

# Towards a possible reinterpretation for the opening theme and two related areas in the Variations and the coda of the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 57

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After examining the manuscript to the second movement of Beethoven's Appassionata Sonata Op. 57, I have come to believe that there exist striking examples of manuscript misreadings in three passages from the famous second movement. The areas in question are mm. 6-7, mm. 62-63 and mm. 86-87

For many years, I have presented the opening passage of the movement in my Harmony classes to discuss the wonderful example of "parallel fifths" seen between measures 6 and 7:

**Example 1** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm.1-8 as traditionally seen:

**Andante con moto.**



The image shows a musical score for the first eight measures of the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 57. The tempo is marked 'Andante con moto.' The score is in 2/4 time and F major. It begins with a piano introduction marked 'p e dolce' and 'sf'. The right hand plays a series of chords, and the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment. The score ends with a repeat sign.

Beethoven mitigates the pure parallel fifth somewhat by treating one of the fifths as a doubly-augmented fourth with the enharmonic spelling E-Bbb to Eb-Ab:

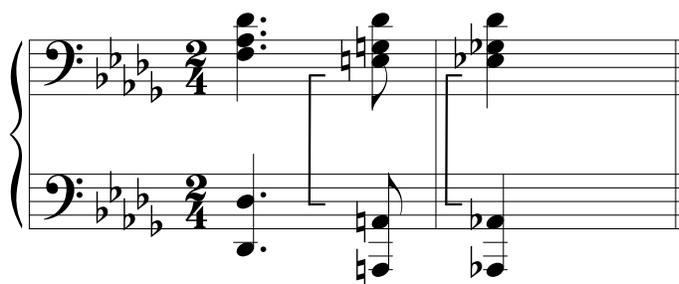
**Example 2** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm.6-7:



The image shows a musical score for measures 6-7 of the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 57. The score is in 2/4 time and F major. It shows a parallel fifth interval between the two staves, with the right hand playing a chord and the left hand playing a chord. The interval is a parallel fifth, with the right hand playing a chord of F major and the left hand playing a chord of C major.

While this may hide at least notationally the parallel fifths, acoustically, the intervals are clearly heard as consecutive fifths slipping a half-step down:

**Example 3** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm.6-7 enharmonically rewritten:



The image shows a musical score for measures 6-7 of the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 57, showing the enharmonically rewritten parallel fifth interval. The score is in 2/4 time and F major. It shows a parallel fifth interval between the two staves, with the right hand playing a chord and the left hand playing a chord. The interval is a parallel fifth, with the right hand playing a chord of F major and the left hand playing a chord of C major.

This is indeed a rare example in Beethoven's work of pure, unmitigated acoustic consecutive fifths. Even the enharmonic respelling of Beethoven's is debatable as he himself contradicts the Bbb spelling in the first variation of the theme respelling it here simply as an A-natural:

**Example 4** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 17-25



(Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig edition)

In the above passage, the parallel fifths are notational as well as acoustic. Here however, they are masked by the suspended A-natural offsetting the second interval of the fifth by an eighth-note:

**Example 5** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 22-23



Yet why does Beethoven decide to spell the identical harmonies in two different ways? There is little reason to do this as the passages are essentially the same and the respelling seems to fall into a curiosity.

Furthermore, given paucity of ancillary marking in the first 8 bars of the pieces (in the first edition, there exists only the indication of *Piano e dolce*, the *sforzando/piano* in measure 5 and a slur over the last falling scale notes in m.8), why would Beethoven suddenly indicate slurs in the left hand from the Bbb's to the Ab's in mm.6-7? And if this articulation is intentional, making for a striking legato effect in the left hand, why would it not be indicated again between measures 22 and 23?

These questions led me to examine the manuscript which exists at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and is easily available online through the library's own beautifully digitized collection. In fact this issue of re-spelling, which brought me to a careful examination of the manuscript, has allowed me to discover some issues which may have serious implications for how this famed movement might be performed in the future.

