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Thesis and antithesis: Resolving the dialectique in the first movement of Debussy's Violin Sonata

ABSTRACT: This article will offer a close reading of the first movement of Debussy's Violin Sonata (1917), and will set forth to discuss its formal principles within a dialectical context. References to Hegelian philosophy will be made, and also to precursory dialectical structures. The work will also be studied in relation to sonata form, and by taking Mark DeVoto's claim that this late work displays a "persuasive sonata form" structure into consideration, this analysis will in fact elucidate Debussy's ostensible departure from archetypical sonata form.

Examining Debussy's correspondences and sketches will posit the Sonata initially within existing scholarship – both historiographical and analytical – paying particular attention to the composer's "late" style in general. A discussion on the relationship between dialectic and symbolist aesthetics will then be necessary in order to promote the idea that the work is structured around a dialectical framework. The second section of this article will carry out an in-depth analysis of the movement, adopting and adapting a semiotic approach as developed by Nicolas Ruwet and Jean-Jacques Nattiez's distributional methodology in order to study the work's formal attributes and motivic construction.

Use of this approach will bring to light the strong bond between the motivic thesis and antithesis in the first section of the Sonata, and also the conflation of material in the final section of the movement, which aims towards a dialectical resolution. Use of paradigmatic diagrams will illuminate the methods in which synthesis is achieved by different compositional strategies, including merging, completion, compression, combination and conjunction. Furthermore, the analysis will draw attention to Golden Section proportions in the middle section of the piece.

In conclusion, it will be argued that Debussy's conscious effort to avoid Teutonic principles has paradoxically brought his work closer to Germanic thinking. Amid a time of personal and social conflict, one could ultimately compare his approach to that of the Hegelian "free spirit" – a free spirit that transcends political boundaries by its occupation of a neutral ground. Whether or not this demonstrated Debussy's conscious compositional intention to reflect Hegel's philosophical principles remains unsolved. More certain, however, is the fact that the presentation of a thesis and a subsequent antithetical section clearly leads to a resolution of the *dialectique* in the first movement of this Sonata.

KEYWORDS: Debussy, Violin Sonata, dialectics, semiotics, Hegel, sonata form, Golden Section.

Introduction

This article examines the formal principles of the first movement of Debussy's Violin Sonata (1917) within a dialectical context.¹ While such a study will inevitably be reinforced by references to Hegelian philosophy, references will also be made to precursory dialectical structures and to sonata form. Taking into account Mark DeVoto's claim that this late work displays a "persuasive sonata form" structure,² this analysis will elucidate Debussy's ostensible departure from archetypical sonata form.

Debussy's Sonata will be placed initially within existing scholarship – both historiographical and analytical – paying particular attention to the composer's "late" style in general. A discussion on the relationship between dialectic and symbolist aesthetics will be necessary in order to demonstrate that the work is structured around a dialectical framework. The second section of this article will carry out an analysis of the movement, adopting and adapting a semiotic approach as developed by Nicolas Ruwet and Jean-Jacques Nattiez's distributional methodology³ in order to study the work's formal attributes and motivic construction in relation to sonata form.

History and Letters

It is widely held that Debussy tended to avoid employing Teutonic approaches in his late compositional style.⁴ Given this fact, the presence of a dialectical approach as the structural basis of his Sonata may on first glance be considered a relatively controversial one,⁵ although Matthew Greenbaum's article, which of-

¹ I am indebted to Pwyll ap Siôn and Robert Pascall at Bangor University for providing valuable suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. I would also like to acknowledge the financial support awarded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under their Research Preparation Masters Scheme, as research for this article was partially undertaken during the course of my postgraduate studies.

² Mark DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on his Music* (Hilsdale: Pendragon Press, 2004), 191.

³ Jean-Jacques Nattiez, "Varèse's "Density 21.5": A Study in Semiological Analysis", trans. Anna Barry, *Music Analysis*, 1/iii (1982), 244–340; Idem, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990); Nicolas Ruwet, "Methods of Analysis in Musicology", *Music Analysis* 6/i-ii (1987), 20–23.

⁴ Marianne Wheeldon writes that Debussy's avoidance of the Austro-Germanic tradition is evident in his adoption of a cyclic approach instead of a sonata, as apparent in this Sonata. See Marianne Wheeldon, "Debussy and "La Sonata cyclique", *Journal of Musicology*, 22/iv (2005), 678.

