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## **Abstract**

### Models and Idea in Beethoven's Late 'Trifles'

*A Stylistic Study of the Bagatelles, op. 126*

GARETH JAMES LEATHER

The Bagatelles for piano that Beethoven wrote in the last decade of his life have attracted little attention in comparison to the 'major' works of the same period. The six Bagatelles he published as op. 126 display a deeper concentration of musical ideas than his previous attempts in the genre. Their density of musical thought approaches that of the larger works, but the small form of the Bagatelle has precluded recognition of their importance for the music of Beethoven's late period. This study seeks to explore the position of the Bagatelle within this complex style. Through a consideration of the individual pieces of op. 126 the notions of Model and Idea will inform an interpretation of the Bagatelle and its relation to the 'late style.' The Bagatelle is considered as a 'model' for larger compositions and as a 'model' for the musical language itself, assuming a crucial part in the evolution of Beethoven's musical thought. The Idea of the individual Bagatelle in turn highlights the various elements that we recognise as comprising the 'late style.' This study attempts to establish an interpretation of the op. 126 Bagatelles as providing a significant insight into Beethoven's last compositions.

# Models and Idea in Beethoven's Late 'Trifles'

*A Stylistic Study of the Bagatelles, op. 126*

GARETH JAMES LEATHER

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MA Thesis

Durham University

Department of Music



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## Contents

Acknowledgements and Declaration	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 <i>The Bagatelle's Formal Inheritance: Origins, Prototypes and Elaboration</i>	8
Chapter 2 <i>Old Roads to New Forms: Miniaturisation and Multiple Style in the Bagatelles</i>	33
Chapter 3 <i>Beethoven's Late 'Art of Variation': Transforming Musical Genres and Approaching the Concept of 'Veränderung'</i>	59
Chapter 4 <i>Rethinking Theme and Form: The Bagatelle as 'Model'</i>	94
Chapter 5 <i>Analytical Conclusions</i>	129
Bibliography	143

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Finally, I am extremely thankful for the unrelenting encouragement from my family, and for the unconditional support of my girlfriend, Francesca.

No material in this study has been previously submitted or published.

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## Introduction

The music of Ludwig van Beethoven is renowned for its expansiveness. The popular reception of the works from the composer's middle period (1803-1812) has been especially prominent in shaping this view; the 'heroic' epithet attributed to this music typifies its grandiose, ostentatious quality. Engraved into musical history as the transgressor of the Classical style's expressive qualities, Beethoven is still known to a wide audience mainly through the works that assert an authoritative self, a metaphorical struggle through time for the subject, and a triumphant climax to conclude a perceived 'psychological journey.' This type of narrative has served as an interpretation of such 'heroic' works as the third and fifth symphonies, the *Waldstein* piano sonata, and the *Razumovsky* string quartets.

Even when Beethoven's musical language endured a significant stylistic change as he moved into the last decade of his life, the compositions are still, often more so, described as 'breaking boundaries.' Moreover, they are understood as expanding further the overall time-scale of individual movements and of multi-movement works. The first movement of the *Hammerklavier* sonata presented not only difficulties for the performer but for the listener, and the unprecedented length of the ninth symphony needs no introduction. The incorporation of shorter movements among the larger designs of the late string quartets does not diminish the accepted view of Beethoven making his music longer and larger.

It would therefore seem curious that Beethoven published two sets of Bagatelles, opp. 119 and 126, in these later years. The short length of the 'Bagatelle' (the German and French words translate as 'trifle') seems to be inconsistent with Beethoven's apparent proclivity for expanding the time-scale of his music in the late period (c. 1816-1826). The set he published as opp. 119, in particular, are literally 'trifles' when compared to the compositions on which he was working at the same time (1820-22): the *Missa Solemnis*, the ninth symphony and the piano sonatas, opp. 110 and 111.

Beethoven wrote twenty-six Bagatelles throughout his career. The most famous is, of course, the one he called *Für Elise*, composed around 1810. Another individual Bagatelle that remained unpublished in the composer's lifetime bears the catalogue number WoO



60, and was written on August 14 1818.<sup>1</sup> The remaining twenty-four were published in three different sets, as opp. 33, 119 and 126. The collection of seven Bagatelles, op. 33, published in 1803, is in fact an album of short pieces that had been in Beethoven's sketchbooks since his Bonn years. Number one of the set, for example, in *E♭* major, is dated 1782, though it is thought to be a mistake on the part of the composer, the real date being 1788. The individual pieces of this collection were originally potential ideas for larger works, or indeed rejected sketches for larger works. As such they represent an assemblage in the true sense of the term.

The compositional history of the two sets of late Bagatelles throws light on their differences. The set of eleven, published as op. 119, are actually taken from two distinct groups. Five of them, numbers 7-11, were composed for Friedrich Starke's *Wiener Pianoforteschule*. They are thought to have been written in 1820, since the autograph of the manuscript is dated January 1 1821; they appeared in the third part of Starke's pedagogical compilation in June of the same year.<sup>2</sup> The autograph of numbers 1-6, the second distinct group, is dated November 1822, but they too, like the op. 33 set, are selected from Beethoven's portfolio of such pieces that reach as far back as the Bonn years.<sup>3</sup> They were picked out by the composer and added to the five that were published in 1821. Only numbers 7-11, then, are proper late works; this is obvious in their smaller size and the greater variety of musical treatment in each one.

The op. 126 set of Bagatelles has a less complicated history: they were composed in one stretch, in 1823-24, most of the main sketching taking place in May and June 1824.<sup>4</sup> They were brand new pieces, unlike op. 33 and op. 119 nos. 1-6, and were not intended for didactic use, as were op. 119 nos. 7-11. His recent composition and reworking of short piano pieces, started in 1818 with WoO 60, seemed to have spurred Beethoven on to develop the 'Bagatelle,' or 'Kleinigkeit' as he called it. The composition of the five pieces for Starke's compilation perhaps stimulated his interest in the small form, especially at a time when he was working on the colossal projects of the ninth symphony and the *Missa Solemnis*. Whatever the stimulus, there is a continuous line of development

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<sup>1</sup> See Jonathan Dunsby's illuminating article on this little "masterpiece": "A Bagatelle on Beethoven's WoO 60," *Music Analysis* 3 (1984), 57-68

<sup>2</sup> Alan Tyson, "The First Edition of Beethoven's Op. 119 Bagatelles," *The Musical Quarterly* 49 (1963), 332

<sup>3</sup> Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 396. See also Barry Cooper, "Beethoven's Portfolio of Bagatelles," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 112/2 (1987), 208-228

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, B. (1987), 223

from op. 119 nos. 7-11 to the six of op. 126, the latter expanding the language and formal variety of the former.

As a composer whose reputation is built, in popular reception at least, upon his tenacity to break the boundaries of the musical past, to expand the musical experience and embrace vast levels of expression, the Bagatelles of late Beethoven are in danger of being seen as insignificant compositions, merely a pastime for the composer as respite from the larger works. The scholarly literature reflects this: studies of the late Bagatelles are in short supply, though they have increasingly become the focus of articles since Edward Cone's seminal work in "Beethoven's Experiments in Composition: the Late Bagatelles."<sup>5</sup> Apart from this, the Bagatelles are relegated to a short explication or passing reference within a larger study.<sup>6</sup>

The standard reception of the late Bagatelles that has emerged is, as the title of Cone's article states, centred upon the notion of experimentation. The composer's designation of these pieces as 'Kleinigkeiten,' insists Cone, was in "half-humorous recognition of this unique potentiality [to experiment], rather than in a mood of self-disparagement..."<sup>7</sup> They have also been described as musical *jeux d'esprit*, small expressions of musical humour that play with the language of the Classical style or humorously trivialise aspects of Beethoven's 'late style.'<sup>8</sup> In both cases, the significance of the late Bagatelle is slowly becoming an important part of Beethoven studies.

The sobriquets used by Beethoven himself to describe these pieces ('Bagatellen' and 'Kleinigkeiten'), then, seem to have held nothing of the belittlement that would be expected when considered alongside the expansive works of the same period. When he

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<sup>5</sup> Edward T. Cone, "Beethoven's Experiments in Composition: the Late Bagatelles," in *Beethoven Studies 2*, ed. Alan Tyson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 84-105. See Benet Casablancas, "Humour in High Classicism: Ludwig van Beethoven, Op. 126, No. 1 in G major (1824)," *Arietta 1* (1999), 26-33; Cooper, B (1987); Dunsby (1984); Christopher Hatch, "Normality and Disruption in Beethoven's Bagatelle Op. 119, No. 8," in *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, ed. Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 341-355; Nicholas Marston, "Trifles or a Multi-Trifle? Beethoven's Bagatelles, Op. 119, Nos. 7-11," *Music Analysis 5* (1986), 193-206; and Janet Schmalfeldt, "On the Relation of Analysis to Performance: Beethoven's Bagatelles, Op. 126, Nos. 2 and 5," *Journal of Music Theory 29* (1985), 1-31.

<sup>6</sup> Wilfred Mellers presents an exception in his book, *Beethoven and the Voice of God* (London: Faber, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Cone (1977), 85

<sup>8</sup> Benet Casablancas' article (1999) typifies this approach, when he considers the "Humour in high Classicism" that is an intrinsic element of the Bagatelle, op. 126 no:1 (see footnote 5 for the reference).

wrote to the publisher Schott in late 1824 to offer him works that he had given his brother as repayment of a debt, the composer promoted the six Bagatelles as being “rather more fully worked out and probably the best of this kind which I have composed...”<sup>9</sup> Here Beethoven the businessman is cast aside by Beethoven the musician. The Beethovenian Bagatelle is perfected, via op. 119, in the six of op. 126.

The name ‘Bagatelle’ was not an invention of Beethoven, although it was rarely used in music before. Pieces by French composers of the eighteenth-century assume the title: a rondeau by Couperin of 1717 and a set of dances issued by the publisher Boivin around 1753, for example.<sup>10</sup> More importantly for Beethoven, a set of *Musikalische Bagatellen*, a combination of small dances and songs, was issued in 1797 by Carl Wilhelm Maizier.<sup>11</sup> However, Beethoven was the first to use the term ‘Bagatelle’ to denote a short, detached piece for solo piano. Moreover, he was the composer who invented the genre as we know it today and as it was used in pieces of this description by nineteenth- and twentieth-century composers.<sup>12</sup>

But does the ‘Beethovenian Bagatelle’ just represent a musical ‘essay’ that is used for experimentation, as a compositional ‘model’ for larger works? Can they be seen as part of the ‘late style’ in the same way as the string quartets? To put it another way, we derive the constraints of the ‘late style,’ what it entails, from the major works of the period, such as the string quartets; can the Bagatelles be seen in this way, as pieces upon which we can construct the language of the ‘late style’? This understanding would have to eradicate the superficialities of size. What, then, would qualify the Bagatelle as an indissoluble part of the ‘late style’?

These are the issues that will be considered within this study. I aim to show how the Bagatelles are related to the ‘late style,’ in similar terms to Cone when he speaks of experimentation. However, I will also consider if the Bagatelle is important for the evolving musical language of the ‘late style,’ if, for example, the Bagatelles are capable, within their small dimensions, of containing the complexities of the late period works and

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<sup>9</sup> Letter 1321 in Emily Anderson, *The Letters of Beethoven* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1961), 1150-52

<sup>10</sup> Lockwood (2003), 395

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Bagatelles by Dvorak, Nielsen, Finzi, Bartok, Webern and Ligeti to name but a few.

the developments of this style that were to be an important element within the string quartets. In short, I will explore the Bagatelles in the stylistic context of the 'late style,' a context that is usually denied them solely on grounds of size.

The provocative opening sentences from Adorno's analysis serve as an appropriate starting-point and stimulus for a stylistic study of the six Bagatelles, op. 126:

Unsociably, the very late Beethoven makes no concessions to domestic music-making. Faced with the last quartets the amateur violinist is completely out of his depth, as is the amateur pianist confronted by the five late sonatas and the Diabelli Variations. To play these pieces and even, for that matter, to listen to them is beyond such players. No easy path leads into that petrified landscape. But when Beethoven made the stone speak by carving figures in it with his chisel, the splinters flew from the terrible impact. And as the geologist can discover the true composition of whole strata from tiny, scattered particles of matter, the splinters bear witness to the landscape from which they come: the crystals are the same. Beethoven himself called them bagatelles. Not only are they splinters and documents of the mightiest productive process in music, but their strange brevity reveals at the same time the curious contraction, and the tendency towards the inorganic, which give access to the innermost secret not only of late Beethoven but perhaps of every great late style.<sup>13</sup>

When I speak of stylistic traits or context, I have in mind the definition of style that Leonard Meyer propounds: "Style is a replication of patterning...that results from a series of choices within some set of constraints."<sup>14</sup> I take the presumption that in Beethoven's 'late style' there are a set of constraints that govern his music and that allow us to conceive it as a rounded style, discrete from his 'heroic style' for example. In this respect I do not focus on Adorno's notion of the 'late style,' except in passing.

I intend, rather, to discern stylistic constraints and their specific realisations within various works of the late period. The op. 126 Bagatelles will be considered with regard to these constraints. Far from touching upon Adorno's complex, multi-discipline approach,

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<sup>13</sup> "Ludwig van Beethoven: Six Bagatelles for piano, op. 126" in Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), 130-32

<sup>14</sup> Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3

splicing sociological, philosophical and musical inquiries, my aim is to concentrate on purely musical motivations. In particular, the relation of Beethoven to the music of the past will be considered throughout.

I will forego a discussion of the 'late style' in this introduction. A picture of the 'late style' should, I hope, emerge from the subsequent chapters as I explore the basic elements of composition that Beethoven grapples with and explores in various lights, particularly in relation to musical tradition as represented by Bach, Handel, Haydn and Mozart.

To gain insight into the Bagatelle as a 'late work' I will first consider its musical origins, its place in the musical tradition, its basic mechanisms of musical language and how these are manifest in the Beethovenian Bagatelle. In short, I will consider its *listening type*. If one is to pursue an inquiry into the merits of the Bagatelle as a 'late work,' I believe that the presuppositions of the genre should be examined, as to avoid judgement of disparate works with the same analytical tools. This misaligned judgement is, perhaps, the reason for the Bagatelle's traditional status in Beethoven studies as 'trifling.'

Moving from this initial consideration I will probe the concept of miniaturisation. The 'splinter' metaphor comes through the strongest here: elements of the 'late style,' what makes the late period works form a stylistic whole, are explored with respect to form. This includes the notion of Beethoven's handling of past 'models,' especially of his engagement with Classical principles of formal subversion characteristic of Haydn. The different methods used to achieve the same formal 'tricks' in Beethoven's last decade elicits a concept of 'multiple style.' I will attempt to explain how the Bagatelles probe this 'multiple style' by miniaturising elements from his earlier compositions of the late period. Also, I hope to show that the Bagatelles cannot only be used as 'laboratories,' as veritable testing-ground, but can uphold the developments of the 'late style.'

The discussion will then centre on the notion of breaking the boundaries of genre. How does the Bagatelle embody the various aspects of Beethoven's musical style, such as his new interest in counterpoint and fugal invention? New ways of solving old problems, with respect to achieving coherence and continuity in instrumental music, moves the discussion to the last level. In this, the Bagatelle, I believe, functions not only as a ground for experiment and the consolidation of established stylistic constraints, but can be thought of as developing Beethoven's musical language of the period, in much the same

way as the late piano sonatas are said to discover new realms of musical possibilities after the music of the middle period.

It has always been acknowledged that the Bagatelles, op. 126, form a unit, that Beethoven intended them to be performed and perceived as a 'cycle.' The final chapter explores possible ways of perceiving the set as a cycle in light of the topics covered within this study.

Throughout this study there are two 'threads' running through: that of Model and Idea. The Bagatelle as Model, as I hope to show, means not only the Bagatelle as ground on which to experiment or play with established stylistic constraints, but as an influential part of the musical language, as crucial for the development of the 'late style' as it is known within the late string quartets. The Idea of each Bagatelle works in a reciprocal relationship with the traits of musical construction that signify the 'late style.' The particular stylistic constraint that is realised within one particular Bagatelle could be its Idea, its 'topic' of musical discourse. On the other hand, the Idea of a Bagatelle could be the manipulation, development, abrogation or amalgamation of established stylistic constraints. This study moves from the former notions of Model and Idea to the latter.

## Chapter 1

### *The Bagatelle's Formal Inheritance: Origins, Prototypes and Elaboration*

A main concern of an interpretation of Beethoven is to understand his forms as the product of a combining of pre-ordained schemata with the specific formal idea of each particular work. This is a true synthesis. The schema is not just an abstract framework 'within' which the specific formal concept is realized; the latter arises from the collision between the act of composing and the pre-existing schema. It both stems from the schema and alters, abolishes or 'cancels' it.

Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*.<sup>1</sup>

#### I

It is generally accepted that the music of Beethoven's late period exhibits a decline of the sonata style as the dominant way by which to structure musical discourse. The apogee of the sonata style was, of course, achieved within the middle period works, epitomised by the attribution of the 'heroic' metaphor to forms that evinced a highly personal touch upon the essential framework of the Classical language and its dramatic spirit.<sup>2</sup> Following the intense period of creative activity between the years 1807 and 1812 that signals the end of this 'heroic' phase (from which symphonies 5-8, the piano trios, op. 70, the *Emperor* concerto and the mass in C are the paragons) came the "twilight stage" of Beethoven's career, to use the words of Lewis Lockwood.<sup>3</sup> In the relatively few works composed in this stage, between 1813 and 1817, Beethoven reaches out beyond the spirit and symphonic grandeur of the 'heroic' period to embrace a style that seems to turn inwards, discarding public 'heroism' in favour of personal exploration. The most important works from this time were, not coincidentally, chamber works. The piano sonata, op. 101, and the cello sonata, op. 102 no. 1, in particular make explicit the gradual attenuation of the sonata style. In both works the consequent experimentation of form within Beethoven's music is evident: elements from the genre of fantasy within the single movement, unclear cadential demarcations, a pronounced interest in contrapuntal

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno (1998), 60

<sup>2</sup> See Scott Burnham's book, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) for the nature and reception of the 'heroic' style.

<sup>3</sup> Cited on page 51 in Elaine R. Sisman, "Memory and Invention at the Threshold of Beethoven's Late Style," in *Beethoven and his World*, ed. Scott Burnham and Michael P. Steinberg (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 51-87.

processes, and a circular multi-movement form all lay the foundations for the late period works and their deviation from the language of the 'heroic' period.

When Beethoven completed the *Hammerklavier* sonata in 1818, the experimental developments of the 'twilight stage' had become established stylistic constraints. The sonata style had indeed declined, though it had not disappeared; its fundamental tenets were dissolved by the presence of various other, often antithetical formal models, such as the variation or the fugue, for example. Sonata form was at times even supplanted by the organisational principles of these models. The 'heroic' period, despite its ostensible originality, ultimately drew upon the models of Mozart and Haydn, often fusing the "feeling for large harmonic masses and...tonal areas" of the former with the "technique of dynamic growth from the smallest details" that characterises the music of the latter.<sup>4</sup> In the late period, on the other hand, Beethoven strives to replace this resultant dynamic, goal-orientated principle as the basis for his musical arguments. And for this reason he turned to a more distant model, that of Handel and Bach, whose music he both revered and had played as a child.

The forms and styles that were to impede upon the Classical sonata style of the middle period, then, were not, to use the words of Giorgio Pestelli, "the brilliant pieces that flourished here and there." Rather, they were ones that lay outside the epoch in which Beethoven had established himself at the turn of the nineteenth-century. They were instead "strict institutions...which were foreign in one way or another to the proper syntactical model of sonata form..."<sup>5</sup> Especially significant is the revival of the fugue as a result of his preoccupation with counterpoint in general, but not as a disciplined technique found in the synthetic sonata movements of high Classicism. The contrapuntal nature of motivic manipulation that governs the music of Bach is imputed in these forms of the late period music. This often obscures formal boundaries that were formerly demarcated and articulated in phase, that is, congruently. The concomitant staggering of functions often harks back to the forms of mid eighteenth-century instrumental dances, wherein the rigidity of the Classical style was alien.

Ultimately, the regression to older models yielded hybrid forms within the late period. Inevitably, a new meaning emerges from the interaction of historically distinct styles of

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (London: Faber, 1997), 399

<sup>5</sup> Giorgio Pestelli, *The Age of Mozart and Beethoven*, trans. Eric Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 245

formal structure. Beethoven pushes together the schema of traditionally disparate forms to create a unique structure whose meaning derives from the collision of conventionally and functionally independent types. The most peculiar and unique moments of the late Beethovenian formal process lay in the sparks that such a collision yields. Accordingly, Stephen Rumph has described each form, produced by Beethoven's persistent amalgamation of such antipodes (in general, the tension between counterpoint and sonata form), as a "hybrid creation."<sup>6</sup> The various hybrid creations of the late period are manifestations of the more general conflict that permeates Beethoven's musical language at this time: the conflict between the old and the new.<sup>7</sup>

The most explicit scrutiny of formal admixture is pursued by Carl Dahlhaus. The general notion of Beethoven's formal processes in the late period works is succinctly encapsulated within the following quotation:

... [T]he late works derived from an effort to reduce traditional forms to their first principles, and from them to draw conclusions that cause general [predefined form] and particular [the organic internal structure] to merge. The forms that Beethoven chose as his starting points—sonata, variations, fugue and character piece—are by no means left unchanged. They are subject to striking transformations, striking not just because of their radicality but because the meaning of one form seems to emerge precisely from its transformation into another.<sup>8</sup>

The hybridism of the late period works operates on all levels of musical discourse. For example, Beethoven presents putative sonata movements whose initial motivic material comprises that which is idiomatically suited to a fugal exposition. The allegro of the first movement of op. 130 is an instantiation of this, in which, says Dahlhaus, the "fugue technique represents a way of creating a sonata exposition from a thematic idea that is only fit to serve the needs of a development passage."<sup>9</sup> The use of the antiquated church modes within the *Missa Solemnis* and the *Heiliger Dankgesang* from the string quartet, op. 132, takes this process one stage further. In the quartet Beethoven fashions a distinctly un-Classical harmonic motion that eschews any sense of late eighteenth-century rationalism, only to juxtapose this with the tonal and cadential symmetry of the 'Neue

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Rumph, *Beethoven after Napoleon: Political Romanticism in the Late Works* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 125

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

<sup>8</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. B. Robinson (California: University of California Press, 1989), 86

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Kraft' section, a relic of the harmonically and rhythmically punctuated forms of late eighteenth-century Classicism.

On the largest level, that of the work itself, the collision of distinct forms and the subsequent 'transformation' of conventional musical structure bear the mark of experimentation. Ambiguity of meaning and function is often the result of an experimental cross-fertilisation of functionally disparate genres and formal types. Take, for example, the interaction between the sonata forms of high Classicism and the predominant forms of Baroque instrumental music. One example is found within the first movement of the string quartet, op. 127, in which aspects of both sonata and Ritornello principles converge to generate a unique construction, one that is inexplicable when measured against the conventional yardstick of either type. The anomalous element of the movement is the recurrence of the opening *Maestoso* material (initially at the start of the movement in *Eb* major), firstly to mark the development section (in *G* major) and secondly to mark the recapitulation (in *C* major). These recurrences cut across the superficial boundaries of the sonata form design, obscuring the traditional binary schema and rendering the strict division of themes and their complementary tonal areas almost impenetrable.

The assumed major-mode of the second subject of sonata form is absent from the new thematic material of what seems to be an extended 'third theme' (bars 41-74) in this movement, a process used in Beethoven's early piano sonatas (see op. 2 no. 3 or op. 10 no. 3) in which a minor-mode passage mediates the dominant preparation ending the first theme and the start of the contrasting tonal area of the second theme. The turn to *G* major (from the *G* minor of the 'third theme') is delayed until the return of the opening *Maestoso*. By this time, however, an authentic second-subject area in *G* major would stretch the proportions of the exposition beyond recognition as a function of sonata form. This *G* major ritornello, rather, initiates the development section, maintaining the proportions of a sonata form. It is only the proportions that are maintained: the functions of the preceding sections are disfigured by the absence of an authentic second-subject and the articulation of the ritornello-like *Maestoso* passage that tears apart the overarching tonal and thematic structure of sonata form (also when the *Maestoso* passage intrudes upon the boundary between development and recapitulation). By obfuscating the traditional tonal rhythm of sonata form and infusing the design with the recurring

structural pillars of the “rondo-become-concerto” form, Beethoven conjures one of his most impenetrable hybrid creations of the late period.<sup>10</sup>

The proclivity towards experimentation of formal design accommodates antonymous distinctions of form and genre in the late Beethoven literature that serve to stress the multiplicity of the ‘late style.’ That is to say, the works of this period constitute not a single style but rather a ‘style of using styles.’ Such quotidian usage of contradictory adjectives as “public...and...esoteric” and “rhetorical...and...inward” fully display this stylistic variety.<sup>11</sup> Thus, for example, Beethoven produced forms of unprecedented proportions at either end of the scale: there are movements of extreme length, as in the *Große Fuge*, the finale of the ninth symphony, and the *Heiliger Dankgesang* of op. 132, to name but a few, and also ones that display concision and denseness of form, as in the two sets of Bagatelles and the shorter movements, often the dances, of the string quartets.

The longer movements of the late period are well-known for inciting disparagement from Beethoven’s peers on account of their alleged prosaic or verbose nature. Conversely, the concise movements of this period are seen to represent wit and artistic skill. The concision of forms, however, is not merely an instance of clever and whimsical craftsmanship on the part of Beethoven, as an attempt to appeal to the musical connoisseur as ‘clever’ amusement. Rather, it points to a fundamental trait of Beethoven’s later years: to compress the formal processes of Classical syntax. In other words, within the smaller works and individual movements Beethoven achieves the ‘tricks’ of the Classical language within a time frame that minimises the conventional formal processes of Mozart and Haydn whilst containing their fundamental articulation. The piano sonata, op. 109, for example, presents the principal material at the outset, in the tonic key, as a four-bar unit after which the consequent four-bar unit (bars 5-8) clearly modulates to the dominant key to present, in a slower tempo, the second subject material. The tonic group first-theme, along with the modulatory progression to the dominant key area of a sonata design, are packed into just four bars without any loss of a sense of formal function implicit in the expanded Classical model.

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<sup>10</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to his Music*, trans. M. Whittall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 231.

<sup>11</sup> Michael P. Steinberg, 215, “Notes on the quartets,” in *The Beethoven quartet Companion*, ed. Robert Winter and Robert Martin (London: University of California Press, 1994), 143-282

In the third movement of the string quartet, op. 130, the modulation is actually folded into the melodic material itself within a ten-bar unit. The opening phrase presents the first theme in the tonic (*D $\flat$*  major), but before this has time to fully assert itself and reach cadential rest the harmony shifts, unmediated, to the dominant (bar 7). The third degree of the scale is forced to be reinterpreted as the sixth of the dominant (the note *F* in *A $\flat$*  major), only for the music to collapse back into the tonic key two bars later with an archetypal cadential passage in bar 9 (Ex. 1.1).

Ex. 1.1: Third movement of string quartet, op. 130, bars 5-9

The terseness of formal process is, in the first example, an abbreviation of the Classical style's harmonic-thematic articulation. In the second example Beethoven compresses the 'tricks' for which Haydn is well-known. These tricks reside in the rhetorical elaboration and manipulation of stylised gambits of formal articulation. In the example from op. 130 the modulation to a related key area, the Classical style's most defined and effective gambit from which grew the dramatic dynamism of sonata form, is purposefully merged with the function of the first-theme group only to be denied two bars later; the effectiveness of this rhetoric lies in the listener's competence with, and hence expectation of, the conventional signposts of Classical sonata form. Indeed, these conventional

signposts are an essential part of Classical music being defined as a 'language.' Only when music becomes a language *per se* can there be conventional signposts and thus expectations that can be subject to a certain amount of 'play' or subversion on the part of the composer. In both instances, then, Beethoven is building upon the 'language' of Haydn and Mozart but taking it further, often hyperbolising elements of form, in turn creating new ways of articulating and organising material.

The reversion to older models, whether it be the use of antiquated modes or reversion to forms such as the fugue, or the elaboration and manipulation of the Classical formal processes of Haydn and Mozart, is the primary stylistic constraint that underlies all that is seen to be eccentric and newfangled within the forms of the late period. New paths were forged from the collision of existing models of musical structure, as well as the manipulation and distortion of conventional Classical ones. The second set of late Bagatelles, op. 126, presents an illuminating case of such formal creation in the late period works. I will explore the origin and nature of the Beethovenian Bagatelle and briefly consider how this is manifest within the more rudimentary designs of op. 119, numbers 7-11, composed in 1821, before studying the complex elaboration of such designs within the first and third Bagatelles of op. 126.

## II

The Bagatelles of Beethoven, owing to their brevity, have often been thought of as the precursor to the Romantic 'Fragment.' The inner contradiction of an apparent closed and rounded structure that, nevertheless, has no meaning within itself, characterises the formal aesthetic of the Romantic Fragment. Schumann's forms, for example, often display intentional ambiguity or ambivalence, as in the famous example of the opening song of *Dichterliebe* ('Im wunderschönen Monat Mai'), which begins with dominant minor-ninth harmony and concludes with dominant-seventh harmony within the 'tonic' of F# minor. In the words of Charles Rosen, this ambivalence towards any sense of a defined formal articulation in the Classical sense is the musical expression of "unsatisfied desire, of longing eternally renewed."<sup>12</sup>

When there resides ambiguity in Beethoven's Bagatelles, however, it is ultimately tempered with affirmation. Such a clash between ambiguity and affirmation runs parallel

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (London: Fontana Press, 1999), 41

to a dichotomy of modernity and tradition within the Bagatelles. It is, therefore, problematic to associate Beethoven's smaller forms of the Bagatelles directly with the Romantic Fragment, whose own forms are patent subversions meant to undercut the system of standardised musical structures. In keeping with Beethoven's reversion to older models, the Bagatelles take as their basis the forms and genres of the eighteenth-century. Also in keeping with his fusion, transmutation and manipulation of pre-determined formal types, both Classical and pre-Classical, Beethoven forges a modern tone from the traditional eighteenth-century model. Originality is carved from the traditional instrumental forms that he knew and played as a child.

It is apt, then, that during the period in which he was experimenting with old means of expression and organisation, and reviving and renewing archaic forms, that Beethoven turned to composing Bagatelles. They are clearly drawn from the smaller instrumental forms that existed throughout the eighteenth-century. These are the forms whose expansion contributed to the evolution of what was later to be termed 'sonata form.' The origin of the Bagatelle, then, is from the eighteenth-century miniature piece, such as the small minuet or song form and other similar binary and ternary designs that abound, especially toward the middle of the century. These are simple in design, usually consisting of two, three or four phrases. As Rosen reminds us, it was the interaction of several permutations of such designs, which "may be classified roughly as binary or ternary," that brought the larger dimensions of sonata form into existence.<sup>13</sup> In this sense Beethoven is not engaging with sonata form itself but with its origins.

By engaging with these miniature dance and song forms Beethoven also touches upon the pedagogical practice of theorists such as Joseph Riepel (1709-1782) and Heinrich Christoph Koch (1749-1816). In Koch's more systematic approach to the relationship of phrase and form within his treatise *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition* (1782-1793), one discerns an incremental approach to the teaching of composition. The four-bar phrase is treated first in detail, followed by instruction on how to combine two of such phrases according to their respective cadential endings. From this combination of two, three or more phrases comes the small dance form, usually of sixteen-bars length, with a strong cadence separating the first period (a conflation of two four-bar phrases) from the second period. The latter concludes the piece in tonic harmony, yielding a sense of harmonic and melodic symmetry between the two 'punctuated' sections.

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Rosen, *sonata Forms* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 17

It is significant that once a small dance form is reached, one symmetrically punctuated by cadential phrase-endings, that Koch's method for producing larger pieces such as the 'sonata allegro' resides in techniques of melodic expansion. This is achieved by either internal repetition or interpolation within a phrase, by extension to the phrase-ending by way of appendices and the elaboration of cadential material, and, finally, by the interpolation of subsidiary phrases alongside the more pertinent structural ones.<sup>14</sup> This method is itself evidence that Koch considered the larger forms such as the Symphonic allegro to be merely an expansion of the smaller dance forms. For Koch, as well as other contemporary theorists, the smaller dance forms of the mid eighteenth-century embodied the essential functional syntax of the large-scale piece. The expanded form, despite its larger proportions, entailed nothing much more complex than in the smaller designs, but was essentially a temporal expansion and interpolatory elaboration of the periodicity, and consequent tonal rhythm, of the small form.