**Example 6** Manuscript page of Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 1-24bis



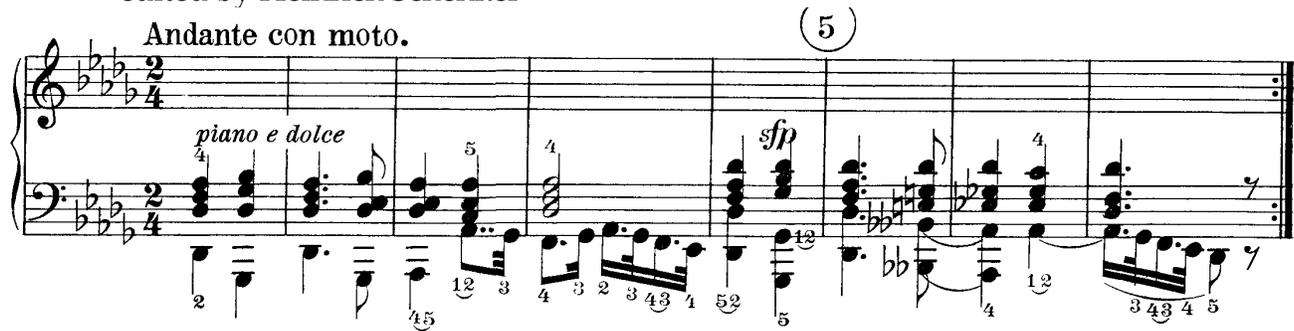
A word about the manuscript itself is necessary before proceeding. We know that the first eight bars of the 2nd movement have been recopied by a hand most likely not Beethoven's. The manuscript, most probably was damaged by water (to wit the other water stains throughout the manuscript). The hand seems clean and professional and indicates that no novice was recopying these measures, but rather someone who knew the music well and was recopying as faithfully as possible what was there originally in Beethoven's hand. I say this because of the unusual copying of all the music into the lower staff alone, something a mere copyist or novice would most likely not have done.

Regardless of what one thinks of the accuracy of the recopied area, the same issue, namely the question of whether Beethoven is creating an enharmonic tie from Bbb to A natural between mm. 6 and 7, can be found again in mm 86-87 of the same movement (folio 28) and this time in Beethoven's *own* hand (see example 16).

Looking carefully at the chord on the last eighth-beat of measure 6, one can unmistakably see what appear to be two ties across the bar from two Bbb's to what seem to be two Ab's in the following measure. What could this mean?

It is my belief that Beethoven did not write what most editions have as published:

**Example 7** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 1-8 Universal Editions 1918  
edited by Heinrich Schenker



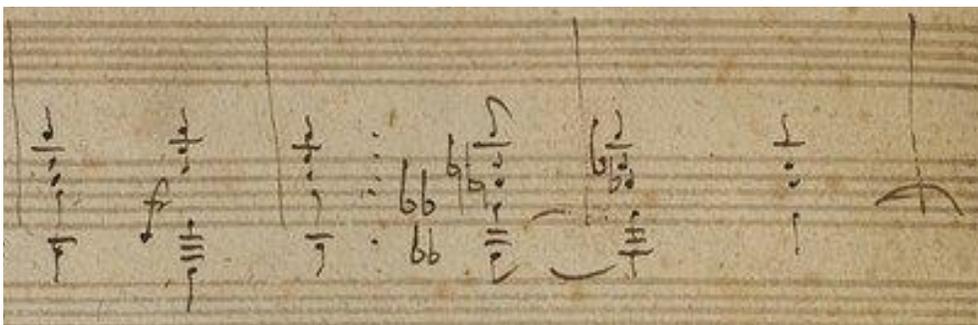
Rather, I propose that a confluence of several unclear issues in the manuscript made further unclear by the first edition, combined with Beethoven's complex use of enharmonic compositional devices throughout the sonata, has led to a significant mis-reading of the composer's original intentions for the passage.