⁵ Such an argument contradicts Adorno's theory, for instance, that "Debussy's music [is] non-dialectical". See Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 257.

fers a pitch-class analysis of Debussy's *Des pas sur la neige* (1909–1910), provides some reinforcement for this argument as it refers to Debussy's uses of dialectical forms.⁶ Greenbaum draws attention to Symbolism's influence on Debussy's organic approach, claiming that he had in fact "perfected a dialectical form without words".⁷ This article will build on Greenbaum's premise, initially by laying out a few observations from a historiographical perspective that reveal contradictions in Debussy's wartime correspondences. Such paradoxes might be associated with the structuralism of the music, hence relating to the symbolic attributes of the dialectic.

Debussy's Violin Sonata was the third in a planned series of six sonatas dedicated to his wife, Emma-Claude, but the completion of this project was sadly left unfulfilled due to his death in 1918. Debussy's correspondences written during a period of undoubted personal anguish and in the midst of global instability brought about by the Great War (1914–1918) provide a telling account of the ailing composer's mindset in the months surrounding this composition, when sentiments of a contradictory nature were often expressed.⁸

Ambivalent feelings towards the Sonata were apparent soon after its completion, particularly towards the finale, as documented extensively by Denis-François Rauss. Rauss's study of Debussy's notebook sketches and earlier drafts of the work brings to light numerous revisions made to the Sonata.⁹ Such contradictions are equally apparent in Debussy's correspondences: in a letter dated 7th May 1917 to his friend Robert Godet, Debussy wrote of his satisfaction in "at last [finishing] the sonata for violin and piano... By one of those very human contradictions it's full of happiness and uproar".¹⁰ In contrast, a letter to Godet merely a month later suggests that his views had changed markedly: "This sonata will be interesting only from a documentary point of view and as an example of what an invalid can write in the time of war".¹¹ Along similar lines, by citing the Godet correspondence of 7th June 1917, Marcel Dietschy documents that Debussy completed the work only "to rid [himself] of it", although he expressed a week later that he was pleased to accept the final printed version from the publisher Durand, claiming that "in spite of [his] sad frame of mind, it was all the same a real joy".¹² This seemingly appar-

⁶ Furthermore, Debussy's *La Cathédrale engloutie* represents an "extended type of dialectical form" in its employment of "a rondo-like succession of syntheses". See Matthew Greenbaum, "Debussy, Wolpe and Dialectical Form", *Contemporary Music Review*, 27/ii (2008), 358.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 345.

⁸ Jane Fulcher writes of the dialogic interplay in Debussy's wartime works in general, taking the literary critical theories of Bakhtinian into account. See Jane F. Fulcher, "Speaking the Truth to Power: The Dialogic Element in Debussy's Wartime Compositions", in Jane F. Fulcher (ed.), *Debussy and his World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2001): 203–32.

⁹ Denis-François Rauss, "Ce terrible finale", *Cahiers Debussy*, 2 (1978), 30–62.

¹⁰ François Lesure (ed.), *Debussy: Selected Letters*, trans. Roger Nichols (London: Faber, 1987), 324.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Marcel Dietschy, *A Portrait of Claude Debussy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 184.

ent opposition — the feeling of sadness and joy — bears some correlation with the thesis / antithesis structure of a dialectical argument, which ostensibly forms the basis of this work, as will shortly become apparent.

In addition to Debussy's own personal conflicts, it might equally be argued that paradoxes form intrinsic elements within the symbolist movement as a whole. Interestingly, Stefan Jarociński has compared the artistic synthesis of subject and object, as found in symbolist aesthetics, with Hegel's philosophy, and indirectly associates this with Debussy's music.¹³ While no concrete evidence exists to confirm that Debussy was directly influenced by Hegel's writings, his adoption of organic growth processes, or the paradoxical "form as process"¹⁴ clearly points in this direction, as will be discussed further in due course. Greenbaum also writes on the "new form-generating structures in late-nineteenth century music" as evident in Debussy's work, and relates it to the "increasingly subjective musical aesthetic that was to find its full flowering in symbolism".¹⁵

