

Early Exploration of Heroism: Motivic Tension and Dramatic Expression in the First Movement of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Sonata (Op. 10 No. 1)

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Abstract. This study examines the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 1 in C minor, Op. 10, No. 1, focusing on the generative logic of early “heroism” and its pathways of musical expression. It employs both documentary analysis and score-based analysis. Documentary analysis is used to trace the context of Beethoven's early compositions, the theoretical definition of “heroism,” and research findings on sonata form, thereby establishing a robust theoretical foundation. Score analysis concentrates on the movement's pivotal sections, elucidating the pathways for constructing motivic tension and the mechanisms for achieving dramatic expression. The research reveals that this movement employs the classical sonata form as its framework. It utilizes leaping intervals and rhythmic conflicts to shape motivic tension, while relying on harmonic color variations and structural progression to intensify drama. This movement distills the early heroism core of “struggle and transcendence,” serving as the central vehicle for Beethoven's stylistic transformation in his early period. This study provides concrete case examples and methodological references for analyzing the dramatic elements of Classical piano sonatas, enriching the research dimensions on the origins of Beethoven's “heroism” style, and offering reliable theoretical support for the performance and interpretation of his works.

Keywords: The First movement of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Sonata (Op. 10 No. 1), heroism, motivic tension, dramatic expression

1. Introduction

The late 18th-century French Revolution gave rise to the ideals of “liberty, equality, fraternity,” profoundly reshaping the spiritual core of Classical music. Beethoven, in his early transformative phase, was breaking away from traditional compositional paradigms to explore individual expression. Current scholarship on his “heroism” style primarily focuses on his mature middle-period works, leaving a gap in the specialized analysis of heroism seeds emerging in his early piano sonatas. “Heroism,” with its core essence of resistance and transcendence, manifests tangibly through motivic tension and dramatic expression, serving as the central artistic identifier of his music. This research aims to fill the academic void, enrich the genealogy of music historiography, and provide theoretical support for performance practice. Taking the first movement of Beethoven's

Op. 10 No. 1 as its subject, this paper employs documentary analysis and score analysis to systematically explore the musical construction pathways and values of his early heroism.

1.1. Definition of terms

The First movement of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Sonata (Op. 10 No. 1): The first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 10 No. 1, composed between 1796 and 1798, stands as a representative work of his early transition toward a personalized style. Employing classical sonata form, this movement utilizes a concise, forceful motif as its primary developmental material. Through tonal contrasts, sudden dynamic shifts, and tightly woven rhythmic progression, it constructs musical tension propelled by rhythm, intervals, and harmony. This movement serves as an early exploration of Beethoven's "heroism" musical character and stands as a crucial case study for examining the dramatic expression found in Classical piano sonatas.

Heroism: The defining spiritual quality that runs through his works, shaped by both the era and his personal experiences, draws from the French Revolution's ideals of "liberty, equality, fraternity" while also incorporating his personal struggles against the hardships of fate. Structural conflicts intensify the music's tension and propulsion, as well as its progression from adversity to triumph. At its core lies a celebration of the human spirit and a pursuit of lofty ideals, becoming the key artistic identifier that bridges his music between Classicism and Romanticism.

Motivic Tension: In musicology, this refers to the internal drive and sense of tension generated when a musical motif—the smallest, most recognizable core melodic pattern—is developed through techniques such as interval leaps, rhythmic density contrasts, modal-tonal conflicts, and dynamic shifts. This serves as the core element propelling musical progression, constructing structural logic, and eliciting emotional anticipation in listeners, often laying the groundwork for subsequent thematic development and dramatic conflict.

Dramatic Expression: In the realm of music, this refers to an artistic expression that employs elements such as shifts in melodic tension, contrasts in rhythmic dynamics, clashes of harmonic color, and structural transitions to enhance emotional shifts and dramatic conflict between musical passages. It serves as one of the core techniques for shaping musical impact and amplifying expressive power, thereby conveying profound ideas or intense emotions.

