforte Sonatas Discussed* (New York: Da Capo, 1968), page 183; Riethmüller et al., page 627. For a study of the “storm” movement from Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony that goes significantly beyond the pictorial surface, see Carl Schachter, “The Triad as Place and Action,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 17, pages 158–69. Schachter proposes that “. . . the stormy world. . . [this remarkable movement] depicts penetrates below the descriptive details of the foreground into the underlying triadic substance” (page 158).

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6. See Beethoven’s letter to Breitkopf & Härtel dated Sept. 23 [1810], in *Ludwig van Beethovens sämtliche Briefe*, ed. by Emerich Kastner and Dr. Julius Kapp (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1975; orig. ed. 1923), page 179.

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7. Cf. Jacques-Gabriel Prod’homme (*Les Sonates pour Piano de Beethoven*, page 202), who suggests (apparently after Charles Malherbe) that Op. 81a may have been inspired by Beethoven’s love to Therese von Brunswick more than his friendship to Rudolph Adolph Bernhard Marx (who was possibly ignorant of the work’s biographical background) similarly believed that the sonata depicted “moments from the life of a loving [opposite-sex] couple”; see his *Anleitung zum Vortrag Beethovenscher Klavierwerke*, ed. by Eugen Schmitz (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, ca. 1912; orig. ed. Berlin, 1863), page 218. While it is doubtful that Beethoven would have made public the sentiments expressed in Op. 81a had he suspected that these could be interpreted in a homosexual light, at least from a present-day perspective the work’s homo-erotic undertones cannot altogether be dismissed. These undertones, however, are totally beside the point as far as the present interpretation of the sonata is concerned.

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8. Anton Rubinstein, *A Conversation on Music*, trans. by Mrs. John P. Morgan (New York: Da Capo, 1982; orig. English ed. New York, 1892), page 9. As Uhde has remarked (*Beethovens Klaviermusik*, page 279), “the fervent activity that the Allegro displays after this Adagio-‘Introduction’ may have struck a naive observer as rather strange.” Subsequently in the same paragraph he explains that “in the entire sonata the contrast between deliberation and determination, between hesitant

question and definite answer, repeats itself again and again.” See also Nagel’s (*Beethoven*, pages 167–68) sharp critique of A. B. Marx’s attempt to see the Allegro in a passionate light. Nagel is evidently disturbed by the Allegro’s apparent programmatic inappropriateness, for in the same paragraph he rationalizes (cf. Uhde) that “[Beethoven] never surrendered himself to a painful thought for long, and from the deepest emotional distress the strength for action arose in him.”

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9. *Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), page 243. Meyer presents a detailed analysis of the first movement (especially the opening twenty-one measures), and lays considerable emphasis on the structural implications of the deceptive cadence of measure 2. According to Blumröder (in Riethmüller et al., *Beethoven: Interpretationen*, page 630), the deceptive cadence carries “a specific emotional quality of uncertainty” (“eine spezifische Empfindungsqualität der Ungewissheit”).

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10. *Ibid.*, 244. See also Uhde, page 272. Uhde points out that the sonata as a whole begins with an ending (departure), and ends with a new beginning (reunion), an idea that he develops into a thesis of contrasting experiences in the time dimension; see pages 272–75.

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11. Blom, page 182; Richard Rosenberg, *Die Klaviersonaten Ludwig van Beethovens*, vol. 2 (Olten: URS Graf-Verlag, 1957), page 325; Uhde, page 279. However, I am not aware of any documentary evidence from which Beethoven’s familiarity with Bach’s youthful work may be inferred.

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12. Bach’s inscription for the first movement is: “Adagio. Ist eine Schmeichelung der Freunde, um denselben von seiner Reise abzuhalten.”

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13. Kenneth Drake, *The Beethoven Sonatas and the Creative Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), page 69.

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14. I realize that some readers may feel uncomfortable with the idea of an inner, psychological struggle, and might prefer an interpretation of Op. 81a more on the lines of Bach’s *Capriccio*. For such readers, the following section is optional. As for the remainder of this essay, the terms of an inner struggle (i.e., denying the reality of Rudolph’s imminent departure) may be easily translated into those of an external struggle (preventing the Archduke’s departure from taking place).

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15. Judith Viorst, *Necessary Losses* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), page 9.

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16. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

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17. See for example Avery D. Weisman, *On Dying and Denying* (New York: Behavioral Publications, 1972), especially chaps. 5 and 6.

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18. Edwin S. Shneidman, *Deaths of Man* (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), page 7.

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19. Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven* (New York: Schirmer, 1977), page 114.

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20. As Solomon notes (*loc. cit.*), Dr. Schmidt was extremely helpful in allaying Beethoven’s anxiety concerning the symptoms

of deafness.