Beethoven's use of enharmonics as an important compositional tool for organization is clear throughout this sonata. It is not my intention here to make a thorough analysis of such a claim in this paper. One needs only to point out in the first movement for example, the sforzando/piano arrival of a first inversion Fb major chord in measure 26, followed by the even stranger arrival of the opening motive in E major (the sonata is in F minor after all) seen in mm. 67-78, to bear witness to the fact that Beethoven is indeed working out complex enharmonic relationships throughout the Sonata.

With regard to the opening theme of the second movement, it is my belief that Beethoven decides to spell the lower pitches as Bbb in m. 6 to highlight the phrygian 6th of the key (lowered 6th degree) moving to the Ab (dominant) in measure 7. Then, through his compositional design of enharmonic relationships, Beethoven ties the Bbb's enharmonically to A naturals in measure 7 before yielding to the Ab Dominant Seventh chord on beat 2 of m.7.

Yet, in the manuscript, he felt no need to indicate the natural signs (they would have been courtesy accidentals anyway-- something a messy manuscript composer such as Beethoven would most likely never had included).

**Example 8** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 5-7



Then on beat 2 of measure 7, Beethoven reaches a regular dominant seventh chord (Ab-C Eb-Gb) which would in his mind again not need any accidentals since these pitches exist naturally in the key signature. Since he saw no naturals in the measure, he saw no need to remind us of the Ab on beat 2. This too would have been a courtesy accidental (see above example of the manuscript).

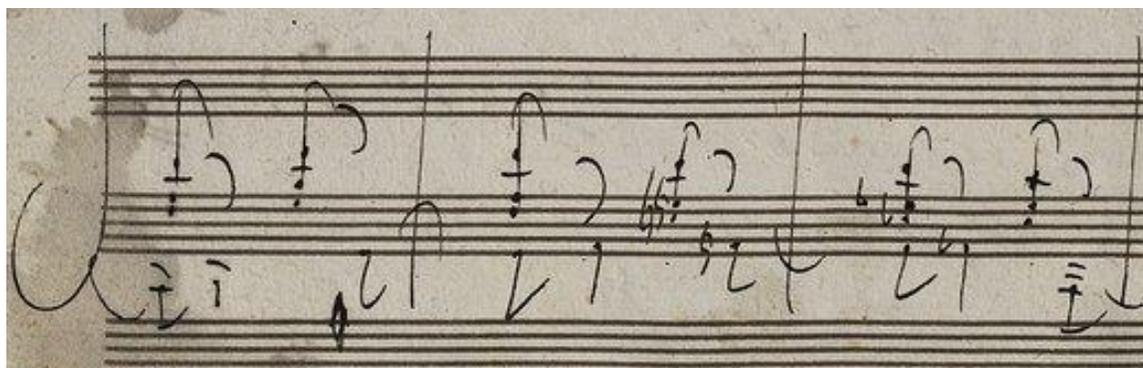
In the similar musical situation where the A is indicated as natural (see measure 21) then Beethoven is reminded to indicate a flat in the following measure to remind us that the A in measure 23 is indeed flat:

**Example 9** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 20-22



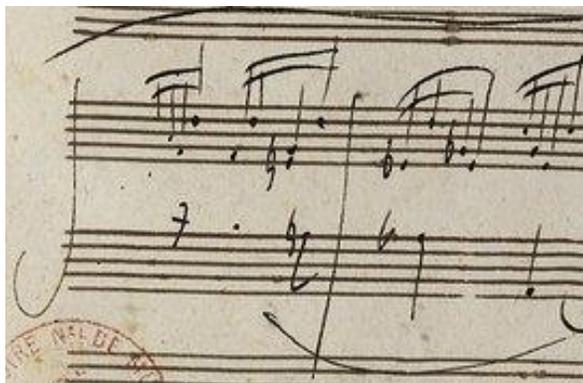
The above is as it appears in the manuscript:

**Example 10** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 20-22



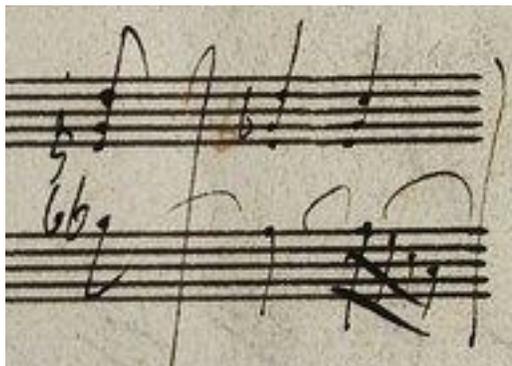
With regard to accidentals, it is evidently clear throughout the manuscript of this movement that Beethoven is prone to obvious errors of spelling owed to forgetfulness. In variation 2 (m. 38) Beethoven forgets the G-natural accidental (an important chromatic pitch, not a courtesy accidental):

**Example 11** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 38-39



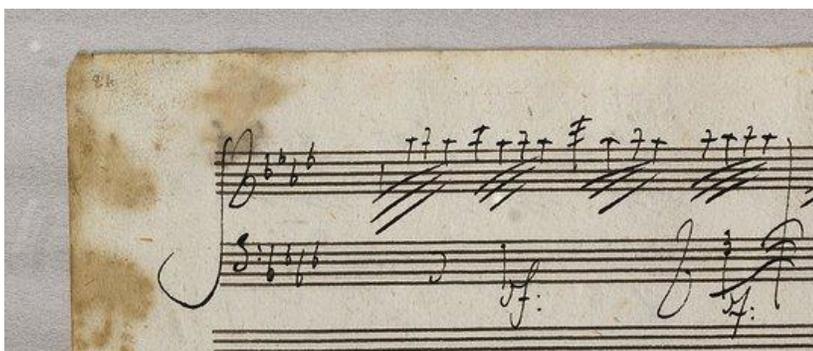
He does this again at the return of the theme (m.86):

**Example 12** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 86

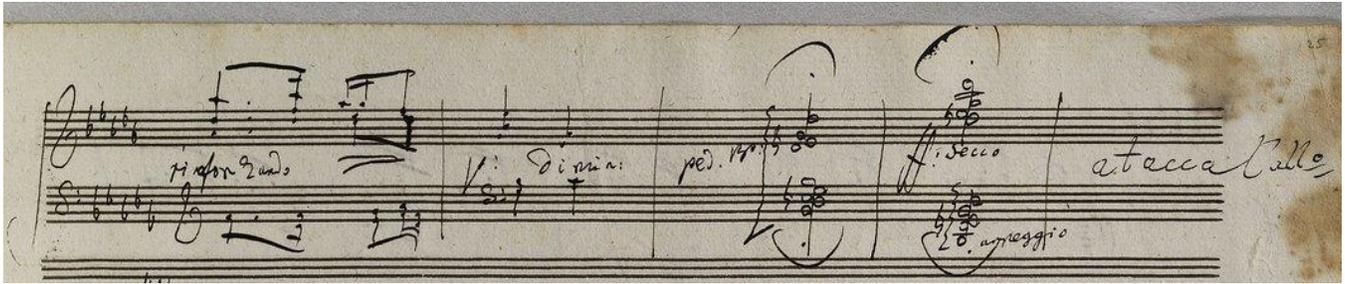


Furthermore, while for the first 3 pages of the manuscript to this movement Beethoven maintains the correct key signature of 5 flats, he seems to forget the Gb in the key signatures at the head of pages 4 and 5 of the movement only to return to the 5-flat key signature atop of page 6 of the movement (in fact the last 4 measures of the movement before the "atacca" (sp.). Provided here are examples of the key signatures for pages 5 and 6:

**Example 13a** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 Top of page 5 (folio 28)



**Example 13b** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 Top of page 6 (folio 29)



Sadly, the first edition only helps to muddy the waters even further with yet more confusing and impossible misprints added. Following is a list of a few such errors:

- A missing G-natural in R.h. chord m.6
- A missing G-natural in R.h. m. 38
- An added E-flat in R.h. m. 62  
(a serious error since it appears as an E-natural in the manuscript)
- A missing G-natural in R.h. m. 86