1.2. Significant of study

1.2.1. Theoretical significance

This study focuses on the nascent state of "heroism" in Beethoven's early piano sonatas, filling a research gap in the connection between the technical language and spiritual core of these works. By systematically examining the intrinsic connection between motivic tension and dramatic expression, and refining the logic behind the innovative application of classical sonata form, this work provides a concrete case study for research on Beethoven's stylistic transformation. It also adds crucial evidence to the scholarly genealogy of the origin and development of "heroism," enriching the historical dimension of musicology concerning the transition from Classicism to Romanticism.

1.2.2. Practical significance

This approach helps performers grasp the hierarchical relationship between dynamics and tension, clarifying the emotional logic behind core techniques such as motif development and dynamic control. Simultaneously, it provides a clear analytical framework for music education, aiding

learners in understanding the essence and expressive techniques of early heroism music. It also offers a reference point for appreciating and researching classical piano sonatas, pedagogical application.

1.3. Research question

This essay explores the construction of the core motif in the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 5 (Op. 10 No. 1) and its role in generating musical tension, thereby functioning as a minimal musical vehicle for the germination of “heroism”.

The present study investigates how the development section attains the crucial leap from “dramatic conflict” to the “heroism” spiritual core.

By revealing the mechanisms of heroism formation across three dimensions: technique, spirit, and narrative, which aims to clarify the characteristics that defined the early explorations of heroism in this movement, as well as the significance of this exploration for Beethoven's stylistic transformation and the development of Classical music.

1.4. Research objectives

This study focuses on Beethoven's early explorations of “heroism,” selecting the first movement of Op. 10 No. 1 as its core subject. The primary reason lies in the movement's classical sonata form, which possesses a complete logical structure encompassing motif presentation, conflict progression, tension accumulation, and resolution. It serves as an excellent vehicle for conveying “motif tension” and “dramatic expression” [1]. Its abrupt, forceful motifs, frequent tonal shifts, and sudden dynamic changes directly reveal the nascent “heroism,” demonstrating strong alignment with the research theme. Other movements either emphasize lyricism or lean toward the concluding movement's resolution, leaving traces of heroism obscure. Academic discourse lacks specialized analysis of this movement's synergistic logic of “heroism—motif tension—dramatic expression.” Selecting it fills this scholarly gap, rendering it irreplaceable in research value.

1.4.1. Literature research method

This project aims to systematically collect and organize relevant academic resources from both domestic and international sources (including authoritative musical examples, core journal articles, dissertations, conference proceedings, etc.), focusing on three core directions: First, research on Beethoven's early creative background, stylistic transformation, and the theory of “heroism,” clarifying its connotations, origins, and academic controversies; Second, musicological analytical frameworks such as classical sonata form and motivic tension, refining adaptable analytical methods; Third, specialized research on Op. 10 No. 1 and contemporaneous piano sonatas, evaluating existing scholarly achievements. Subsequent steps will involve categorizing and critically evaluating literature, synthesizing scholarly perspectives through comparative analysis to establish theoretical foundations and identify research gaps. This approach enhances the academic rigor and contemporary relevance of the study, providing foundational support for defining and addressing research questions.

1.4.2. Score analysis method

Scholarship on Beethoven's piano sonatas in China has developed across multiple dimensions, with core research focusing on theoretical interpretations of “heroism,” the emotional connotations of

specific keys (such as C minor), and stylistic transformations in his early works. This has yielded a rich theoretical foundation and numerous analytical case studies. Existing research either focuses on the macro-level expression of heroism or analyzes the musical characteristics and structural logic of individual works. However, most studies tend to explore single dimensions. Specialized research that deeply integrates the “early explorations of heroism” with “motif tension” and “dramatic expression,” systematically deconstructing their intrinsic connections, remains relatively weak. There is a significant academic gap in such integrated analyses.