Debussy's alliance with Stéphane Mallarmé clearly points towards the strong influence of symbolism upon the composer. Jarociński writes of the Tuesday gatherings at Mallarmé's apartment, whereat a wide artistic and intellectual circle were invited to discuss avant-garde ideas in several disciplines.¹⁶ James Hepokoski also refers to Mallarmé's connection with Debussy's compositional approach, identifying three frequently occurring formulaic openings attributed to the influence of a symbolist aesthetic. Such innovative expositions "stress persistent originality and remain more open to non-rational, mysterious interpretations".¹⁷ The beginning of the *Violin Sonata* reflects one of these three exact forms of openings according to Hepokoski, namely the "modal/chordal opening": through a series of either two or four chords they exude a "mysterious" modal quality to suggest, according to the designated context, primeval times, ecclesiastical austerity, quasi-mystical reverie, or uncommon experience in general".¹⁸ In the case of the Sonata, two such

¹³ See Stefan Jarociński, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism*, trans. Rollo Myers (London: Eulenberg Books, 1976) 29. In a much earlier article, Henry Prunières had also drawn attention to Hegel's resounding with the symbolist aesthetic, noting that the philosopher drew attention to the "natural relation between the image and the thing signified, and this relation it is that constitutes the symbol. See Henry Prunières, "Musical Symbolism", *Musical Quarterly*, 19/i (1933), 18.

¹⁴ Janet Schmalfeldt, "Form as the Process of Becoming: The Beethoven-Hegelian Tradition and the "Tempest" Sonata", in *Beethoven Forum*, vol. 4, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 37–71.

¹⁵ Greenbaum, "Debussy", 343.

¹⁶ Jarociński, *Debussy*, 89–90. See also Elizabeth McCombie, *Mallarmé and Debussy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xii. David Code also writes on the association between Debussy and Mallarmé in his analysis of the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'une faune*. David J. Code, "Hearing Debussy Reading Mallarmé: Music après Wagner in the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'une faune*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 54 (3) (2001), 493.

¹⁷ James A. Hepokoski, "Formulaic Openings in Debussy", *19th Century Music*, VIII/i (1984), 52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

chords are employed in order to create a “psychologically modern” effects.¹⁹ Such “mysterious” elements could well be associated with the Symbolist aesthetic due to its religious or magical connotations, as Jarociński observes.²⁰

In light of symbolism’s influence on Debussy, the claim of the Hegelian dialectic as the basis of his formal approach in the Sonata becomes more convincing.

Nevertheless, while these observations might plausibly point toward the relevance of dialectic in Debussy’s formal principles, the direct impact of Hegel’s influence upon the composer remains largely inconclusive. The philosopher’s effect on Mallarmé is far more concrete, however. In his study of Hegelian trends in France, Michael Kelly confirms that Mallarmé’s debt to Hegel has “often been evoked, and it is evident that he discussed these ideas with friends like Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, who probably introduced him to Hegel”.²¹ Furthermore, Kelly draws attention to the publication of the French new edition of Hegel’s *Aesthetik* (as *Esthétique*) in 1875, and that “its audience was no doubt maintained by the submerged but pervasive spread of Hegelian aesthetics among the symbolist writers”.²² Kelly nevertheless comments that the philosopher’s impact upon the nation had weakened during the First World War (when Debussy’s Sonata was composed), although the 1920s saw “a period of Hegelian revival”.²³

Structural Analysis

With the exemption of Hepokoski’s observations, relatively little has been written on the Sonata in depth from a purely analytical perspective. Notable exceptions include the writings of David Lewin, Richard Parks and Avo Somer. Lewin studies the movement from the perspective of “parallel voice leading”,²⁴ which is particularly applicable to the Sonata’s introductory material to which Hepokoski

¹⁹ Ibid., 54. In a later article on Debussy’s *Canope* out of the second book of *Préludes*, James Baker writes on the “voice-leading triads [that] recurs at the close in somewhat modified form [...] thus framing the structure” (see James M. Baker, “Post-Tonal Voice Leading”, in Jonathan Dunsby [ed.], *Early Twentieth-Century Music* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1993], 30), which resounds with Hepokoski’s account.

²⁰ Jarociński, *Debussy*, 26.

²¹ Michael Kelly, “Hegel in France to 1940: A Bibliographical Essay”, *Journal of European Studies*, 11/i (1981), 57–58.

²² Ibid., 57.