It is not without merit to suggest that the re-spelling of the A-natural in measure 6 to a Bbb might have been a result of a later rethinking by Beethoven of the passage. It is clear from the manuscript that the first 8 measures of the movement were cut out from the original manuscript page, re-written onto new pieces of manuscript paper and pasted into the manuscript:

**Example 14** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 of page 1 (folio 24)



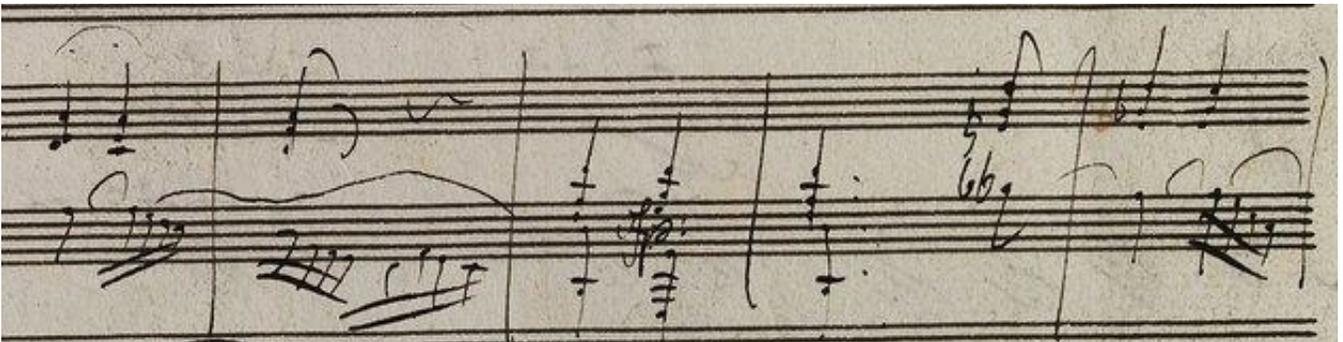
As pointed out above, the corollary passage in the first variation (measures 16-24) exist on the original manuscript page and bears the A-natural to Ab in the lower voice (measures 21-22):

**Example 15** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 21-25 (folio 24)



This progression from A-natural to Ab is maintained in the manuscript throughout the variations except at the final return of the theme at the end of the movement. By m. 86-87 in the manuscript, Beethoven has clearly come to think of the a-natural as a Bbb:

**Example 16** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 83-87 (folio 28)



Would it not be plausible then to suggest that Beethoven, in rewriting the passage (one can hardly imagine that the original opening 8 measures which had been cut out of the manuscript, would be substantially different from the pasted-in version), rethought the enharmonic play of the Sonata as he had come to realize it by mm. 86-87 and rewrote the original A-naturals in m.6 as a Bbb's tied to A-naturals in m. 7? Beethoven would most likely not write in courtesy naturals for these A's on beat one of measure 7. Furthermore, since he saw no accidentals prior to beat two of that measure he thus saw no need to indicate a flat for the Ab on that beat.

It is also worth noting how consistent Beethoven is when writing his slurs and ties. Slurs, are always *above* the notes he is slurring whereas his ties are always *between* the notes he is tying. (see example 10, 11, 15, 16 for some examples of slurs and ties)

It is my guess as a composer that in the cut-out version, there was likely little change to the actual first 8 measures of the movement, save for the re-spelling of the A-naturals in measure 6 as two Bbb's. But until we find the original part of the manuscript page that was cut out and replaced by the recopied version, this will remain a delicious and unprovable speculation.

What is more astounding is that looking at the first edition of the Sonata published in 1807 we see that the engravers tried to honor Beethoven's notation as clearly as is possible (note the ties between the notes from measures 6 to 7):

**Example 17** First Edition Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 1-8



These tie figures are faithful to those seen in the manuscript even though as mentioned above, a new error is introduced in the publication by not putting a natural on the G in the right hand of measure 6. This G-natural is clearly present in the manuscript.

The confluence of errors, those of omission, of habit and of rapidity made by Beethoven in his manuscript combined with the added errors of the first edition seem to create a perfect storm for later editions to write the passage as it is commonly known (see above Examples 1 and 7).