2. Research status

2.1. Research status in China

Research on Beethoven's piano sonatas in the Chinese academic community has developed diverse dimensions, focusing on the theoretical interpretation of "heroism", the emotional connotation of specific modes (such as C minor), and the style transformation of early works, and has accumulated a wealth of theoretical basis and work analysis cases. Existing studies have either focused on the macro expression of heroism, or analyzed the musical characteristics and structural logic of a single work, but they tend to explore from a single dimension. The special research on the deep binding and systematic deconstruction of the intrinsic relationship between "early exploration of heroism" and "motivational tension" and "dramatic expression" is still relatively weak, and there is a significant academic gap in the relevant fusion analysis [1-3].

2.2. Research status abroad

Overseas research is characterized by its focus on macro-theoretical construction and historical contextualization, emphasizing the overall positioning of Beethoven's musical style, the establishment of theoretical frameworks for heroism, and the analysis of universal sonata form techniques. It also prioritizes interpreting the formation of heroism style within historical and cultural contexts, resulting in mature and rigorous theoretical systems. However, foreign research predominantly concentrates on macro-level or universal techniques, with limited micro-level specialized analysis of this specific movement (the first movement of Op. 10 No. 1). Particularly lacking is in-depth exploration of the synergistic logic among “heroism—motivic tension—dramatic expression,” and integrated studies targeting this specific vehicle notably underrepresented in the literature [4].

2.3. Summary

Academic research on Beethoven's piano sonatas both domestically and internationally has established a macro-theoretical framework and diverse analytical dimensions. However, existing studies predominantly focus on single dimensions or generic technical explorations. Regarding the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 10 No. 1, a specialized analysis that deeply integrates the synergistic logic of “heroism early exploration,” “motif tension,” and “dramatic expression” remains an academic gap.

3. The connotation and technical construction of the "heroism nature" in the early period

3.1. Thematic background and the connotation of "heroism"

3.1.1. Creation background and work orientation

The revolutionary ideals of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” from the late 18th-century French Revolution reshaped the spiritual core of classical music. Beethoven was in a pivotal transitional phase, breaking away from the compositional paradigms of Haydn and Mozart to explore individual expression [5]. The first movement of his Piano Sonata No. 1 in C minor, Op. 10, composed between 1796 and 1798, employs the framework of classical sonata form. Through its abrupt and forceful core motif, frequent tonal shifts, and stark dynamic contrasts, it emerges as an early embodiment of “heroism” qualities. Compared to Beethoven's mature heroism works from his middle period, which have received greater scholarly attention, the nascent heroism in this movement remains under-analyzed. The connection between its technical execution and spiritual essence holds significant research value.

3.1.2. Beethoven's early period "heroism"

Beethoven's early “heroism” was not the grand epic narrative of his middle period, but rather a spiritual prototype centered on “resistance and transcendence,” encompassing dual dimensions: the historical dimension carried the revolutionary ideals of “liberty, equality, fraternity” from the French Revolution, celebrating the human spirit; the personal dimension implied his struggle against the initial signs of hearing loss, revealing an unwavering will to confront suffering head-on. Musically, this is realized through a logical chain of “motif tension accumulation—dramatic conflict intensification—emotional closure completion,” favoring a nuanced narrative of “localized resistance—phased transcendence” distinct from the grand “darkness-to-light” structure of his middle period. This definition provides a core benchmark for subsequent technical analysis.

3.2. Technical analysis of motivation tension construction



Figure 1. The core motivation of Beethoven Op.10 No.1 in the first movement (subsections 1-4)

Selecting the core motif of the movement as the subject of analysis, this motif serves as the minimal vehicle for the germination of “heroism.” Through the synergistic interplay of intervals, rhythm, and harmony, it constructs tension, laying the foundation for dramatic expression (see Figure 1).