²³ Ibid., 42. Michael Kelly’s observation is again re-iterated in a later publication, in which he comments: “The combination of anti-German patriotism with the submergence of the socialist movement in the grand coalition of national unity ensured that Hegel once more disappeared from French intellectual life, or at least from its public expression”. Michael Kelly, *Hegel in France* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1992), 30.

²⁴ David Lewin, “Some Instances of Parallel Voice Leading in Debussy”, *19th Century Music*, 11/i (1987), 59–72.

alludes. Parks discusses the piece's metrical and phrase structural attributes,²⁵ while Somer examines the phrase structures in the late sonatas.²⁶ In fact Debussy's late style in general has become the subject of recent scholarship in this area.²⁷ Boyd Pomeroy identifies two distinct characteristics of his mature style — that of “a more refractory than ever approach to syntactical continuity of harmonic practice”, and “the emergence of a new neoclassical simplicity” as apparent in the Violin Sonata.²⁸ Pomeroy further postulates five characteristics of his tonal approach: first, the weakening of the bass progression from tonic to dominant; second, use of modality in the foreground of the work; thirdly, a distinct use of chromaticism; fourth, the emergence of non-functional diatonicism, such as pentatonicism; finally, colouristic use of chords and vocal thickness.²⁹ Several of these features are common in the Violin Sonata's configuration: the predominance of modal characteristics, as immediately evident by the “formulaic opening” progression from tonic to Dorian subdominant in the movement's introduction,³⁰ which is complemented by its retrograde in the work's conclusion. Furthermore, the lack of a final V — I resolution (in Schenkerian terms) towards the end of the movement serves as another feature of the mature style according to Pomeroy's descriptions.

As mentioned at the outset of this article, Mark DeVoto writes that the work uses a “persuasive sonata form”,³¹ however the lack of conventional expository, development and recapitulative sections suggests that the work departs from archetypal sonata form. In structural terms, the movement comprises three parts: section *A* is heard across bars 1–83, section *B* between bars 84 and 145, and the final section, *A+B*, between bars 146 and 255. The use of a three-part form is no real surprise given the fact that it is Debussy's “most favoured formal design”,³² and to a certain extent, such a tripartition may be considered as characteristic of sonata form.³³ More specifically, the structure here ostensibly relates to a type defined by Richard Parks as a “tripartite morphological plan”, in which the “last

²⁵ Richard S. Parks, “Structure and Performance: Metric and Phrase Ambiguities in the Three Chamber Sonatas”, in James R. Briscoe (ed.), *Debussy in Performance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 193–224.

²⁶ Avo Somer, “Musical Syntax in the Sonatas of Debussy: Phrase Structure and Formal Function”, *Music Theory Spectrum*, 27/1 (2005), 67–95.

²⁷ See in particular Rebecca Leydon, “Narrative strategies and Debussy's Late Style,” Ph.D. diss. (McGill University 1996); Leydon, “Debussy's Late Style and the Devices of Early Silent Cinema,” *Music Theory Spectrum*, 23 (2001), 217–241; Fulcher, “Speaking”; Wheeldon, “Debussy”.

²⁸ Boyd Pomeroy, “Debussy's tonality: a formal perspective,” in Simon Trezise (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 156.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Hepokoski, “Formulaic”, 52.

³¹ Mark DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on his Music* (Hilsdale: Pendragon Press, 2004), 191.

³² Pomeroy, “Debussy's”: 163.

³³ Sonata form's relation to ternary form can be observed in Parks's remark that the first movement of Debussy's String Quartet represents a “sonata design” that emphasizes a ternary

section synthesizes characteristic features of the first two".³⁴ Parks does not refer explicitly to any dialectical sense of synthesis in this description, yet this type can clearly be associated with the formal principles in the first movement of the Violin Sonata, as will shortly become evident.