It is crucial that the theorists recognised within the compositional practice of the late eighteenth-century that the small forms of dance music were the *origins*, both structurally and idiomatically, of the extensive, resplendent sonata forms of the Classical style. As Leonard Ratner has noted, there was a growing consciousness in the latter half of the century of the origins of more grandiose forms, whereby the theorist and composer alike "acknowledged the debt owed by their 'serious' music to dance music..."<sup>15</sup> Thus, Koch could demonstrate how the function of an initial eight-bar period from a binary dance form could fulfil that of an exposition from a sonata allegro: the establishment of the principle melody in tonic harmony, and subsequent rest four-bars later with an intermediary cadence, would become the 'first subject' or 'tonic theme'; the second half of the eight-bar period, with the move to a related scale-degree (the dominant, for example) and cadential closure upon this harmony, would become the transition and 'second subject,' closing the exposition in this newly established key area.

Central to this notion of periodicity (what later became generativity in music theory of the twentieth-century) is the metaphor of 'punctuation.' At the lowest level of the phrase closure is attained at the end of the eight-bar *Satz*; at the largest level of sonata form this first point of punctuation, the first *Periode*, is at the end of the exposition. The

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Spitzer, *Metaphor and Musical Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 256-259

<sup>15</sup> Leonard G. Ratner, 447, "Eighteenth-Century Theories of Musical Period Structure," *The Musical Quarterly* 42 (1956), 439-454

connotations of Enlightenment thought are obvious in this method: in an age that was pre-occupied with origins, that is, with the historical generativity of culture from nature, it is not surprising that to reach musical enlightenment, the 'coming-of-age' as a composer, is to progress from the smallest formal level (dance and song) to the largest. Sonata form as the highpoint of musical culture is achieved only with the *progression* from its primitive, natural origins.

Of particular relevance to this discussion is the notion of smaller forms specifically as 'models' for larger compositions. Koch displays how teachers of composition have recourse to song and dance types as 'models' for the realisation of larger forms. Koch's treatise, however, is not only a pedagogical manual designed to instruct compositional method and technique, but is generally acknowledged as a genuine reflection of contemporary compositional practice. Elaine Sisman reveals the prevalence of Koch's methodology within the professional sphere as a practical tool, whereby the composer is able to create larger forms from smaller ones.<sup>16</sup> As proof of the practical usefulness of Koch's methodology, and also as proof of the currency of this methodology as a general compositional technique amongst the professional, Sisman turns to Haydn: a sixteen-bar theme taken from a variation set of Haydn's Divertimento No. 2 (Hob. II: 11/iv, 'Der Geburtstag') is expanded using various techniques described in Koch's treatise into a 67 bar Andante from the composer's symphony No. 14.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of a smaller form as a 'model' for a larger one, therefore, is found as a gambit of the active composer within the late eighteenth-century. In an age when the larger dimensions of the sonata allegro were the focus of true artistic endeavour and merit, the miniature forms of the minuet and other such dances, as well as small song forms, were used as a compositional 'laboratory' in which certain formal, harmonic, or melodic elements could be 'tried and tested.' The central concepts of 'model' and 'laboratory' are inseparable when studying the individual forms of the op. 126 Bagatelles.

### III

The earlier of the late Bagatelles, numbers 7-11 of op. 119, display forms that are more elementary than their counterparts of op. 126. They are shorter in length, more consistent

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<sup>16</sup> Elaine R. Sisman, "Small and Expanded Forms: Koch's Model and Haydn's Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 68 (1982), 444-475

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 459-463

in texture and thematic material, and they reflect more directly and plainly the basic small forms that represent the eighteenth-century ‘miniature,’ or Koch’s prototypical ‘small model.’ The two quintessential elements that coalesce to create sonata form, Koch’s dance and song types, are literally split apart and addressed individually within the Bagatelles, as almost primitive designs. The ninth Bagatelle of op. 119 best illustrates this. The symmetrical design of this twenty-bar piece is symptomatic of the “mechanical periodicity” that typifies the miniature dance.<sup>18</sup> It is *geometrical* symmetry that governs the formal rhythm of an archetypal dance such as this: two eight-bar periods (bars 1-8 and 13-20) are separated by a four-bar dominant-pedal passage. The two eight-bar periods are themselves perfectly symmetrical, divided half-way by an imperfect cadence on dominant harmony; these resolve symmetrically when the imperfect cadence of the four-bar antecedent is answered by the perfect cadence of the four-bar consequent (Ex. 1.2). Such geometrical symmetry epitomises, in a very plain manner, the dance miniature of the eighteenth-century.

Ex. 1.2a: No. 9 of op. 119, antecedent phrase of principal period, bars 1-4



Ex. 1.2b: Consequent phrase of principal period, bars 5-8



Ex. 1.2c: Contrasting middle section, ‘standing on dominant’ function, bars 9-12



<sup>18</sup> Spitzer (2004), 250

The metaphor of 'punctuation' can be easily brought to mind at this point: the cadential division of the eight-bar phrase by arrival on the dominant (bars 4 and 16) could be marked by a 'semi-colon,' followed by the 'full-stop' of bar 8 (and bar 20). The proportional grouping of equal length phrases into a period, the paragon of symmetry and proportion in the later eighteenth-century, is the ideal means of formal organisation within a dance. The articulation of only three harmonies (I,  $bII_6$  and  $V^7$ ) reinforces the emphasis upon the symmetrical distribution of both thematic material and the cadential endings of phrases. This concurs with Koch's treatment of the form, in which, as Michael Spitzer has noted, "tonality is almost irrelevant at the level of a miniature dance."<sup>19</sup> The ninth Bagatelle of op. 119, in its simplicity and direct concurrence with eighteenth-century prototypes of 'small form,' could have served well as an example of the dance within Koch's *Versuch*.

As with the ninth Bagatelle, the eighth of op. 119 assumes a binary form (although the ninth is in "rounded binary" form, whereas the eighth adheres to the principles of what William Caplin describes specifically as a "small binary"<sup>20</sup>). However, formal rhythm is not achieved by geometrical symmetry, as in the ninth Bagatelle, but instead by tonal punctuation.<sup>21</sup> One can thus categorise this particular Bagatelle as a song, owing to its pre-occupation with tonal articulation, that is, establishing a tonic-dominant polarity, which is then resolved within the second part by travelling back to the tonic key area. The many intricacies of this Bagatelle, of course, are far removed from the simplicity of the prototypical ninth. Yet behind the late Beethovenian mannerisms of the surface lies the distinguishing trait of the prototypical song as formulated by Koch: formal rhythm is dictated by a drive towards a cadence in a related key (in this instance, the dominant at bar 8), followed by a further drive in the second half of the form to re-establish the tonic.

To use Koch's terminology, the difference between dance and song forms involves a shift of formal emphasis from rhythm (symmetrical phrase-ordering) to punctuation (outline of a normative I-V-I cadential structure). In short, the tonal punctuation of a song is marked

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 249

<sup>20</sup> William E. Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 87. Caplin treats the "small ternary" and "rounded binary" as synonymous forms. The "small binary" can be distinguished from the latter, he observes, by virtue of the lack of a "genuine recapitulation." The function of the second part of a "small binary" is not to recapitulate the melodic material of the first part of the form, but to simply conclude the piece with a perfect cadence in the tonic key.

<sup>21</sup> See Spitzer (2004), 249-251

by an “end-orientated process.”<sup>22</sup> What makes this particular song more animated than a mere prototype is the enhancement of such a process during the movement through its essential tonal arch (I-V-I). In the first half of this arch the chromatic passing notes of bars 1-4, and the accompanying chromatic ascent in the bass, yearn for resolution upwards, spurning momentary rest at bar 4 on an imperfect cadence, instead rising further (Ex. 1.3a).

Ex. 1.3a: No. 8 of op. 119, bars 1-4



The accented appoggiatura of bar 6 (f#) then produces an abrasive dissonance (major 7<sup>th</sup> of a G major triad) that is not resolved until the weak upbeat of that bar. Repose in the form of a perfect cadence is required if this opening phrase is to make sense. Such repose is granted when the melodic line, for the first time within the piece, descends ineluctably towards rest, in the key of G major (bars 7-8; Ex. 1.3b). The archetypal cadential movement underscoring the melodic descent from g'' to g' in these bars reinforces the sense of rest that now balances with the unstable chromatic ascent of bars 1-6. The formal rhythm in the first half of this Bagatelle, then, resides not in geometry, that is, of symmetrical phrase lengths, but in tonal orientation, motion towards a harmonic goal. Beethoven sets up a progression in bars 1-6 that eschews immediate harmonic stability by ascending chromatically. This progression is answered by stability in the form of an end-orientated process of tonal drive, a salient cadential descent in the new key (V). Punctuation is therefore an overtly harmonic one. Beethoven magnifies such tonal punctuation within this Bagatelle: here, as elsewhere in the late Bagatelles, he finds ways of enhancing the basic principles of a prototypical form and its essential formal rhythm.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 249



And so, as the constituent parts of a dialectic through which sonata form evolved, the formal principles of both the dance and the song offer once again starting points as independent forms. Such a case is adducible in the larger works of others composers, as in the multi-movement instrumental cycle of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century, for example. The slow movement and minuet that traditionally form the two middle movements of a symphony allow cogitation upon the isolated elements that make up the preceding hybrid form of the sonata-allegro. The reflective and personal is isolated within the slow, 'song' movement; the communal dance is presented *bona fide* within the minuet. Elements within both encapsulate, on a smaller scale, elements within the sonata form hybrid, on the largest level of form, to harmony and, on the smallest level, the motive. Wagner elegantly captured this essence of miniaturisation, which is intrinsic to a smaller dance or song form. He speaks of the dance movement from a symphony:

...the symphony's formal germ survives till this day in its third movement, the minuet or scherzo, where it suddenly appears in its utmost naivety, as though to tell the secret of the Form of all movements.<sup>23</sup>

The concept of miniaturisation, and the return to the small formal types that represent an origin for the larger, more 'mature' forms of the Classical era, are essential to an understanding of the Beethovenian Bagatelle, particularly the later set, op. 126. However, it is not only the forms that are taken from the eighteenth-century: the function of these pieces is essentially eighteenth-century in outlook. By using forms that utilise the most basic means of formal organisation, that is to say, that are simple binary or ternary patterns, the Bagatelles uphold the lineage of Koch and his contemporaries, composers and theorists alike, by which the miniature piece is a veritable *laboratory* that affords experimentation.

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<sup>23</sup> Wagner, from "On Liszt's Symphonic Poems," in Spitzer (2004), 328

The forms of the Bagatelles, therefore, are best understood as involving a tension between historical 'prototypes' and the late Beethovenian propensity for experimentation. In this sense Edward Cone treats each Bagatelle as an "individual essay," asserting that the Bagatelles "gave him [Beethoven] a chance to try new methods in a setting at once relaxing yet realistic."<sup>24</sup> As the Bagatelles present a "solution to a specific compositional problem," or are experiments with "an unusual technique," it is as if one looks inside on Beethoven's compositional laboratory.<sup>25</sup> Miniature experimentation ranges from motivic construction to harmonic progressions and tonal relationships, and finally to the level of formal construction.

As discussed previously, there are two perspectives involved in the employment of the smaller forms ('prototypes' or 'models') of the eighteenth-century. On the one hand, the engagement with the 'models' of miniature form convey the sense of the pedagogical pathways of Koch and Riepel, among others. The small proportions of the dance are ideal 'laboratories' in which the student, or indeed the composer, can test or probe certain elements before expanding this design into a fully fledged sonata movement. Experimentation of form can be afforded within the more modest and intimate dimensions of the dance or song.

On the other hand, or the other side of the same coin, the 'prototype' inevitably embodies the elements that constitute the student's, or composer's, larger forms. The 'models' are not confined to serve solely as a kind of 'pilot study' to the realisation of the ultimate, expansive sonata design. They are used as 'laboratories' precisely because the essential functions of a large-scale structure are present within the smaller forms. To quote Koch, 'prototypes' are "representations in miniature of larger compositions."<sup>26</sup>

Both of these aspects of historical form are found to function, often together, within the late Bagatelles of Beethoven. Generally, the forms of the op. 126 Bagatelles adhere to the 'rounded binary' design, with three constituent sections, the last representing a 'reprise' of some sort, and a coda added to conclude the form. This basic formal 'skeleton' of the Bagatelle is observed within their exiguous predecessors, numbers 7-11 of op. 119. Yet the Bagatelles of op. 126 are more substantial in content and less rigid, or more subtle and intricate, in their handling of the 'rounded binary' or 'small ternary' formal type. Both

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<sup>24</sup> Cone (1977), 85.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> In Spitzer (2004), 244

experimentation of form and the miniaturisation of Beethoven's own 'late style' language within these Bagatelles converge to create pieces of greater artistic substance and greater denseness of compositional technique.<sup>27</sup> Such denseness and intricacy of form is obvious in scholars' reception of the op. 126 Bagatelles: as Lewis Lockwood summarises, these six Bagatelles show Beethoven "deepening the expressive qualities of his short piano pieces once more..."<sup>28</sup>

The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with two instances of an expressive deepening of the Bagatelle's prototypical form. Firstly, we turn to a processual amplification of the middle section of a 'rounded binary' design in the first piece of the set. Secondly, the compression of this same process within the third Bagatelle will concern us. I will hope to highlight by way of these brief analyses a general idea of Beethoven's treatment of basic formal types and traditional schemata. The issue of tonal rhythm will be the subject of the succeeding chapter in relation specifically to miniaturisation and the consequent experimentation and multiple methodology of discourse. For the present time, however, it will suffice to illuminate one specific constraint of formal treatment (the elaboration of the miniature's prototypical formal structure) as a window into the 'late style.' It is the *general* idea of idiosyncratic treatment that concerns me; the compact structure of the Bagatelle sheds light most easily and neatly onto this stylistic concern.

#### IV

"Harmonic balance" is one issue that Edward Cone identifies as being "seriously questioned" within the late Bagatelles.<sup>29</sup> It is most perceivable in the forms of the op. 126 Bagatelles that Beethoven was carrying out experimentation not only with harmonic processes themselves, but with the overarching harmony that governs a piece of music (Koch's tonal punctuation). The mechanical scherzo of op. 119 (no. 10) broaches the notion of an initial ambiguity of harmony, whereby the arrival of tonic harmony, A major, four bars into the piece, is heard at first as the subdominant harmony (within an ostensible E major, the harmony that starts the piece), and is only confirmed as tonic in the five-bar coda (Ex. 1.4). This is, of course, a witty miniaturisation of the mechanical scherzi of

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<sup>27</sup> Denseness as compressions and cross-references will be considered later in connection with motivic behaviour.

<sup>28</sup> Lockwood (2003), 397

<sup>29</sup> Cone (1977), 86

Beethoven's late period, in which the music threatens to repeat infinitely, circling the motivic material with no sense of a fixed point of articulation in the form.

Ex. 1.4: No. 10 of op. 119, complete



An understated instance of initial harmonic contingency actually spills over into the middle section of a 'rounded binary' form in the opening Bagatelle of op. 126. What results is a hyperbolic harmonic-circling upon a fragmented motivic strand. The superficial formal schema, the explicit distribution of musical sections, conforms to the basic 'small ternary'/'rounded binary' model of later eighteenth-century practice and can be summarised as follows:

	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>  :</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>A'</b>	<b>Coda :  </b>
Bars	1-8	9-16		17-32	33-39	40-47

From this schematisation the constituent parts of the whole are perfectly symmetrical, maintaining phrase lengths of eight bars (sixteen (8+8) in the B section). Section A presents the principal eight-bar melody, which is then repeated with decoration and "more

richness of movement.”<sup>30</sup> The section marked as A’ reprises the principal melody but, due to the re-writing of the supporting voices, this is best qualified as a ‘reinterpretation’ of the first section rather than an exact or lightly decorative ‘repetition.’

The above schematisation would seem to satisfy the constraints of an eighteenth-century dance, that is, by geometrical symmetry, not dissimilar to the tenth Bagatelle of op. 119. The peculiar harmonic behaviour of the actual music, however, grates against this geometrical symmetry. Between the relatively orthodox phrase-structural designs of sections A and A’ lies the saliency of the ‘contrasting middle’ (B), which Benet Casablancas describes as the “hypertrophy” of the form.<sup>31</sup> Such salience is not a consequence of length in bars as compared with the outer sections (twice that of the principal melody). Nor is it due to the loose organisation of the thematic functions: there is nothing unusual in presenting an unconventionally organised theme-type(s) within the middle section of a ‘small ternary.’ This is, in fact, a standard procedure, one that allows the music to evade a strong cadential confirmation *in* the dominant key and instead proceed to the *dominant of the tonic key* in preparation for the return to the first section. Rather, it is the manner by which Beethoven emphasises the dominant key of the fundamental tonal arch (I-V-I) that elicits such marked salience. In particular, it is the amplification of the dominant by circling relentlessly around the progression V/V-V using a three-note figure from bar 20 as protagonist, an amplification that seizes control of the music and thus develops “according to its own law,” to use the words of Adorno.<sup>32</sup>

The ‘hypertrophy’ of this Bagatelle, therefore, achieves a ‘standing on the dominant’ function by clinching the three-note figure at the end of bar 20 and reinterpreting it as a *perpetuum mobile* under which the harmony oscillates between V/V and V. This is a literal ‘standing on the dominant,’ a seemingly interminable prolongation (Ex. 1.5). Accordingly, Adorno writes of this structural schism that “[a] giant hand seems to thrust itself into the peaceful structure.”<sup>33</sup> The consequence of this impeding ‘giant hand’ is an immediate change of metre from 3/4 to 2/4 at bar 21, in which the three-notes emerge from the preceding bar to be transformed from a cadential figure, typical of “mere connective materials,”<sup>34</sup> to an actual motif. The sudden change of metre gives

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<sup>30</sup> Adorno (1998), 130

<sup>31</sup> Casablancas (1999), 26. I will refer to this section of music hereafter as the ‘hypertrophy’ of the form.

<sup>32</sup> Adorno (1998), 130

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Casablancas (1999), 29

prominence to the ‘contrasting middle’ section, and serves to challenge the tonic key of G major.

Ex. 1.5: No. 1 of op. 126, bars 20-24



It is not only a change of metre that affords the ‘hypertrophy’ (bars 21-30) its markedness, however. Rather, it is what Edward Cone calls an “expansion of the metrical harmonic unit.”<sup>35</sup> That is, Beethoven literally widens the time-scale by stretching the preceding harmonic movement of the bass from a crotchet in triple time (bars 17-20) to a minim in the new duple time signature. Cone refers to the metrically expanded bass movement of bars 21-24 as the “hypothetical bass” (Ex. 1.6).<sup>36</sup>

Ex. 1.6: No. 1 of op. 126, Edward Cone’s “hypothetical bass”



The geometrical symmetry of the ‘rounded binary’ schema is contorted within these bars by paradoxically appearing to be static and, at the same time, dynamic, or developmental. The music appears static when the harmony V/V consumes six beats (three bars of duple time). Beethoven slows down the harmonic rhythm, in turn magnifying the pulsating crotchet bass that has pervaded the piece thus far. Moreover, the motivic ‘flourish’ seized upon from the upbeat of bar 20, with its insistent appoggiatura (b’-a’), yields a certain sense of ‘dawdling.’ The protagonist of the Bagatelle’s “discursive flow” at this point in the music, says Casablancas, is given to an unimportant, even bland, background figure or “connecting-link” (the cadential ‘flourish of bar 20), which consequently suspends any

<sup>35</sup> Cone (1977), 99

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

“proper sense of continuity.”<sup>37</sup> It is as if the music is stuck in time, determined to a relentless circling of the ‘flourish.’

The dynamic or developmental aspect of this passage, on the other hand, relies on an inherently Classical procedure. It is achieved by a process of ‘fragmentation’ upon the three-note ‘flourish,’ a process that underlies a sense of progression towards the cadential goal within a Classical sentence phrase-type.<sup>38</sup> A perceived sense of development is attained when the ‘flourish’ is contracted in length from quavers to quaver-triplets to semi-quavers, with chromatic appoggiaturas (g# and bb/a#) heightening the forward motion toward the cadenza of bar 30.

Of course, this is another twist of proportion, a contortion of Classical balance: the fragmentation of motivic units is usually reserved solely for the latter half of an eight-bar sentence within the Classical style, in order to generate a push towards the cadence.<sup>39</sup> To apply fragmentation as the developmental process itself, upon the motivic deliberation of the ‘flourish,’ renders this passage one of the most dense of the late period works. The conventional ‘flourish’ within this phrase is exposed in the foreground structure to take charge of the ‘discursive flow’ of the music, thus transcending its former role as a mere connective material between more hierarchically pertinent functions. The prosaic and static harmonic motion is merged with the dynamic process of motivic fragmentation. The result is a bold deformation of formal proportions.

In terms of dynamicism, therefore, the ‘hypertrophy’ of this form relinquishes any sense of geometrical symmetry in favour of a hyperbolic ‘end-orientated process,’ a patent forward drive toward the cadence of bar 30 (the structural dominant of the form). Beethoven intentionally disturbs the regularity of bars 17-20 to create the ‘hypertrophy,’ built from a subsidiary three-note figure. This is diversity within the middle of unity, that is, within the two conventionally formed outer pillars of a ‘small ternary’/‘rounded binary.’

Yet this diversity is not an abrupt juxtaposition of disparate material or heterogeneous textures, as is often the case in Beethoven’s late string quartets, for example. It is instead

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<sup>37</sup> Casablanca (1999), 30

<sup>38</sup> See Caplin (2001), 11

<sup>39</sup> The first movement of Beethoven’s piano sonata, op. 2, no. 1 is the most popular example of fragmentation within the Classical sentence, especially by Schoenberg and the advocates of his theory.

a move whose initial surprise is counterbalanced by its own logical development. There is no external material that is brazenly plunged into the structure without justification. As I mentioned earlier, Adorno observes that the melodic movement of the 'hypertrophy' is fashioned 'according to its own law,' with the three-note figure of bar 20 generating its own trajectory, and thus modifying the appropriate musical parameters accordingly (the change of meter at bar 21). The 'hypertrophy,' from bar 21 onwards, is logical because its melodic figure is seized from the previous phrase. It is the most subtle of transitions, devoid of laborious craftsmanship. As Martin Cooper has observed, it is as if "Beethoven's attention" was literally "caught by a single phrase."<sup>40</sup>

Paradoxically, then, the most conspicuous section of the Bagatelle is achieved by a logical and frugal transition from the "peaceful structure," as Adorno terms it, to the 'hypertrophy' of the form.<sup>41</sup> It is apparent that the formal structure embodies a tension. The form is ostensibly a 'small ternary' or 'rounded binary,' this conclusion being based upon the distribution of formal functions in the 47 bars of music. However, the 'contrasting middle section' achieves extreme contrast by a static 'standing on the dominant' function and the dynamic thrust of motivic fragmentation. Consequently, the tonal rhythm of this Bagatelle is heavily tilted toward its dominant (D major). As we will see in the discussion of cyclical form, this has repercussions for the whole cycle.

## V

In the third Bagatelle Beethoven similarly applies metrical expansion to the middle of the form, although to generate a quite different effect from the first of op. 126. A cursory glance at the opening of this Bagatelle brings to mind the texture familiar to the expressive, song-like slow movements of the late string quartets. The opulent timbre of the piano's middle register, reinforced by a deep bass pedal, is particularly suggestive of the warm *sotto voce* texture of the *Cavatina* from the string quartet in B $\flat$ , op. 130, completed two years after op. 126. Such adjectives as "hymn-like" and "darkly rich" fully reflect the similarity in texture.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, it is a texture of the late period that is

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Cooper, *Beethoven: The Last Decade 1817-1827* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 217

<sup>41</sup> Adorno (1998), 130

<sup>42</sup> Cooper, M. (1985), 219; Mellers (1983), 219

continually equated to the voice, one that is implanted with a certain "vocal impulse."<sup>43</sup> This Bagatelle, therefore, can be classified as the song of the cycle, imparting a necessary change in mood from the indefatigable drive of the preceding Bagatelle.

The third Bagatelle moves the process of the first to a more extreme level. The 'contrasting middle' of the first Bagatelle is a lingering passage upon a 'linkage' theme, from the end of a regular four-bar phrase in the new dominant key area, which manipulates the temporal scale of the music to present a process of magnification rather than a section of conventional thematic functions. Also, the obfuscation between the structural dominant concluding the 'hypertrophy,' and the tonal stability of the re-exposition (bars 30-34) in the first Bagatelle are a result of a dynamic process began by the cadenza and followed by a diminished arpeggiation that yields a sense of growth into the re-exposition.

The third Bagatelle represents an intensification of this design. It is a realisation of the form towards which the first Bagatelle tends: the passage set between the two main structural sections of the third Bagatelle (bars 24-27) is now a consummate process, engendering no theme or motivic fragment as protagonist. It is a process that stretches a simple harmonic progression. The cadenzas and the recitative (bars 24-27) homogenise into the function of 'transition,' progressing from the theme to the variation as an inextricable element of both sections. By intensifying, or rather, by telescoping the same process of metrical expansion from the first Bagatelle, Beethoven generates not a hyperbolic middle section of a ternary design, but a seamless movement from an expansive sixteen-bar period and codetta (bars 1-24) to its variation. The same process that produces a form marked by an over-prominent 'contrasting middle' section can also dissolve the ternary model altogether.

After the serene sixteen-bar theme (an eight-bar antecedent, answered by an eight-bar consequent), there resides the codetta to the theme (bars 17-23). At this point in the music a sustained dominant pedal in the bass at first functions as a conventional 'standing on the dominant,' over which the upper-voice swings melodically with 'horn calls,' from tonic to dominant, first in sixths and then inverted to thirds (Ex. 1.7). The dominant pedal is prolonged, regardless of the melodic resolution to tonic harmony at bar 21 (Ex. 1.8).

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph Kerman, *The Beethoven quartets* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966) 196. Kerman focuses upon this aspect of the slow movements within the late quartets, attributing to the *cavatina* a "thoroughly operatic stance."

Distance emerges within this passage both literally, in the registral gap between the two hands, and metaphorically in the harmony, when the melody and bass are severed and move noncongruently, intoning tonic six-four chords. As this melody then descends and recalls the descent of bars 2-4, the gap in registral distance contracts, and in bar 23 Beethoven begins to draw together the two hands. The seemingly immutable pedal rises to the leading note of the tonic at which point the bass and melody converge on a first inversion dominant seventh; this harmonic convergence pulls the music to the surface, to re-emerge from the distance as now existing in the present. In a similar manner to the first Bagatelle, though more modest in proportion, the climactic juncture of the music, in this case the congruence of upper-voice harmony and lower-voice supporting bass, is emphasised by an expansion of the beat, that is, by an expansion of the ‘metrical harmonic unit.’

Ex. 1.7: No. 3 of op. 126, ‘Horn calls’ over dominant pedal, bars 17-20



Ex. 1.8: No. 3 of op. 126, bars 21-23



The expansion of the ‘metrical harmonic unit’ formed a complete section (the **B** of an **ABA** model) within the first Bagatelle. Expansion in the third Bagatelle, however, is more succinct in both its nature and function. It is in nature a transitory bar that is augmented into four. The dreamlike and idyllic sense of distance generated within the codetta to the theme is broken off with an intrusion by the “internalized soloist” of the “written-out cadenza,” an element, incidentally, that is prevalent in the late period works,

particularly those for keyboard (Ex. 1.9).<sup>44</sup> This ‘soloist’ facilitates the move from the harmonically static codetta to a new beginning, the variation of the song. As the harmonic rhythm of the original theme is sought to be resurrected, Classical plasticity, in the form of rigid cadential intervention, is superseded by a new, fluid and thoroughly late Beethovenian formal trajectory.

Ex. 1.9: No. 3 of op. 126, essential harmonic function of cadenzas and recitative, bars 24-27

The image shows a musical score for four bars (bars 24-27) in a two-staff system. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music consists of four bars. The first bar starts with a treble clef and a bass clef, with a '24' above the treble staff. The second bar has a treble clef and a bass clef. The third bar has a treble clef and a bass clef. The fourth bar has a treble clef and a bass clef. Below the bass staff, there are harmonic labels: Eb: V7, I, and V7.

In terms of function, these four bars (bars 24-27) serve as a harmonic prolongation. A progression from the dominant-seventh (first inversion) to tonic and back to dominant (second inversion), complete with a melodic ‘recitative’<sup>45</sup> that falls from Eb to Bb (bars 26-27), functions as the central dominant harmony of the essential tonal arch of Classical form (the V from the quintessential I-V-I paradigm of Koch). Just as Beethoven disfigured sonata form with alien formal models in the late string quartets, here the eighteenth-century prototypical ternary form is contorted by eschewing a substantial ‘contrasting middle’ function whilst, however, maintaining the structural signpost of such a section (by articulating the dominant in a salient stretching of the normative beat).

The written-out cadenzas are not to be interpreted as mere ‘filling in’ figuration between essential harmonies, for want of more imaginative or substantial transitory material. The cadenza in the late period works, like many conventions bequeathed from the genres of the Classical style and before, as discussed at the start of this chapter, are given a new meaning and a more important functional role by Beethoven. He animates their former conventional rigidity whilst paradoxically assuming their former contextual meaning. The cadenza is reserved specifically for points of climax, not as ostentation, but rather as a way of stretching time beyond the bar lines. Added emphasis can be given to a climactic arrival upon a cadence, for example, by stretching the music’s time-scale (the fixed

<sup>44</sup> Rumph (2004), 104

<sup>45</sup> Cooper, M. (1985), 219

ordering of beats to a bar) and inserting the one custom of musical language that disregards strict temporal organisation of any sort. In short, Beethoven realised that the cadenza could be used to stretch the time-scale at any given point in a piece of music. This ensures that extra emphasis or psychological importance be granted to a structurally significant event. The cadenza as a convention ensures that the backbone of tonal punctuation is maintained within this song (the I-V-I arch), despite the preclusion of authentic ternary-form functions.

This interpretation serves to dismiss the notion of the third Bagatelle as fulfilling the functions of a “very simple, three-part song.”<sup>46</sup> Such generalisations of schema ultimately veil the function of the intervening cadenzas: their psychological and expressive meaning are overlooked and taken literally to be four bars of real music that constitute an authentic structural divide. There is no new key area formed within these four bars, nor is there a ‘standing on the dominant’ function that would enable one to perceive of this passage as a complete structural section. It is a miniaturisation within a miniaturisation: an expansion of the beat, fantasia-like cadenzas and recitatives are compressed into the smallest space, between the most sparing of harmonic progressions, within the smallest of formal types.

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The elaborations of the prototypical ‘small ternary’/‘rounded binary’ formal schema within the first and third Bagatelles, more specifically in the central climactic section of these pieces, are apposite instances of Beethoven’s unique handling of the prototypical structure of the eighteenth-century miniature. Furthermore, they account for the increase in formal expression from Beethoven’s earlier attempts of op. 119 by means of an aberrant but manneristic hyperbolisation of musical parameters (in the case of the first), and an equally idiosyncratic compression of musical process (in the case of the third). On a higher level, the search for new stimuli within old ‘models’ of discourse, in this case the ‘miniature’ forms of the eighteenth-century, reflect fully Beethoven’s tendency to abstract and build upon older, often antiquated modes of musical organisation and expression.

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<sup>46</sup> Adorno (1998), 131

## Chapter 2

### *Old Roads to New Forms: Miniaturisation and Multiple Style in the Bagatelles*

#### I

It is well-known that in his later years, from around 1817, Beethoven became more curious about the music of the past. This stretched beyond the time of Bach and Handel to embrace the early Baroque and late Renaissance periods. The conversation books of 1819 in particular are testament to his enthusiasm for the music of the past, and especially to his concern for the theories on the pre-tonal language of the modes. Thus, Czerny told Beethoven that “we have some old Italians,” referring to the theorist and composer Gioseffo Zarlino (1517-90).<sup>1</sup> The copying out of pieces by Byrd and Palestrina has obvious implications for the *Heiliger Dankgesang* of op. 132, and the copying out of contrapuntal works by Baroque composers such as Georg Muffat and Antonio Caldara adds biographical weight to Beethoven’s new exploration of counterpoint within his compositions.<sup>2</sup>

Beethoven also took influence from another historical practice that is not as frequently, if at all, documented by the composer or his acquaintances. The dance forms of the mid eighteenth-century held importance for the Bagatelles of op. 119, as was discussed in the previous chapter. From 1808 there is a marked difference in Beethoven’s ‘heroic’ style with the piano trios, op. 70 nos. 1 and 2, in which the influence of Haydn becomes more pronounced. Elaine Sisman speculates that the F# major piano sonata, op. 78, of the following year, the year of Haydn’s death, was conceived by Beethoven as a *tombeau* for the master.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, it is not only the key of the work that alludes to Haydn (as in his ‘Farewell’ symphony); Beethoven obviously draws upon his style of musical construction and expression, as well as his well-known gambits. Beethoven’s interest in the music of the past, then, embraces not only the distant past but the recent, that of his childhood, to which he remained faithful throughout his career.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Lockwood (2003), 367

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine R. Sisman, “After the Heroic Style: Fantasia and the ‘Characteristic’ Sonatas of 1809,” in *Beethoven Forum* 6, ed. Lewis Lockwood, Christopher Reynolds and Elaine R. Sisman (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 86-87

The recourse to prototypical schemata, another strand among his various pre-occupations with musical history, is a fundamental component of the op. 126 Bagatelles. This affords the notion of miniaturisation to be the function of all aspects of their form. It is such, of course, because of the smaller dimensions of the Bagatelle, that is, because they are ‘miniatures,’ more modest in proportion than the accustomed forms of the time. They are indicative of the general tendency to return to historical models that is inherent in forms of all proportions, particularly in the expansive movements of the late string quartets that were to follow. For instance, one recalls the interaction of Ritornello and sonata principles in the first and fourth movements of op. 127. The Bagatelles are consistent with the formal concerns of the ‘late style,’ then, as they explore new stimuli from pre-existing means.