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21. In Beethoven's sketches, (*Der*) *Abschied* is the title of the first movement. See Nottebohm, *Zweite Beethoveniana*, page 100.

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22. See Solomon, 154; see also Gerhard von Breuning, *Memories of Beethoven*, trans. by Henry Mins and Maynard Solomon, ed. by Maynard Solomon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 38–40.

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23. Hanna Segal, "A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetics." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 33 (1952), page 199.

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24. George H. Pollock, *The Mourning-Liberation Process*, vol. 1 (Madison: International Universities Press, 1989), page 114.

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25. As Maynard Solomon has suggested (*Beethoven*, page 121), Beethoven enacted his own death and resurrection in the Heiligenstadt episode. "He recreated himself in a new guise, self-sufficient and heroic. The testament is a funeral work, . . . in a sense it is the literary prototype of the Eroica Symphony, . . . a daydream compounded of heroism, death, and rebirth. . . ." See also Uhde's (*Beethovens Klaviermusik*, pages 275–76) characterization of the sonata's three movements (especially the third movement), as well as his comments on pages 271–72 in favour of a "universal" interpretation of the sonata's program.

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26. Uhde (*Beethovens Klaviermusik*, pages 277–78), characterizes the *Lebewohl*-motto as a "Tatsache-Motive": an unchallengeable, factual, objective statement.

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27. In "Auf dem Flusse: Image and Background in a Schubert Song" *19th Century Music* 6:1 (1982), 47–59, David Lewin employs a somewhat similar idea of "textural segregation." See especially Figure 5 and its discussion on pages 56–7. Another point of contact with Lewin's essay is psychological. According to Lewin, the poet in Schubert's setting suppresses a painful question. Suppression (or repression) and denial are related psychological operations.

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28. Pointing out that Beethoven's crescendo in measures 252–53 contradicts the "sigh" implications of the C–B \flat motive (cf. measures 248 and 250), William Rothstein (private communication) suggests that Beethoven is portraying a change from sighing grief into manly resolve. For more on the conventional "sigh" motive in this movement, see Rothstein's sensitive discussion of Op. 81a in "Heinrich Schenker as an Interpreter of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas," *19th Century Music* 8:1 (1984), pages 12–13. Heinrich Schenker [*Free Composition*, trans. and ed. by Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), page 64 of the main text] views the two-note sequence A \flat 1–G1, A \flat 2–G2, F1–E \flat 1, E \flat 2–D \flat 2, D \flat 2–C2, C2–C \flat 2, and C \flat 2–B \flat 1 (measures 66–86—see Schenker's Figure 62/4), as representing statements of the *Lebewohl*-motto, shortened by one syllable. "The third syllable is lost" he states, "as though in a sob."

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29. Concerning the G–E \flat dyad, it is perhaps significant that the C–minor ♯ chord on the downbeats of measures 4 and 5 is represented by G and E \flat only (note also the right-hand's melodic minor sixth G–E \flat on the last eighth of measure 4). The sense in which the G–E \flat dyad is unstable is rendered (following the deceptive cadence) doubly acute. A significant compositional issue in the movement is "C versus C \flat " (or "G versus G \flat "). See Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, Figure 119/7 and its discussion on page 100 of the main text; and William Rothstein, "Heinrich Schenker as an Interpreter of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas," pages 12–13 and 17.

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30. I read a prolongation of IV from measure 11 (second half) through measure 18. Uhde (*Beethovens Klaviermusik*, page 282) makes the interesting proposition that measures 35–50, rather than measures 50–58, are the sonata's second subject (Uhde

considers measures 50–58 as the exposition’s closing group).

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31. The first passage of this type occurs already near the end of the exposition (measures 62–65); as several commentators have noted, the passage (restated in the recapitulation, measures 154–57) makes use of rhythmic diminution. In a broad sense, the idea of the left hand following the right hand originates from the very beginning of the movement, where the left hand enters after a full-measure rest.

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32. Schenker’s implied E \flat in the left hand in measure 207 is of course technically correct, yet nonetheless seems to miss the point. See *Free Composition*, Figure 125/5 (the figure illustrates “deceptive intervals” that arise from keyboard writing). The pianistically awkward note-repetitions in measures 219 and 221 seem to support the idea that Beethoven’s B-flats have special significance, since these repetitions could have been easily remedied by resorting to the implied E \flat . Although a crossing of the voices would have resulted in the process, such a voice crossing is pianistically less awkward than repetition.

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33. Or, in terms of an external struggle (cf. Bach’s *Capriccio*), at this point Beethoven finally allows Rudolph to depart. Interestingly, measures 239–43 are traditionally interpreted as depicting the withdrawal of the Archduke’s coach.

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