The movement's design according to an $A B A + B$ structure demonstrates a close affinity with typical features of the Hegelian dialectic. But what exactly are the typical features of the dialectic in Hegel's terms? Ian Biddle provides a succinct explanation in his writings on the philosopher's work, stating that:

Characteristic of Hegel's philosophy is the use of dialectical forms of argument, and this is reflected in his tendency to use arguments that fall into three distinct phases. In short, the dialectic constitutes for Hegel a universal form that the human mind brings to reality: every affirmative action has its own negation, and this contradiction always implies some future resolution (often referred to as "thesis", "antithesis" and "synthesis", although he rarely used these terms himself).³⁵

In light of Hegel's theory on dialectical philosophy — opposing arguments followed by resolution — the structure of Debussy's piece gives rise to the following expression contained in Fig. 1:

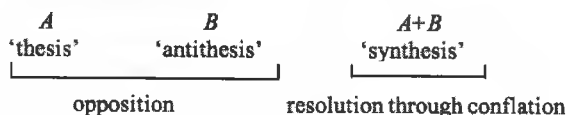


Fig. 1: Hegel's dialectics

The key of the Sonata is G minor, however it modulates to E major at the beginning of section *B*. This antithetical contrast in tonal colour is supported by a structural contrast as well, as the middle section, *B*, ostensibly makes exclusive use of Golden Section proportions as illustrated in Fig. 2.³⁶ The opening twenty-two bars of section *B* (bars 84 to 105) are subsequently repeated in C major between bars 106 and 127, and is followed by 18 bars which prepares towards the final section by moving from E-flat minor chords towards the dominant major of the opening key (thereby demonstrating an association with the middle part of a sonata-form movement).

principle of exposition — development — reprise". See Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 217.

³⁴ Ibid., 220.

³⁵ Ian Biddle, "Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich", *Grove Music Online* <<http://www.grove-music.com>> (Accessed 21 March 2006).

³⁶ Roy Howat observes that Debussy's post-1915 works tend not to make extensive use of proportional systems. See Roy Howat, *Debussy in Proportion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 162. The partial presence of such a configuration in the Violin Sonata is therefore consistent with his late style in this respect. The proportions are calculated in this analysis as follows: $62 \times 0.618 = 38.316$ (therefore the division is accurate within ± 1.684 bars).

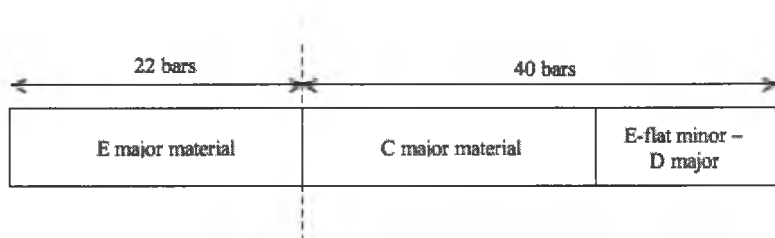


Fig. 2: Golden Section proportions in the middle section

Section *B* therefore presents a different proportional identity to its precursor. Other dissimilarities between sections *A* and *B* are apparent in terms of metre, as the former section's simple triple differs to the implied compound duple of section *B* (as provided by the piano's accompaniment); the juxtaposition of this metre with the simple duple time implied by the violin is yet another indication of contrast. Other comparisons between thesis and antithesis can be observed from a performance perspective, as the subtle ornamentation and employment of harmonics and *portamento* techniques on the violin are omnipresent in section *B* while absent in the first section. Both sections are also expressively varied: in conjunction with *rubato* indications, softer colours and a sense of tranquillity; such antithesis contradicts the passionate outbursts of the thesis.

Although the above remarks illuminate the oppositional characteristics of this binary relationship, it seems logical at this point to emphasise that in dialectical terms, a pair of opposites is always bound together by a common element. In *Natural Law* (1802–03) Hegel articulates that “everything specific is in its essence either +A or –A; and –A is indissolubly linked to +A, just as +A is to –A”.³⁷ Such a philosophy is carried over in his later manifesto *Philosophy of Right* (1821), in which the notion of negation as an inherent part of individuality or independence is stated.³⁸ Within a socio-political context, Hegel's thesis strived “to show how personal right and subjective freedom can receive real content through the institutions of the modern state”.³⁹ Hegel's thoughts on war — which he considered as representing the finity of life and material things”,⁴⁰ reverberates with the period in which Debussy's sonata was composed. Taking into account these observations, the relationship between both opening sections of the Violin Sonata — i.e. the thesis and antithesis — is therefore justifiably borne out of strong motivic connections that might well represent Hegel's notion of the “individual “being-for-itself””

³⁷ Georg W. F. Hegel, *Natural Law: the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, its Place in Moral Philosophy, and its Relation to the Positive Science of Law*, Trans. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 447.