However, as I explained previously, the Bagatelles can be seen to represent miniatures in the specific sense of an eighteenth-century ‘laboratory.’ Concomitantly, their function is consistent with the concern of these pedagogical forms: namely, that the quintessential function beneath external differences of the music is analogous on all levels and proportions of design, between small models and large compositions. Thus, the concept of small forms as ‘representations’ in miniature of larger designs invites one to comprehend the same processes and ‘play’ of form within both small and large forms.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, on a methodological level, subtle choices within the realm of a specific stylistic constraint of formal articulation can be discerned more easily within the smaller model. Formal elision, for example, can be scrutinised to specific detail, uncovering specific methods, or alternative methods within different pieces, of achieving such a goal. Equally, solving a specific compositional problem is facilitated within the ‘miniature’ of the Bagatelle. Most importantly, however, is that all the elements of Beethoven’s late period works, in this case on the level of form, are miniaturised.<sup>5</sup> To use the words of Lewis Lockwood, the six Bagatelles, op. 126, offer Beethoven a “museum of small forms,” an opportunity to create artefacts, each of which reflect the varied approaches to formal articulation that makes up the veritable museum of the ‘late style.’<sup>6</sup>

The Bagatelles of op. 126, then, miniaturise elements of the style from which they come, the so-called ‘late style.’ Such miniaturisation, however, is not one of literal or

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<sup>4</sup> Koch, in Spitzer (2004), 244

<sup>5</sup> The elements on other levels that are miniaturised within the Bagatelles will be discussed in the succeeding chapters.

<sup>6</sup> Lockwood (2003), 398-399

proportional replication of some constraint, whether it is motivic, thematic or otherwise. The concept of miniaturisation, as I use it in this discussion, does not involve the duplication of motives from a string quartet, for example, in which these are subject to a proportional compression and merely placed into the vernacular of the Bagatelles. Such would inevitably lead one to conclude that the late period works are a unified set in terms of immediate elements (such as the motive).<sup>7</sup>

What I aim to show in this chapter, rather, is that the elements of the 'late style,' as a set of constraints manifest within the works of this period, are discernible within the Bagatelles in various realisations. What emerges is unity within diversity: aspects of the late Beethovenian formal ambiguity, to name an instance, can be traced within different contexts, some extreme, others slight in their treatment, within in each of the six Bagatelles. Turning to the structure and process of the forms specifically, there is a predominantly uniform schema reflecting, in general principle, the designs of the eighth and ninth Bagatelle of op. 119. As I briefly discussed within the previous chapter, however, the symmetry of this formal distribution can prove to be superficial: the first Bagatelle of op. 126 clearly accentuates this point, with the 'hypertrophy' of the form shifting importance from the tonic pillars of the initial **A** section to the dominant harmony of a 'statically-developmental' **B** section.

I will also examine miniaturisation on the level of form. The differing treatment of the essential structural schema, or varying permutations of such a schema, namely, the **ABA** design, is illuminating for two reasons. Firstly, the Bagatelles exhibit the constraints of the larger, 'monumental' works of the late period (the ninth symphony, the *Missa Solemnis* and the last five string quartets in particular). They are consummate examples of Koch's 'representations' in miniature of larger forms. Moreover, the intimate nature of the solo piano miniature, as opposed to the public genre of the symphony or even the dramatic narrative of the contemporary sonata, affords a certain intellectualism on the part of the composer. Beethoven can play with certain elements of his style that were established within the five piano sonatas of the years 1817-1822, elements that are ultimately reified within the bold formal dimensions of the last string quartets.

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<sup>7</sup> Deryck Cooke's article, "The Unity of Beethoven's Late Quartets," *Music Review* 24 (1963), 30-49, employs this very process of reductive 'motif-spotting' in the late string quartets, speculating that "the set may be treated as a single phenomenon" due to the pervasive *Grundgestalt* found in various realisations (such as at the start of the first movement of op. 132).

Secondly, the fundamental nature of the Bagatelle, its rhetorical as well as technical facets, can be expounded by the implementation of a general but uniform schema on an abstract level. As a superficial 'backbone' to the form of the Bagatelles, this schema (in this case the **ABA** schema of eighteenth-century small forms) is maintained to highlight similitude and/or deviation, not only from conventional permutations of such forms but also from each other within the opus. In the case of the latter, the different realisations of a certain procedure may be discerned. Conversely, alternative methods may be employed to achieve the same formal process or goal. In any case, the Bagatelles highlight the multiple discourse of the 'late style' that was briefly touched upon in the previous chapter.

Within the 'style of styles' that is the late period works of Beethoven, then, one perceives in each Bagatelle a different way of handling one specific problem or part of the form. Because the Bagatelles are prototypical formal types, basic forms that embody in essence the elements of more elaborate and expansive designs, each strand of the multiplicity of the 'late style' may be uncovered as one facet of a specific Bagatelle. In this respect the Bagatelles are literally a 'museum' of stylistic constraints.

These two methodological considerations (the Bagatelle as miniaturising elements of the 'late style,' and the Bagatelle as one realisation among many in the multiple constraints of the style) are treated respectively. It should be noted, however, that a discussion of one will inevitably embrace aspects of the other. Thus, a discussion of the miniaturisation of 'late style' formal elements will inherently entail a notion, however slight, of this being just one instance among many of the same kind; such is evident in the very fact that not one of these Bagatelles applies the same formal characteristics, despite a similar result in formal rhythm among some of them.

I turn initially to the first and sixth Bagatelles, and aim to show two characteristic ways in which Beethoven avoids the rigid congruity of formal rhythm that characterises the high Classical forms. As I hope to show, this lies not in brazen subversion of established 'rules,' but in a more deep-rooted stylistic constraint of Beethoven's later years, one that has played a dominant role in my discussion thus far: a reversion to an older musical language, in this case to the 'tricks' Haydn himself used in the conventionalised forms of instrumental music. A combination of the two ways of the first and sixth Bagatelles will be the focus of the fifth, by way of a discussion of the fourth.

## II

In a style that reverts to older models of organisation and expression, it is not surprising to discover Beethoven probing forms that bear a resemblance to the formal articulation (or non-articulation) inherent in the music of the 1750s-1770s. This, after all, was an era in which musical parameters were less rigidly articulated, before the fixedness of form within the high Classical period yielded a certain conventionality of structural articulation. In his article on Haydn's divertimenti for Baryton trio, W. Oliver Strunk stresses that "an attempt to reduce the 'first movements' of the divertimenti to a formula, or rather to a series of formulas, would make hard reading."<sup>8</sup> Such an attempt on many forms of this period, by many composers apart from Haydn, would also 'make hard reading,' for the formulaic irreducibility of form was a symptom of this particular juncture in music history. By analogical extension, we can assume the same to be true of each of the op. 126 Bagatelles: they are irreducible to one 'true' or fixed **ABA** formula, precisely because they are miniaturisations of a style whose basis is found in recourse to elements of the *style galant*, a period in which elasticity of form was the *modus operandi* of musical discourse.

As Strunk observes, within the Baryton trios and other works of this period (c. 1766-1772) Haydn's forms, especially his sonata forms, are diverse in terms of both thematic material and in manifestation of design. As such, asserts Strunk, Haydn's forms of this period "discourage regularity."<sup>9</sup> "The conventions of the form had not yet become firmly fixed," says Strunk, and as a result it is often characterised somewhat disparagingly as the 'immature' Classical period.<sup>10</sup> The specific aspect of form that elicits this view resides in the manner of articulation after the double bar-line that concludes the exposition, that is, within the development and 'reprise' sections. An interruption of the development section with what is commonly known as a 'false reprise,' the early re-statement of the principal subject in the tonic key, is characteristic of both Haydn's music and his contemporaries' within this period. The illusion of a reprise is in turn thwarted by a continuation of the development section hereafter.

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<sup>8</sup> Oliver W. Strunk, "Haydn's Divertimenti for Baryton, Viola, and Bass," *The Musical Quarterly* 18 (1932), 235

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. See also Michael Spitzer, "Haydn's Reversals: Style-Change, Gesture and the Implication-realization Model," in *Haydn Studies*, ed. Dean W. Sutcliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998b), 182, and James Webster, *Haydn's 'Farewell' symphony and the Idea of Classical Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

This double deception of the 'false reprise' is decisive for Beethoven's late period works. It is not a specific model or permutation of such elasticity of form that is of importance in a discussion of the Bagatelles or other works within the 'late style.' It is, rather, the overarching principle that underlies the heterogeneity of the 'immature' Classical period, what Leonard Meyer terms the "non-congruence" between the primary musical parameters (melody, rhythm and harmony).<sup>11</sup> Even as early in the eighteenth-century as J. S. Bach, one can recognise this situation of parameters appearing 'out of phase': in a binary *Allemande* from Bach's 'Partita in Bb major' (from the *Clavierübung*), the reappearance, in the latter half of the form, of the second theme from the first section is 'out of phase' with the harmony, that is, non-congruent. This theme is not within the tonic key after a definitive and structural V but is actually "part of the uninterrupted movement towards [this structural] V."<sup>12</sup> The second theme and the tonic resolution of the form function non-congruently.

Beethoven's reversion to older models seems to have given rise to a predilection for this non-fixedness of parameters and a certain irregularity of formal rhythm inherent in the 'immaturity' of the mid eighteenth-century. Almost all his forms from the later years evince an adherence to the pre-Classical way of formal articulation. There is, of course, no one way of avoiding fixedness or regularity of structure, and this is evident in the differing instances of parametric non-congruence within the Bagatelles. The late piano sonatas and string quartets display flexibility, in which parameters are split, overlapped or blurred; these are miniaturised, explicitly or not, within the Bagatelles, op. 126.

The first Bagatelle of op. 126 was seen to disrupt the conventional formal rhythm of a three-part structure due to the almost grotesque twisting of proportions, both harmonic and motivic, within the 'hypertrophy' of the form. More specifically, the tonal rhythm is 'tilted' heavily towards the dominant key: relatively stable cadential closure on tonic harmony is elusive within the main body of this Bagatelle until the 'reprise' and 'coda' sections. This is, of course, a basic way of maintaining continuity, thus avoiding a rigid division of formal sections.

The reversal in register of the principal melody is not an arbitrary choice based on a concern for textural and/or timbral variety, but is fundamental in this section being

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<sup>11</sup> Leonard B. Meyer, *Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations* (London: University of California Press, 1973), 80-113

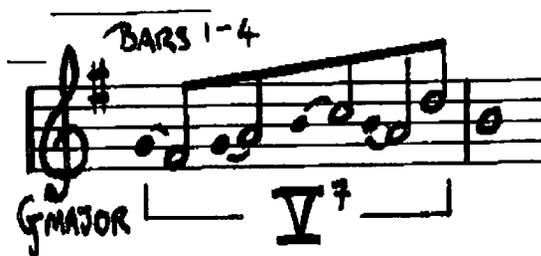
<sup>12</sup> See Rosen (1988), 24

conceived as a 're-interpretation' rather than a straightforward 'reprise.' As Benet Casablancas observes, the original four-bar theme (bars 1-4, echoed in bars 5-8) is now transformed into an "authentic cantus firmus" in the left hand, a solid foundation over which other voices move in counterpoint.<sup>13</sup> The original theme thus assumes new meaning by textural augmentation and its function as a genuine bass that satisfies the conventional bass movement of a perfect cadence

There is, however, a more fundamental significance of function assigned to the inversion of parts: the function of re-transition, that is, the progression from the middle section to the 're-exposition.' There lies an abnormally arduous task of progressing smoothly into the concluding section due to the grotesque convolution of temporal proportions in the 'hypertrophy' of the form. Beethoven's solution is to dovetail the two sections, resulting in an obfuscation of formal boundaries typical of the late period works and reminiscent of the unclear formal functions of the 'immature' Classical period, especially within the works of Haydn in this period.

The re-transitory function of this particular theme resides in its specifically dominant character. Indeed, this must pertain to all themes that function in this way, simply because the structural cadence that precedes the return of both the principal material and its tonic key area is invariably the dominant-seventh (in this Bagatelle we reach the structural V<sup>7</sup> at bar 30). The integral dominant 'tilt' of this particular theme is obvious from a diatonic simplification of bars 1-4 (Ex. 2.1). In short, the make-up of the theme, its initial openness, facilitates the 'blur' between the dominant of the 'hypertrophy' and the eventual tonic arrival of the 're-exposition.'

Ex. 2.1: No. 1 of op. 126, diatonic simplification of bars 1-3



Common to both the late period works in general and to this piece, then, is the notion of functional staggering. In bars 30-34 the melody is now, simultaneously, the return of the principal material and the harmonic support over which the upper voices can attempt to

<sup>13</sup> Casablancas (1999), 28

realign the primary parameters. This ambiguity between harmonic and melodic forces is increased by an ambivalence of meter between the two respective voices. The melody of the bass is, of course, in 3/4, whilst the voices providing the melodic counterparts and the harmonic 'padding' to the 'cantus firmus' imply a duple meter (2/4).

The outline of the principal theme is of a dominant-seventh, as aforementioned, but the placement of this progression in the bass also supplies a quintessential cadential support of b-c-a-d-g (beat 3 of bar 33 to downbeat of bar 35) that articulates strong closure on the tonic of G major as  $I_6 - IV - ii^7 - V^7 - I$  (Ex. 2.2). It is a gradual process of functional realignment from bar 32 to this particular point: chromaticism gives way to diatonicism on the last beat of bar 33 with the succession of  $b\flat$  by b-natural, and it is at bar 35, with the instigation of what is fundamentally a IV- V- I cadence, that duple meter transforms to the original meter of 3/4 to express an unequivocal G major. It is only at this juncture that the 'reprise' begins properly.

Ex. 2.2: No. 1 of op. 126, bars 34-35



It is therefore ironic that the melody which opened the piece, strongly outlining the dominant-seventh at the foreground harmonic level and hence providing an initial dissonance to the piece, also serves as a strong, archetypal bass progression that supports an effective harmonic resolution to the tonic. In his article on this Bagatelle, Casablancas assigns a 'private humour' on the part of Beethoven to the 'paradoxical effect' of the 'hypertrophy' of this Bagatelle: "It is a stroke of ingenuity which presupposes, logically, a perfect knowledge on the part of the listener of the basic mechanisms of the language employed."<sup>14</sup> I would argue that the re-transition from the middle section, in which the principal theme functions dually as the thematic 'reprise' and as a stable bass, is a guileful

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 29

device that perfectly highlights the ingenuity and neatness that is an innate element of Beethoven's miniature genre.

The overlapped arrival of the primary parameters within a 're-transition/reprise' passage is symptomatic of the elasticity of form evident in the late period works of Beethoven. Indeed, the very fact that 're-transition' and 'reprise' functions are here inextricable elements of one process attests to Beethoven's predisposition for the non-fixedness of formal articulation inherent in the 'immature' Classical period. In this instance, Beethoven's own 'trick,' if that be an appropriate term, is to construct, from a principle melodic line, a re-transition that at once denies expected closure by overlapping musical parameters, and achieves a stable arrival to the tonic 'reprise' proper (bar 35) by inverting the function of this line from a treble 'melody' to an archetypal bass 'support.' Such neat inversion of material is reminiscent of the gambit of which Haydn was so fond, whilst the merging of 're-transition' and 'reprise' functions is merely an intrinsic element of Beethoven's 'late style.'

### III

Within the context of the whole of the late period works, the above instance of parametric non-congruence is slight. It represents but one way in which functions are staggered, that is, are non-congruent. The late piano sonatas and string quartets display a wealth of ways in which to articulate musical material, especially within that part of the form that consists of a development or middle-section and the consequent 'reprise' or 'recapitulation' section. In a style which is predicated on formal versatility it is not surprising to find that there are differing degrees of non-congruence at play in Beethoven's forms. The first Bagatelle of op. 126, for example, is intricate in comparison with the more peculiar manifestations

In the third movement of the string quartet, op. 130, the functions of the form are broken up and staggered over the course of a small sonata design. The function of development in particular is broken up and scattered across the traditional boundaries of the structure. The authentic development section starts at bar 32 and ends at 38; it assumes a traditional process whereby the 'codetta' theme of the exposition (bars 26 and 29) is subject to a series of sequential modulations, first to B $\flat$  minor, then to E $\flat$  minor. The brevity of this

development section is compensated for in the form of a mini-development section that occurred earlier in the exposition, and in the recapitulation that is to follow.

To add confusion to the matter, the actual development (bars 32-38) is also a false recapitulation: after the codetta of the exposition, a concluding perfect cadence in the dominant (the key of the second subject group) is evaded by slipping back to *Db* major, the tonic key, via an interrupted cadence at bar 31. Harmonically, then, Beethoven sets up a recapitulation; he denies these expectations and rejects such a recapitulation in favour of the authentic development, which eventually leads to the *bona fide* recapitulation eight bars later (bar 39).

Within this movement Beethoven is playing with, and manipulating, our presupposed knowledge of the “basic mechanisms of the language employed.”<sup>15</sup> Firstly, Beethoven presents us with a developmental passage within the second subject area of the exposition; secondly, he concludes the exposition, after the elaboration of a codetta theme, not in the dominant, but with an ambivalent ‘slip’ back into the tonic key; thirdly, he tricks us by rejecting a recapitulation when this home key is reached, instead moving into the authentic development section. It is fair to speculate that with the premature recapitulation of bar 32 Beethoven is balancing the equally premature modulation of bar 7 (which was also rejected with a ‘slip’ back into the tonic key). These ‘breaks’ within the structure represent a more complex form of parametric non-congruence, a heightened proclivity within the string quartets to eschew the regularity and congruence of formal functions.

The pre-Classical approach to formal articulation, in which parameters reappear out of phase with one another, is not a tenet exclusive to the composer’s last decade, but one with which he was fond from an early age. The piano sonata in F major, op. 10 no. 2 of 1798, displays such intentional non-congruence that is characteristic of Haydn’s witticisms. Within the first movement one finds what may be termed a ‘literal false reprise,’ as compared to a normative ‘false reprise’: after beginning the recapitulation in the ‘false’ key of D major, Beethoven resolves the long range tonal tension not by restarting the whole exposition in the ‘correct’ key, but by sliding back into the tonic key at this point, as the thematic material continues to unfold. The important aspect to notice is that the argument of the linear axis (the themes of the exposition) is unbroken. It

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<sup>15</sup> Casablancas, see footnote 14, above.

resembles that of the exposition and is therefore literal. The harmony shifts against this, however: the functional parameters are fully congruent, therefore, only when the music returns home to the tonic.

The formal experimentation inherent in Beethoven's late works serves to magnify these 'slips' or 'breaks' of musical structure that was not uncommon in the early Beethoven. More common to the late period works, however, is a split, as opposed to an overlapping, of thematic and tonal elements. Beethoven often enhances this split by 'correcting' the parametric non-congruence, often by means of a harsh juxtaposition of material or an abrupt caesura in texture. Frequently, the form's meaning is generated from the manner of this 'correction.'

The most obvious and extensive example of the splitting of functions and their subsequent restatement, or 'correction,' is within the first movement of the string quartet, op. 132. The relatively short development section (bars 75-102) leads into a 'false reprise' of the exposition in the dominant key (E minor). This section turns out to be not just a 'false reprise' but an actual presentation of the exposition in the key of E minor, a 'false restatement,' complete with the submediant modulation to the second theme (E minor to C major; A minor to F major in the exposition). "From the point of view of [high] classic form," as Joseph Kerman stresses, "the tonal situation here is as aberrant as the nature of the development section itself."<sup>16</sup> When the exposition is restated again, now in the key of A minor, with the long range resolution of the second theme in the conventional A major/minor, the situation becomes clear. The A minor recapitulation is an abnormally large-scale 'correction,' which realigns the parameters that Beethoven had so emphatically split within an equally abnormal 'false reprise.' Says Charles Rosen of this: "the middle section ['false reprise,' bars 103-191, in E minor/C major] acts *harmonically* as a development and *thematically* as a recapitulation..."<sup>17</sup>

The above example would prove to be the most explicit of its kind within the late period works. Throughout the 'late style' the solution to resolving the 'break' in formal functions is found in the 'double statements' that Beethoven presents: theme and formal rhythm remain congruent, and the harmonic function is sundered from both, only for the parametric totality (the 'correct' articulation of parameters) to be stated in full. This point

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<sup>16</sup> Kerman (1966); 247

<sup>17</sup> Rosen (1988), 355

is crucial: the formal meaning, the musical expression, arises precisely in the manner by which Beethoven re-joins the primary parameters. This one *moment*, the moment of ‘re-alignment,’ of structural ‘correction,’ holds a large amount of musical meaning for Beethoven’s late forms. Indeed, the whole formal meaning can be atomised into this one, brief moment.

The first movement of the piano sonata, op. 110, is a perfect example. After the thematically static development section (bars 40-55) and the texturally enhanced reappearance of the opening motto (bars 56-62), Beethoven again starts the recapitulation, of the first theme, in the subdominant (*Db* major). What is striking in this instance is the remote direction in which Beethoven pushes the music hereafter: the subdominant is transformed into the subdominant minor (*Db* minor, notated as *C#* minor). This in turn modulates to its own relative major (*E* major). After only two bars of the second subject in the flattened submediant key (*Fb* major/*E* major), the music abruptly ‘slips’ back into the tonic key of *Ab* major via a simple chromatic descent, to restate the second subject in full (bars 76-82; Ex. 2.3). The harmonic development (turning from *Db* major to *C#* minor to *E* major) is undermined by an effortless ‘jolt’ back into *Ab* major.

Ex. 2.3: First movement of piano sonata, op. 110, bars 76-79

Such tonal motion “adds extraordinary harmonic tension to the recapitulation,” comments Charles Rosen on this movement.<sup>18</sup> The ‘correction’ to the splitting of thematic and tonal

<sup>18</sup> Charles Rosen, *Beethoven's Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 236-237

parameters, that is, the return to the tonic and the restatement of the second theme in this 'correct' key, is "properly ambiguous and mysterious."<sup>19</sup> The harmonic development is undermined by an effortless 'jolt' back into *Ab* major. The surface detail that corrects the formal break (the move from *g#* to *g*-natural) becomes a salient feature of the form, and thus assumes a deeper musical expression.

#### IV

The harmonic aberrance in the recapitulation of the first movement of op. 110, Rosen reminds us, is an expansion of a standard Classical model: "the most remote harmonic region is placed in the recapitulation, and yet this is achieved simply by the expansion of the most conventional procedure of late eighteenth-century style."<sup>20</sup> This "most conventional procedure" is the "introduction of subdominant harmony after the opening of the recapitulation."<sup>21</sup> To split the thematic function from the tonal by moving from subdominant to tonic within the recapitulation (mirroring the same dominant-orientated motion from I to V in the exposition) is one of the simplest ways of staggering the return of the exposition's material in the recapitulation. Indeed, Mozart uses the subdominant in this manner, as did Schubert after him, as a key that attenuates tonal tension.<sup>22</sup>

However, this is a procedure that actually pre-dates the Classical style. As William Caplin observes, it is one that "has antecedents in baroque and pre-classical practice."<sup>23</sup> This is one of the most frequently used and manipulated conventions of the eighteenth-century that Beethoven has recourse to in the late period works. As was observed above, Beethoven builds upon this convention to create novel and often anomalous formal types (the first movement of op. 110, among others). I mentioned in the previous chapter that the Bagatelles presented a unique environment in which Beethoven could forge new paths of development from existing models. The abstract formal schema of the 'prototype' provided the raw material, as it were, with which Beethoven could explore a more experimental path of formal process. The first Bagatelle was seen to stretch the conventional boundaries of an **ABA** schema, producing a uniquely, and somewhat

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 237

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 236

<sup>22</sup> Rosen (1988), 144, calls the movement from subdominant to tonic, whereby the existing transition from the exposition can be used with no recourse to new material, a "lazy mannerism."

<sup>23</sup> Caplin (2001), 174.

abnormally structured formal rhythm. New paths are also forged from formal conventions themselves. The first movement of op. 110 clearly illuminates this point, with its distinctive and 'mysterious' tonal motion from flattened submediant to tonic.

In the sixth Bagatelle of op. 126, Beethoven presents, in miniature, a similar split of thematic and tonal functions to op. 110, staggering the (tonal) resolution of the exposition's material. The subdominant character of this Bagatelle is unusually strong; Beethoven eschews any strong articulation of the dominant key. In this sense, the sixth Bagatelle approaches the forms of the Romantics more so than in the other Bagatelles. Whereas a move to the dominant key area is the most significant structural event of a Classical form, as in the first Bagatelle, Romantic formal articulation has a proclivity towards the subdominant as a structurally significant event. A structure articulated by a central, climactic subdominant harmony, of course, induces relaxation, an attenuation of the tonic-dominant tension of eighteenth-century forms. Thus, it is easy to understand why commentators attach such adjectives as "lyrical"<sup>24</sup> or "contemplative"<sup>25</sup> to this piece, where the subdominant governs the latter half of the form.

Tempting as it may be to ascribe a fully Romantic treatment of form to this Bagatelle, it is crucial for the understanding of the formal rhythm that the structural functions of this subdominant harmony represent an *approach* towards the Romantic dissolution of the tonic-dominant polarisation, and not an actualisation. For Beethoven relies upon the eighteenth-century distinction between the subdominant and dominant harmonies. In the early nineteenth-century, Rosen stresses, "the subdominant lost its antithetical function of opposition to the dominant, and became only another closely related key."<sup>26</sup> It is because Beethoven "observes that classical distinction" that he is seen as an exponent of the eighteenth-century sonata style.<sup>27</sup> And it is with acknowledgement of this distinction that one can comprehend the subtle yet substantial irony of formal non-congruence within the sixth Bagatelle.

A relatively common-place subdominant recapitulation becomes more significant in light of smaller events, ones that deviate from the normative eighteenth-century practice. As

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<sup>24</sup> Adorno (1998), 132. Adorno asserts that the "tone" of this Bagatelle recalls that of the *An die ferne Geliebte* cycle, the most Romantic of Beethoven's works.

<sup>25</sup> William Kinderman, *Beethoven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 261

<sup>26</sup> Rosen (1988), 354

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

was discussed within the previous chapter, Beethoven's late period forms are not wholly comparative to the forms of the Romantic generation. The latter negate for the sake of negation, to "repudiate convention," to use the words of Leonard Meyer.<sup>28</sup> Beethoven, rather, plays with conventions: he neither repudiates the conventions of the eighteenth-century nor does he conform to the rigid patterns of such 'schemata.'

The non-congruence of harmony and formal function is found within the first part of the main body of this Bagatelle (bars 7-21). The subdominant recapitulation is seen to be not only a splitting of harmonic and thematic functions but, on a larger level, a re-ordering of the Classical style's I-IV-V-I model. The framing *Presto* sections serve to magnify this ironic re-ordering. According to Adorno, these six bars "are among the strangest and most enigmatic left behind by the late Beethoven."<sup>29</sup> The "riddle" of their meaning, insists Adorno, "lies in their *conventionality*."<sup>30</sup> The passage distinctly resembles that of a concluding fanfare topic akin to that found at the end of a Classical symphony or concerto. The rising tonic harmonies of bars 5-6 are idiosyncratic of such a trope. More importantly, the conventionality of the concluding fanfare lies in the predictably emphatic V-I movement (here grounded by a tonic pedal). This gesture is static: it is one that traditionally confirms closure after the actual arrival of functional closure, what William Caplin terms an "after-the-end," "postcadential" function.<sup>31</sup>

The solution to the 'riddle,' then, lies in the fact that a 'postcadential' function introduces the piece. More specifically, it is an 'after-the-end' gesture precisely because it contains no subdominant harmony, for subdominant harmony is essential to *articulate* closure. The antithetical functions of subdominant and dominant were thus in the Classical style because a progression of IV-V is the most effective way of articulating closure onto the tonic at the level of the phrase. In the words of Meyer, it is "this progression [from subdominant to dominant] that specifies particular tonal centers [*sic*]."<sup>32</sup> The subdominant, then, is essential for the articulation of musical language and for achieving stable closure within a tonic key, because without it a V-I cadence is ambiguous: "a dominant to tonic progression does not define a tonal center, since that progression can be interpreted as I to IV in another key."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Meyer (1996), 164-167

<sup>29</sup> Adorno (1998), 132

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis from original.

<sup>31</sup> Caplin (2001), 256

<sup>32</sup> Meyer (1996), 274

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 274-275.

It is ironic that the subdominant plays a decisive role within this piece after its exclusion from the Bagatelle's introduction. This irony is compounded by deceptive moves towards a functional dominant. The weakening of cadences, and the use of deceptive ones, are an obvious part of the late period works.<sup>34</sup> The first six bars of the main body of this Bagatelle involve a tonic-dominant-tonic progression in a pair of three-bar phrases ('ritmo di tre battute'), grounded, as was the *presto* section, by a tonic pedal (Ex. 2.4a). At bar 13 the move to a new theme in the relative minor (C minor) suggests transition (Ex. 2.4b). Moreover, this move from tonic to relative minor is a prototypical approach to modulation that strongly implies arrival on the dominant: the C minor harmony would move to  $V^7/V$ , which would in turn resolve to V. Seen retrospectively, then, the relative minor harmony (C minor) should function as a large-scale ii in a ii-V-I progression in B $\flat$  major.

Ex. 2.4a: No. 6 of op. 126, bars 7-12



Ex. 2.4b: No. 6 of op. 126, bars 13-17



This transition, however, is interrupted at bar 15 before  $V^7/V$  is reached. This Beethoven does by flattening of the a-natural of bar 14, resulting in the *subdominant* of E $\flat$  major. This deceptive cadence, and the subsequent 'fall' back into the tonic, is not dissimilar to

<sup>34</sup> William Kinderman, *Beethoven's Diabelli Variations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 63. Kinderman writes that "[a] striking aspect of Beethoven's late compositional style is his tendency to obscure formal landmarks within individual movements, such as cadences." On a general level this flexibility of articulation reflects Beethoven's reversion to the 'immature' pre-Classical language, when elasticity of form was prevalent (as discussed above).

that of the third movement of op. 130, discussed above. In the words of Edward Cone, this break in harmonic implication “calls forth a restless continuation through a deceptive resolution.”<sup>35</sup> Yet the ‘restless continuation,’ in the tonic, is itself truncated by an abrupt and unprepared move to the dominant (Ex. 2.5). The secondary key area is established, therefore, not by a thorough transition and preparation, as was attempted in bar 13, but by the brazen nature of the material (the triplet figuration of bars 19-21).

Ex. 2.5: No. 6 of op. 126, bars 18-19



The thematic and harmonic functions are not aligned with each other at this point: they are functioning non-congruently. If it were not for the deceptive cadence of bar 15 the ensuing material of bars 16-18 would have established the tonal area of the dominant, which would have been confirmed by the ‘after-the-end’ cadential figure of bars 18-21. The harmonic function (V) is pushed along until the postcadential function of the ‘exposition’ section. In short, the dominant key area is undermined.

At the arrival of the subdominant recapitulation the thematic and harmonic functions become sundered. Yet this is no mere conventional subdominant recapitulation. As was discussed above in relation to the recapitulation of the first movement of op. 110, Beethoven expands the eighteenth-century procedure. In this case, Beethoven marks the arrival of the subdominant not only with a strong cadence, the strongest of the main body thus far, but with a strong contrast in texture: a deeper register and thicker texture complement the “tonal deepening and darkening...” of this patent arrival.<sup>36</sup> This strong cadential arrival, in the ‘false’ key, further undermines the dominant of the exposition. These factors serve to magnify the splitting of harmonic and thematic functions.