3.2.1. Interval leaps: the source of dynamism

In the original score, the motif ascends via a perfect fifth leap from C (first octave) to G (second octave), simulating the explosive force of “resistance.” Subsequently, the intervals alternate between stepwise motion and leaps: E (C2) → C (C3): an ascending major sixth leap creating a “breakthrough sensation” [2]; Sub-sub-group C → Sub-group B: A descending minor-second step, returning to the tense harmonic context. This interval progression sustains tension, forming an “explosion-suspension” dynamic curve that implicitly embodies the heroism spirit of confronting conflict head-on. This interval design ensures the motif possesses distinct recognizability while reserving space for “escalating conflict” in subsequent developments.

3.2.2. Rhythmic conflict: the embodiment of contradiction

The dotted quarter note + sixteenth note/dotted eighth note in measure 1 (stable long-duration note + flowing short-duration note) creates a conflict with the dotted eighth note + eighth note slur in measure 2 (medium-duration staccato + explosive short-duration note). The powerful propulsion of the “repeated quarter note” in measure 3 contrasts with the soft conclusion and sustained stability of the “half note + quarter note” in measure 4, evoking “hesitation and resolve within struggle.” The contrasting rhythms generate propulsive tension within the passage, embodying the psychological tension of heroism. This treatment disrupts the regularity of classical rhythmic tradition, highlighting Beethoven's exploration of personalized emotional expression.

3.2.3. Harmonic color: accumulation and breakthrough of tension

The main section of the exposition employs a contrasting phrase + interlude structure, which clarifies the passage's hierarchical layers. Phrase A utilizes a dual-motif on the tonic chord, repeated over the dominant chord; Phrase B employs a single motif, creating a stark contrast with the preceding section. Measure 1: C minor tonic chord (C-E $\flat$ -G) on an upbeat, establishing harmonic stability and a clear tonal starting point. Measures 2-3: Harmony primarily employs “melodic subdominant extension” (expansion above the dominant note G, subdominant reinforcement via high-register minor thirds), shifting harmonic color from 'stable' to “tense.” Measure 4: Concludes with a dominant-leaning chord in an anacrusic position. The harmonic color returns from “tense” to “relatively stable,” yet retains momentum for subsequent development through tonal ambiguity, foreshadowing the unfolding “dramatic conflict.”

3.3. Dramatic conflict and the sublimation of heroism



Figure 2. Beethoven Op.10 No.1 first movement expansion (excerpts from subsections 112-124)

The development section (bars 106–168) serves as the pivotal transformative stage where “motivic tension → dramatic conflict → heroism” culminates [4]. Through multidimensional struggles involving tonality, motifs, and voice parts, it achieves a leap from technical appearance to spiritual essence (see Figure 2).

3.3.1. Motivic transformation and voice opposition: the escalation of conflict

The core motif undergoes two crucial transformations here: first, “condensation,” compressing the original four-bar motif into two bars (marked ① in Example 2). The consecutive diminished fifth intervals (e.g., C♯-G♭, G♭-D♭) serve as “conflict symbols,” while the repetition of intervals reinforces dramatic tension, building momentum for the main theme's return in the recapitulation. Second, “expansion” (② in Example 2), where the motif's contour is elongated into half notes, creating a “brief respite.” Simultaneously, the left hand employs dense sustained notes in the lower c register, while the right hand executes large leaps in the upper c register (e.g., the octave leap in measure 118), creating a spatial contrast between the “dark lower register” and the “bright upper register.” This tonal range disparity induces a sense of shifting spatiality in the listener, elevating the musical conflict from a technical level to an emotional one.