³⁸ Idem, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 362.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

apparent during times of war.⁴¹ With the aid of semiotic representation, the following section will now demonstrate this inherent “relation-through-contrast” of sections *B* with *A*.

Applying Distributional Semiotics

The equivalence classes presented as Exs 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the main connections between *A* and *B* at the oppositional stage, which consolidates the oppositional relationship between thesis and antithesis (the thematic/motivic interaction in the final stage of the Hegelian process will be examined in due course). In addition to revealing cross-sectional connexions, Exs 1, 2 and 3 also articulate progressive motivic development at an inter-sectional level; this aspect directly relates to the earlier discussion on the phasing-in of developmental procedures within section *A* and within section *B*, as will become more apparent in a moment. While Exs 1.1 and 1.2 draw attention to the progressive development of the first subject through a semiotic distribution of the violin part, Ex. 1.3 illustrates how the second subject (yet again demonstrating inter-sectional development) accommodates the motivic derivations in their new environment. Ex. 1.3 clearly shows therefore that the Hegelian antithesis is strongly related to its thesis, as is required by any binary opposition.

As shown in the first equivalence class, the first subject material is initially introduced and subsequently developed: the descending arpeggiation of thirds contained in segment **[a]** immediately give rise to the subsequent version in **[a¹]**, developed as a result of sequential repetition and rhythmic variation (the tied crotchet being replaced by a crotchet rest). Segment **[b]** first presents an intervallic fourth (as an octave-complement of the intervallic 5th present in **[a]**, and thus inherently bound by the preceding material), filled with a stepwise progression, leading to another replication (albeit elaborated) of the descending thirds, in the form of eb^1-c^1-a . An arpeggio tonic chord that ultimately rests on the subdominant follows this. The c^1 pitch gives rise to the transposed version of segment **[b]** in **[b¹]**; this phrase is modified by the replacement of the intervallic third with a descending fifth in the second bar. An ascending triad in the final bar of **[b¹]** assimilates the motion in its directly preceding vertical equivalent (varied by rhythmic feature, as well as the addition of a concluding auxiliary note). The final segment of Ex. 1.1 exhibits how **[b²]** rhythmically relates to the preceding segment: the ascending/descending third motion in the first bar (enacted four times) draws on the dotted crotchet-quaver rhythm of the second bar of **[b¹]**. In addition to this rhythmic connexion, the repetition of f^2 in the latter segment is linked to the repetition of a in **[b]** and g in **[b¹]**. The ascending/descending motion of d^2-f^2 is developed in the

⁴¹ Ibid., 359.

x. 1.1

Ex. 1.1 shows a sequence of musical notation. It begins with a single note labeled 'a'. This is followed by a line of notes labeled 'a'' and 'b'. Below this, another line of notes is labeled 'b'' and 'b'''. Arrows point from 'a' to 'a'', from 'a'' to 'b', and from 'b'' to 'b''', indicating a progression or relationship between these elements.

Ex. 1.3

Ex. 1.3 shows a sequence of musical notation. It begins with a single note labeled 'c'. This is followed by a line of notes labeled 'c'' and 'c'''. Below this, another line of notes is labeled 'c''' and 'c''''. Arrows point from 'c' to 'c'', from 'c'' to 'c''', and from 'c''' to 'c'''', indicating a progression or relationship between these elements.

Ex. 1.2

Ex. 1.2 shows a sequence of musical notation. It begins with a single note labeled 'b'''. This is followed by a line of notes labeled 'b''', 'b''', and 'b'''. Below this, another line of notes is labeled 'b'''' and 'b'''''. Arrows point from 'b''' to 'b''', from 'b''' to 'b''', and from 'b'''' to 'b''''', indicating a progression or relationship between these elements.

subsequent bar: d^2 is replaced with c^2 thereby creating an intervallic fourth. In addition, this bar relates to its equivalent in **[b]** by rhythmic feature. The descending quavers and the reiteration/sustaining of a single pitch, bb^1 in the subsequent bars (followed by the prolonged $f\sharp^1$), forms an association with the final two bars of **[b]**. Also, the third bar of **[b²]** is connected to the third bar of **[b¹]** by the symmetrical rhythmic pattern of two quavers, a crotchet and two quavers; the auxiliary note, c^2 , at the end of this bar further reinforces the assimilation.