<sup>35</sup> Cone (1977), 95

<sup>36</sup> Mellers (1983), 411

In view of the deceptive cadences of the exposition, and the correlative late arrival of the dominant, the subdominant key area is the most salient formal event up to this point. When the transitory three-bar phrase from bars 15-17 reappears at bar 45 it is in the relative minor of the new key (F minor in  $A\flat$  major). Obviously, a simple repeat of the transition material is impossible if the music is to proceed back to the tonic, for in the 'exposition' the transition material moved from relative minor back to tonic. This would result in a fall back to  $A\flat$  major at this point, which would be an uncharacteristic anomaly, even for the experimental forms of Beethoven's 'late style.' In a similar manner to op. 110, the music 'slips' back into the tonic at bar 48 with no reworked transitory material (Ex. 2.6). The recapitulation proper (the alignment, or congruence, of harmonic and thematic functions) is confirmed only when the postcadential figure reappears now in the tonic key.

Ex. 2.6: No. 6 of op. 126, bars 46-49



The resolution from subdominant harmony to tonic is achieved only at the repeat of the three-bar transitory material and the three-bar postcadential figure (bars 48-53); the tonic is almost suffocated by the omnipresence of the subdominant. On the largest level, the subdominant significantly obscures the formal rhythm of the piece, with an authentic harmonic resolution eschewed within the three formal functions of 'exposition,' 'development' and 'recapitulation,' and is replaced with a terse 'slip.' The authentic harmonic resolution to the tonic is left instead to the extended coda.

The irony of this Bagatelle, therefore, is that the main body (bars 7-68) is framed by a *presto* section that lacks subdominant articulation. The 'main body,' on the other hand, is replete with movement toward and around the subdominant, whether it be a deceptive cadence (bar 15), a non-congruent structural arrival (the subdominant recapitulation at bar 33), or a denial of the dominant (the 'slip' back into tonic with no strong mediating dominant, at bars 45-49). The paragon of tonal articulation (an archetypal IV-V-I progression) is in fact reversed within the three normative functions of 'exposition,'

‘development’ and ‘recapitulation’ sections. Because there is no dominant to articulate arrival to the tonic after the ‘false recapitulation,’ but rather an unmediated ‘slip,’ the Classical syntactic structure is subverted. The only salient assertion of dominant harmony is when the music drops onto the postcadential figure within the ‘exposition’ (bars 19-21). The fluent, unbroken flow of the music, therefore, is a result of this reversal: the subdominant, the harmony that reduces tension and precludes strong articulation, comes after the dominant, resulting in a disproportionate V-IV-I.

## V

The subversion of the IV-V-I model in this Bagatelle is in fact anticipated by the fourth of the cycle. This Bagatelle has been described in relation to the other Bagatelles, by Wilfrid Mellers, as “structurally more conventional, in that it is a scherzo and trio.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the scherzo section (bars 1-51 and 106-160) of the scherzo-trio-scherzo schema conforms in design to the Classical model.<sup>38</sup> That is, it generally adheres to the **ABA**’ design of the ‘small ternary’/‘rounded binary’ model prevalent in the Classical style. Within this prototypical framework, however, Beethoven staggers the essential harmonic functions in a similar manner to that of the sixth Bagatelle. The difference is, however, that this yields a sort of formal discourse within the scherzo section.

It is again a situation in which Beethoven uses the antithetical relationship of the dominant and subdominant harmonies to generate a deeper expression through non-congruence. In the sixth Bagatelle Beethoven counterbalanced the rigid dominant harmony of the *presto* section with an emphatic assertion of subdominant harmony throughout the latter half of the main body; the conventionality of dominant articulation (delineation and end-orientation) was counterbalanced with the unbroken flow of the subdominant (a dissolution of tension and hence end-orientation). Such a process works *within* the ‘small ternary’/‘rounded binary’ design of the scherzo in the fourth Bagatelle, rather than between explicitly contrasted sections..

There is a lack of subdominant articulation within the exposition (bars 1-8): instead of an end-orientated articulation characteristic of Koch’s song form, Beethoven completes the eight-bar phrase with an abrupt and somewhat ambiguous juxtaposition (Ex. 2.7), wherein

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<sup>37</sup> Mellers (1983), 409.

<sup>38</sup> See Caplin (2001), 219-230.

the music climbs to the high register of the keyboard before reaching a cadence in G major, the submediant.

Ex. 2.7: No. 4 of op. 126, bars 3-6



The middle section (bars 9-39) counterbalances the lack of an articulative IV. Beethoven compensates for any lack of conventional harmonic articulation by a gradual emergence of a strong subdominant (E minor). This is obvious at the start of the middle section, with a statement of the opening theme, now in E minor. The movement through two closely related keys of E minor (C major and G major respectively) reinforces a strong sense of the subdominant (bars 12-20). The real affirmation and authentic tonal articulation of the subdominant, however, is reserved for the bars preceding the 'recapitulation' (bars 32-37): the main theme is given in a more developed form, now with a stable accompaniment figure, in the key of E minor.

It is significant that the most harmonically stable and thematically developed part of the piece thus far is within the subdominant key. This compensates for the harmonic imbalance of the opening eight-bar phrase. It is not, however, a 'false recapitulation,' a splitting of harmonic and thematic functions, as in the sixth Bagatelle, for this is only one part of a larger motion: it is a tonicisation of the subdominant in a large-scale IV-V progression that sets up the imminent recapitulation of the opening material at bar 40. The subdominant is over-emphasised to counterbalance the ambiguous articulation of the opening. On a higher level, it is part of an emphatic and unequivocal preparation for the return to the home key, a key that was circumvented before satisfactory confirmation in the opening bars. A well-prepared cadential articulation is thus required to resolve the harmonic tension of the form. The large-scale IV-V motion of bars 32-39 fulfils this requirement.

In this Bagatelle Beethoven makes the conventional point of reprise stronger and hence more conspicuous than in eighteenth-century practice. Paradoxically, this is attained by

denying a crucial component of tonal articulation. As a consequence, the tonal rhythm of the piece shifts from the beginning to the end of the scherzo section; the stability of Classical form is obscured. The staggering of harmonic functions (the subdominant) ensures that the scherzo be perceived as “all dynamic action and kinetic energy.”<sup>39</sup> The form achieves the conventional end without the conventional mean: the energy of the scherzo is sustained not simply by lucid, forward-looking articulation and strong syntactic relationships, but by the non-congruence and the subsequent ‘correction’ of conventional tonal articulation.

The fifth Bagatelle embodies a more complex tension than in the above example. The framework of a prototypical form (a ‘small binary’) is obscured by the content of the music. The harmonic functions are ambivalent with respect to the formal schema that is implied. Once again, the prototypical form (Koch’s model) serves as a conventional framework from which to build a structure that is characteristic of the ‘late style’ formal experimentation, and that yields a more deep and expressive form than a mere ‘trifle.’ Janet Schmalfeldt deftly encapsulates the situation with regard to the form of the fifth Bagatelle:

It is generally well known that Beethoven’s late works demonstrate his capacity to transform traditional formal models...[T]he model undergoing transformation here is the so-called *small* (or simple) *binary* form...In the Bagatelle, the double bars mark the boundaries of the two fundamental parts, and the final section (mm. 33-42) stands outside the essential form.<sup>40</sup>

The form of this Bagatelle is transformed by mixing elements from other eighteenth-century formal types. As such, certain functions from each are scattered across the structure. Correlatively, the primary parameters are not so much split (non-congruent) or staggered, but equivocal, that is, unclear in meaning if judged solely against a conventional model.

The eight-bar antecedent of the opening implies a sixteen-bar period. The first non-congruence in this Classical model, however, is the chromatic alteration of bar 10 (Ex. 2.8a). After this point the music passes through the harmonies of E minor, rising up, then descending to articulate a chromatically altered Phrygian cadence in this key (IV<sub>6</sub>-V; Ex.

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<sup>39</sup> Mellers (1983), 409

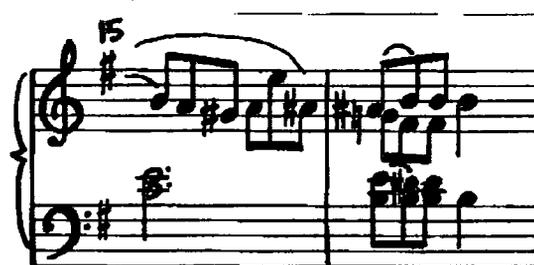
<sup>40</sup> Schmalfeldt (1985), 23. Emphasis from original.

2.8b). The relative shock of this deviation, to an imperfect cadence in the relative minor, implies a different continuation to what actually occurs. That is, the external design implies a 'small binary,' a design that Beethoven used in the Bagatelle, op. 119 no. 8.<sup>41</sup> In such a typical form the two main sections are repeated, the second of which moves from the dissonant key, that had been established in the first part of the form, back to the tonic. The second part of this form is non-congruent with the abstract schema that is implied; the formal implication created by the first part of the form is not realised.

Ex. 2.8a: No. 5 of op. 126, bars 9-11



Ex. 2.8b: No. 5 of op. 126, bars 15-16



What occurs instead is the inception of a 'trio' section. The key is C major, the subdominant, a key of relaxation and attenuated tension; the texture is continuous and simple, with melody in thirds and an unbroken triadic accompaniment, suggesting what Robert Hatten denotes as "placid stasis."<sup>42</sup> These elements, over a typical drone bass, imply the 'pastoral,' the topic that became associated with the 'trio' sections of a 'minuet-trio' form within the Classical style (Ex. 2.9). The harmonic instability at the end of the first section (bars 15-16) is not resolved or developed toward some point of resolution, as

<sup>41</sup> The 'small binary' and 'rounded binary' are exact in notation. That is, they both comprise two parts, normally with these repeated. "However," writes William Caplin (2001), 87, "the small binary distinguishes itself from the rounded binary primarily through its lack of genuine recapitulation..." The second part returns to the tonic key to conclude the form, but without the 'basic idea' of the first part of the form.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation and Interpretation* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1994), 80

a conventional binary design, but is simply discounted in favour of a seemingly “self-contained trio.”<sup>43</sup>

Ex. 2.9: No. 5 of op. 126, bars 17-20



Further compounding this formal non-congruence is the subtle modulation back to the tonic starting in bar 25. Notice here that the stasis of the pastoral, evident in the circumscribed melodic range of a perfect fourth (bars 17-24), is contravened by an archetypal ascent that unequivocally signifies a modulation to the dominant, in this case from C major to G major. The tonic is approached as if it were the dominant. Notice too that because the reappearance of the tonic at this juncture (that is, before the ‘self-contained trio’ can reach closure) is anomalous with regard to conventional models, that Beethoven marks arrival not by syntactic means, because he has breached the syntactic ‘code’ of this particular formal type, but by statistical means. In short, the arrival back to G major is premature and thus cannot readily ensure stability by purely syntactic means. Rather, a marked registral climax (one of Meyer’s ‘secondary’ parameters) at bar 29, strengthened by a ‘*rinf.*,’ forces an arrival back to the tonic. Only then is the tonic corroborated by syntactic means, with a  $I_6-IV-I_{6-4}-V^7$  cadential progression.

The above non-congruence and obfuscation of high-level formal function presents a further problem of large-scale interpretation according to archetypal schemata. Bars 33-34 are functionally ambivalent (Ex. 2.10), a point which is evident in two opposed interpretations by Edward Cone and Janet Schmalfeldt. Cone argues for this two-bar passage to be understood as a dominant prolongation which, after the metrically weak motion from V (D major) to I (G major) at the end of bar 32, serves as an authentic, albeit covert, dominant preparation for the true tonic recapitulation, “which should definitively arrive only with the advent of the theme itself in bar 35.”<sup>44</sup> Schmalfeldt, on the other hand, argues that bars 35-42 lack the functional resolution of a recapitulation because it

<sup>43</sup> Schmalfeldt (1985), 23

<sup>44</sup> Cone (1977), 93

“fails to re-establish the register of the opening theme.”<sup>45</sup> As such, this passage is only a “tender reminiscence,” that is, a coda.<sup>46</sup> These two bars, then, are for Schmalfeldt a tonic prolongation after authentic tonic closure at bar 32, one that links formal harmonic closure to a concluding, ‘after-the-end’ coda.

Ex. 2.10: No. 5 of op. 126, bars 33-35



Whichever view is taken from the above two, it is evident that the ‘atmosphere of childlike naïveté’ that William Kinderman discerns within this Bagatelle is merely a superficial one. The formal functions are staggered and obscured to create a relatively complex and original design. The ‘trio’ section is not a true one, according to the Classical archetype, for it lacks cadential closure within itself. Conversely, the modulation back to the tonic without a recapitulation of thematic material is not a ‘small binary’ design precisely because this section began as a harmonically stable section replete with the *topos* of the pastoral. The harmonic and thematic functions simply do not match up with the implied prototypes. Due to this peculiarly non-Classical treatment of form and its functional parameters (the non-regularity, as opposed to an almost formulaic design, of structural articulation), this Bagatelle is perhaps the one most reminiscent of the pre-classical or ‘immature’ age of composition, the most redolent of the age of formal ‘elasticity.’

Despite the convincing reversion to an older procedure of formal articulation (or non-articulation), the final section, (bars 35-42) redeems the structure, and creates a conventionally tempered formal rhythm which ultimately ensures that “the little composition nevertheless comes to a satisfying and convincing close,” to use the words of Cone.<sup>47</sup> Beethoven achieves this by conflating the formal functions of recapitulation and coda. Even if one accepts Schmalfeldt’s proposal that the middle section (bars 17-32) closes with stability in the tonic, the form, due to a relaxation of tonal tension at the

<sup>45</sup> Schmalfeldt (1985), 27

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Cone (1977), 93

inception of the ostensible 'trio' section, demands a *thematic* reprise rather than just a harmonic one. This is due to the fact that Beethoven causes two disparate formal functions to collide within this Bagatelle (that of the 'large ternary,' with a trio section, and a 'small binary,' with no thematic return, only a harmonic one within the two-part external framework).

Further to this, the recapitulation/coda conflation realises and hence sets into relief the conspicuous formal ambiguity from the earlier part of the form (the half-close on V of E minor in bars 15-16). Schmalfeldt correctly observes that bars 35-42 present "the consequent unit that might have appeared at mm. 9-16 had the initial periodic structure of the opening theme closed normatively in the tonic."<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, she recognises that "the final cadential gesture of the movement [*sic*] parallels and thus closes the open-ended gesture on the dominant of VI at m. 16..."<sup>49</sup> However, I believe that one crucial point is missing from these observations. The two-bar link passage of bars 33-34 corrects the formal 'slippage' or non-congruence that occurred in the middle of the form (bars 15-17): the note b is unequivocally established, through what Leonard Meyer terms an "axial" melodic motion in bar 34, as the third scale-degree of G major, balancing-out and resolving the same note that was the linear 5 of E minor in bar 16.<sup>50</sup> The sudden turn to a sparse texture only serves to emphasise this 'correction,' that is, the congruence of melody and harmony, the note b as 3 of the tonic rather than another step of another key area.

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The instances discussed from the Bagatelles, op. 126, consummately show that the reversion to the pre-Classical elasticity of form allowed Beethoven to experiment with the moment of formal resolution. The Bagatelles individually embody elements of form that were probed in the last five piano sonatas. In this respect, the sixth Bagatelle represents a miniaturisation of tendencies that informed the first movement of the piano sonata, op.

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<sup>48</sup> Schmalfeldt (1985). 27

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> See Meyer (1996), 242, when he describes axial melodies, which are a common trait of Romantic music, as ones that prolong one note "which functions as the axis around which higher and lower tones revolve and towards which they tend to gravitate." This type is in contrast to the eighteenth-century "changing-note melody." They serve to deny strong articulated motion as well as to infer the romantic ideological constraint of openness and becoming. In this example it is to confirm, without being part of a larger progression towards an articulated cadence, the third of the tonic key area.

110; the subdominant recapitulation and the tiny but structurally significant 'slip' back into the tonic that grasps tonal resolution are salient formal features of both the large and small designs of the two works.

However, the Bagatelle here is shown to move beyond the role of miniature; one begins to discover that the Bagatelle, as it is conceived in op. 126, does not solely 'miniaturise' elements of the 'late style' that were probed in the larger works, namely the piano sonatas. In the fourth Bagatelle, for example, Beethoven employs similar methods of formal articulation as he did in op. 110, but with a shift in emphasis he generates a different result in the design of the music. Moreover, the fifth Bagatelle highlights a point that will begin to unfold more forcefully within the subsequent chapters: the Bagatelle is not only a musical space within which to miniaturise established features of Beethoven's 'late style,' but can be individual in design. The Bagatelle can generate new realisations within the constraints of the 'late style.' In the case of the fifth of op. 126, the multiple style that is inherent in Beethoven's late period works emerges to create a curious design, subtle in appearance and mood but indicative of Beethoven's compositional concerns in his last decade, namely, the forging of new forms from the recourse to the models of the musical past.

## Chapter 3

### *Beethoven's Late 'Art of Variation': Transforming Musical Genres and Approaching the Concept of 'Veränderung'*

The listener who wishes to understand Beethoven's variations had better begin at once by relieving his conscience of all responsibility for tracing the melody. Moreover, he need not worry about the harmony.

Donald Francis Tovey, *Beethoven*.<sup>1</sup>

#### I

The manifold, intricate nuances in the texture of Beethoven's late period music often conjure a sense of a fissured and non-coherent surface. The individual utterances cast among the myriad surface gestures are reducible, in whatever contortion or disguise, solely to the techniques and stylistic remnants prevalent within the Classical style, that is, as 'topics.'<sup>2</sup> The individual topics that make up the distinctive texture of the Classical style largely originated and evolved in the individual dance of Baroque instrumental suites. A definition of any specific topic, therefore, resides in the recognition and delineation of the associative rhythmic figure, the time signature, the mode of key, the tempo, the nation of origin and the general ambiance that distinguished one dance-type from others (this method pertains to any textbook descriptions of individual Baroque dances, such as 'Gavotte: French dance in common time, begins with upbeat'). Topics also originated as highly distinctive 'styles,' ones that permeated movements constructed around a 'single affection,' such as the 'hunt style,' the 'brilliant style' or the 'singing style.'<sup>3</sup> It is commonly held that the success of the Classical style was its ability to digest these topics into a discourse that could express a variety of types, and at a various levels of the discourse, without an infringement upon the highly articulated syntax developed in

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<sup>1</sup> Donald F. Tovey, *Beethoven* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 125

<sup>2</sup> Kofi V. Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 30, lists a "universe of topics" that mixes both full dance movements (Bourée, Gavotte, Musette etc.) and elements or techniques within a single piece (cadenza, sigh motif etc.) that classical composers bequeathed from the music of the Baroque. This theory of topics is developed from Leonard Ratner's seminal study of classical music, *Classic Music: Expression, Form and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), in which he asserts that the style's essence lies in the variety and complexity of its musical material.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

the music of Mozart and late Haydn.<sup>4</sup> The topical episodes of the surface, as it were, had to march to the rules of syntactical function.

If one wishes to generalise further, and to move the discussion to a broader historical level, the Classical style can be viewed as a language built upon the hegemonical relationship of past inheritance and present possession. Put another way, the revered counterpoint of the late Baroque, which represents the highpoint of what can be achieved with musical material, was etched into the texture of the 'simple' style of the *galant* in an attempt to expiate the loss of what was now, in the later eighteenth-century, viewed as an unreachable standard of musical excellence.

After the complexities of Bach's and Handel's contrapuntal processes, and their manipulation of fugal textures, came a generation of composers, notably Sammartini, whose music was antithetical to that of their Baroque predecessors. The Enlightenment's emphasis on the 'agreeable,' 'appreciable' and the 'rational' inveighed against the learned complexity of the 'Church style' of Bach. Indicative of this shift within the musical aesthetics of the time is Johann Adolf Scheibe's diatribe against J. S. Bach in *Der kritische Musikus* of 1737. Scheibe deplores the music's extreme difficulty, its ornamental restrictions and, most importantly, the distortion of a prominent melodic line with superfluous polyphony.<sup>5</sup> From this criticism one can trace the facets of the *galant* style that were deemed as comprising true aesthetic value: Scheibe felt that Bach allows "a bombastic and confused style to suffocate naturalness in his pieces," and that he obscures the music's beauty "through excessive artifice."<sup>6</sup> Bach "contends with reason" when he leads "naturalness to artificiality" and "sublimity to obscurity."<sup>7</sup> The contemporary musical taste in Europe, then, was concerned with the symmetrical construction of phrases, rhythmic regularity and a restrained mood. Such 'gay' and 'pleasant' qualities were to radically change the musical style of the eighteenth-century. "Counterpoint was the thing to be avoided," states Giorgio Pestelli, and the style to supersede this, the *galant*, would be one "which clearly separated melody from accompaniment."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Topical activity in the music of Beethoven's 'late style' will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

<sup>5</sup> See Pestelli (1995), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Scheibe, in Enrico Fubini, *Music and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe: A Source Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 272

<sup>7</sup> Scheibe, in *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Pestelli (1995), 7

Homophony, pure and simple, was thus the hallmark of musical style in the mid eighteenth-century. This new “simplicity of style”<sup>9</sup> remained inexorably severed from what was now seen as the ‘academic’ style of Bach. Haydn, however, did not renounce the old practice altogether. In his instrumental works he sustained the paragon of outmoded counterpoint, the fugue, though he could not escape the intellectual milieu of the time. Consequently, the chasm between the two worlds is illuminated by each appearing utterly detached and independent from one another. Such detachment is exemplified within the second, fifth and sixth quartets of Haydn’s op. 20, written in 1772. The first three movements present a melodic voice, almost without exception in the first violin, under which the remaining three instruments provide triadic accompaniment. The finales, however, present fugues that conform in a strict, almost draconian manner to the contrapuntal procedures that inhabited the fugues of Bach. They are authentic High Baroque fugues that eschew any trace of the preceding homophonic movements.

In these works, then, there exists no balance between the unashamedly direct expression of early Enlightenment homophony and the reputedly cryptic procedures of ‘learned counterpoint.’ In the *galant* style the two worlds are irreconcilable: the modern preference for ‘natural’ and ‘agreeable’ melody and the recondite invention of the *ancien regime* could not be accommodated as anything but antithetical.

However, when he described the six quartets of op. 33, written in 1781, as being in an “entirely new and special manner,” Haydn recognised his feat.<sup>10</sup> These works consummately embody the mediation between the homophonic style and the counterpoint of the High Baroque. The mediation between these extremes was to become the foundation of the high Classical style, and was to secure its popular success, both then and now. The new, post-Baroque homophony of the *galant* is fused with Baroque-like contrapuntal gambits. What emerges from this is a hybrid form that at once permits lucid articulation of musical grammar (producing concrete and fixed formal boundaries) and a looser, more dramatic process of thematic development, in which counterpoint pushes the individual voices (of a string quartet, for example) towards parity without any loss of a sense of formal coherence.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Elaine R. Sisman, *Haydn and the Classical Variation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 172.

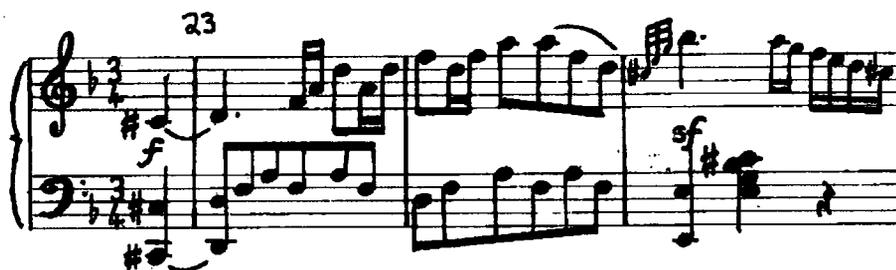
This recuperation of the extolled past represents an important convulsion in musical history, for out of it rose the 'mature' Classical Style. As its unreserved exponents, Mozart and Haydn thickened the texture of the *galant* style in an attempt to match the artistic elevation of Bachian craftsmanship. Such resurrection of past brilliance embodies the culmination of Enlightenment thought. Rousseau, Condillac, Herder and Sulzer all sought to examine *origins* (in particular, the origin of language) in an age that had broken with the long-established past and was looking forward into a new, modern era. For the first time in history, man was becoming historically aware. In terms of music, this meant that the old, 'outworn' style of learned counterpoint was no longer banished as an esoteric exercise in rules and abstract construction; it was to be paid its due respect as the origin of the modern style, but only after its deliberate preclusion in the music of the mid eighteenth-century.

The coexistence, as separate entities, of the high Baroque style and the 'simple' homophonic style is no longer perceivable in the 'new and special manner' of the 1780s and afterwards. Such a fusion of the old and the new within the 'mature' Classical style, however, is not a true synthesis. It is rather a situation in which certain contrapuntal elements were 'placed' back into the homophonic *texture* of the music. Residues of the old contrapuntal practice are now absorbed into the texture, but never as an equal element. Strands of the late Baroque style of Bach and Handel, such as imitation, running bass-lines, the circle of fifths, as well as post-Baroque elements such as *Sturm und Drang*, were now stylised and thus disciplined by highly articulated syntax; they are subordinate to the functionally dependant periodicity that governs the Classical forms of the later eighteenth-century. While the texture of the Classical style accommodates various tenets of the Baroque style as elements of surface discourse, its essential function still resides in the drive towards cadential punctuation at different hierarchical levels of the structure. Periodicity dictates the form; the Baroque style is merely a foreground 'flavour.'

Such strands of the 'old practice' are found, therefore, within the 'gaps' of a Classical form. The versatility and pliancy of the circle of fifths, for example, serves well as a transitory passage between the functions of larger sections (such as 'first theme' and 'second theme'). On a larger scale, it is befitting as part of a series of transitory functions within the development section of a sonata form, for example. In the transition from first to second subject of his piano sonata, K. 332 of 1783, for instance, Mozart uses a paroxysmal *Sturm und Drang* episode in D minor in order to achieve an imperfect

cadence in the dominant (Ex. 3.1a). As a transitory passage within the second subject group of this sonata, Mozart composes out a circle of fifths that eventually leads to the dominant of the new key (V of C major), in preparation for the exposition's coda (Ex. 3.1b).

Ex. 3.1a: *Sturm und Drang* episode. Mozart, piano sonata, K. 332, bars 23-25



Ex. 3.1b: Circle of fifths, bars 60-64



Elements of Baroque music, then, are revived within the texture of forms that originally ousted them in the name of simplicity, but now as subordinate to the rules of the 'mature' Classical style.

## II

In the music of Beethoven's late period one senses that the relation of individual topic to formal syntax has become more evenly balanced.<sup>11</sup> The equilibrium in this relation is quintessential to an understanding of the 'late style,' and has accordingly been accepted into the canon of thought by scholars. Indeed, it is this equal relationship that may account for the 'bizarre' quality often attributed to the late music by Beethoven's contemporaries. The uneven, often fractured flow of the texture, and the ostensible

<sup>11</sup> Formal syntax in this sense means the convergent movement of harmony and melody towards cadential arrival that punctuates formal rhythm.

cacophony that resulted, was the outcome of a synthesis hitherto unheard in the language of music. That a single movement could accommodate a multitude of short and disparate topics or gestures, "in which ideas flit from one to another without rhyme or reason,"<sup>12</sup> is evidence that Beethoven sought to unify elements whose hegemony was the basis of the Classical style.

What of genre? In this area Beethoven radically moves beyond the Classical style. The emphasis thus far has been on the 'mature' Classical composers' achievement within the *texture* of the music. To absorb remnants of the Baroque tradition within the surface flow of the music was revolutionary. As far as its exponents were concerned, they had achieved a superior style to the preceding simplicity of the *galant*. This may be so, yet the revolution within the larger sphere of *genre* was to begin to develop some thirty years after the 'new and special manner' of 1781, in the works of the mature Beethoven.

Just as there is an inequality in the relationship of topic to syntax in the discursive flow of the Classical style, so too did there exist an imbalance between genre and syntax.<sup>13</sup> Topics, as blocks of style-specific attributes, "unfold with respect to a syntagmatic axis."<sup>14</sup> That is, they are the surface animation of a deeper and more fundamental structure that binds the music on a paradigmatic axis. It is this deep-lying structure that Kofi Agawu terms the "beginning-middle-end paradigm."<sup>15</sup> This paradigm is essentially a Schenkerian *Ursatz*, whereby the actual content, the surface of the musical work, is an elaboration of a more fundamental arch motion through time, from tonic (with scale degree 3) to dominant (with scale degree 2) to a unison tonic. According to Agawu, and Schenker, this is the basic deep-structure upon which the music of the 'mature' Classical style is based. Put in more historically aware terms by Charles Rosen, it is this abstract deep-structure that essentially defines the style of the Classical language. Thus, "almost every kind of music," says Rosen, is engulfed by "a style so powerful that it can apply almost equally well to any genre."<sup>16</sup> This style is, of course, the sonata style. Formulated in Rosen's terms, its essence is: the dramatisation of modulation, the contrast of theme and texture, and the symmetrical resolution of tonal and thematic elements. In short, the

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel K. L. Chua, *The 'Galitzin' quartets of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 90-91, on the first movement of the string quartet, op. 132.

<sup>13</sup> I talk here of formal genres and not, as in Hatten (1994), of "expressive genres."

<sup>14</sup> Agawu (1991), 50

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-79

<sup>16</sup> Rosen (1997), 47

syntax of the sonata style is pervasive regardless of the specifications of individual genres, whether the piano sonata or the symphony, the aria or the Mass.

However, the formal genres of the concerto and 'theme and variations' remained distinct from the eminence of the sonata style syntax, though sonata principles did enter the piano concerti of Mozart. The 'theme and variations' was thoroughly different to its Baroque ancestor. The Classical genre was denigrated by the following generation and seen as an inferior instrumental genre to that of the symphony or sonata by its own.<sup>17</sup> This is so for two reasons. Firstly, the surface embellishments of the theme do not 'transform' the material, but merely 'clothe' it in figuration; the surface, therefore, does not contain the topical and thematic diversity of a sonata design. Secondly, the repetition of discrete, structurally identical units (an eight-bar period, for example) produces a static form, and thus prohibits the tension-resolution arch of sonata forms. This reception of the 'theme and variations' was to materialise into the explicit disparagement of the Romantic generation just over a decade later. It was, however, a realistic alternative to the sonata style genre for the Classical composer, despite the dominance of the latter.

The concerto as formal genre, on the other hand, contained the traces of the older (Baroque) form. It prevailed through the stylistic vicissitude between the High Baroque and the 'mature' Classical style. The ritornello section was transformed into the orchestral *tutti*, the virtuosic display of the soloist became greater, and the design of the Classical concerto became more symphonic in its grander dimensions, especially in Mozart's essays in the genre, but its essential attributes and functions are still clearly derived from its Baroque ancestor. The concerto is a unique instance of genre sustenance, surviving the convulsions in music history, from the High Baroque through the "intermediate and confused period"<sup>18</sup> of the *galant*, to the 'mature' Classical style.

The fugue, however, which was viewed by musicians of the Classical era as somewhat 'academic,' was an uncommon form. The high styles (especially the sonata and the symphony) did not tolerate the fugue as an individual movement. Rather, fugal processes were instilled as parts of larger movements, such as in development sections, or as episodes within the finale of a symphony, for example. In the latter case, however, the music always capitulates to the sonata style in order to resolve the tensions of the entire

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<sup>17</sup> Sisman (1993), 2

<sup>18</sup> Rosen (1997), 49

work, and to mark the conclusion with the appropriate topical flourish.<sup>19</sup> Fugue never penetrates the essential deep-structure of the sonata style.

The genre of fugue in the late period works of Beethoven, however, assumes an exalted position. Less than only half of his music from 1816 onwards did not contain a large fugue. He had written a fugal finale to the cello sonata, op 102 no. 2, and had incorporated a substantial fugue within the finale of the piano sonata, op. 101. One year later, in 1817, he composed the small fugue for string quintet, published as op. 137. The colossal fugue that concludes the *Hammerklavier* sonata, op. 106 of 1818, established the genre as a central and serious component of his style, standing a long distance from the “contrapuntal itch” that was manifested in “study-fugues” and *fugati* of his early and middle periods.<sup>20</sup> A neglected genre was restored in its own right and not as a technique within an overarching sonata design. Beethoven worked and re-worked the genre, exploring new possibilities with each outcome of a somewhat laborious compositional process in the sketch-books. The diversity of the late fugues show at once the embracing of an archaic genre in its own right, as independent from the sonata style, and its importunate transformation through the following nine years of Beethoven’s ‘late style.’

As Joseph Kerman saw it, the fugue of Beethoven’s late period “was the crop that he cultivated most eagerly and harvested most stubbornly. He rarely missed an opportunity to fertilize the ground.”<sup>21</sup> The technical variety invested in the genre is mirrored in the various functions and placements of the major fugues of this period: as the grandiose finales of the piano sonatas, opp. 106 and 110, and the monumental *Große Fuge*, as the original finale to the string quartet, op. 130; the “natural flow and mastery of transition”<sup>22</sup> of the fugue from the string quartet, op. 131, which replaces the traditional first movement of a multi-movement instrumental work; variations 24 (‘Fughetta’) and 32 within the ‘Diabelli’ variations, op. 120; the instrumental fugue within the ‘chorale’ finale of the ninth symphony, op. 125; and the vast concluding double-fugues of the ‘Gloria’ and ‘Credo’ movements of the *Missa Solemnis*, op. 123.