3.3.2. Tonal wandering: the embodiment of struggle scenes

This passage represents a dramatic climax of tonal shift: a sudden leap from G minor to B-flat major (the subdominant key of C minor). This “unexpected turn” in tonality mimics the abrupt twists within the struggle, intensifying the dramatic conflict within the section. Harmonically, the blurred overlap between the B-flat major dominant seventh chord and the C minor subdominant chord (as in measure 120) obscures blurred boundaries between key areas, amplifying the “uncertainty of resistance” and foreshadowing the subsequent spiritual transcendence. Frequent tonal shifts disrupt the regularity of the Classical “functional harmonic chain,” a key manifestation of its exploration toward more proactive emotional expression. This technique simulates the “complexity of the struggle's environment,” lending the dramatic conflict a vivid sense of setting. Listeners intuitively experience the emotional ebb and flow of “darkness—glimmer—darkness again.”

3.3.3. The logical transition from dramaticism to heroism



Figure 3. Beethoven Op.10 No.1 first movement reproduction section (excerpts from subsections 233-238)

Measures 215–228 function as the “pseudo-expository” section within the recapitulation, employing rigorous formal design to achieve a logical leap from the dramatic to the heroism. The original score reveals a 7+7 irregular phrase structure, breaking the 8+8 regular paradigm of the exposition's secondary section and leveraging structural imbalance to build internal momentum [6]. The tonality deviates from the main key of C minor, unfolding in the subdominant key of F major. The bright timbre creates a light-dark conflict with the main section's tragic mood, forming the core dramatic tension. Its “pseudo-recapitulation” quality breaks with classical sonata form tradition, heightening the listener's expectation for the reestablishment of the home key. Harmony is underpinned by the tonic-dominant-tonic functional circle. The incomplete cadence at bar 221 builds tension toward the implied full cadence at bar 228, while the dominant chord and chromatic bass line further accumulate latent expressive intensity. Dynamic shifts, paired with lyrical melodies in the upper-middle register and arpeggiated chord textures, allow the music to gather strength within contemplation. Through the logic of “tonal deviation-tension accumulation-structural breakthrough,” this design transforms dramatic conflict into a heroism spiritual core. It lays the groundwork for the return of the main theme and emotional outburst after measure 229, interpreting the narrative thread of a hero's quest amid adversity, struggle, and resolve, achieving a natural transition between the two (see Figure 3).



Figure 4. Beethoven Op.10 No.1 first movement reproduction section (excerpts from subsections 260-274)

The selected measures 264-267 form the dramatic core of the secondary theme's closing section: the opening C-#F augmented fourth both echoes the main theme's motif and disrupts the secondary theme's lyricism with dissonant tension, instantly pulling the listener back into the main theme's dramatic tension. Accompanied by *sf* dynamics and a “short note + block chord” texture, this interval serves both as a conflict marker and fulfills the harmonic function of “tonic → dominant” in the main key of C minor. Its combination of “interval + dynamics + texture” transforms the lyrical accumulation of the secondary theme into a heroism outburst. This section bears dual functions—structural connection and emotional transition—serving as the pivotal fulcrum for the secondary theme's progression toward the coda (see Figure 4).

3.4. Early-stage heroism exploration: multidimensional characteristics

Technical Dimension: While remaining within the overall framework of the classical sonata form, the work significantly expands the emotional capacity of this structure through “motif-driven development” (where the core motif appears in the exposition, development, and recapitulation sections) and “harmonic innovation” (frequent use of augmented triad variations and diminished

seventh chords). This allows the traditional structure to serve as an effective vehicle for expressing “heroism” sentiments.

Spiritual Dimension: The core theme of “struggle and transcendence” remains partially developed. Compared to the grand narrative of “from darkness to light” in the middle-period *Sinfonietta* (Op. 57), this movement leans more toward “localized struggle—phased transcendence” [7]: For instance, the return of the main theme in the recapitulation to C minor, with intensified dynamics and thickened texture, clearly manifests “resolve after struggle,” representing a phased embodiment of heroism spirit.

Narrative Dimension: By following the logical chain of “accumulation of motivational tension (exposition)—escalation of dramatic conflict (development)—resolution of tension (resolution),” it accomplishes an emotional narrative of “repression—struggle—resolve.” This establishes an early paradigm for heroism storytelling, laying the groundwork for the grand narratives of subsequent mature works.