I am not a musicologist, and therefore cannot make claims for the thoroughness of the historical aspects of the Sonata's genesis. Still, so far as we know, for this Sonata, there exists only the manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the first edition made by *Le Bureau des Arts et d'Industrie in Vienna* (1807). Also, there exists a corrected proof copy of the first edition in Vienna, but this contains but a few, mostly minor, corrections made by Beethoven.<sup>1</sup> Finally, for this movement, only scant sketchbook material exists (see Mendelssohn sketchbook 15)<sup>2</sup> making it impossible to make definitive claims as to the notational errors I am suggesting.

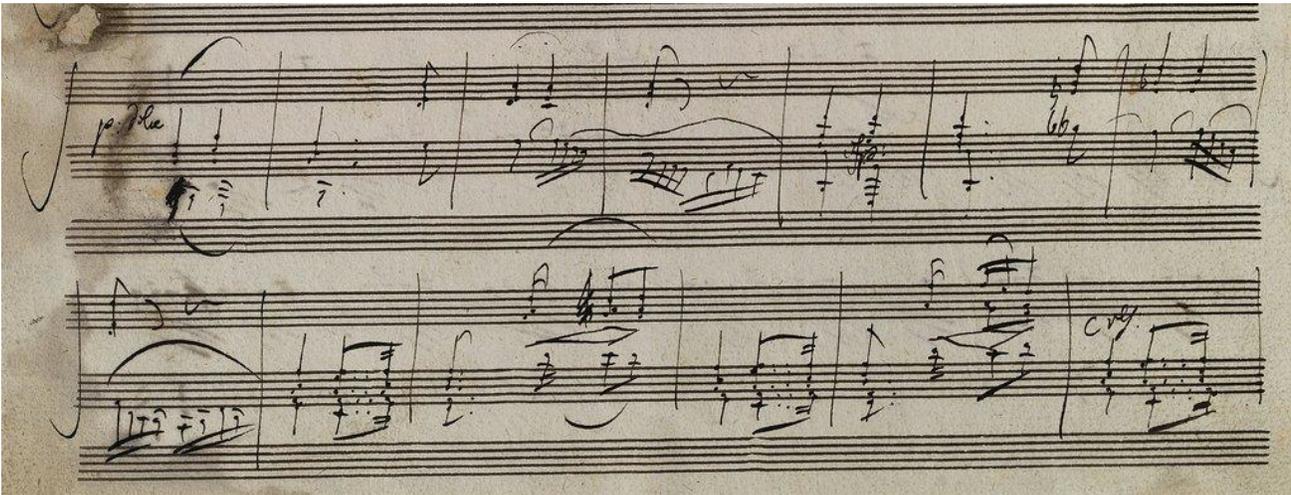
Related to this is also the fact that for this Sonata, Beethoven apparently had to deal with a copyist not familiar to him.<sup>3</sup>

In truth, it could be the very fact that there is such a lack of documentary clarity that might in part explain why mis-readings of such magnitude could actually have slipped through everyone's attention, including Beethoven's and thus never be actually noticed until now.

.../...

The Coda of this movement also clearly bears witness to this enigmatic and confusing issue of whether Beethoven meant for a slur or a tie from the Bbb to the A(b?) in the following measure:

**Example 18** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 81-93 (folio 28)



Comparing the “slurs” generally in the excerpt, it seems fairly clear that the symbol between measures 86 and 87 is a tie (albeit an enharmonic tie) and *not* a slur. The slurs are generally thicker and for longer sets of notes and do not sit *between* notes but rather *above* or *below* notes and stems. Once again, especially in a manuscript, there would be most likely no indication of an A- natural here as this would be a courtesy accidental.

The first edition rather ambiguously suggests the tie rather than slur as well:

**Example 19** First Edition Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 79-97



This again suggests a re-thinking of the passage such that one holds the Bbb turned A-natural then begins the gentle slurred arpeggio from a Gb (an augmented second away from the A-natural):

**Example 20** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 81-88 with clarification of mm. 86-87

mm.81-88

The musical score for Example 20 consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 81-84, and the second system covers measures 85-88. The right hand features chords and melodic lines, while the left hand has a more active, rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include *p dolce* and *sfp*.