Within the above pieces Beethoven accomplished much more than the mathematical calculation of tonal combination that was, according to the Classical composers, the art of

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<sup>19</sup> See *ibid.*, 99-100

<sup>20</sup> Kerman (1966), 271

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 270

<sup>22</sup> Cooper, M. (1985), 418

the 'dark ages.' The sonata style was no longer the driving force toward which all else tended: the dramatic tonal articulation of sonata form gives in to the "placid routine"<sup>23</sup> that underlies the tonal modulations within the fugue. In this sense, the fugue genre stands beside the sonata style as an equally good model of musical discourse for the late Beethoven

How, then, did Beethoven transform the genre as represented by Bach into the monumental designs of the above-mentioned fugues? He turned the hegemony of the Classical style on its head. A gradual relaxation of the sonata principles of formal organisation after the 'heroic period' allowed Beethoven to pursue other means, namely in the fugue and related contrapuntal procedures. The resources of thematic modification available in strict fugue-writing were, however, widened to embrace the sonata style's own techniques of thematic modification.<sup>24</sup> The uniform texture and tonal fluidity of the fugue was animated by an unequivocally Classical process of thematic development. Thus, Carl Dahlhaus writes that "Beethoven incorporated elements of sonata technique in the fugue" when his "[fugue] subjects tend to enter the process of thematic-motivic manipulation."<sup>25</sup>

Specific techniques of 'thematic-motivic manipulation' are absorbed into the antiquated genre of fugue, just as contrapuntal elements were digested by the overarching formal organisation of sonata form's deep-structure in the Classical style. Symptomatic of the shift in emphasis from one genre to the other is when Beethoven deflects a sonata form ironically with fugal processes; he often presents a sonata structure whose initial material resembles that of a fugal exposition. The *allegro* of the first movement of op. 130 is an instantiation of this, in which, says Dahlhaus, the "fugue technique represents a way of creating a sonata exposition from a thematic idea that is only fit to serve the needs of a development passage."<sup>26</sup> The fugue is at once revived as an independent model, yet is transformed into a thoroughly late Beethovenian hybrid genre.

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<sup>23</sup> Kerman (1966), 274

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 275. These resources are: "augmentation, diminution, inversion, *canonizans*, syncopation, and some other rare ingenuities."

<sup>25</sup> Dahlhaus (1989), 86

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

### III

A more protracted and onerous transformation of genre was, of course, the variation. Beethoven was preoccupied throughout his career with this genre, composing individual 'theme and variation' sets as well as variation movements within larger instrumental works, from his earliest years to his last string quartet of 1826. The standard view of Beethoven's inheritance and subsequent transgression of the Classical variation, as established by Haydn and later by Mozart, is that he transformed what was seen as a static and trivial genre into one that matched the artistic merits of Bach's monumental *Goldberg* variations. The twenty or so variation sets that Beethoven composed even before the one in the string quartet, op. 18 no. 5 of 1799, are suggestive of his tenacity in the genre. Appearing in many works of the early period, the variation was already gaining freedom from the disparagement of its "trivial Classical phase."<sup>27</sup> The 'new path' of Beethoven's middle period, around 1803, represents the culmination of his early attempts in the genre, with the grand variation finale of the *Eroica* symphony, op. 55: the individual variations upon the two themes are merged into a seamless and dynamic mould, abundant with *fugati*, modifications of the themes' periodic structure, and extensive transitory passages.

Thus, Beethoven had already fashioned a transmutation of the Classical variation genre by 1803. What followed thereafter was the intensification of this 'new path' in the variation genre, in which dynamic elements, inextricably bound up with the principles of his middle period sonata technique, entered the process of varied repetition. In the midst of his middle period Beethoven further stretched the boundaries of the Classical language, which had now become a framework for his own, personal developments.<sup>28</sup> The variation movement of the *Appassionata* sonata, op. 57 of 1804, for example, "reach[es] the proportions of the sonata style, the dramatic shape and the placing of tension and resolution."<sup>29</sup> The customary return of the theme in its original form at the end of the set, due to its 'feeling of release,' bears the appearance of a recapitulation within a sonata form. The static, additive character of the Classical variation form was transcended by Beethoven's middle period variations asserts Charles Rosen; they conform to the "dramatic and almost spatially conceived figures of sonata style."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sisman (1993), 2

<sup>28</sup> Rosen (1997), 400

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 438

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 438-439

Even the use of a typical Baroque passacaglia theme in the 32 variations in C minor, WoO 80 of 1806, did not free the set of a “classically articulated sense of climax within the phrase and over the series of variations.”<sup>31</sup> Such was the synthesis of the sonata technique and traditional variation form in Beethoven’s middle period works. In this particular work he sought to enrich the harmonic framework of the theme, something Mozart or Haydn would never envisage in their variations. Beethoven substitutes harmonies from the eight-bar progression, with no impairment to the comprehensibility of the original (see variations 5 and 7, where he replaces the diminished-seventh harmony over the *ab* bass of the original with V/V in bar 5). Essential to the enrichment of the theme’s harmonic ‘skeleton,’ then, is Beethoven’s acknowledgement of the fungibility of harmonies with respect to the *function* of an overall progression. The tension between harmonic digression and functional similarity is what sustains the momentum of the variations until the conclusion.

Furthermore, the construction of this particular theme lends itself to more than mere ‘embroidery.’ Beethoven varies other parameters besides the melodic line. Carl Dahlhaus distinguishes four ‘constituents’ of the theme that become material for succeeding variations: the progression in the bass (a chromatic descent from *c* to *g*), the harmonic and metrical scheme, the framework of the melody, and the actual theme as presented at the outset.<sup>32</sup> In essence, the variations all take as their basis the two-part counterpoint implicit in the theme (Ex. 3.2).

Ex. 3.2: Four “constituents” of the theme from the 32 variations in C minor, WoO 80

The image shows four musical staves illustrating the constituents of the theme:

- 1) Bass Progression:** A bass clef staff showing a chromatic descent from C to G: C4, B3, Bb3, A3, Ab3, G3.
- 2) Harmonical + Metrical Scheme:** A bass clef staff showing a sequence of chords: i, V, V/IV, IV, vii°7, i, iv, iv, V, i. A note below reads "(IN ANY INVERSION)".
- 3) Melodic Framework:** A treble clef staff showing a sequence of notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5.
- 4) Actual Theme (Bars 1-8) without ornamentation:** A treble clef staff showing the first eight bars of the theme.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 401

<sup>32</sup> Dahlhaus (1997), 157. When I refer to the ‘theme’ hereafter I refer to the totality of these four “constituents.”

In the individual variations Beethoven, as Dahlhaus points out, chooses between the “various attributes [constituents] of the theme that can be isolated for further examination.”<sup>33</sup> It is not merely linear melodic motion above an inviolable harmonic progression that is embellished; all four constituents, together, separately, or in any combination, are the subject of variation.

As each constituent is equally prominent within the original theme, and hence easily recognisable as indispensable to the totality of this theme, their subsequent digression always feels at once newly developed yet traceable as a variation. This leads Dahlhaus to call this variation set truly ‘dialectical’: by accumulating individual attributes (constituents) of the original theme, Beethoven obtains “a freedom of movement to formulate motives of particular variations that is unthinkable when a single framework provides the backbone of a cycle.”<sup>34</sup> This is how Beethoven sustains the musical argument in a traditionally static genre of ‘varied repetition.’

This ‘dialectical’ path of development can be perceived as a corollary of Beethoven’s achievements within the sonata form of the same period. The accustomed notion of a ‘dialectical’ synthesis between the Subject (the individual, original idea or highly recognisable motive) and the Object (the form, its structural frame, and its socially accepted boundaries) was championed by Adorno. It describes the sustained and logical quality of Beethoven’s musical discourse within the handed-down tradition of sonata form.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, it neatly reflects the transformation of the sonata genre that Beethoven had achieved at this time, especially in relation to his immediate forerunners, Mozart and Haydn: the Subject or theme, after asserting its identity in the ‘exposition,’ enters the ‘development’ section and is forced to take on new identities and to be transformed by the objective, external reality, after which, in the ‘recapitulation,’ the Subject resumes its original form and thus demonstrates its power by the very fact that it has traversed into the furthest reaches of the objective and external world.

The heroic narrative that emerged from the ‘dialectical synthesis’ of opposites (of Subject and Object) reflects more generally the dynamic and ‘goal-orientated’ quality that underlies all Beethoven’s music from the ‘heroic style.’ It is symbolic of the dynamic

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 158-159

<sup>35</sup> See Adorno (1998), 60-74 and 81-100; and also Max Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 233-237.

drive of the actual musical work, in which any particular point of the form “always seems to emerge as the logical outcome of what has preceded.”<sup>36</sup> In short, when Beethoven entered the late period of composition this ‘logical flow’ from one moment to the next was an intuitive element of his style, one that had penetrated other genres. In this case he had synthesised the logical flow of form with the variation genre, which generated music that was truly anchored upon the tensions between dynamic (logical) and static (varied) processes. The variation was to become subject to a further metamorphosis within the late period works, just as a transformation was achieved in the fugue by absorbing the sonata style’s ‘motivic-thematic manipulation.’

Beethoven’s partiality for Baroque genres led to inevitable fusions within the late period music; this is no less the case with respect to the variation. The variation of the late works, as both a form in its own right and as a technique within larger movements, assumes greater dimensions and provides a more complex process of change than had hitherto been afforded the ‘artificial and arbitrary’ eighteenth-century model, even more so than in his ‘heroic’ variation form.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Beethoven no longer simply conforms to the figures of sonata style. The various and extensive essays he leaves us in this genre from the late period, starting with the inception of variations on the Diabelli waltz and the finale of the piano sonata, op. 109, demonstrate an unparalleled achievement in the art of variation, one that led to its apotheosis within Beethoven’s last works, the five string quartets of 1824-26.

#### IV

It is significant that of all Beethoven’s independent variation sets, both published and unpublished, the only one that does not carry the customary appellation of ‘Variationen’ is his last and greatest in terms of stylistic variety and overall formal coherence, the ‘crowning glory’ of his lifetime’s work in the ‘theme and variations’ genre. The set is instead headed by the word ‘Veränderungen,’ a term that in its differentiation with the conventional ‘Variationen’ fully represents Beethoven’s feat in crafting a new genre of variation. The ‘33 Veränderungen über einen Walzer von A. Diabelli,’ op. 120 of 1819-23, flaunt Beethoven’s encyclopaedic tools of ‘change’ upon a theme. These tools, taken

<sup>36</sup> Rose R. Subotnik, “Adorno’s Diagnosis of Beethoven’s Late Style: Early Symptom of a Fatal Condition,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 29 (1977), 249

<sup>37</sup> Sisman (1993), 1

together, invite one to glimpse into the inner workings of Beethoven's concept of 'Veränderung' that was so important to his late period music.

Among the rich array of these "character variations,"<sup>38</sup> a term first used by A. B. Marx, resides the tension needed to instil each transformation of the theme with a sense of motion and ineluctable progression forwards, whilst retaining some similarity to the original theme. Above of all, this is due to Beethoven's treatment of the theme itself.<sup>39</sup> Each variation has its own unique character, retaining its individuality. Firstly, this individuality is accomplished by the topical animation of the theme. To name but a few, variation 25 takes on the character of a 'German dance,' variation 1 is a contrived 'march' and variation 31 is redolent of the Baroque 'aria.' Other variations employ stylistic topics, as in the 'brilliant style' passages of variation 6, or the lilting 'pastoral' movement of variation 8. The rich array of topics across the range of the 33 *Veränderungen* contort the original waltz into various guises; melodic 'embroidery' gives way to a 're-designing,' or transformation of the theme, so as to comply with the parameters of individual topics.

This variety of topical material in each transformation is expressed within a framework that tampers with the original harmonic underpinning. While the abstract pillars of harmonic articulation remain intact (initial and concluding I, separated by a dissonant foreground key of some sort), the more immediate harmonic 'skeleton' of the theme is often distorted by contrapuntal voice-leading, expanded with interpositions, or simply changed. Melodic embellishment of the theme, by means of certain 'improvisatory' figuration, was the standard and familiar means of varied repetition within the Classical canon of the late eighteenth-century; as a result, the theme's harmonic 'skeleton' was rarely, if ever, compromised. Beethoven's willingness to modify and manipulate the theme's harmonic 'skeleton,' however, represents a significant departure from the "frozen moments," the "decorative tableaux," and the "nearly inevitable pattern of cadences" of the late eighteenth-century instrumental variation.<sup>40</sup>

In op. 120 Beethoven takes this process further than in the variations, WoO 80. In the latter Beethoven *substituted* harmonies that he regarded as equal in harmonic function.

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<sup>38</sup> Dahlhaus (1989), 86, writes that "only in Beethoven" did the fusion of the variation cycle and the character piece "reach a stage that makes it seem appropriate to speak of a transformation."

<sup>39</sup> See Kinderman (1999), 76-83

<sup>40</sup> Sisman (1993), 3

However, this only flavoured the harmonic framework, which was essentially unchanged. That is to say, the fundamental I-V-I motion of the theme (see Ex. 3.2, above) was immutable throughout the succeeding variations, with the functional substitution of harmonies imparting variety to the *progression* but not to the harmonic *process*.

In the 'Veränderungen' of op. 120 Beethoven edges away from the harmonic process of the theme (a I-V-I arch spread over a binary form, each section consisting of 16 bars). Number 18 of the set upholds this motion, but somewhat ambivalently. The progression towards the dominant (G major) half-way through the first phrase (bars 9-16) is replaced with a peculiar passage in octaves, starting with a *Db* and continuing to the end of the first phrase with chromatic appoggiaturas obscuring the arpeggiations (Ex. 3.3). The dominant is grasped in bar 16, but somewhat precariously as an octave (scale-degree 5) rather than a fully prepared triad. The textural and harmonic hiatus of bar 9 is no substitute for the original progression of the theme: it is a discontinuity that significantly weakens the structural V of the theme's essential I-V-I framework.

Ex. 3.3: Variation 18 of op. 120, bars 8-10 and 14-16



A proliferation of chromatic harmony similarly weakens the harmonic process of Diabelli's waltz in the canonic variation, number 20. A host of dissonant-seventh harmonies and false relations are no mere functional substitutes, but are harmonic digressions that eclipse a strong motion through the tonal arch (I-V-I). Within the second half of the 'Fughetta,' variation 24, Beethoven turns the subdominant inflection of the original (bars 23-25 of the waltz) into an episode culminating in E minor (bars 18-26),

concluding with no hint of F major, instead grounding the music unequivocally in C major in the last four bars.

In variation 14 Beethoven disrupts the harmonic process of the waltz completely. The initial tonic-dominant exchange is preserved; after this, however, the harmonic process of the waltz is left behind to make way for the variation's own path of development. The accented chromatic appoggiaturas of bar 5, which are at first only a cadential decoration upon the subdominant inflection of the original theme, develop according to their own law. That is, they are grasped as the actual motive of the music, in much the same vein as in the 'hypertrophy' of the Bagatelle, op. 126 no. 1. What was a chromatic appoggiatura actually rises sequentially until the first phrase concludes at bar 8 with a perfect cadence in E minor. At the beginning of the second phrase Beethoven returns immediately, and somewhat abruptly, to the dominant seventh of C major as in the waltz, the harmonic process now following the original until the end.

This variation escapes the structural motion from tonic to dominant, the latter being replaced by the mediant minor. This is real change: variation 14 has its own individual character (the uniform rhythmic profile) and its own sharply defined harmonic structure. This structure arises, of course, by developing its logical argument from chromatic appoggiatura to sequential motive. As if to make amends for this acute individuality, however, the second half of the variation adheres rigorously to the harmonic process of the waltz. The two sections of this variation represent, respectively, the dynamic and static elements that underlie the relation between the late Beethovenian theme and its variations: the first part presents real change from the original harmonic process; the second half underscores the similarity to the original.

To return briefly to the second of our attributes that invests each variation with a unique character and individuality, we turn to parody.<sup>41</sup> This may seem paradoxical when one considers that parody's fundamental aspect is an "allusion that points beyond itself," one that enjoys a "complex existence between two modes of being-literal, and referential."<sup>42</sup> Beethoven, however, is able to parody the waltz, to allude to it, yet draw from this an original, interesting and highly individual variation. In the variations, WoO 80, he

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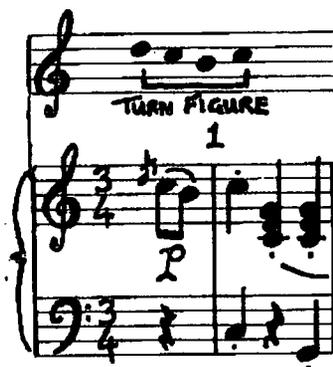
<sup>41</sup> See Kinderman (1999), 68-75

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 69

composed a theme moulded from four constituents, each of which could be varied without obscuring the similarity between any particular variation and the theme.

In op. 120, on the other hand, Beethoven parodies the hackneyed elements of Diabelli's 'cobbler's patch,' and generates unprecedented stylistic variety and complexity.<sup>43</sup> Such elements include the ten-fold iteration of the C major triad of the waltz (bars 1-4): variation 21 exaggerates this static aspect, while variation 1 fills out the descending fourth of the waltz's bass, which produces ironic dissonances. Beethoven also creates striking variations from inconspicuous elements of the waltz. Consider, for example, variations 9 and 11: the modest, decorative turn in the melody (upbeat to bars 1 and 5 of the waltz) is seized upon and actually provides the variations' entire thematic material (Ex. 3.4a, b and c).

Ex. 3.4a: Theme of op. 120, turn-figure on upbeat to bar 1



Ex. 3.4b: Variation 9 of op. 120, principal figure, bars 1-2



<sup>43</sup> Lewis Lockwood (2003), 394, contests the traditional disparagement of Diabelli's theme when he argues that the waltz is a "well-crafted, symmetrical little piece, not just a simple tune."

Ex. 3.4c: Variation 11 of op. 120, principal figure, bars 1-2



The most inconspicuous of conventions, then, can serve as inspiration for an entire variation. Beethoven breathes life into the most mediocre aspects of the theme's make-up, showing that the most mundane and purportedly trivial aspects of musical construction can be subject to a transformation. As William Kinderman has noted, Diabelli's modest waltz was for Beethoven a "reservoir of unrealized [sic] possibilities," in which the variations realise, that is, bring to fruition, the musical potential implicit in the tiniest motivic strand or the most trivial structural feature.<sup>44</sup>

The profusion of disparate topical material, the deviation from the harmonic 'skeleton' of the theme, and the parodistic treatment of Diabelli's waltz would all seem to point towards contrast and dissociation in the overall form of the set. Yet Beethoven succeeds in constructing a cogent, cohesive whole. He foreshadows a fundamental principle of the string quartets that he was to begin the following year, after the completion of the Diabelli variations: the wealth of surface contrast is bound by subtle internal relations. Particularly important for op. 120 is the 'psychological journey' from beginning to end that Beethoven imparts from the ordering of the variations.

There are three large areas that are discerned within the set, each demarcated by a change in stylistic direction or by a different method of transforming the waltz. The first area (variations 1-18) generally remains faithful to the waltz in essential harmonic and melodic outline, though one can sense an increasing divergence between the original and each variation as the music progresses. This first section is rounded off and closed, however, with three parodies of the theme that closely resemble the conspicuous elements of the waltz, variations 16 and 17 fixing almost obsessively on the descending fourth and fifth, in bars 1 and 5 respectively, of the original melody.

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<sup>44</sup> Kinderman (1999), 67

The middle section (variations 19-28) presents a seemingly fractured flow from one variation to the next. The contrasts in texture, the disparate treatments of the waltz, the variety of topical material and the wide-ranging tempi convey an unplanned, chaotic hotchpotch of variations that do not seem to have any common thread (see, for example, the sequence of operatic parody in variation 22 to the strident and virtuosic étude of variation 23 to the tender and refrained 'Fughetta' of variation 24). This rhetorical juxtaposition of disparities, so common in Beethoven's late music, is present within one variation, number 21, creating bold contrast within the larger 'chaos' of this section ('Allegro con brio' and 'Meno Allegro' sections).

This section is not, of course, just a hotchpotch of unrelated invention. Instead, it is the section's *function* to appear as chaotic: to quote Kinderman, it is "precisely the impression of chaos, of enormous, bewildering contrasts, that defines the formal role of these middle variations in the entire work."<sup>45</sup> Hereafter, in variations 25 to 28, Beethoven draws the variations together, pointing in the same direction. They point towards variation 29, which initiates the final chain of transformations (this term is most appropriate to this last section). Turning to the tonic minor, they leave behind the commonplace structure of the waltz and its world to pursue a more substantial, transfigured territory.

This last section is the most psychologically integrated of the three. The ornate aria of variation 31, shorter in the number of bars than the waltz but more expansive in terms of time and melodic and harmonic breadth, introduces the sublime vestige of Baroque *topos*. The following variation explodes the dimensions and essential melodic and harmonic framework of the waltz, ceding to a grandiose exclamation of Baroque sublimity in the form of a vast, four-part fugue in variation 32. This vast fugal design eventually ceases at a violent dissonant harmony that is diffused into an enervating cadenza. As he had done five years earlier in the *Hammerklavier* sonata, op. 106, Beethoven reaches large-scale formal climax with a colossal fugue, unencumbered by the strictures of the sonata style.

Whatever music that follows is now irrevocably transfigured: a concluding ballroom dance, the minuet, is no longer trivial, conventional and restrained entertainment, but is now a transformed genre, one worthy of ending a grand psychological journey (variation 33, 'Tempo di minuetto moderato,' Ex. 3.5). A genre once frivolous is here afforded status in the realm of the sublime. As if to ensure that 'entertainment' has been

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 111

transformed into 'sublime conclusion,' Beethoven throws into the transfigured minuet the keyboard figuration of the Baroque diminution variation, a technique which ushered in musical closure within the variation finales of the piano sonatas, opp. 109 and 111, composed in 1820 and 1822 respectively.

Ex. 3.5: Variation 33 of op. 120, 'Tempo di minuetto moderato,' bars 1-2



The journey is complete. Beethoven's musical *Veränderung* has cast its spell: by expanding the waltz's dimensions, melodic and harmonic framework throughout each variation, by leaving behind the world and its hackneyed conventions of the ballroom, entering the sublime realm of musical invention in the fugue, and by culminating this multifarious journey with a transfigured minuet-cum-diminution variation, Beethoven has transformed not only the waltz's material, the surface elements of musical construction, but its genre, its meaning. The ballroom can be trivial, but if looked on from a different angle, or reinterpreted with the appropriate musical tools, it can match or even surpass the sublime ideals of Baroque invention, as epitomised in the fugue.

Beethoven's *Veränderung*, then, is as much about transforming the genre of the material, that is, the concepts associated with certain parametric configurations (what is involved when one defines any particular topic), as it is with transforming the motivic, melodic, and harmonic material itself. In short, to transform for Beethoven is to create greater worth from something than is conventionally permitted within its generic boundaries, be it a melodic decoration, a theme, a commonplace cadential flourish, a harmonic progression, or a genre itself. Lewis Lockwood's lapidary description of such transformation in op. 120 can serve to conclude the discussion of this work, and can reinforce the general psychological importance of *Veränderung* in the late works:

The path to the transcendental has once again been traversed, now all the way from the Viennese ballroom through human tragedy and comedy, finally arriving once more, and by a different route, at the starry heavens.<sup>46</sup>

## V

Beethoven's developments and achievements in the variation genre, through the middle period to the late, generally correlate with the intellectual milieu and philosophical stances of the time. Moreover, these developments and achievements reflect, and may be said to be dictated by, the aesthetic taste of the early nineteenth-century. This climate has its roots in the latter part of the eighteenth-century, in which a bifurcation began to evolve between the perception of something as beautiful and something as sublime. The most notable of the early attempts to demarcate the two were Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* of 1759 and Immanuel Kant's pre-critical *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* of 1763. Of specific relevance to this discussion is the emerging polarity of the beautiful and the sublime in these works. Orderliness, to such an extent as to suggest limitation, is integral to the notion of the beautiful as propounded by Burke. More explicitly, Kant associates the beautiful with the superficial, whilst both afford a higher worth to the sublime: the powerful, astonishing, incomprehensible, and the cause of "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."<sup>47</sup>

Despite the more complex difference between the two presented in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, of 1790, the inferiority of the beautiful, as compared to the sublime, is obvious: "Beauty in nature concerns the form of the object; and this consists in limitation."<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, extraneous decorations within such a beautiful form are belittled: "If however the decoration is not integral to the beautiful form itself, if as with the golden frame it is there as an attraction simply to arouse admiration for the painting, it is then termed an *embellishment* and it has nothing to do with beauty."<sup>49</sup>

The chasm between the formal restriction of the beautiful and the overwhelming freedom, and thus higher worth, of the sublime, widened in the early nineteenth-century when

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<sup>46</sup> Lockwood (2003), 395

<sup>47</sup> Edmund Burke, cited in Sisman (1993), 13

<sup>48</sup> Immanuel Kant, cited in *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Kant, cited in *ibid.*, 14

Friedrich Schiller decried “spiritless regularity” and favoured an extolled “spiritual disorder.”<sup>50</sup> The aesthetic environment of the early nineteenth-century, then, gave little worth to forms that were restricted or limited, and even less to those which displayed external or peripheral decoration. In terms of music, this provoked a disliking for repetitive structures whose sole means of progression through time was decoration or embellishment of fixed melodic lines and conventional cadential endings. The most uncompromising Classical genre, in these terms, was of course the variation; its denigration by nineteenth-century Germanic culture shows clearly the attitudes towards musical construction. The Classical style’s penchant for ornamentation on simple, symmetrically closed melodies (‘spiritless regularity’) could not fulfil the expectations of the new taste. In the early nineteenth-century, the “concepts of repetition and decoration,” writes Elaine Sisman, “are conjoined for a devastating critique.”<sup>51</sup>

The response to such an antagonism of limitation and decoration, as represented musically by the late eighteenth-century variation, was the rise of the organic metaphor within works of art, typified in the writing of Friedrich Schlegel. These metaphors implied the freedom of the sublime by discarding the restriction of ‘frozen moments’ and exact structural or periodic repetitions that were adorned superficially. Freedom generated flexibility of structure, deviation from a fixed and rigid pattern, one that now had a logical continuity of growth and thus lacked superfluous embellishment. The prominent terms, or metaphors, were ‘becoming’ (*Werden*) and, more characteristically of the early Romantics, ‘flowering.’ The intimation of a continuous process of growth (‘flowering’) can be appropriated, and has been by critics such as E. T. A. Hoffmann, as a metaphor for the dynamic unfolding of Beethoven’s sonata forms of his middle period.

The paradox of Beethoven’s dynamic variation genre lies in the static-dynamic dichotomy that governs the music. We saw in the Diabelli variations how Beethoven held a large surface area of disparate topics and styles together by projecting a sense of ‘journey,’ from a commonplace waltz to a transfigured realm of expanded invention, ending with a transformed minuet. This work is unrivalled in the genre of variation in terms of coherence of overall form: the whole imparts dynamic movement from one variation to the next, while each of these elements remains perceivable precisely as a variation of the original. Yet this dynamic movement that seems to grow organically and

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

reach a transfigured climax toward its end finds its philosophical counterpart in contemporary metaphors such as 'flowering.'

The impetus behind Beethoven's remoulding of genres thus lies as much in contemporary aesthetic taste and artistic-philosophical theory as it does in the resurrection of 'outworn' genres and their amalgamation (or collision) with Classical genres. To fulfil the shift in emphasis from the rhythmic hierarchies and tonal punctuation of Classicism to an unfolding, organic whole of early Romanticism Beethoven pursued a nexus of compositional possibilities, as discussed thus far in the chapter. The result of fusing old with new, merging disparate genres, and transferring generic and stylistic techniques from one form to another was a musical style that satisfied, in terms of the variation at least, the contemporary theory and praxis of organicism, a concept far removed from the purported 'spiritless regularity' of the recent Classical past. Paradoxically, then, Beethoven's fixation on old models of organisation, and their coercive entanglement with Classical models, can be described aptly by the metaphorical tags that define an artistic age which prided itself on representing a radical new direction from this bygone epoch.<sup>52</sup>

A more precise concept derived from the 'flowering' metaphor that is applicable to Beethoven's late variation genre was tendered by Goethe. It encapsulates aptly, I believe, Beethoven's process of variation (or *Veränderung*) within these works: the concept of *Steigerung*.<sup>53</sup> *Steigerung* is a biological/linguistic concept that Goethe also applied to aesthetics. It is a process that affords several strands of development simultaneously. The most important of these are "spiritual growth," "intensification of feeling," and "biological development."<sup>54</sup> It is a process of growth and ascent in which a 'seed' blossoms, or flourishes organically, into a fully grown and complete entity, until the beginning, the seed, is reached once again. To elucidate this notion: it is analogous to "Goethe's circular morphology of the flower," a process by which the "seed in the ground" climbs "to the seed in the blossom."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> I am not asserting that Beethoven was essentially Romantic or bound up with its ideology, nor am I asserting that Beethoven was both a Classical and Romantic composer in various attributes of his compositions, as does Amanda Glauert in her article "The Double Perspective in Beethoven's Opus 131," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 4 (1980), 113-120. Rather, I simply wish to highlight the complex relation of historical and contemporary musical material and compositional practice that comes to bear on Beethoven's late period variation genre.

<sup>53</sup> See Spitzer (2004), 290-297

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 295

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 324

The *Steigerung* trope is not a compositional premise or 'deep-structure' that Beethoven's variations adopt explicitly as the fundamental law upon which they are built. Rather, this metaphor is, I believe, a useful one to keep in mind when attempting to explain the organic feeling of the variation, especially in terms of the historical climate in which they were created. The climate was one that only tolerated entities that constituted a true, autonomous living whole; it was one of 'flowering' and continuous processes of growth, allowing no "externally imposed laws"<sup>56</sup> upon a form, but recognising worth only in those that evolve and 'live' within themselves, as a natural organism would do.

Such designs that comply with the aesthetic and philosophical climate of the early nineteenth-century are in abundance within the late works, not only in the works that are in 'variation form' specifically.<sup>57</sup> The variation finale of the piano sonata, op. 109, for example, consists of six variations upon the original theme. Each represents a gradation in a scale of successive growth, rather than with different means by which to decorate the same unit of material. The first variation preserves the tempo, the essential melodic outline and the harmonic skeleton, despite a changed bass progression; variation two intensifies the rhythmic activity by fragmenting the melody and accompaniment in a similar manner to the principal theme of the first movement; the third variation switches to a duple meter and *Allegro vivace* tempo marking, where the two hands participate in a two-part invention of four-bar imitations, after which the fourth variation reverts to a slower tempo with more adventurous harmonies in a florid three-part texture; variation five reverts to the duple meter and imitative entries, retaining the three-part texture; the last variation restores the original triple meter and tempo but accelerates the rhythm of two inner pedals successively, until they reach trills, after which a bass trill signals a diminution of the upper part. This spiralling rhythmic increase then falls back onto the original theme. Each gradation serves to further propel the music forward, yielding a sense of growth (increase in tempo, thickening of texture, increasingly adventurous harmonies etc.) until the sixth variation reaches the zenith of the process with a flourish of trills and intense rhythmic activity. The process began with the seed (theme) of the metaphorical flower; the seed ascended through each variation until the veritable blossom of variation six, from which the seed (the original theme) was once again reached.

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<sup>56</sup> Sisman (1993), 15

<sup>57</sup> My argument revolves around this very point: that Beethoven's *Veränderung* is indeed genre-embracing and is a part of every form within this late period as an innate element of his style and partly as a reflection of the age's need for organicism and wholeness as a reaction to Classical artificiality. The Bagatelles are discussed in this context briefly at the end of the present chapter.

The variation movement from the string quartet, op. 127, goes one step further. More expansive than the finale of op. 109, this set not only shrouds division of each gradation by subtle continuation techniques, but it reaches out beyond one key area to embrace the flattened submediant (Fb/E major) and the minor subdominant (Db/C# minor). The versatility of phrase design, pliancy of the harmonic skeleton of the original theme, and establishment of new key areas, as well as a developmental episode intervening variations four and five, render this movement as a “much more organic conception than that of the traditional classic variation model.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, this movement represents Beethoven’s most coherent movement in the art of his own organic variation, a design that conforms to the aesthetic climate of the early nineteenth-century and its nurturing of metaphorical organicism in the art work.