3.5. Summary

This movement's exploration of heroism marked a pivotal step in Beethoven's departure from classical paradigms toward a personalized style. It provided a compositional model where the “spiritual core precedes” the transition from classical to romantic music—demonstrating that musical emotional expression could transcend traditional technical frameworks. Beginning with “motif tension,” it progressed through “dramatic conflict” to reach the core of “heroism.” Practically, technical analyses of its motivic development, dynamic control, and tonal design provide performers with theoretical foundations for emotional expression, preventing a disconnect between technique and spirit. Historically, it fills a gap in research on Beethoven's transition from the nascent to mature stages of his “heroism” style, clearly illustrating the composer's path to reshaping the boundaries of classical music through individualized creation.

4. Early "heroism": characteristics and research value

4.1. Core cognition of thematic background and the connotation of "heroism"

4.1.1. Creative context and functional orientation of works

The revolutionary ideals of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” from late 18th-century France infused classical music with a new spiritual core. At that time, Beethoven was undergoing a crucial transition, breaking free from the compositional paradigms of Haydn and Mozart to explore individual expression. The first movement of his Piano Sonata No. 1 in C minor, Op. 10 No. 1 (1796-1798), structured within the classical sonata form, became a pivotal vehicle for his early “heroism” explorations [8]. This was achieved through its concise, forceful core motif, frequent tonal shifts, and stark dynamic contrasts. Compared to the mature heroism works of his middle period that have received significant scholarly attention, incipient heroism elements. Research into the connection between its technical execution and spiritual essence holds significant value as it addresses an existing academic gap.

4.1.2. Dual dimensions of early "heroism"

Beethoven's early “heroism” was not the grand epic narrative of his middle period works, but rather a spiritual prototype centered on “struggle and transcendence,” encompassing both historical and

personal dimensions. On the historical dimension, it embodies the French Revolution's ideals of “liberty and fraternity,” celebrating the power of the human spirit. On the personal dimension, it reflects Beethoven's struggle against the early signs of hearing loss, showcasing an unwavering resolve to confront adversity head-on [9]. In musical expression, early heroism unfolds through a logical chain of “motif tension accumulation—dramatic conflict intensification—emotional closure completion,” favoring a nuanced narrative of “localized resistance—phased transcendence.” This contrasts with the grand arc of “darkness to light” characteristic of the middle period.

The compositional context of this movement, intertwined with Beethoven's personal life experiences, collectively shaped the unique essence of early “heroism.” Its dual-dimensionality coupled with intricate narrative provides crucial reference points for subsequent technical analysis.

4.2. Technical pathways and core logic of motivic tension construction

4.3. Interval leaps: the core source of dynamic momentum

The movement's core motif opens with an ascending perfect fifth leap from C minor to G minor, simulating the explosive force of “resistance.” Subsequently, through an alternating pattern of stepwise motion and leaps—such as the ascending major sixth leap from E minor to C minor—it creates a sense of “breakthrough,” forming a dynamic curve of “explosion—sustained momentum.” This interval design not only endows the motif with distinct recognizability but also reserves space for “escalating conflict” in subsequent developments, implicitly conveying the heroism spirit of confronting adversity head-on.

4.3.1. Rhythm conflict: the visualized representation of psychological tension

The rhythmic combination of “long-duration stability + short-duration flow” in the first measure contrasts with the “medium-duration staccato + short-duration burst” of the second measure. The powerful propulsion of “repeated quarter notes” in the third measure then creates a stark contrast with the “long-duration stability + soft-volume conclusion” of the fourth measure, evoking the duality of “hesitation and resolve within struggle.” This departure from the rhythmic regularity of classical tradition gives tangible form to the psychological tension of “heroism,” highlighting Beethoven's exploration of personalized emotional expression.