This reading allows for a much less affirmative, more gentle and colored cadence at the end of the return of the theme. To my ears it is more subtle and “Beethovenian” cadence and it avoids the overt parallel fifths which again I believe are not what Beethoven intended.

In fairness to all possible readings, one must point out that Beethoven does permit the parallel fifths to be heard fairly clearly in the second variation (mm.38-39), but here, the sixteenth-note passagework makes their occurrence fleeting and rather less obvious than in the chordal passages mm. 6-7 and mm. 86-87 where there is nothing else going to on obfuscate the parallelism.

One final area must be discussed. It is more involved but nonetheless a fairly clear misreading of the manuscript. Measures 62-63 are traditionally played this way:

**Example 21** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 62-63

The musical score for Example 21 consists of two systems of music. The right hand features a complex sixteenth-note passagework with fingerings 1, 4, 2, 1, 5. The left hand features chords with dynamics *sf* and *f*, and fingerings 1, 4, 2, 3, 1.

This is indeed how the passage is presented to us in the first edition:

**Example 21** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 61-63 First Edition



Yet in the manuscript a much more unclear situation is presented to us:

**Example 22** Manuscript Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 60-67 (folio 27)



The two measures in question span a system change. Beethoven has begun a set of quarter-note syncopations in the left hand beginning in bar 61. Looking closely at the first bar of the second system, Beethoven has included a treble clef followed by three eighth note Ab's the first of which is up an octave from the next two.

In the manuscript at least, it seems clear that there is no Ab on the first eighth-beat of the measure. Furthermore, judging by the line up of right hand and left hand materials, the first upper Ab is to be played on the second eighth beat of the measure and that there is only one.

What could this mean? I believe Beethoven meant to tie the A-natural of the previous bar to the first eighth beat of bar 63. Since it spanned the system change, he forgot to put in the tie and the eighth-note A-natural in bar 63. Hence I propose that Beethoven meant:

**Example 23** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 61-64 with clarification of downbeat  
m. 63

The image shows a musical score for Example 23, which is a clarification of the downbeat in measure 63 of the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 57. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows measures 61 and 62, and the second system shows measures 63 and 64. The music is in 2/4 time and B-flat major. The right hand plays a complex rhythmic pattern with syncopations, while the left hand provides a bass line with dynamic markings such as *sf* and *f*. The score includes a variety of note values, rests, and articulation marks.

This would continue the syncopations in a completely natural way and of course, once again avoid the obvious sonority of the parallel fifths: A-E to Ab-Eb across the bar.

It is interesting to note that in the proof copy of the first edition housed in Vienna at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (Brahms Nachlass VII. 45363), Beethoven corrects the E-natural in m. 62 (beat 4 rh) to an Eb. Barry Cooper points this out in the commentaries for the Op 57 sonata Vol 3 of *The 35 Piano Sonatas* published by ABRSM in 2007.<sup>1</sup> Though this may seem to contradict my own suggestion, on the contrary, it seems to confirm Beethoven's desire to get rid of the parallel 5ths that the first edition had owing to the E-natural to Eb between m. 62 and 63. Since Beethoven most likely did not have the manuscript to consult, he saw only the A-natural to Ab in the left hand of mm 62-63 as printed in the first edition, and sought to fix the parallel fifths that these create with the E-natural to Eb in the right hand. Had he consulted the manuscript, he might have remembered the syncopations that he created in m. 62 into m 63 (as I am suggesting) which avoid the parallel fifths as well.

In conclusion, though it changes how we have learned to know these famous passages of this movement, I propose that Beethoven intended mm 62-63 and mm. 86-87 to be as I have indicated above (see examples 20 and 23) and mm. 6-7 to be as follows:

**Example 24** Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57 Mvt. 2 mm. 1-8 with clarification of mm. 6-7  
*Andante con moto*

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 7. The left hand plays a series of chords, starting with an augmented sixth chord (F major with a raised fourth) in measure 1, which resolves to a dominant seventh chord (C major with a lowered second) in measure 7. The right hand plays a melodic line with ties between measures 6 and 7. The second system contains measure 8, which is a repeat of the first measure of the first system.