The Ex. 1.2 equivalence class gives insight into the various appearance of what arguably becomes the chief motive of the piece, **[b⁶]**. The first example of this motive in its veiled form, **[b²]** highlights the descending step from c^2 to bb^1 followed by a descending leap of a major third (albeit enharmonic). The subsequent segment, **[b³]**, is

a retrograded and altered version of this, as the descending major third is followed by a descending half step; the rhythmic feature of this segment has been derived from the second bar of **[b²]**, varied by the replacement of the inner crotchet for two quavers. As shown in **[b⁴]**, Debussy alternates this figuration with its major equivalent as $a\sharp^2$ creates a descending minor third. The penultimate segment is effectively an inversion of **[b²]** as the ascending step gives rise to an ascending major third. The final version, **[b⁶]**, consists of a descending step followed by a falling minor third (thereby a retrograde of **[b⁴]**); this is repeated twelve times between bar 42 and 53.

Ex. 1.3 distributes the second subject, and as shown in the first segment, **[c]**, the initial material assimilates the rhythmic attributes of **[b]** or **[b¹]**, specifically the quaver rest followed by five quavers (thereby forming a connexion with the first subject). The subsequent four quavers descending through a fourth are an inversion of the ascending fourth in **[b]**. The first 2½ bars of *B* therefore draw on the rhythmic and thematic characteristics of the first bar of **[b]** or **[b¹]**. Segment **[c¹]** is motivically derived from the preceding material, illustrating the sequenced use of the descending fourth that leads to yet another version of the motive as extracted in Ex. 1.2. The descending minor third-and-a-step is a retrograde of **[b⁶]**, though elaborated through ornamentation and the repeat of the $d\sharp^1$ pitch. It might also be suggested that this contains an inversion of the first bar of **[b²]**: $f\sharp^1-d\sharp^1 d\sharp^1-f\sharp^1$ (ornaments) as opposed to $d^2-f^2 f^2-d^2$. The descending third-and-a-step is subsequently followed by its retrograde, supplying the final three notes of **[c¹]**. The **[c¹]** segment is therefore a product of inter- and cross-sectional development.

In segment **[c²]**, the final two bars of the preceding phrase are repeated and further extended by the tied crotchet: this leads to sequenced and rhythmically diminished versions as shown in **[c³]** and **[c⁴]** (thereby a developmental progression principally within the antithesis, but also deriving from the thesis's **[b⁴]** segment). The final segment of Ex. 1.3 illuminates how the parallel-fifth dotted minims are motivically related to the preceding material: the initial rising step in **[c⁴]**, for example, is inverted in **[c⁵]**, while the second bar of the final segment enacts an inversion of the ascending third, in an attempt to reach c^1 .

The equivalence classes of Exs 2 and 3 are chiefly concerned with the development of thematic material in accompaniment figurations. As shown in Ex. 2, the groups of three minims in the opening violin statement, **[a]**, are replicated in the descent through a third in the piano part of bars 34–39 as shown in **[d]**. Additionally, this hemiola pattern is also audible in the transitional violin passage (bars 72–76) as shown in **[d¹]**. In segment **[e]** of Ex. 3, one can observe how the rest and five quaver pattern employed in sections *A* and *B* (in segments **[b]** and **[c]** respectively) also forms an accompaniment figuration to **[c⁵]**; this being the second (and shorter) part of the Golden Section-proportioned second subject material. This figuration is subsequently developed into the quintuplet figuration of the codetta, **[f]**, which is a transposed version of **[e]** (transposed down an octave and a semitone, with the omission of the final e^1).

Ex. 2

Ex. 3

Towards a Resolution

In the third and final section, the ultimate “resolution” is achieved through conflation of the preceding subject matter. The concluding section begins with the merging of a quintuplet figuration derived from [**f**] with initial fragments of the first subject (comparable to [**a**] and [**a**¹] in Ex. 1.1) heard an octave above the original. In fact, the groups of three minims in the melodic component of bars 149–56 are complete — in segment [**a**¹], the *g*¹ pitch was not tied across the bar. Consequently, this is an example of resolution in the final section, based on merger and completion.