4.3.2. Harmonic color: accumulation and reservation of tension

The main section of the exposition employs a “contrasting phrase + interlude” structure, where the dual-motif A phrase starkly contrasts with the single-motif B phrase. Harmonically, the strong-beat tonic chord in C minor in bar 1 establishes a stable tonality. Bars 2-3 build tension through an extended dominant function, culminating in a weak-beat dominant-leaning chord in bar 4. While this returns relative stability, creating unresolved harmonic tension.

The core motif successfully builds sustained internal tension through the interplay of leaping intervals, rhythmic conflicts, and harmonic colors, becoming the smallest musical vehicle to carry the budding “heroism” and laying a solid technical foundation for the movement's dramatic expression.

4.4. The realization process of the intensification of dramatic conflicts and the sublimation of heroism spirit

4.5. Development section: the critical link of conflict escalation

This section serves as the escalating core of the movement's “motif tension → dramatic conflict”: through motif compression and transformative development, it intensifies the symbols of conflict. The spatial confrontation between upper and lower registers gives tangible form to the conflict, while the tonal shifts and wandering mimic the complex landscape of struggle. This transforms the earlier motivic tension into a fully realized dramatic conflict, simulating the emotional ebb and flow of “darkness—glimmer—darkness again,” laying the emotional and structural foundation for the final heroism sublimation.

4.5.1. Recapitulation: heroism sublimation and closure

This section breaks from classical sonata form traditions through its asymmetrical structure and deviation from the key of F major, building anticipation for the return to the main key of C minor. Through progressively intensifying harmonic tension and the through dynamic layering and harmonic development, it transforms dramatic contrasts of light and shadow into a heroism core of “struggling through adversity.” This approach preserves the lyrical qualities of the secondary theme while laying the groundwork for the subsequent emotional outburst upon the main key's return. The secondary theme's closing section (bars 264-267) echoes the primary theme's drama through an augmented fourth motif. It disrupts lyricism with “sf sforzando + columnal chord” textures while reinforcing the tonic through harmonic function, transforming accumulated emotion into heroism expression and structural resolution. The development section intensifies multidimensional conflicts, while the recapitulation material integration and tonal inversion collectively complete the logical chain of “motif tension → dramatic conflict → heroism sublimation,” achieving a crucial leap from technical appearance to spiritual core.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Three-dimensional characteristics of early heroism exploration

In terms of technique, the movement remains within the overall framework of classical sonata form, emotional scope for conveying conflict and resolution through “motif-driven development” and “harmonic innovation” (including augmented triad variations and frequent use of diminished seventh chords) [10]. On the spiritual dimension, the core theme of “resistance and transcendence” remains partially developed. For instance, the concluding passages retain the restrained expression characteristic of classical style. Compared to the grand narrative of the middle-period “Sonata of Passion,” this work leans more toward a phased manifestation of “localized resistance—staged transcendence.” On the narrative dimension, it follows the logical chain of “tension accumulation in the exposition—conflict escalation in the development—resolution of tension in the resolution,” completing an emotional narrative of “repression—struggle—resolve” and establishing an early paradigm for heroism storytelling.

5.2. Summary

This study examines the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 1 in C minor, Op. 10 No. 1, focusing on the early exploration of “heroism” themes. It employs both literature review and score analysis methodologies. Results reveal that within the framework of classical sonata form, the movement constructs motivic tension through techniques such as leaping intervals and rhythmic conflicts. Dramatic intensity is heightened through motivic transformation and tonal shifts, highlighting the core theme of “struggle and transcendence” in terms of technique, spirit, and narrative: technique, spirit, and narrative. This research fills an academic gap in specialized analysis of early heroism, enriches the scholarly genealogy of stylistic development, and provides concrete examples and methodological references for studies on the transition from Classicism to Romanticism. It also clarifies how performance techniques relate to emotional expression, offering theoretical support for practice.

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