In this solution, the obvious parallel fifths are not heard directly because the Bass motion is delayed by the ties. This solution also explains the unusual double tie/slur gestures seen in both manuscript and first editions between measures 6 and 7. I propose that they are not slurs, but rather that they are in fact ties, just as similar markings are considered everywhere else in the manuscript. This more elegant solution is maintained in measure 21-22 as is correctly transcribed in standard editions.

In each of these three cases, though each is for sure notationally unclear or confusing, there seems to be solid evidence from the manuscript for Beethoven's avoidance of the parallel fifths caused by the direct shift from the beautiful German Augmented Sixth chord to the Dominant seventh chord (with 4-3 suspension above) and with the exception of mm. 38-39, it seems clear that the composer wishes this avoidance of such blatant parallel fifths.

Finally, I believe the solutions proposed are entirely plausible, elegant and "Beethovenian" in quality and flavor, otherwise none of these speculations would be indeed helpful, useful or productive. In the absence of musicological proof that the habitual ways of performing these three passages of the second movement of Beethoven's Op. 57 piano sonata are indeed correct, it is my hope that pianists will consider the possibility of performing the movement with these proposed changes and hence bring back an important detail written by the master which seems to have been lost to time, error and habit.

Philip Lasser  
 September 27, 2012  
 (revised in 2018)

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## Notes and Sources

Ex. 1, 2, 4

Beethoven, L. van. *Sonate für das Pianoforte Op. 57*. 1804-06. Leipzig. Breitkopf und Härtel, Beethoven Werke series 16 # 146,1862-1890. p. 14 (178). Print.

Ex. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11,12,13a, 13b, 14, 18

Beethoven, L. van. "Appassionata Sonata Op. 57" manuscript in Beethoven's hand, 1804-1806, Collection Manuscripts, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France. f.24.

Digitized version downloaded 9/25/12 from [www.gallica.bnf.fr](http://www.gallica.bnf.fr)

URL <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b72003116/f24.image#>

Ex. 7, 21

Beethoven, L. van. *Sonata Op. 57*. 1804-06. Vienna. Universal Editions, edited by Heinrich Schenker, 1918 p. 430.

Ex 17, 19, 21

Beethoven, L. van *Sonata Op. 57*. 1804-1806. Vienna. Bureau des Arts et d'Industrie, 1807. p. 14 Plate 521

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[http://www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de/sixcms/detail.php?](http://www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de/sixcms/detail.php?id=15248&template=dokseite_digitales_archiv_en&_eid=&_ug=Pieces%20for%20two%20hands&_werkid=57&_dokid=T00011787&_opus=op.%2057&_mid=Works%20by%20Ludwig%20van%20Beethoven&suchparameter=&_sucheinstieg=&_seite=1)

[id=15248&template=dokseite\\_digitales\\_archiv\\_en&\\_eid=&\\_ug=Pieces%20for%20two%20hands&\\_werkid=57&\\_dokid=T00011787&\\_opus=op.%2057&\\_mid=Works%20by%20Ludwig%20van%20Beethoven&suchparameter=&\\_sucheinstieg=&\\_seite=1](http://www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de/sixcms/detail.php?id=15248&template=dokseite_digitales_archiv_en&_eid=&_ug=Pieces%20for%20two%20hands&_werkid=57&_dokid=T00011787&_opus=op.%2057&_mid=Works%20by%20Ludwig%20van%20Beethoven&suchparameter=&_sucheinstieg=&_seite=1)

Footnotes:

1. Beethoven, L. van *The 35 Piano Sonatas*. Edited by Barry Cooper. London: Association Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 2007, p. 8
2. Frohlich, Martha. *Beethoven's "Appassionata" sonata*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1991.
3. Ludwig van Beethoven *Briefwechsel Gesamtausgabe*, Volume 1, Letter No. 218, p. 252-25