To this point in the discussion I have mentioned only those works in variation form that define Beethoven’s new art of *Veränderung*. Is this technique of dynamic variation (one may use the term ‘developing variation’) legitimate outside the world of the variation form? Did Beethoven’s works outside the genre of variation remain bound up with Classical principles of formal symmetry and tonal punctuation? Are the techniques involved in *Veränderung* felt in movements that take sonata form as their model? If so, how do they affect the individual functions of binary and ternary structures? Is his *Veränderung*, as identified in this discussion as a way of suggesting dynamic change with repetition of musical material, a salient feature of his ‘late style,’ and thus a mode of formal organisation in itself that can be part of any genre, producing ‘hybrid creations’? In short, can *Veränderung* be viewed as a genre in its own right?

To attempt an answer to these questions I turn to the first, third and sixth Bagatelles of op. 126 respectively. In the smallest of forms one can grasp the specific compositional gambits that are at work in constructing the sense of transformation or *Veränderung*. Yet it is precisely that Beethoven does set out to ‘transform’ material within these ‘trifles,’ the smallest musical structures, that strengthens the claim of Beethoven’s ‘late style’ as breaking the traditional boundaries of genre. The dominance of certain genres over others in the Classical era, such as the symphony or string quartet, no longer dictates the musical language employed; rather, the musical language, the specific moulding of musical material and how this is projected into form, takes precedence over artificial, cultural-specific barriers. In short, genre no longer shapes syntax. Beethoven’s musical ‘language’

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<sup>58</sup> Kerman (1966), 212

resides in every creation of this period, even in the so-called 'trifling,' modest forms of the Bagatelles.

As I discussed in the first chapter, the late Bagatelles take as their point of departure the miniature of the eighteenth-century, prototypical two- and three-part forms redolent of the 'small models' used in the pedagogical treatises on composition. The 'reprise' in eighteenth-century 'models' (the return to the opening musical material after thematic/harmonic digression in the middle) is the defining function of the Classical style: it imparts symmetry and satisfactory balance to the whole, which, when expanded into sonata allegro movements, becomes the dramatic resolution of tension, a long-range restatement of thematic materials that imbues the overall structure with a hyper-rhythmic symmetry. Beethoven moves away from this process in the late period works: the harmonic resolution that concludes the form endures, but the means to this is different in the traditional 'reprise' section, yielding a curious mix of variation and contrapuntal techniques with a re-expository function. The 'reprise' sections of the Bagatelles, because of their brevity, provide specific insight into the new techniques of development and continuity that are so essential to the concept of *Veränderung*.

## VI

Benet Casablanca prefers to label the third section of the op. 126 no. 1 Bagatelle a "re-exposition" instead of the customary 'reprise' or 'recapitulation.'<sup>59</sup> Moreover, William Kinderman writes that "this is not unlike the enhanced recapitulatory techniques used in the variation movements of Beethoven's later years."<sup>60</sup> Avoidance of a "literal restatement" is attained by a "transformation in texture," a "broadening in register" and similar techniques that "produce an effect of the theme being explored from a new, heightened perspective."<sup>61</sup> The 're-exposition' of bars 31-39 is thus symptomatic of Beethoven's late period works.

We saw in the preceding chapter that Beethoven re-stated the principal melody in the bass, overlapping the functions of 'contrasting middle' and 'reprise' sections. The primary parameters (harmony, melody and rhythm) remain incongruent until bar 35,

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<sup>59</sup> Casablanca (1999), 28. I will term this section (bars 31-39) the "re-exposition" hereafter.

<sup>60</sup> Kinderman (1997), 261

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

when G major was unequivocally established. By conventional standards, then, this four-bar passage is developmental, in the sense that previously heard material is obscured by instable parametric relationships. Parametric congruency is reached at bar 35 (the meter is fully established, the harmony moves through a IV-V-I archetype, and the melody rests on scale-degree 1); only at this point can a functional appellation of ‘reprise’ be appropriately used.

Despite this parametric congruence at bar 35, however, the whole melodic strain of bars 31-39 (the re-statement of the principal melody) is developmental in another important sense. The second phrase of the principal melody (bars 5-8) sees the bass take up the melody of bars 1-4 on the third scale degree with a countermelody now in the treble voice. The principal material of this piece (bars 1-8) is thus a two-part contrapuntal framework, enriched harmonically by a dominant pedal (Ex. 3.6).

Ex. 3.6: Two-part contrapuntal framework of principal material from op. 126 no. 1, bars 1-8

The image contains two systems of musical notation. The first system shows two staves (treble and bass clef) in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The bass line features a dominant pedal point on G. The treble line has a melody that moves from G4 to A4, B4, C5, and then descends. The second system shows a similar two-part setting, but the bass line is now on the third scale degree (B4) and the treble line has a new countermelody.

With the re-statement of the principal material Beethoven employs two simple fugal processes to vary and develop this framework: firstly, he inverts not just the melody but the whole two-part counterpoint; secondly, he adds a new countermelody to the framework, increasing the contrapuntal voices from two to three (the dominant pedal of the original is present in the middle of the texture in bars 32-33 but is abandoned as the music aims to strongly assert the tonic, G major). With the entry of the melody on the third scale-degree, now in the highest register of the piece thus far (bars 36-39), the music proceeds, to use Adorno’s words, in “widening counterpoint.”<sup>62</sup> The contrapuntal

<sup>62</sup> Adorno (1998), 130

framework is disguised by the dominant pedal at the outset of the piece. It is barely more obvious in bars 31-35 when the texture is thick. In bars 36-39, however, the counterpoint emerges as a fluid, unfettered passage of small-scale fugal invention. What was implicit in the opening material becomes explicit in its varied and developed restatement, in its 're-exposition.'

If one views this piece in the context of the other late period works there is nothing strange about this restatement, even if it can only be described peculiarly in traditional musical locution as a 'contrapuntally developmental variation-cum-restatement.' Bars 31-39 point to a new stage in the way Beethoven develops themes, particularly previously heard musical material. It is not the motive or single melodic line that is developed in Beethoven's 'late style,' but the whole contrapuntal complex of a theme's make-up. As Stephen Rumph has observed, the profusion of old models of thematic shape and formal organisation in his 'late style' led Beethoven to a new conception of development. Contrapuntal inversion, for example, is a trait familiar to the last three piano sonatas, opp. 109-111.<sup>63</sup> "He is not transforming motives," argues Rumph, "but whole complexes of double and triple counterpoint. He is developing a contrapuntal theme *contrapuntally*."<sup>64</sup>

This new conception of thematic development pervades even the small dimensions of the Bagatelles, mixing 'reprise' functions with a contrapuntal development technique that descends from strict fugal writing. The 're-exposition' of this Bagatelle transforms the principal material by contrapuntal variation and development, by explicitly realising the latency of the contrapuntal framework that is grounded in a homophonic texture at the beginning of the piece. Fugal processes represent a way of musical variation, precluding exact, artificial repetition of previously heard material, and in turn variation breaks free of genre divisions to yield a dynamic (organic) structure from a section whose very name, 'reprise' or 'recapitulation,' implies static repetition.

The third Bagatelle, as I noted in the first chapter, is a simple theme and variation, but with a I-V-I arch of a ternary form, the structural V having been articulated by an expansion of the 'metrical harmonic unit' in bars 24-27. Beethoven abandons the rigid divisions of eighteenth-century variation sets, in which each variation remains a closed unit in itself. In this Bagatelle he elides the theme and its variation, firstly by a seven-bar

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<sup>63</sup> Rumph (2004), 115

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. Emphasis from original.

codetta (bars 17-23), and secondly with the interpolatory cadenzas and recitative of bars 24-27. The codetta is simply a dominant prolongation, but its 'after-the-end' dissonance, as discussed in the first chapter, is effective in pushing the music forward and escaping the static cadential punctuation at the end of the theme.

The theme itself is a simple sixteen-bar period, comprising a conventional antecedent phrase marked by an imperfect cadence, followed by the conventional consequent phrase, which concludes the theme with a perfect cadence. Such a conservative theme does not naturally allow for the diverse treatment of variation and development that was used within the first Bagatelle. Yet the spell of *Veränderung* is inherent, even if only slightly; Beethoven does not resort to mere 'embroidery.'

The theme of the antecedent phrase is presented essentially unchanged in bars 28-35. Notice, however, that the block-like harmony that underpins the melody in the original is sacrificed: the left hand alone plays a lighter textured version of the theme, with harmony pushing melody to the weak beats of the bar (Ex. 3.7). The difference in texture is essential to the conception of this variation and its relation to the opulence of the theme. This comparative lightness in the texture is enhanced by the complementary rhythmic diminution in the left hand, moving consistently in semiquavers.

Ex. 3.7: No. 3 of op. 126, bars 1-4 and 28-31

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'ORIGINAL BARS 1-4' and is in treble clef. It shows a melody in the right hand and a block-like harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. The bottom staff is labeled 'VARIATION BARS 28-31' and is in bass clef. It shows the same melody in the left hand and a lighter, more rhythmic accompaniment in the right hand. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/8.

Furthermore, the deeply rich tonic pedal of the theme is flipped on its head in the variation, standing diametrically opposed with regard to all qualities: registrally, it stands in the upper, bright register of the keyboard; harmonically, it stands a fifth apart from the original, running parallel to the tonic-dominant polarity that forms the basis of Classical tonality; texturally, of course, it is the uppermost voice, not grounding the melody as the tonic pedal of the theme had done, but providing a certain instability to the texture. Finally, the most obvious difference is the vibrant trilling on this dominant pedal, in complete contrast to the sustained, plangent tone of the original tonic pedal.

The texture of the theme, then, is flipped on its head in the variation: low register becomes high; uniform quaver movement becomes semiquavers, then, in the consequent phrase and curtailed codetta of the variation (bars 36-47), demi-semiquavers; static pedal becomes dissonant trill. Herein lays the transformation from theme to variation: the melody remains clearly audible to the listener, but is utterly transformed in *quality*. The serenity of the original theme is enhanced by a feeling of distance created by the tonic pedal and the uniform melodic-harmonic movement, an effect Beethoven had exploited in the second song of *An die ferne Gelibte*, op. 98 of 1816 ('Wo die Berge so blau'). The sustained vocal pedal in this song imparts not only harmonic stasis but a psychological impression of distance. As Charles Rosen observes when discussing this particular song, the melody is pushed into the distance with respect to the sustained pedal of the foreground, whereby the "feeling of distance in time is translated...as distance in space..."<sup>65</sup> The dissonant, almost immutable pedal of the codetta to the theme in this Bagatelle, of course, only serves to augment the feeling of distance.

In these terms, then, the disparate texture of the variation represents the present. To signal this present Beethoven makes use of a by now common rhetorical device in his late period music: the trill. In Beethoven's 'late style' trills move beyond the function of empty decoration, becoming one of many rhetorical gestures in a highly rhetorical language. "Trills," writes Elaine Sisman, "are heraldic signs that welcome present time."<sup>66</sup> Just as the trill had brought strength to the convalescent in the 'Neue Kraft fühlend' section of the third movement from the string quartet, op. 132, or had signalled the arrival of the grandiose fugal conclusion from the preceding *fantasia* largo in the *Hammerklavier* sonata, op. 106, it heralds a new life for the melody, one that has greater rhythmic animation and is brighter in texture. This new life, the present, is pushed forward from bar 36 as the original melody is now disfigured by Beethoven's typical late period pianistic figuration, and is pushed to registral limits in bar 41 with a c'''' in the right hand.

It is the diminution variation, the oldest of its type within the variation genre, which breathes new life into the theme of the third Bagatelle. Furthermore, the variation itself is a diminution within a diminution, the new life itself splitting into new life at bar 36. The melody's journey is folded into the last five bars of the piece, the postlude of bars 48-52,

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<sup>65</sup> Rosen (1999), 169

<sup>66</sup> Sisman (2000), 67

which was originally designed by Beethoven as the prelude.<sup>67</sup> The piece's essential musical events are compressed into these five bars in the form of cadential gestures. This passage is typical of the late Beethoven, in that it functions as a traditional coda (a simple, triadic cadential conclusion) *and* as a summary of the linear discourse. Both the essential melodic framework of the theme and the two rhythmic strata of the diminution variation are moulded together to summarise and resolve: the antecedent phrase of the variation (bars 28-35) subsists as the detached semiquavers at the start of each but the last bar; the rhythmic level of the consequent variation phrase (bars 36-47) is retained with the demi-semiquaver skips; these skips jump to sequentially descending statements of the theme's initial descending third (bar 1), which in bars 49-51 assumes the role of cadential figure; and above these cadential figures Beethoven resolves the dissonant *ab* of bar 2 by completing, unadorned, the structural melodic descent from scale-degree 3 to 1 (Ex. 3.8).

Ex. 3.8: No. 3 of op. 126, postlude, bars 48-52

The I-V-I tonal arch of a ternary form provides the backbone to what is essentially a theme with variation. Beethoven, however, does not make use of the extensive techniques from the Diabelli variations to transform the theme. Rather, the theme undertakes a journey that 're-clothes' the melody in terms of texture and that imparts greater tension through the archaic diminution variation genre. A transformation is only achieved when Beethoven compromises between the various stages and strata of this journey to produce an ideal form of the principal material in the five-bar postlude. "Time must have a stop" within this Bagatelle, stresses Wilfrid Mellers<sup>68</sup>; bars 48-52 not only serve to stop the sense of movement through time, but serve also to reflect on the course and history of the material through time, the 'biological' development from start to finish, as it were. *Veränderung* can represent an ideal, finished state.

<sup>67</sup> See Cooper, M. (1985), 219

<sup>68</sup> Mellers (1983)

The case of the sixth Bagatelle is more complex than the two preceding examples. It is not a case of contrapuntal development, inversion and variation upon an initial two-part framework, as we saw in the first Bagatelle, but a matter of motivic, harmonic and textural thickening of a succession of ideas. Nor is it a straight forward variation form, as in the third Bagatelle. The dynamic unfolding of the restatement, in the sixth Bagatelle, is built upon its relation to the principal material of bars 7-21. In other words, the restatement (bars 33-53) varies the motivic fragments and, more importantly, 'fills out' the textural disjunctions underlying these motivic fragments in the principal material. Consequently, Beethoven moulds a reprise-cum-variation by reworking detached units into a fluid passage free from any disjunctions, be they harmonic, textural or melodic.

The fifteen bars of principal material (bars 7-21) are divided into the 'Ritmo di tre battute,' blocks of three-bar as opposed to four-bar phrases, that is familiar from the development section of the scherzo from the ninth symphony, op. 125. This is not anomalous in itself, but it does magnify the abrupt movement from one unit to another with ambiguous cadential movement. Consider, for example, the circumvention of an expected imperfect cadence in C minor at bars 15-16, which instead moves unexpectedly to the dominant-seventh of the tonic in the fourth three-bar unit (bar 16; Ex. 3.9). Consider also the sudden drop into the unprepared B $\flat$  major at bar 19, with which this section concludes.

Ex. 3.9: No. 6 of op. 126, bars 15-17

Handwritten annotations below the score:   
 MINOR: i V (V?)   
 Eb V VI VI I

Furthermore, this ambiguous cadential demarcation and abrupt harmonic juxtaposition between the discrete three-bar units carries disparate thematic material whose brevity and juxtaposition with dissimilar material circumscribe immediate development; they are no more than disjunct intervals or discrete motivic fragments. For example, the broken 'horn calls' of the right hand (bars 7-12) are so stilted in their construction that they lack even latent potential for future motivic development. Their large intervallic gaps, however, have potential to be 'filled out.'

In terms of both harmonic articulation and the surface motivic material, then, Beethoven presents a model that easily allows for a modification in the harmony and texture, and also a reconstruction of static motivic fragments. The small development passage (bars 22-32) starts an inevitable path of development that is to continue until the return of the framing presto. From this point onwards all discrete motivic fragments and disparate three-bar units are developed and reinterpreted to form an unbroken musical passage that represents an extended 'developing variation' of bars 7-21. It will suffice to note a few brief observations of how Beethoven achieves this from bar 22 onwards.

The triplet figuration from the B $\flat$  major three-bar unit (bars 19-21) is the subject of immediate development in bars 22-32. This development is harmonic rather than motivic: it serves to elaborate the movement from B $\flat$  major to a dominant prolongation in C minor. With a perfunctory turn to the dominant of A $\flat$  major in bar 31 the triplet figuration embellishes the first strong preparation and articulation of an unambiguous perfect cadence within the Bagatelle thus far (Ex. 3.10). The first sense of musical development and strong cadential articulation of the piece is entrusted to the most conventional of pianistic figuration, which is no more than a chromatically decorated arpeggiation. The triplet becomes motif, and this motif is now inextricably embedded within the texture of the music until bar 62. Ironically, therefore, the conventional becomes the essential: the triplet figuration provides the driving rhythm of the piece, holding together the texture beneath motivic contrasts.

Ex. 3.10: No. 6 of op. 126, first strong perfect cadence, bars 31-33

The image shows a musical score for three bars (31-33) in a single system. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat major/C minor). Bar 31 starts with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The bass line consists of chords and single notes. Below the bass line, Roman numerals indicate the harmonic progression: A $\flat$ : V, I, V. The triplet motif is clearly visible in the right hand across all three bars.

The reprise of the six-bar 'horn call' theme returns in an expanded form in bar 33. Of course, the broken thirds and sixths remain almost identical to the original at bars 33-38. Yet the triplet motif now fills out the bare fifth drone of the original. It undulates in the deep bass register, imparting a sense of timelessness, strongly pointing back to the fourth variation of the 'Arietta' from the piano sonata, op. 111 of 1822. This variation in texture is enhanced six bars later with a repeat of the six-bar strain, in which the stilted and

disjunct intervals of the original horn call are filled in by conjunct motion (bars 39-44; Ex. 3.11). The harmonic deepening (*A<sup>b</sup>* major), the dark undulations of the texture and the transformation of a disjunct intervallic pattern into a smooth passage of conjunct scale-work, one that stretches out beyond the seventh of the original to traverse the full range of the keyboard, do not represent a disfigurement or manipulation of the principal frameworks of the principal material, whether it be harmony or melodic profile. They represent, rather, the creative act itself, an early nineteenth-century solution to artificial construction. The variation of bars 33-44 corrects, as it were, the fragmented construction of the principal material.

Ex. 3.11: No. 6 of op. 126, right hand melody-conjunct motion, bars 39-41



After the restatement of the minor-mode three-bar unit, now in *F* minor, and the ‘slip’ back into *E<sup>b</sup>* major that leads to the cadential figuration (bars 51-53), Beethoven again develops the triplet motif, but this time more extensively, avoiding rest on a pedal note and instead spinning out the motif for an end in itself within a developmental coda. At this point one has to agree with Adorno when he asserts that the triplet motif now “takes possession of all voices.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the form’s organic flow, its dynamic movement towards the concluding presto, is anchored around the triplet motif; this motif is transformed within a series of gradations that represents one continuous route of successive growth, from a conventional cadential figuration (bars 19-21) to a developmental fragment (bars 22-32) to an accompaniment figure (bars 33-50) to the principal melodic material in the coda, the only material that is authentically ‘worked-out’ in detail within the Bagatelle (bars 54-62). The ‘flowering’ of this triplet figure into an elegantly ‘worked-out’ motif produces a linear trajectory, a teleological line of developmental from metaphorical ‘seed’ (bars 19-21) to ‘flower’ (bars 54-62).

On a larger level, this ‘biological development’ in the horizontal axis of the musical discourse (the transformation of the triplet motif) works against the vertical axis, the putative **ABA** formal schema.<sup>70</sup> The formal space of the sixth Bagatelle is used as a veritable arena by Beethoven, in which he plays out the tensions between the dynamic

<sup>69</sup> Adorno (1998), 132.

<sup>70</sup> See footnote 54, above.

growth of the seed and the static, artificial divisions of the **ABA** schema, in short the static-dynamic dichotomy that permeated the shift from 'Classicism' to 'Romanticism' in the early nineteenth-century. This Bagatelle is perhaps Beethoven's most Romantic creation, an essay in motivic *Steigerung*. The primitive 'seed' of bars 7-21 grows into the flower of bars 33-62, a flourish of transformations of the original material. After bar 62 the cycle of life reaches at once its end and beginning, falling back to the 'horn call' fragments over a dominant pedal that literally signals the return of the presto fanfare (bars 69-74). In the terms of the early nineteenth-century this fanfare is a musical embodiment of 'external reality,' of uncultivated, natural gesture from which grows basic articulation (bars 7-21) before developing into the elegance of rich and complex musical 'language' (as represented in bars 54-62).<sup>71</sup> Here, then, Beethoven's musical *Veränderung* reaches its zenith within the miniature form, explicitly pointing towards a new conception of formal articulation, a 'circular morphology' of musical construction.

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<sup>71</sup> Kinderman (1997), 261

## Chapter 4

### *Rethinking Theme and Form: The Bagatelle as 'Model'*

#### I

In a letter to his Viennese publisher, Tobias Haslinger, dated September 10 1821, Beethoven recounts a fantastical journey that had occupied his dreams while travelling from Baden to Vienna:

Now while I was dozing I dreamt that I was travelling to very distant parts of the world, even to Syria and, in fact, to India and back again, and even to Arabia; and in the end I even got as far as Jerusalem. The Holy City made my thoughts turn to the Sacred books.<sup>1</sup>

“So it is no wonder,” continues Beethoven, “that I then began to think of that fellow Tobias.”<sup>2</sup> This holy vision, in turn prompting thoughts of Haslinger, inspired Beethoven to artistic creation, in the form of an eponymous canon ‘O Tobias! Dominus Haslinger! O! O!’ A return to consciousness robbed Beethoven of this idea but, on the return journey to Baden, Beethoven’s subconscious vision returned: “...the same canon occurred to me. This time as I was awake, I held on to it...and only allowed it to transform itself into three parts.”<sup>3</sup> This three-part canon was written-out in full within the letter, the work we know today as WoO 182.

Whimsical as this episode may seem, it explicitly highlights a trend almost exclusive to Beethoven’s late period, from around 1815 to his death in 1827: that of composing humorous canons, on either personal quips, as tributes to friends or patrons, or as settings of small extracts from literature.<sup>4</sup> From 1819 Beethoven started to compose canons more frequently as personal amusement. Many were written, like the above example, in letters to patrons, friends and chance acquaintances: to wish Countess Anna Marie Erdödy a happy new year; to give thanks to his doctor, Anton Braunhofer; and as a pun on the

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 1056 in Anderson (1961), 922-24

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 922

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 922-3

<sup>4</sup> Beethoven composed two musical jokes, ‘Lob auf den Dicken’ (‘In praise of the fat one,’ referring to Ignaz Schuppanzigh) and ‘Graf, liebster Graf,’ in 1801 and 1802 respectively. Two three-part canons, ‘Im Arm der Liebe ruht sich’s wohl’ and ‘Herr Graf, Ich komme zu fragen,’ are thought to have been composed between 1795 and 1797. Three more three-part canons, ‘Ewig dein,’ ‘Kurz ist der Schmerz’ (from Friedrich Schiller’s ‘Die Jungfrau von Orleans’) and ‘Freundschaft ist die Quelle,’ were composed in 1811, 1813 and 1814 respectively. The remaining 36 canons, from a total of 43 composed by Beethoven, are from 1815 onwards.

surname of Friedrich Kuhlau, who Beethoven had met in 1825.<sup>5</sup> The late canons as a whole reveal the various sides to Beethoven's often erratic temperament. Some reveal warm-hearted affection, others betray his irascibility, whilst others display his convivial humour. Whether as gifts, thanksgivings or as jokes, the canons gave Beethoven much delight in his last years and seemed to be within his mind at all occasions.

The pervasiveness of the canon in the late period is not to be underestimated, however 'trifling' they may appear. Indeed, it is not coincidental that Beethoven composed and published the two collections of Bagatelles, opp. 119 and 126, within the same period ('trifles' themselves, as he often referred to them). From around 1814-1815 he had begun to take delight in smaller, more personal 'amusement' than before. His endless enthusiasm for composing canons is a manifestation of his turn inwards, away from the large-scale, public 'heroicism' of his middle period into the personal, almost reclusive language of chamber music that is characteristic of the last years, not coincidentally from 1815 also. Beethoven was able to write expansive compositions such as the last piano sonatas and string quartets, as well as the comparatively small Bagatelles, opp. 119 and 126. His pursuit of the canon in the last years of his life was as much an authentic engagement with smaller units of musical construction as it was pure amusement. The centrality of the canon in his personal life, as well as the greater effort he put into the composition of the op. 126 Bagatelles, highlights such a point.

That one should not trivialise the status of the canon in Beethoven's last decade is obvious when it is considered in relation to his major works of the period. On the one hand, an allusion is made to certain canons within larger works. The classic example is the finale of the string quartet, op. 135, in which the canon 'Es muß sein! Ja, heraus mit dem Beutel!', WoO 196, provides the principal material of the *allegro*. Extra significance is granted to the words of this canon as Beethoven plays out an opposition between slow, minor-mode introduction and fast, major-mode sonata form, the former asking the question 'Muß es sein?' to which the latter answers in the affirmative.

For many years commentators have speculated about the biographical meaning of this 'difficult resolution,' as it is commonly translated: from Beethoven accepting his fate of foreseeable death to him giving a comically insouciant answer to an ambiguous question. In fact, the original canon (WoO 196) is Beethoven's musical reply to Ignaz Dembscher,

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<sup>5</sup> Letters 986, 1371 and 1427, respectively, from Anderson (1961), 860, 1196 and 1245-46

an amateur musician who held chamber music sessions at his house. When Dembschner wanted the string quartet, op. 130, to be performed at his home, but had not subscribed to the first performance of the work, Beethoven requested that fifty florins, the subscription fee of the work's premiere, be sent to him; to this Dembscher jokingly asked "Muß es sein?"<sup>6</sup> The mischievous reply from Beethoven served as inspiration for the string quartet that he finished only months after this incident. Again, the meaning of the words from the canon impart an extra layer of musical meaning, making the simple, diatonic tune assigned to the word 'Es muß sein' a literal reply to the grave, chromatic gestures of the question.

Other allusions from canon to large-scale work, or vice versa, are less direct than in the above example. Stephen Rumph, for example, believes that in the canon 'Doktor sperrt dem Tor den Tod,' WoO 189, Beethoven "spoofs" the *Heiliger Dankgesang* from the string quartet, op. 132.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, he draws a connection between the melody of 'Kühl, nicht lau,' WoO 191, and the theme of the *Große Fuge*.<sup>8</sup> Both cases draw attention to Beethoven's penchant for 'borrowing' motives or little tunes from both large and small works, recycling them into grand designs and jovial canons alike. A canon could be spun out from a rejected melodic sketch for a larger work, or a larger work could grow from a trifling canon. Such was the relevance of all invention to the compositional process of the 'late style.'

However, the most important influence of the canon in Beethoven's 'late style' is not this motivic allusion within larger works. It is rather that Beethoven starts to think canonically. Canonic invention pervades his music, especially from the Diabelli variations onwards. Even in the odd allusion to his previously composed canons it is not the melody or motive being used that is of significance, but the whole complex of the canon, the act of imitation between voices. The knowledge of the words to a given tune only adds curiosity to the specific theme, whether it is meant as ironic or simply as a matter of motivic desirability. The canonic fragments within larger works are more revealing in terms of the language of the 'late style' than textual significance, in the context of this discussion at least.

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<sup>6</sup> See Lockwood (2003), 480, and Kerman (1966), 362

<sup>7</sup> Rumph (2004), 117

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

The delight Beethoven took in composing two-, three- and four-part canons as personal amusement is nowhere more obvious in his 'major works' of the late period than in the Diabelli variations, op. 120. He takes great pleasure in producing canonic variations from a theme whose construction, and indeed the world it stands for, is inimical to contrapuntal treatment of any kind. The canon, of course, is the most primitive type of counterpoint, involving exact imitations of short, simple material. The variety of canonic invention that Beethoven creates from the rigid waltz is thus all the more comical. For example, variation 4 begins with a lilting three-part canon; the second half of the same variation also begins with canonic entries, but ends with more harmonic and textural complexity; variation 6 starts as a canon on a fanfare, while variation 19 is a fast two-part canon with *stretto* entries (Ex. 4.1a). There are more subtle instances of imitative entries that clearly point to Beethoven's preoccupation with the canon: the graceful 'Grave e maestoso' of variation 14 presents a two-part canon in the right hand over the heavy bass chords of the left; variation 12 begins with a six-note motive that is echoed twice in the right hand; in variation 18 the opening figures of each hand are imitated in the other hand, so that it is a double imitation, two canons at once (Ex. 4.1b).

Ex. 4.1a: Variation 19 of op. 120, bars 1-3



Ex. 4.1b: Variation 18 of op. 120, bars 1-2



Beethoven upholds this canonic imitation in the late string quartets. The most striking example is in the fifth variation of the 'Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile' from

op. 131. Generally, imitative entries are now fully worked into the texture of large formal sections within these quartets. Motives are effortlessly passed between the four voices, inducing a texture far removed from the balanced sound of the Classical quartet. Even in movements that are not explicitly based on imitative principals, the canonic itch is still tangible. The fifth movement from the same quartet, for example, is at first glance cast in Beethoven's usual scherzo manner. A closer look at the texture, however, reveals fragments of canonic imitation that are woven into the texture throughout the entire movement. The second violin's canonic echo of the melody in bars 5-6 and 13-14 is a typically delicate instance (Ex. 4.2); the canonic echoes of the rising-fourth, major-third and minor-third intervals of the first violin, in bars 25-36, is a more blatant manifestation of the movement's innate imitative texture.

Ex. 4.2: Fifth movement of the string quartet, op. 131, bars 3-8



## II

Beethoven's subconscious, extempore composition of 'O! Tobias!' in the letter cited at the start of this chapter lends an insight into his changed musical thinking within the late period, the different way in which he thinks about musical construction with respect to his early and middle periods. Inventing musical canons on surnames, as jibes or as gifts of friendship was not just humorous fun by 1821. His creative imagination had been overtaken by his fascination of the genre, by his love of imitative musical construction. The extemporisation of the canon for Tobias Haslinger points beyond the whim of Beethoven's theological imagery to new, 'distant parts' of the world of thematic design.

That the simplest form of manipulating sound (canonic entries of the same musical unit) was an important, underlying concern for Beethoven is obvious within the works mentioned above, in which canonic entries begin variations and, more generally in the later works of the 'late style,' in which the canonic itch pervades all of his music, even that traditionally grounded in homophonic textures. In sum, the canon for Beethoven, to

use the words of Martin Cooper on the subject, was “a discipline which became first a pleasurable activity or game and finally *second nature*.”<sup>9</sup>

This second nature in Beethoven’s ‘late style’ represents an entirely new direction taken from the music of Haydn and Mozart: it is Beethoven’s radical change in the concept of a ‘theme,’ of thematic construction and of what actually constitutes a ‘theme,’ that truly separates the late music from the Classical tradition.<sup>10</sup> Affected by his enthusiasm for composing canons, and by the specific construction of this genre, the ‘theme’ loses all trace of Classical functionality. As Stephen Rumph as concisely noted, the canon is constructed as such that “theme and form are identical.”<sup>11</sup>

This point is fundamental for the subject of this chapter. In the previous chapters I have concentrated on formal characteristics, the models they draw from and the specific Idea that guides the particular formal design, as compared to both handed down tradition and Beethoven’s own *oeuvre*. In this chapter I will consider the changing relationship between theme and form, that is, the way in which the two functions are connected and the ways in which theme and form are conceived as articulating musical discourse. To put it another way, I will be discussing the role of the theme and if it can be called thus in the context of its eighteenth-century meaning within the late period music. The abstract thematic-motivic gestures and disjunctions are perhaps the most striking characteristic of the ‘late style,’ especially in relation to the Classical tradition. The theme and isolated motivic gestures are less subsumed by the functions of an overarching phrase, by the functions of form, than in, say, Mozart. In the late music they become more prominent and independent, less dictated by “the rush of the phrase toward the cadence.”<sup>12</sup>

The burgeoning of the canon in Beethoven’s late music represents one basic way, one manifestation of a broader process, in which his musical reasoning had changed. It is a simple instance within a larger trend, one that represents a shift in emphasis from Classical principles of rhythmically organised thematic units (on several hierarchic levels) to a manipulation of thematic/motivic units that are unhindered by principles of formal

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<sup>9</sup> Cooper, M. (1985), 419. Emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> See Dahlhaus (1997), 121-142, where he discusses the eighteenth-century concept of the term ‘theme,’ in both its aesthetic (theory of affects) and its technical (rhetorical) connotations.