The syntax of the first subject material is subsequently interrupted by the interpolation of second subject material relating to [**c**⁵]. As shown in Ex. 4, the resumed recapitulation of [**b**¹] is represented by [**g**], wherein bar 170 onwards is accompanied by a figuration comprising two sets of three quavers that originate in the accompaniment of section *B* as presented in segment [**h**]. The synthesis presented here is therefore characterised by compression and combination. Fol-

Ex. 4

lowing the sustained $f^{\sharp 1}$ in bars 179–80, Debussy develops the codetta material; Ex. 5 demonstrates the original use and the subsequent variants. Segment $[i^1]$, as heard in bars 181–2, represents the violin part, in conjunction with the piano's accompaniment (this is subsequently followed by imitation of the phrase in the piano's inner treble voice). As shown in segment $[i^2]$, the motive is rhythmically augmented and juxtaposed with an inverted version in the lowest register of the bass clef, while the upper bass voice articulates a syncopated $e^{\flat 1}$.

Ex. 5

Not shown in Ex. 5, the rising/falling intervallic second is also heard in the false recapitulation of $[a]$ material from bar 195 forwards, merged with the sustained $e^{\flat 1}$ in the violin. Furthermore, in bar 208, the violin articulates this motive as a residue of the sustained $e^{\flat 1}$ of bars 206–8 (thematic material emerging from an earlier sustained pitch is characteristic of this movement). The synthesis here is essentially by conjunction.

The movement's conclusion provides further examples of motivic development and of conflation: as shown in segment $[j]$ of Ex. 6, the rising/falling quaver thirds are intervallically related to the first bar of $[b^2]$ while the rhythmic values comprising four quavers are reminiscent of the c^2 - f^2 f^2 - c^2 progression that have been vertically aligned. The prolonged g that extends over three bars is of identi-

Ex. 6

cal length to the prolonged $f\sharp^2$ at the end of the [b²] segment. Ex. 6 also shows the descending third-and-a-step in the lowest treble clef (thereby a conflation of two first subject motives). This motion is then developed by rhythmic augmentation (tied crotchets) and connected by an $a\flat$ pitch to a retrograde version that is simultaneously performed by the violin. The obstinate repetition of this retrograde version in bars 233–6 promotes further intensification.

Ex. 7



The *molto sostenuto* coda draws out the phrase illustrated in segment [i] of Ex. 5, performed an octave and a semitone above this version; also, the *portamento* slides through a semitone rather than a tone. This motive is subjected to additive and rhythmically augmentative techniques promoting organic growth, while also exuding an improvisatory character. The $e\sharp$ contained in the piano's emphatic chords at this point is harmonically significant: its appearance resolves its conspicuous absence since bars 185–94. As shown in [k] of Ex. 7, the penultimate set of two bars is a retrograded and rhythmically diminished version of the progression in bars 5–9; in addition, the C minor triad in the coda differs from the major version heard in the introduction (segment [I]). Furthermore, the $E\flat$ minor triad of the introduction is replaced with a major version in the coda.

Conclusions

Now that the piece has been discussed from the perspective of distributional analysis — both in relation to dialectical principles — certain key findings can be drawn from this study in conclusion. Mark DeVoto's claim that the work reflects a "persuasive sonata form" cannot be maintained with any great deal of authority, as Debussy largely avoids a formalist approach in the first movement of the Sonata. The formal description of the work conforms with Richard Parks's "tripartite morphological plan" — this morphology can be associated with the

organicism of a Hegelian and Symbolist approach, and an attempt to elucidate upon the germination of Debussy's musical ideas has been supported by the use of distributional diagrams presented during the course of this article. The use of such an approach has demonstrated the strong bond between the first and second subject in section A, and also Debussy's various strategies of synthesis in the final section: namely merger and completion techniques, compression, combination and conjunction.

In conclusion, Debussy's conscious effort to avoid Teutonic principles has paradoxically brought his work closer to Germanic thinking. Amid a time of personal and social conflict for the composer, one could ultimately compare his approach to that of the Hegelian "free spirit" — a free spirit that transcends political boundaries by its occupation of a neutral ground. Whether or not this demonstrated a conscious effort to reflect Hegel's philosophical principles remains unsolved. One could equally see Debussy's use of Golden Section proportions and the mystery of such structural configurations as a Symbolist gesture. More certain, however, is the fact that the presentation of a thesis and a subsequent antithetical section clearly leads to a resolution of the *dialectique* in the first movement of this Sonata.

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