<sup>11</sup> Rumph (2004), 117

<sup>12</sup> Michael Broyles, *Beethoven: The Emergence and Evolution of Beethoven's Heroic Style* (New York: Excelsior Music Publishing Co., 1987), 222

functions, but are rather presented in their purest forms, as they are 'in-themselves.'<sup>13</sup> Syntax and topic become equal. A certain topic or theme is not controlled by the need to punctuate the musical discourse by means of cadential formulae. Syntax, in the Classical sense (and as used in the previous chapter), is now just another way, alongside the individual theme, of articulating form. A purported disunity, or 'dissociation,' has been noted in the late music by generations of scholars; this is due to the parity of a formerly hegemonical relationship between individual idea, theme, or topic, and the musical syntax, the totality and congruity of the three basic parameters (melody, rhythm and harmony).

I will use the remainder of this chapter as an exploration of the nature of this new relation between theme, motive or idea, and form. The grand designs of the piano sonatas and string quartets are usually fertile ground for such analyses. However, can the Bagatelles accommodate this new relationship? Moreover, are their prototypical forms too small or too much bound up with eighteenth-century 'models' to present more complex thematic content than the functions of small phrases would allow? In short, can music cast in essentially Classical forms overcome the Classical relationship between theme and formal function? The canon embodies this relationship and it is, of course, smaller in dimensions than the Bagatelle, but the canon is predicated on this relationship, it is the *modus operandi* of the genre. As Stephen Rumph reminds us, "[o]nce devised, the melody of the canon contains the entire seed of its development."<sup>14</sup> In other words, the theme *is* the form within a canon.

It is an oft-cited observation that the theme in late Beethoven challenges the superficial boundaries of formal schemata ('ABA,' 'sonata form' etc.). The theme does not become the form itself in the chamber music of the last decade, as it is intrinsically within the canon, but Beethoven's determination to rid it of subsumptive functions causes a complex formal dynamic to emerge, in which neither theme nor traditional formal schemata fully dictate the music, and in which coherence is no longer perceivable in the Classical sense of the term. A conflict between 'dissociation and integration,' as the title of Brodbeck and

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<sup>13</sup> It is not coincidental that the majority of examples from Beethoven's music are limited to the early and middle period works within William Caplin's "theory of formal functions" of Classical music. These two periods, despite the latter's apparent originality, are still tied up with Classical principles of musical form and the relationship between the three primary parameters. That is to say, large-scale rhythm (form) still dictates the musical flow. Caplin (2001). See also Spitzer (2004), 207-275.

<sup>14</sup> Rumph (2004), 117

Platoff's well-known article specifies, determines the principles of the formal dynamic.<sup>15</sup> In general, this means that there exists a rich variety of disparate thematic materials (or 'topics') and formal anomalies that are worked out within and between themselves.<sup>16</sup>

The string quartets of the late period fully embody the anomalies and contradictions that arise from Beethoven's new conception of the relationship between theme and form. Prince Galitzin's confusion and disappointment with the three quartets he had commissioned from Beethoven (published as opp. 127, 132 and 130) holds testament to such a reading. The Prince, a competent cellist, wrote to Beethoven on several occasions to enquire about apparent mistakes in the parts of the *E♭* quartet. Was the inclusion of a *db* in the viola part a printing mistake, supplanting the 'correct' note *eb*, for example? There was debate among the Prince's quartet about many such matters throughout the piece. It was not a mistake, insisted Beethoven: the strange sounding *db* was the composer's intention "on account of the melody, which merits always to be preferred to anything else."<sup>17</sup> The melody Beethoven has in mind here is, of course, the whole complex, the four parts together. The *db* for him was an inextricable element of the four-voice counterpoint that represents the material, the melody or theme, or whatever one wishes to term it. Moreover, Beethoven's sketching habits corroborates the reading of a melody or theme as being not a single line but a multi-voice complex: the single-line melodic sketches that he had made throughout his career in many different notebooks and individual leaves of manuscript was dropped in favour of a new work habit, in which ideas were jotted down and worked-out in score.

The Prince's initial disappointment with the three 'Galitzin' quartets, therefore, is most probably because he and his musical circle had expected of Beethoven something akin to his earlier essays in the genre, particularly his op. 18 set. The initial reception of these works gives today's scholar a palpable sense of the new direction of Beethoven's musical thought in the last decade of his life. Furthermore, the difficulty they presented to the listeners of the time attest to their new conceptions of thematic function, formal coherence and the abandonment of the Classical style's sense of balance and integration, in short, the sheer difference of the musical language. As Michael Steinberg has noted,

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<sup>15</sup> David Brodbeck and John Platoff, "Dissociation and Integration: The First Movement of Beethoven's Opus 130," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 7 (1986), 149-162

<sup>16</sup> Formal anomalies when judged by the standards of Classical form, which is assumed to be the intention of Beethoven.

<sup>17</sup> Beethoven; in the only surviving reply to Prince Galitzin concerning this matter. Quoted in Chua (1995), 3.



one critic who attended one of only three public performances of the op. 127 quartet in March 1825, experienced the work as an “incomprehensible, incoherent, vague, over-extended series of fantasias-chaos, from which flashes of genius emerged from time to time like lightning bolts from a black thunder cloud.”<sup>18</sup> These adjectives represent a musical reality that veils Beethoven’s new conception of theme and form.

### III

To return to my above questions, how can a small form such as the Bagatelle express this new musical conception? The string quartets are not only imbued with intricate, related motivic patterns, as well as rhetorically juxtaposed disparities *within* the single movement, but *across* the entire plan of the work, traversing the four, five and six movements, respectively, of each quartet. The resulting complexity of thematic material and its relation to the formal dynamic of the structure seems unbecoming to the miniature binary and ternary designs of the Bagatelles. Yet there exists a new method and complexity of motivic/thematic construction and development within the late Bagatelles; as Beethoven himself said in the letter to Schott of November 1824, several of the op. 126 Bagatelles “are more fully worked out” than previous attempts.<sup>19</sup> A few observations from an earlier Bagatelle, op. 119 no. 8 of 1821, will serve to introduce facets integral to Beethoven’s new conception of motivic construction and development on the level of the miniature form.

Lawrence Kramer has described this Bagatelle as “a tiny interlude of utterly relaxed lyricism,”<sup>20</sup> yet the dense motivic associations imbue the music with tension, on both a vertical and horizontal axis. Moreover, the variety of motivic manipulation is extraordinary within the twenty bars that comprise this piece. More appropriately, Christopher Hatch has analysed the instances of motivic and thematic manipulation across the ‘small binary’ form. Not surprisingly, he uncovers instances of relative “normality and disruption” with respect to conventional Classical models of formal-thematic articulation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> An unnamed critic, quoted in Steinberg (1994), 217

<sup>19</sup> Letter 1321 in Anderson (1961), 1150-52

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth-Century and After* (London: University of California Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Hatch (1993). It is not coincidental that Hatch’s title runs parallel to the terms ‘dissociation and integration,’ as op. 119 no. 8 adumbrates the conflict between abstraction and conventionality that characterises the late string quartets, particularly op. 130.

Edward Cone isolates the problem when he ponders the question of whether the form is a three-part, due to the tonal scheme, or whether a sense of a recapitulation is illusory due to the absence of an overt restatement of the opening melody, making the form a two-part.<sup>22</sup> To assign a two-part form to this Bagatelle on account of no readily perceivable recapitulation, Cone maintains, is to “overlook a cleverly concealed thematic return.”<sup>23</sup> In short, the motivic and thematic complexities of this piece are such that their cognisance affects how one perceives the overall form.

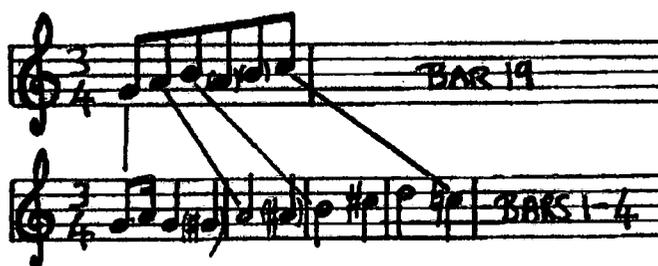
The key to perceiving the true relationship between the thematic-motivic material and the form is to search for motivic compressions, expansions and cross-references between the two sections of the piece. Though a wide range of disparate topical material is not possible within such a small form, the essential, or structural, motivic figures are still hidden; in this case they are hidden beneath varied figuration. Notice, for example, that the ascent from C to c in bars 1-4 in the left hand is stripped of all chromatic passing-notes and compressed into four crochet beats in bars 17-18 (Ex. 4.3a). Also, the perfect cadence of bar 4 is expanded in the last two bars, whereby the dominant-tonic resolution is drawn-out. Furthermore, the melodic ascent of bars 1-4 is compressed into the penultimate bar of the piece: the chromaticism of the former is superseded by the diatonicism of the latter (Ex. 4.3b). The ‘recapitulation’ is confined to two bars (17-18), compressing the original four (bars 1-4 comprise the original material, since the perfect cadence on the third beat of bar four rounds off the opening phrase and proceeds to modulate thereafter to the dominant in bars 5-8). The ‘coda’ of bars 19-20 neatly compresses the melodic span of the original melody from bars 1-4 in a direct diatonic version, as a summary of the principle material, while the cadence marking the end of bar 4 is drawn-out within this ‘coda’ in order to emphasise closure.

Ex. 4.3a: No. 8 of op. 119, bars 1-4 and 17-18



<sup>22</sup> Cone (1977), 89-92

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 89



The mysterious octave  $b\flat$  that begins the second section of the form, itself a rich source of speculation for commentators, can be interpreted in two ways.<sup>24</sup> Firstly, one can follow Cone's line of thought. He posits two contextual readings of the  $b\flat$  disjunction. Initially, it collides with the  $b$ -natural of the preceding G major chord that closes the first section. One may recall that the  $b\flat/b$ -natural ambiguity was a feature of the first movement of the string quartet, op. 127, in which G minor and G major respectively were brought into conflict within the confines of a traditional exposition section. The small scale of the Bagatelle somewhat enhances this ambiguity: immediately the  $b\flat$  gives the effect of G minor, but Beethoven then tonicises the octave, so as to appear in  $B\flat$  major. As Cone stresses, bar 12 would seem to present a II-V motion in  $B\flat$  major.<sup>25</sup> The two possible harmonic functions of the  $b\flat$  (G minor and  $B\flat$  major) are, of course, revealed to be transitional, representing a mini-development section perhaps, for the music arrives on a dominant prolongation in bars 13-16 as a preparation for the lucid tonic resolution of the form (bars 17-20).

The second contextual reading involves a reinterpretation of the  $b\flat$ , for this disjunction now follows the perfect cadence in C major of bars 19-20 when the repeat is played; the  $b\flat$  is in this case now heard as a seventh. From this point, therefore, the music from bar 9 points towards F major. The cadence in bar 12 is now a V-I in F major. In this case, the articulation of the diminished-seventh at the end of bar 12 comes as less of a shock than before, and the preparation and establishment of C major follows more smoothly than it had done the first time of asking, completing an expected large-scale I-IV-V-I.<sup>26</sup> Thus, an ambiguity, when reinterpreted harmonically, can serve to imbue a repeated section of music with a sense of development and resolution. In this case, a motivic disjunction

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Cone.(1977), 91-92; Hatch (1993); Kramer, L. (1984), 11-15; and Marston (1986), 193-206

<sup>25</sup> Cone.(1977), 91-92

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 92

lends greater weight to the 'utterly relaxed lyricism' of the miniature structure by modifying the formal dynamic in the repeat, shifting from harmonic ambiguity, and hence relative discontinuity, to relative stability and the fulfilment of normative cadential completion.

The second interpretation of the octave *bb* does not contradict or refute Cone's, but adds to complex motivic procedures intrinsic to this piece. More importantly for this discussion, its coexistence with the above interpretation lends insight into the relationship between motive, or 'theme,' and the form of which it is a part. As I discussed in the first chapter, Beethoven adds instability to the first six bars of the Bagatelle in the form of ascending chromatic appoggiaturas in the two outer parts. Kramer has pointed out that the augmented triads on the third beat of bars 1-3 are a result of "expressive voice-leading," to which these harmonies provide extra weight in the resolution onto subdominant, dominant and, eventually, tonic harmonies respectively.<sup>27</sup> However, his conviction that the second part of the form represents an antithesis to the first overlooks an important facet of motivic cross-referencing and reinterpretation that pervades the form.<sup>28</sup>

For example, the first chromatic appoggiatura in the piece (*g#* in bar 1) becomes important in the second section of the form. Notice that the *g-g#* motion of bar 1 is presented in inversion as *ab-g* in bars 13-14 (Ex. 4.4). Moreover, this semitone motion is stretched out over four bars (notated as *ab-a-natural*) as part of a cadential figure that animates the dominant prolongation in bars 13-16, and, as a long-range resolution, the *a-natural* drops back to the primary note of the melody (*g*) instead of rising as the melodic line had done in bars 1-6. Indeed, one can speculate further and associate this motion (*ab (g#)-a-natural-g* of bars 13-16) as resolving the tensions of bar 6, in which the abrasive *f#* displays a "Tristanesque ambiguity between chord and appoggiatura."<sup>29</sup> The four-bar expansion and reinterpretation of the original *g-g#-a* motion, then, serves to generally balance and resolve the harmonically unstable appoggiaturas of the first section. Dissonant passing-note becomes normative melodic decoration. Discrete cross-

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<sup>27</sup> Kramer, L. (1984), 13

<sup>28</sup> Kramer's interpretation is simplified here. He admits, for example, that the "harmonic obscurities are local, not structural..." Furthermore, he concludes that the structure of the Bagatelle depends on an "antithesis in which the opposed elements-oblique and direct harmonic textures [of the first and second sections respectively]-reverse their usual expressive roles." In short the chromaticism of the first section actually "remains firmly centred on the tonic" whereas the "bright, severe, almost modalized tonic-dominant of the surface" in the second section in fact presents subtle dissonances on a deeper level. (1984), 13-14. My point is, however, that the local motivic activity does have a bearing on the form.

<sup>29</sup> Cone (1977), 89

references, or 'motivic reinterpretations,' therefore, yield a sense of balance between the two sections of the form.

Ex. 4.4: No. 8 of op. 119, bars 13-14

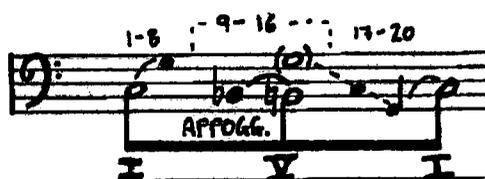


In a piece that focuses upon the balance and resolution of unstable local appoggiaturas, one can interpret the octave *bb* in the same light. However, if it is to be heard as an appoggiatura it ceases to be local, a surface event, and becomes structural, for it cannot be reduced to a diatonic simplification as can the local chromaticisms of bars 1-6. The *bb* becomes structural when Beethoven harmonises it: first it is the root of *Bb* major, then it persists as the third of *G* minor and the seventh of *V* in *F* major (bars 11-12). What seems like an arbitrary motivic disjunction actually defines the harmonic context of bars 9-12 (excluding the last quaver beat of bar 12). The fact that the key is uncertain in these bars, however, further justifies the claim that this passage functions as a development section (more appropriately, as a 'mini-development') in that it is moving through tonal centres without cadential punctuation, however brief it may be.

This structural appoggiatura is resolved upwards by a semitone, in accordance with the many local ones within this Bagatelle. It moves to *b*-natural, which, of course, is the underpinning of a dominant-seventh first inversion in *C* major. The fact that Beethoven prolongs the leading tone and does not opt for a stronger and more consonant dominant root to this harmony in bars 13-16 strengthens the sense of a deep structure appoggiatura of *bb*-*b*-natural. When the music arrives on what may be termed the 'recapitulation,' the structural appoggiatura again ascends by a semi-tone to the note *c*. The re-emergence of tonic harmony, the crucial moment in a 'small ternary'/'rounded binary' design, is entrusted to an essentially melodic motion that started as a deep-structure appoggiatura when *bb* resolved to *b*-natural in the same manner as the local appoggiaturas of the first half.

In this bagatelle, then, the ascending chromatic appoggiatura moves from the foreground of the music (in bars 1-8) to embrace the structural framework (in bars 8-20). In short, the semitone ascent becomes the form itself. The essential I-V-I arch of Koch's prototypical song is enhanced by this *structural* motivic motion. Form and motive are no longer cast in a functionally hierarchical relationship. They are equal, and this parity is exemplified in both the motivic expansions, compressions and cross-references across the divisions of formal schema that justify the labels of 'exposition,' 'development' and 'recapitulation' to an apparent two-part form, and in the fusion of a salient motivic appoggiatura and the form's fundamental structural framework. The appoggiatura's penetration into the Schenkerian *Ursatz*, itself an apt representation of the essential tonal arch of a prototypical form, is a suitable portrayal of the amalgamation of motivic, linear motion, with the tonal rhythm of the form (Ex. 4.5).<sup>30</sup>

Ex. 4.5: No. 8 of op. 119, rising appoggiatura within the form



The structural V is established at the end of the first section; it is not prolonged through to bar 16 as such, but is suspended by the structural appoggiatura motion. This motion, however, does not distort the fundamental articulation of the three structural pillars. The b-natural of the deep motivic thread has a double function: firstly as a motive, secondly, as the underpinning bass of a structural harmony. The absence of the dominant note (g) at this point does not mitigate the I-V-I tonal arch, nor does it underplay the moment of tonic arrival in bar 17. Motive and form are inexorable. The drawn-out perfect cadence in the last two bars does not represent a retro-active root-position dominant but a function of 'coda,' an 'after-the-end' corroboration of tonic harmony after the *bona fide* structural arrival in bar 17. The role of the theme, or two-note motive in this case, bears a much more complex relationship to the formal schemata in late Beethoven, even in the tiny form of a miniature such as this. Formal coherence is not achieved solely by the large-scale formal rhythm of the Classical style, in which thematic material is subordinated to the functions of individual phrases within ever-increasing rhythmic hierarchies. The

<sup>30</sup> 'Amalgamation' is the most appropriate term for the relationship between theme (motive) and form in this example. As we will see later in this chapter, the two are not always amalgamated but are pitted against each other as equals.

interplay between the thematic material and the traditional formal schemata holds the key to understanding a particular design in the 'late style.'

#### IV

Perhaps the most obvious theory that attempts to elucidate the new conception of formal and thematic relations in Beethoven's late period music is Carl Dahlhaus' notion of the 'subthematic.' 'Subthematicism,' as it is termed by Dahlhaus in his study of the composer, is the attempt to perceive and explain in traditional musical parlance the composer's new conception of formal process, that is, the new-fangled attempt by Beethoven to reinvent the "guarantee of coherence and continuity" in his instrumental music.<sup>31</sup>

This process can be elucidated when one considers Beethoven's new conception of a theme itself, which involves two levels in which the theme operates: on a thematic and a 'subthematic' level. In the former, conventionality is predominant. The extreme objectivity that comprises the surface, the existence of typical figures and topics as the immediate musical discourse, "can be disregarded," says Dahlhaus, "and left untouched because it merely represents a façade..."<sup>32</sup> The importance of thematic structure does not reside in its role within the functions of the phrase, but is reduced "to the formal process, regardless of whether the sonata-form outline remains intact."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, adds Dahlhaus, "[t]he expressive character of the themes is kept, to a certain extent, at a distant, as though held under condition."<sup>34</sup>

Conventional figures, melodic shapes or standard topics are "left untouched," to quote Adorno, instead of being "permeated and overpowered by subjectivity."<sup>35</sup> In other words, the immediate themes of the music, of the surface, are naked conventions, ones that are "made visible in unconcealed, untransformed bareness."<sup>36</sup> They bear no mark on the actual formal process of the music, but are merely surface events, even when they do satisfy the rules of the superficial formal schema (such as an **ABA** design). The form, in the sense meaning the logic and perception of coherence of the music, is broken off from

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<sup>31</sup> Dahlhaus (1997), 204

<sup>32</sup> Dahlhaus (1989), 84

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Adorno, quoted in Dahlhaus (1997), 202

<sup>36</sup> Adorno (1998), 124

these conventional thematic figurations or topics that constitute the exterior themes. The music's continuity is withdrawn from the surface, which is now "riven with contrasts," asserts Dahlhaus, and thus becomes fissured and discontinuous.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, the surface theme, Beethoven's conception of a 'theme' in the first sense, is sundered from the formal process. The exterior design of the form may remain intact (as a sonata design, for example), and the manifold themes may correspond to this superficial design (being a 'second subject,' for example), but the conformance of themes with the formal schema is no longer a 'guarantee of coherence and continuity' in the music. Indeed, this conformance is a convention itself, in the sense postulated by Adorno. The real formal integrity, the logical flow and internal unity of the music, stands outside the conformance of surface theme and formal schema. The musical logic, then, no longer manifests itself as the "commanding, goal-directed course of events" as had been the case in the 'heroic' period.<sup>38</sup>

The relationship between theme and form (form in this sense meaning the logic and coherence of the musical argument, not the formal schema) is brought towards parity in the late music, and hence departs from the relationship that was the basis of the Classical style and the early and middle periods of Beethoven. In the middle period, the Classical style's function of the theme reached its culmination, in which the teleology of the form, the coherence and continuity of the music, was "turned ostentatiously outwards..."<sup>39</sup> The subordination of the theme in terms of the overarching functions of the formal schema is mere objectivity in late Beethoven; the untruth of this relationship dominates the surface, becoming arbitrary and discontinuous, often fleeting from topic to topic and purposely creating the sense of incoherence and deliberate disassociation between the linear elements throughout a particular movement.

The new relationship between theme and form is epitomised in the second level in which the theme operates in late Beethoven: the 'subthematic.' As its name suggests, 'subthematicism' is a brand of thematic working in the loosest sense of the term that lies beneath the exterior of the music. The logic of continuity inherent in the external themes of the Classical style, and particularly in Beethoven's middle period music, is usurped by a logic that retreats into the deep structure of the music. In this sense, 'subthematicism'

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<sup>37</sup> Dahlhaus (1997), 204

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 204-5

represents the formal process itself, often perceivable only as abstract networks or connections of intervallic 'shapes.' The exterior form (like a sonata design, for example) and the traditional thematic functions of this exterior are still present, intentionally so, but are shown to be detached from the real form, the formal process of the music, which is now embodied within the 'subthematic' domain.

Dahlhaus encapsulates the composer's new conception of formal and thematic relations, which together constitute the new structural integration that pervades the late music:

What distinguishes the late style... is that the actual formal procedure is withdrawn from the domain of clear-cut themes and straightforward development into a 'subthematic' realm. Here connections crisscross the entire form instead of being presented ostentatiously outwards in a mighty sweep of rigorous logic and consistency, as in the middle-period works.<sup>40</sup>

The formal process resides in an abstract musical idea that permeates the 'fabric' of the music. This abstract musical idea hides behind the 'façade' of the surface, and is therefore detached from it. Focusing on the string quartets, opp. 132 and 130, Dahlhaus refers to this sub-surface logic as the "magic of association."<sup>41</sup> Instead of viewing the interconnectedness of themes as an accumulation of variants from an original prototype presented in its truest form at the start of the music (what Adorno invariably termed 'humanistic stocktaking,' meaning motif-spotting and association in order to create an illusory unity between the motivic material of a movement or entire work), Dahlhaus asserts that "[a] fundamental form [of a discernible motivic pattern or configuration] does not exist, but it is found in a number of variants..."<sup>42</sup>

Dahlhaus' well-known analysis of the first movement from the string quartet, op. 132, lends insight into the two aforementioned levels of thematic technique. As well as the extreme contrast of topics which inhabit the surface of this movement, such as 'march' in the first theme, 'gavotte' for the transition to the second subject (bar 40 onwards), and 'aria' for the second subject, the contrast between *adagio* and *allegro* is an obvious feature that yields a "rhapsodic effect" on the surface of the music.<sup>43</sup> Sudden

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<sup>40</sup> Dahlhaus (1989), 84

<sup>41</sup> Dahlhaus (1997), 227-230

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 227-28. This is a statement about the first movement of the string quartet, op. 130.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 204. On the topical discourse of the surface and how this relates to the movement's fundamental structure, see Agawu (1991), 110-126, and Michael Spitzer, "Inside Beethoven's

juxtapositions of texture and the abrupt curtailment of cadences (see bars 90-93, for example) further enhance the feeling of discontinuity and dissociation along the linear axis of the movement. A main idea of the movement, then, is the configuration of the *adagio* and *allegro* sections, in which the former loses its historical function as introduction and is fully integrated into the thematic material.

However, the fundamental idea of the movement that unites the disparate elements is in fact the four-note group g#-a-f-e. This, of course, is heard ‘thematically,’ that is directly, at the start of the *adagio* that begins the movement. In the *allegro* this figuration is heard less conspicuously, partially hidden by the disparate surface material and contrasts, and as such is presented ‘subthematically.’<sup>44</sup> An important point to note at this juncture is that the four-note group is asserted throughout the movement only *latently*. As Dahlhaus emphasises, it is only an abstract idea, devoid of a concrete formulation: one only perceives this four-note group as binding the movement from within when “instead of settling on the first ‘concrete’ formulation [in the *adagio*], we define the fundamental idea as an ‘abstract’ configuration of two (rising or falling) semitone steps with a variable interval between them.”<sup>45</sup> The element that binds the music internally, beneath the disparities and contrasts of the foreground, is a mutable intervallic structure based on the four-note figure (g#-a#-f-e) that is independent of rhythm, meter, duration and harmonic context. It is even independent of the actual notes themselves, and is transposed, as in bars 75-78 or bars 103-106, or even in the subtle manifestation in the second violin at bars 123-126 (Ex. 4.6).

Ex. 4.6: First movement of the string quartet, op. 132, bars 123-26

Paradoxically, the sheer variety of forms of this abstract configuration imparts a strong sense of internal coherence to the music. Permutations of the abstract four-note figure cut

‘Magic Square’: The Structural Semantics of Op. 132,” *Musique et Signification: Les Universaux en Musique* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998a), 87-126.

<sup>44</sup> Dahlhaus (1997), 204.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

across the traditional formal functions such as 'first theme,' 'second theme,' 'development section' etc. For example, the 'aria' of the second subject appears to lack any trace of the figure's implicit chromaticism. Notice, however, that the standard cadence on the dominant (V of F major) in bars 51-52 contains a variant of the 'subtheme' (e-f-b-c). Though this derivation may seem remote, it verifies the musical reality of the piece as perceived by the listener. The penetration of the abstract four-note group into the musical tissue of the movement is so relentless and pervasive that it precludes a conscious perception of all associations across the movement that relate to the abstract configuration, especially "of the kind that almost invariably requires study of the score," to use the words of Dahlhaus.<sup>46</sup>

The descriptions offered above of this particular abstract figure are not adequate in conjuring the impression of internal unity that is felt within this movement. It is enough to say that the constant intervallic reiterations, even when cut short as in the cello in bars 134-5, or distributed between the instruments and between registers as in bars 23-6, impart a feeling of unity in the fact that a easily perceivable motion (the two semitones) are omnipresent in infinite variants, either as part of the immediate melody (as in the 'first theme' of bars 14-15), as patent statements (as in the *ff* eruption in bars 103-6), as superimposed harmony (as in bars 193-4), in counterpoint with other thematic material and other permutations of the same figure (as in bars 111-14 and especially in bars 199-206), or hidden as part of the texture (as in the viola part of bars 79-82).

In this theory of formal and thematic relations in Beethoven's 'late style,' then, the theme, in its Classical sense meaning the exterior presentation of melodic shapes, stands as a veil to the real formal process. This process is no longer a hegemonical relationship between form and theme, an ostentatious logic that relies on the assertiveness of the theme, which is 'overpowered by subjectivity.' Also, the formal schema stands outside of the real formal process. The real form and theme are amalgamated: the theme, or rather 'subtheme,' in order to differentiate it from the conventional meaning, is an ineradicable element of the music's coherence and logic; it becomes the formal process. The coexistence of the two levels of form and theme (surface and sub-surface), despite the exterior level representing a mere façade, constitute the musical reality of the late works.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 205

The new musical construction, in which the (sub)theme weaves across and beneath the form, uniting the parts from within, unimpeded by formal boundaries, is given all the more potency by its being pitted against the very process to which it is antithetical, namely, the conventional exteriority of thematic conformance in a superficially defined schema. In other words, the new sense of musical construction, the freedom of the theme from functional obligations within an exterior form, is purposely concealed by the very construction that it aims to supplant. Of course, this is the kind of musical account that Adorno attempts to explicate as a kind of intrinsic critique of society on the part of Beethoven, who, by working this critique into the materials of his music, becomes a proponent of the truth regarding fractured social relations. It represents the truth as opposed to the falseness of the 'heroic' style's synthesis of particular and individual.

To return to purely musical terms, the exterior is made no longer to stand as the formal process itself but becomes awkward and seemingly arbitrary when it is, however latently, perforated by the sub-surface logic of 'subthematicism.' The nature of 'subthematicism,' to put it another way, is such that only glimpses of its logic and unity are perceivable among the disjunctures, discontinuities and disparities of the thematic material, or topics, of the foreground texture. The critic who attended one of the performances of the op. 127 string quartet seems strangely to have been proffering methodological advice for the understanding of late Beethoven: the surface of the music indeed appears to be 'incoherent,' but only because the logic of continuity and coherence is withdrawn from the surface into the 'subthematic' realm. To understand some of Beethoven's most 'vague' or 'incomprehensible' music one needs to probe Beethoven's new conception of a 'theme,' and its role in the logic of the formal process.

## V

The interpretation of the Bagatelle, op. 119 no. 8, now becomes clearer in this context. The appoggiatura motion of a rising semitone can be construed as a 'subtheme,' in that it is an abstract configuration and not tied to one particular pitch. Furthermore, it is presented 'thematically' at the beginning (bars 1-6) and is withdrawn into the structure within the second half of the form, becoming 'subthematic,' representing a fundamental element of the actual formal process. It is an essay in Beethoven's evolving conception of 'subthematicism' that was to culminate in the last string quartets.

In a similar disposition to this piece, the Bagatelle, op. 126 no. 1, displays motivic-thematic compressions, expansions and cross-references. However, I will term the process in this instance ‘surthematicism,’ for Beethoven presents motivic strands *over* the detail of the surface melodies and harmonic functions, instead of beneath. As a result, the form becomes static and abrasions persist between motive and harmony.

In his article on this Bagatelle Casablanca observes two interval patterns, each demarcated by the interval of a perfect-fourth, that recur throughout the exposition and middle section.<sup>47</sup> The first, f#-b, is the melodic span of the first four bars of the principal melody. It is also this interval of a fourth, now unfilled and rhythmically compressed, that initiates the ‘hypertrophy’ of the form at bars 21-29. The second, and more pertinent intervallic pattern, is the one consisting of a-d. Its pervasiveness in various moulds across the form enhances the piece’s dominant-harmony ‘tilt.’ Moreover, this interval constitutes the melodic span of the middle section’s opening four-bar phrase (bars 17-20). Ex. 4.7 shows the different permutations of the interval, a-d, within the exposition and middle section.

Ex. 4.7: No. 1 of op. 126, permutations of the perfect-fourth interval, a-d



This ubiquitous perfect-fourth interval (a-d) is reduced to a Classical archetype within the first 20 bars. The first eight bars of the piece, when diatonically simplified, represent a V-I cadence, the bass dropping from dominant pedal (d) to tonic harmony (g at bar 8). Within this large permutation of the falling fifth motion there is the exact interval (d-a) in the run of bar 4 that, in essence, mediates between the dominant pedal and the echo of the principal melody on the note a. The a-d interval thus represents descent to tonic harmony in the exposition. The interval span of the middle section, however, is this same a-d, but

<sup>47</sup> Casablanca (1999), 27

now ascending. Beethoven is almost conventionalising the cognitive perception of tonic as descent and the more unstable dominant as ascent.

The theme of bars 17-20, to use the words of Adorno, opens “very matter-of-factly in the dominant.”<sup>48</sup> This is a consequence of another ‘fixed’ element of the Bagatelle that pervades the music and therefore cuts through the harmonic framework: the opening of the middle section contains almost exactly the same vertical complex as the opening, that is, both sections begin with the same ‘dyad’ of g-b, only inverted (compare upbeat to bars 1 and 17). After the ornamented repeat of the principal melody (bars 9-16) the ‘dyad’ reappears for the third time (as it begun the piece then begun the repeat of the principal melody); the recurrence of the same vertical complex (the ‘dyad’ over a pedal of d) imbues the form with a static ‘signpost’ as it were, in such a way that, initially, the opening of the middle section could in fact be another repetition. In short, the middle section of the Bagatelle opens ‘matter-of-factly’ because expectations of another repeat are denied; the abruptness resides in the relative surprise of a new melodic contour that follows the same ‘dyad.’

When the dominant key area has been established, however, the prevalence of the ‘dyad’ does not diminish. Rather, the harmony cuts across the fixedness of the ‘dyad,’ generating a friction between tonic (g-b) and dominant harmonies (see the ‘cluster’ at the start of bar 19, for example; Ex. 4.8). The three-note figure at bar 20, constructed from the amalgamation of the first ‘fixed’ perfect-fourth interval (f#-b) and the melodic motion from bars 16-17 (b-a), further heightens this sense of friction: the linear-note 3 is isolated from the note g and is subject to a more strained coexistence with the dominant, as it is incessantly reiterated over the static vacillations of V and I in the key of D major (bars 21-26; see Ex. 1.5 in the first chapter).

Ex. 4.8: No. 1 of op. 126, bars 18-20

<sup>48</sup> Adorno (1998), 130

As the three-note figure moves into the 2/4 time signature, there resides a conflict between the linear 3 and 2 (the notes b and a respectively). The propulsion of the three note figure in the ‘hypertrophy,’ with its unremitting articulation of the b-a appoggiatura, forces the conventional background structure (the melodic 2 supported by the structural V in a Schenkerian *Hintergrund*) to accommodate the linear 3 with the linear 2 (Ex. 4.9).

Ex. 4.9: No. 1 of op. 126, fundamental form



At the outset of this middle section, then, Beethoven explicitly presents the higher level descent of b-a at the foreground level (anacrusis in bar 16), that is, ‘thematically.’ The note a (the linear 2) is prolonged by the melody’s curvilinear motion from a-d and back again to a in bars 17-20. The arrival of the ‘hypertrophy,’ however, undermines the linear 2 by literally “dawdling” on the motion of b-a.<sup>49</sup> This affects the deeper structure of the piece not by ‘subthematicism,’ by retreating beneath empty surface material, but by becoming ‘surthematic,’ by a forceful existence over dominant harmony, bearing no resemblance to a ‘theme’ in the traditional sense, but rather an appoggiatura akin to the one in bars 16-17.

Not only does Beethoven blur the boundaries of the form on the foreground level (between the exposition and the middle section in the ‘matter-of-factly’ fashion), he obscures the fundamental structure of the *Ursatz* (the essential I-V-I arch of a ternary design) in a situation where V is set against the linear 3. The motivic logic and the ‘fixed’ nature of pitches and intervals within this Bagatelle are such that the note b resists subordination from even the highest of structural functions. The high-level motive becomes equal to the functions of the form.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the coda realises the implications of

<sup>49</sup> Casablancas (1999), 27

<sup>50</sup> This abrasion of the the third scale-degree against the dominant key area is, of course, a miniaturisation of what Beethoven had done in the piano sonata, op. 110, written three years earlier, where the linear 3 of the beginning is elided with the arrival of the dominant key-area of the second subject. Consequently, the music arrives at the second subject proper (bar 20 of op.

the 'V<sup>(7)</sup> against linear 3' obtusion implicit in the middle section of the form.<sup>51</sup> The struggle between melodic note b and the harmony V<sup>(7)</sup> is mapped onto the foreground texture in the two-voice polyphony and is played out fully in the form of 'crunches' or, to quote Adorno, "...very harsh friction between seconds..."<sup>52</sup> These 'crunches' result from the contrary motion of the voices (bars 41 and 43). The coda thus transforms the friction between structural parameters (the structural linear descent and the structural harmony of the Schenkerian *Ursatz*) into a 'thematic' element in its purest form, as surface-level counterpoint.

Thus far the emphasis has been on the Bagatelles' capacity to uphold the new conception of thematic and formal integration ('subthematicism' and 'surthematicism') that is a basic constraint of the 'late style.' Disparate topics, as well as disjunctions in texture and harmonic discontinuities, hover on the surface of the late string quartets. In the first movement of op. 132, for example, commentators have attempted to derive the meaning of the form from a musical narrative that is generated by the interplay of topics. The conceptual nexus between topics such as the 'aria,' the 'motet' and the 'gavotte,' serves as a starting-point in these interpretations, as a base upon which the actual music is merely an elaboration, in other words an actualisation in time of a way in which to mediate these topics.<sup>53</sup>

The Bagatelle, op. 119 no. 8, of course, is too short to possibly accommodate such webs of topics. Even in the more expansive Bagatelle, op. 126 no. 1, the concern is more with simple melodic shapes on the surface than with fully defined topics. Can the interplay of topics, which represents the equality of the relationship between topic and syntax, since exterior formal boundaries do not subsume the individuality of the topic with the overarching functions of phrases, generate the logic and coherence of a miniature form? In such a case it would not be a motive withdrawn into the interior structure that directed the formal process. It would entail a more rhetorical approach to formal process, engendering a conceptual link between the parameters of harmony, melody and rhythm, and the individual topics that moulded these parameters.

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110) on the apex of the primary tone (in this case, the note c, the third scale-degree of Ab major).

<sup>51</sup> See Caplin (2001), 179-191, when he describes one possible role of the coda as realising "the implications generated by various compositional processes that have been left unrealized in earlier sections," implications that have arisen due to a "problem or disturbance" within the main body of the piece.

<sup>52</sup> Adorno (1998), 130

<sup>53</sup> See Spitzer (1998a) on this, which he terms the "structural semantics" of the movement.

Such a rhetorical approach to the formal process is, I believe, inherent in the Bagatelle, op. 126 no. 4. This piece displays the more equal conception of the relationship between topic and form. In the second chapter I considered the working-out of the subdominant in this form after its absence in the articulation of the opening eight-bar theme. In particular, the strong subdominant as part of a large-scale IV-V-I cadence (bars 32-38) compensates for the denial of this harmony when the mysterious octaves of bars 5-8 usurped its expected place in the function of the opening theme.

A denial of expectations is corroborated when viewed in terms of topics. The opening material (bars 1-4) presents what one could term a 'funeral march' topic, albeit in an ironically fast tempo, replete with a stamping bass and initial rising melodic intervals set in a plain I-V harmonic mould. The archetypal characteristic of such a minor-mode topic is the submediant 'drop' of  $b6-5$ , which is the most conspicuous aspect of the minor-mode and was thus manipulated during the Baroque and Classical periods for its 'affect' of lamentation. However, when the  $f\#$  of bar 4 ascends by a semitone to  $g$ , the expectation of resolving back to the  $f\#$  as an archetypal  $b6-5$  drop is rejected by Beethoven. The tonicisation of the flat-submediant is the first surprise of the music, as it rejects the role of appoggiatura in favour of a four-bar phrase, ending with a perfect cadence in G major. In short, a conspicuous motivic appoggiatura intrinsic to this topic is transformed into a harmonically closed phrase.

In terms of the motivic expectations of a topic, the sequential octaves of bars 44-51 resolve this anomaly: the  $b6-5$  motion ( $g-f\#$ ) is characteristically overemphasised by Beethoven with *sforzandi* markings on both notes. The continuation down the B minor scale and the cadential ending on this octave figure in the tonic key symmetrically balances the opening disjunction.

In the middle section of this form (bars 9-39) the feeling for development and instability that traditionally falls between the exposition and reprise is enhanced by the rhetorical contrast and interplay between topics. From bar 12 the music reaches a more joyful and playful topic, a syncopated dance reminiscent of the ecstatic third variation from the *Arietta* of op. 111. The contrast of moods between the 'funeral march' and the inception of this playfulness is emphasised tonally, the former cast in B minor, the latter in C major, a relatively remote distance for the early nineteenth-century composer.

As Beethoven seems to get lost amidst the playfulness of this passage, now restarting in G major at bar 17, the *f#* interjections (bars 20-21 and 24-25) halt the unrestrained movement of the dance figuration. Rhetorically, they are rejecting the joyfulness presented thus far within the middle section of the design. Harmonically, they reject the keys of C and G major, and hint towards the strong dominant that has been evidently lacking in this developmental passage. After an attempt at a revival of the playful topic (bars 22-23 in G major), the *f#* interjections have overcome the harmonic digression and instigate the large-scale IV-V-I that heralds the reprise in bar 40. Ironically, the more fully worked-out version of the 'funeral march' material is now cast into a 'polka.' The moment of reprise, then, is emphasised by the large-scale cadential movement of bars 32-39, but underplayed by the light dance topic of the 'polka.'

The relation of topic to syntax stands in a complex relationship. The rise in importance of the topic with respect to formal functions is clear within this Bagatelle, for the contrasts in topics is emphasised by contrasts in tonality, but the topics are themselves not confined to the functions of the symmetrical phrase. The bare octave interjections on *f#* stand neither as motive or harmony, but as a rhetorical gesture within the freely moving topics across the 'backbone' of the formal schema (a 'rounded binary' scherzo). The topics serve at once to articulate thematic material, to underplay structural points of the conventional form, and to create a musical discourse among themselves, regardless of exterior formal design, but in turn without abrogation of a fundamental tripartite structure.

## VI

To conclude this chapter I will attempt to explain the formal process of the Bagatelle, op. 126 no. 2, for in terms of this discussion it bears the closest resemblance to the propensity for abstraction that is intrinsic to the 'major' works of the 'late style.'<sup>54</sup> Commentators are often vexed by the Bagatelle's apparent abnormality of structure. Adorno, for example, judged the form to be "highly peculiar."<sup>55</sup> Admittedly, the form does seem to tend towards fragmentation and disunity. This is clear when one attempts to delimit the structure in terms of a schema that represents the distribution of motives, the harmonic framework and the general structural articulation (as in **ABA** etc.).

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<sup>54</sup> Adorno (1998), 131, regards the fourth of op. 126 as the most important in terms of the 'late style.'

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 130

Among writings concerning this Bagatelle it is a moot point as to where the recapitulation begins, or if one occurs at all. Adorno asserts that there is “no reprise or repetition of the beginning,” and thus adopts an organicist approach describing the concluding section of music (bars 66-89) as a result of the “new motif in crotchets,” when it “detaches itself” from the semiquaver motion of the accompaniment, subsequently growing “more distinct,” until it attains self-sufficiency from the form.<sup>56</sup> It is evident that formal functions are not only staggered but are dislocated or even missing altogether. The form is not a witty ‘play’ on conventional formal functions, as with a ‘false reprise’ (in the music of Haydn as well as Beethoven), for the functions never re-align, or at least they do not within the traditional framework of a binary design.

The abnormality in the structure is due to something that Edward Cone states only tacitly when referring to an “emphatic subdominant” within the latter half of the form.<sup>57</sup> It is, of course, the absence of the quintessential harmonic articulation of the Classical language: the dominant harmony. Beneath the relative abnormality of structure one can trace a subthematic ‘thread’ that latently binds the music from within, beneath the surface disjunctions, disparities and harmonic aberrance.

Janet Schmalfeldt broaches the notion of a dialectic that governs the formal process of this piece in place of the normative formal rhythm of a binary design.<sup>58</sup> In her article she locates the dialectic as a dramatic dialogue between the two ideas presented within bars 1-4 and bars 5-8 respectively: “here are ideas of strongly opposing character...[T]he basic idea [bars 1-4] and the contrasting idea [bars 5-8] have been juxtaposed as rivals and...will now begin to compete for pre-eminence.”<sup>59</sup> She then adds that “the duality of opposing characters will affect the dramatic process of the entire movement.”<sup>60</sup> Ex. 4.10 shows the ‘basic idea’ and ‘contrasting idea.’ Intrinsic to the ‘basic idea’ is what I will term the ‘head motive,’ a prevalent rhythmic figure throughout the Bagatelle.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Cone (1977), 102

<sup>58</sup> Schmalfeldt (1985)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Ex. 4.10a: No. 2 of op. 126, 'basic idea,' bars 1-4

Ex. 4.10b: No. 2 of op. 126, 'contrasting idea,' bars 5-8

Schmalfeldt's is an interpretation that gives prominence to the exterior thematic material and its presentation, reinterpretation and its mutual interaction. The alleged dialectic is named and based solely upon a synthesis, at the end of the form (bars 66 onwards), of seemingly 'contrasted' ideas. Moreover, it is a synthesis that arises from a 'play,' rivalry or motivic battle between these two ideas that seems to operate purely on the surface of the form. This yields two problems: are the two ideas (bars 1-4 and 5-8) contrasted to the extent that they represent a true dialectical opposition (i.e. one as a sublation of the other); and is the 'synthesis' merely a surface amalgamation of motivic patterns?

To the former question I answer no. The opening eight bars function as one-half of a period, the antecedent, which closes on a conventional imperfect cadence. The consequent of this period (bars 9-16) does not balance the imperfect cadence (bars 5-8) with a perfect cadence in the tonic (G minor), but with a perfect cadence in the mediant (Bb major), which is not altogether abnormal practice. In this respect, the 'contrasting idea' of bars 5-8, despite the connotations of its epithet, is perceived as inseparable from the phrase to which it belongs. There does exist a distinctness of character that allows one to perceive it as being different from the 'basic idea,' but at the level of the phrase it

displays “continuation functions,” such as fragmentation, harmonic sequence and a “conventionalized melodic formula for the cadence.”<sup>61</sup>

Concerning the music following the exposition (from bar 27 onwards), Schmalfeldt discerns motives that are derived either from the ‘basic idea’ as patent recurrences of its semi-quaver rhythm, or as a motivic reinterpretation of the ‘contrasting idea.’ However, I maintain that the foreground of musical events is given up to the objectivity of conventional material, objective in character purely because of its subordinated and conventional use within the Classical style. For example, the ‘head motif’ has the characteristics of an alberti-bass accompaniment that is a common feature of the Classical keyboard sonata, though here it stands strangely detached from its conventional function. Indeed, this figuration was originally to be played by the left-hand alone in the lower register.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps in order not to be misunderstood Beethoven made absolutely clear that this is a purposely isolated convention by dividing it between the two hands. Already one can sense, by looking at the recurrences of this ‘head motive’ throughout the piece (especially in the distension and contraction of silence in bars 42-57), that Beethoven foreshadows the last string quartets, in that extinct surface conventions are abundant on the foreground thematic level.

The obvious reoccurrences of the ‘head motive’ affects the texture of the music. It is this very figure that halts the *cantabile* melody and perforates the form, inciting a silence that almost paralyses the music (bar 42 onwards; see Ex. 4.12 below). However, this ‘head motive’ is merely a conventional figure and has little impact upon the motivic network that I believe binds the disparate parts from within.

Schmalfeldt’s ‘rival’ ideas, then, are in reality two variants of a more abstract motivic ‘thread’ that permeates the structure. This ‘thread’ is stated in the first two bars of the piece as a salient intervallic motion, within the ‘head motive,’ of *b6-5 (eb-d)*. Ironically, the submediant drop that was incomplete in the opening of the fourth Bagatelle is the most conspicuous element of an otherwise conventional figure in this piece. In this sense, therefore, the imperfect cadence in bars 7-8 is a subthematic variant, incorporating an additional semitone into the ‘thread’ (*eb-d-c#-d*).

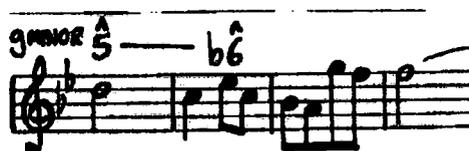
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<sup>61</sup> Caplin (2001), 12.

<sup>62</sup> Cooper, M. (1985), 218

As in the string quartet, op. 132, one becomes aware that this subthematic ‘thread’ is the underlying logic of the formal process only when it is withdrawn from the ‘thematic’ statement of the opening measures into latency, into the structure of the piece as an abstract recurring motive. As this ‘magic of association,’ as Dahlhaus termed it, penetrates the subsurface of the music, this motivic ‘thread’ is freed from the ‘head motive’ and presented, for example, in the *cantabile* melody as a rhythmically augmented variant (Ex. 4.11).

Ex. 4.11: No. 2 of op. 126, *cantabile* melody, bars 27-30



The re-harmonisation of the prominent note of the ‘thread’ (d) disrupts the essential tonal arch (I-V-I) of the form. Incidentally, the *cantabile* melody is reminiscent of the D major melody from Mozart’s *Fantasia in D minor*, K. 397. And, like many of Mozart’s sonata forms, especially in his piano sonatas, Beethoven begins the development with a continuation of the exposition’s closing harmony (in this case, the mediant, Bb major). However, the dominant never emerges to articulate the fundamental V in preparation for a conventional tonic ‘reprise’ of some sort.

The reinterpretation of d as the scale-degree 3 of Bb major is even more of a surprise due to the fact that the ‘exposition’ (bars 1-26) had set up expectations of a structural dominant on three hierarchically posited levels: firstly, as the salient melodic motion of the ‘head motive’ in bars 1-2 (d-eb-d); secondly, as demarcating the ‘basic idea’ with a bass note d, instigating the change in register and texture of the ‘contrasting idea’; thirdly, as the harmony that closes the antecedent of bars 1-8 with an imperfect cadence. The prominence of the dominant ascends in function from theme, to foreground punctuation, to structural punctuation on a middle-ground level. The conventionality of this process sets up an expectation of a thoroughly prepared structural dominant in the middle section of the form. It is with the opening of the *cantabile* melody, therefore, that the dominant retreats into the internal, abstract form of the piece, as a subthematic ‘thread.’

Paradoxically, the linear 5-1 descent remains in the latter part of the form (from bar 27).<sup>63</sup> The 5 of the *cantabile* section descends opaquely to the structural 4 at bar 41, but the failure to resolve the implicit perfect cadence in this bar, to a strong C minor, somewhat obscures the structural function of this note (c, the linear 4; Ex. 4.12).

Ex. 4.12: No. 2 of op. 126, bars 40-45

Rhetorically, the Bb major from bar 26 onwards is exposed here as a foreground key area. But is the dominant strong enough to undermine Bb and enter the Bagatelle as a formal articulation? The subsequent distension of silence and isolated 'head motive' would suggest not. This passage would seem to be one of a merely rhythmic and temporal nature, whereby the 'head motive' (as a proponent of the 'basic idea') gathers back its strength, ineluctably achieving its original rhythmic value (as Schmalfeldt asserts). This is it does. Equally important, however, is the subthematic aspect: contained beneath the iterations of the naked alberti-bass figures is the eb-d thread, now in the context of an implied Eb major (Ex. 4.13). In a subversion of Classical principles the structural dominant, as an overarching harmony of a development section, has withdrawn obliquely into the formal process itself; its existence is drawn to our attention through the isolated 'head motive' figure. The dominant, then, assumes the form of a 'thread,' a motive, which weaves through the form in much the same way as the abstract four-note group of op. 132 had done.

<sup>63</sup> There is, of course, a linear descent of 5-3 in the exposition. However, the re-harmonisation of 5 in Bb major represents an interruption to the descent started in the exposition; as atonement for the missing structural dominant, the dominant note asserts itself and hence starts, and ultimately, completes the descent that was interrupted by the *cantabile* section's mediant harmony

Ex. 4.13: No. 2 of op. 126, bars 50-53

The linear 3 is hammered out over this elongated ‘thread’ (see above, Ex. 4.13). The climax of the form comes when it descends to the 2 in bar 58 (Ex. 4.14). This curious passage resists strict harmonic classification: it bears a resemblance to a dominant first-inversion, but the inner movement of the left hand brings ambiguity. Engaging with this enigma, Wilfred Mellers proposes that “[w]hat sounds like a wide-spaced F sharp minor triad [on the first crochet beat of bar 58] turns into a diminished seventh of G minor, with C sharp as passing note...”<sup>64</sup>

Ex. 4.14: No. 2 of op. 126, bars 58-59

Conversely, I believe that this climactic point is a continuation of an oblique counterpoint that began with the distended silence between the iterations of the ‘head motive’ in bars 42-53: the motivic ‘thread’ is present in bars 58-62 as yet another variant, this time an inversion of the variant from bars 7-8 (c#-d-eb-d). Set against this, of course, is the overemphasised note a, the 2 of the structural linear descent. The tumult of bars 58-62 is the consequence of having denied a structural dominant in the Classical sense. The climactic point of structural articulation now takes the form of a two-part counterpoint between the 2 of the fundamental linear descent and the subthematic ‘thread.’ The formal process at this point, therefore, tends to be less ‘subthematic’ than ‘subpolyphonic.’

<sup>64</sup> Mellers (1983), 408

These observations yield another way, as well as Cone's and Schmalfeldt's, of hearing the music from bar 66 as a sort of 'recapitulation,' or at least a resolution of some kind in terms of a binary design, especially considering that there is no overt thematic reprise of any sort, except in the five-bar coda. It resides in the formal process and not the external distribution of themes within an exterior formal schema; that is, it resides in the 'subthematic' realm.

At bar 70 the subthematic 'thread' becomes 'thematic' once more. But, paradoxically, its reappearance on the surface reinforces its role as a 'subtheme' in the preceding bars because, by being transposed to centre upon the tonic (as *ab-g-f#g* in a reduction of bars 70-73 and 74-77; Ex. 4.15), its form becomes more abstract and latent, as in the description of the four-note group from op. 132, where the particular pitches of the configuration are irrelevant to its cognisance as a 'thread.' The emergence of the 'thread' into the 'thematic' realm, and its fixing around the note *g*, replaces the thorough preparation and strong establishment of tonic harmony that conventionally articulates such a binary design; this reinforces the view that the theme (in this case, motive) becomes more important in shaping the formal process of the 'late style' music.

Ex. 4.15: No. 2 of op. 126, bars 72-73



Furthermore, a sense of recapitulatory resolution is also attained when the 'head motive' is accorded its conventional context and expressive meaning at bar 66 onwards, where it is subsumed as a genuine alberti-bass, and thus gains its original, historically-informed meaning as a triadic accompaniment figure beneath the 'thread.' This gives the listener a sense of culmination, an achievement of something hitherto elusive: the attainment by the 'head motive' of its conventional expressive meaning is made to feel all the more like a resolution (as a surrogate to a harmonic resolution in sonata form) after witnessing the disintegration of the 'basic idea' into extreme objectivity in the development and its struggle to achieve its original form of the beginning (at bar 54). Moreover, the 'thread' is

sundered from this figure; this emphasises the conventional role of the alberti-bass figure throughout, which in turn underscores the importance of the subthematic realm as formal process, in binding the music from within, creating coherence and continuity across the disjunct formal sections.

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In sum, this Bagatelle engages with a surface conventionality, not an exterior theme as such, but a standard Classical figuration. This alberti-bass figure and its associated turn figures (in bars 2-4) are objective and conventional gestures that constitute a veneer under which lies a more fundamental configuration (the 'thread' of a semitone), one that bears no exact form but is abstractly inferred by its variants hidden within these conventional flourishes and on several levels of the form (as 'subthematic' or 'thematic').<sup>65</sup> The formal process is not to be found in the distribution of formal functions over a superficial schema, but on an abstract level, a structural level. The motivic 'thread' retreats into the background: it becomes more important than the functions of formal boundaries. This, I believe, explains the formal process of the music in the absence of a traditional explanation offered in terms of conventional binary designs.

The preoccupation with the canon represents an interest in new modes of handling theme (linear construction) and form (its movement through time). Beethoven took delight in composing canons for friends and patrons alike; this leaked into the major works, such as in the canonic variations of the Diabelli variations, and it coincided with the heightening polyphonic itch of 1815-16 that led to the onslaught of unrestrained counterpoint in the piano sonatas, string quartets and orchestral music of the last decade. More generally, Beethoven's new conception of musical construction moved away from its Classical meaning, as represented in his own early and middle period works. The theme as a function of the phrase, within the confines of a rhythmically hierarchic form, becomes meaningless in the 'late style.' As such, his contemporaries were confused as to where the

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<sup>65</sup> Similarly, but on a larger and more abstract level, Chua (1995), 54-106, speculates that the quartet, op. 132, has at the heart of the first movement the motive that initiated the movement (g#-a-f-e) in various orderings and at various structural levels. It is this 'submotive' that weaves a logical thread through, and thus unifies, the multi-topical texture of the immediate musical surface. Because of its smaller proportions, the thread of this Bagatelle (initially d-eb-d and variants thereof) has manifestations in the immediate foreground structure of the music (for example, bars 23-24 and 58-62) as well as higher-level prolongations (the *cantabile* section) and is therefore perceived as a more concrete substance than that of the quartet.

'logic' and 'coherence' lay, as Prince Galitzin and the unnamed critic were. The incoherence of the music is countered by the new logic beneath the surface.

The Bagatelles discussed, far from being 'trifling,' exhibit these new ways of thinking about the construction of musical form, presenting and resolving thematic tensions, and securing the coherence of the formal process. The Bagatelle, op. 126 no. 2, in particular, develops 'subthematicism' to a point that had not been seen thus far in the late period works: its 'subthematic' processes were to emerge again in the string quartet, op. 132, composed two years later, and to become more fully developed. These 'miniatures,' therefore, could be termed as 'models' themselves of the late Beethovenian formal process, upon which the late string quartets built.

## Chapter 5

### Analytical Conclusions

After considering the individual Bagatelles of op. 126 I will now briefly discuss them as a whole. Is it relevant to regard these six Bagatelles as an integrated multi-movement work? Moreover, is there any trace of cyclical organisation within the opus? After an attempt to answer these questions I will conclude my study with a reflection upon the nature of the Bagatelles, op. 126, and their status as 'late works.'

#### Interpretations of Beethoven's Multi-Movement Works: Cyclical Forms

Commentators have always believed cyclical integration to be an important part of Beethoven's instrumental works. The third and fifth symphonies are the paragons of such interpretations. The 'heroic style' in general has received much attention for its feeling of a 'psychological journey' or a process of growth across the traditional four movements. The long-range resolution of the finale in these works, of culminant triumph and transcendence, has long been celebrated, the fifth symphony being the most heavily dissected of the period.

Joseph Kerman summarises the perception of Beethoven's through-composed, cyclical music of the 'heroic' period, what he terms "the symphonic ideal," when he writes that "this development may be viewed as the projection of the underlying principles of the sonata style on the scale of the total four-movement work..."<sup>1</sup> Charles Rosen's scrutiny of the term 'cyclical form' in the Classical period yields two meanings: firstly, it signifies "a set of apparently independent pieces that must be understood and performed as a whole. Traditionally it also signifies a large work in which an earlier movement reappears as part of a later one."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kerman, quoted in Webster (1999), 367. In more recent scholarship the traditional view of Beethoven as the originator of such a process of through-composition and cyclical relations has been contested. Haydn is in fact the composer of the first kind of cyclically integrated instrumental works, within his symphony no. 46, whose finale incorporates a few bars of the minuet movement. James Webster has traced a strong sense of through-composition in Haydn's instrumental music from symphony no. 45. See *ibid.*, 13-122

<sup>2</sup> Rosen (1999), 88

Kerman's definition of Beethoven's cyclical integration in the middle period music conflates the two offered by Rosen. The fifth symphony, as an obvious example, offers a reminiscence of the scherzo within the finale; more generally, the gradual resolution of the opening movement's ferocious rhythmic and harmonic tension throughout the course of the work, ending in the final movement with a cathartic C major, powerfully imbues the entire work with a sense of goal-directed motion, as a process, to be unequivocally 'understood and performed as a whole.'

More recently, the middle period works are close to being surpassed, in attempts to unearth the process of cyclical integration, by the late period works. The emphasis on the perception of a 'whole' shifts from a grand 'psychological journey,' a process of growth and triumphant culmination, to more subtle, withdrawn attempts to weave threads of unity through a multi-movement work. The attention that the late piano sonatas and string quartets have drawn in this context fully reflects the problems of interpretation on the level of cyclical organisation.<sup>3</sup> The contrasts of design between the individual movements, and their juxtaposition of dissimilar moods and styles (such as comic buffoonery and the fugues of the 'high style'), are a familiar trait of the multi-movement instrumental work in the late period.

Between movements that seem to have been purposefully designed to contrast or even contradict each other, commentators have pursued issues of large-scale unity that are not defined in terms of an ostentatious 'journey' or 'process of growth.' The movement towards triumphant culmination of the 'heroic' period is no longer present. Rather, the outward appearance of individual movements discourages the "projection of the underlying principles of the sonata style on the scale of the total four-movement work."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Barbara R. Barry, "Recycling the End of the 'Leibquartett': Models, Meaning and Propriety in Beethoven's quartet in B-Flat Major, Opus 130," *Journal of Musicology* 13 (1995), 355-376; Joseph Kerman, "Beethoven's Opus 131 and the Uncanny," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 25 (2002), 155-164; William Kinderman, "Integration and Narrative Design in Beethoven's piano sonata in A-flat major, Op. 110," in *Beethoven Forum* 1, ed. Lewis Lockwood, Christopher Reynolds and Elaine R. Sisman (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 111-145; Richard Kramer, "Between Cavatina and Overture: Opus 130 and the Voices of Narrative," in *ibid.*, 165-189; Christopher Reynolds, "The Representational Impulse in Late Beethoven II: string quartet in F major, Op. 135," *Acta Musicologica* 60 (1988), 180-194; and Robert Winter, "Plans for the Structure of the string quartet in C Sharp Minor, Op. 131," in *Beethoven Studies* 2, ed. Alan Tyson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 106-137.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 1, above.

An *underlying* unity, therefore, sometimes hidden in the most quotidian of musical detail, has often been the exegesis of the analyst. William Kinderman, for example, in his study of the 'integration and narrative design' in the piano sonata, op. 110, asserts that beneath the "drastic contrasts" of the individual movements, Beethoven "infuses [the sonata] with a particularly rich array of connecting devices while incorporating a network of forecasts and reminiscences of themes no less dense than those in the ninth symphony."<sup>5</sup> Of course, actual thematic *recurrences* within the works of the late period appear only in the piano sonata, op. 101, and the song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*, op. 98. Kinderman speaks here not of actual reminiscences as such, as in the finale of the fifth symphony, but of covert associations between the themes of the movements. Indeed, the later works of the 'late style' increasingly become more delicately integrated beneath the surface of overt contrasts.

The attempts to acknowledge Haydn as the founder of cyclical organisation in instrumental music, and Beethoven as merely an inheritor of this practice, falls short on one account: the overall tonal scheme of the multi-movement plan. The difference in the two composers' conception of cyclical form is a phenomenon exclusively of the 'late style.' The individual movements from the middle period works conform to the standard tonal plan of Classical multi-movement works, generally incorporating only those tonal areas closely related to the tonic, such as the tonic minor/major, the relative minor/major, the subdominant and the dominant. The third relationships that began to govern the local level of the middle period music (in the first movement of the *Waldstein* sonata, op. 53, for example) become a standard principle of organisation on a multi-movement level in the late works.<sup>6</sup> The increasing number of movements in the string quartets, opp. 132, 130 and 131, incorporate more complex and remote tonal relationships between the individual movements than would have seemed appropriate to Haydn. In op. 130, for example, the third and fourth movements, not coincidentally the midway point of the work, are separated by a tritone relationship (Db major-G major). The op. 131 quartet is, of course, famous for its Neapolitan relationship between the opening two movements (C# minor-D major).

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<sup>5</sup> Kinderman (1992), 111

<sup>6</sup> Charles Rosen's admonition that "Beethoven's expansion of the large-scale harmonic range took place within the limits of the classical language, and never infringed upon the tonic-dominant polarity" is certainly applicable to individual movements (as in sonata form movements), but bears less truth when considered between movements, in the context of a large multi-movement work. Other tonal relationships bear importance to the overarching plan of the late Beethovenian cycle.

The new tonal relationships that run over the course of an increasing number of movements were not arbitrary, for Beethoven took great effort in planning and re-sketching the tonal scheme of the whole, as well as the ordering and the detail of the individual movements. Robert Winter emphasises that the composer's intention for the string quartet, op. 131, itself the paradigm of cyclical form, was the conception of an over-arching tonal plan and harmonic scheme.<sup>7</sup> The latter is realised within particular points of detail in the individual movements. One could cite the re-working of the fugue subject's answer in the subdominant, F# minor, which accentuates the note d-natural, later to become the key of the conjoined second movement. Or one could also mention the preoccupation with the crux of the fugue subject, the note a, its transformation into a surface key area in the fugue (the episode of bars 67-73), and its emergence as the tonic of the fourth movement (the centre) of the cycle. Indeed, Beethoven's intention of binding the detail of individual movements to the overall plan of op. 131 was so deliberate that he originally planned to include a scherzo as the fourth movement, in the key of F# minor, which was later to become the basis for the main theme of the finale, in order to strengthen the irregular F# minor answer of the fugue.<sup>8</sup>

In the multi-movement works of the late period, especially in the ones exceeding the traditional four movements, the individual detail, harmonic scheme and overall tonal plan enter into a nexus of associations, connections and implications that imbues the work with a sense of unity, a unity more understated than that of the middle period but no less real. The grandiose process of the 'heroic style' gives way to a gamut of internal links and associations across the various and disparate movements of a late period work.

#### *The Bagatelles, op. 126: A Collection or a Cycle?*

The six Bagatelles of op. 126 are generally thought to be more of a unit, more of an integrated cycle than the eleven of op. 119, not only because Beethoven described them as a 'Ciclus von Kleinigkeiten' in the leaves of a sketchbook.<sup>9</sup> Lewis Lockwood is confident of their integration when he says that "...their convincing sequence of

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<sup>7</sup> Winter (1977)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 129-130

<sup>9</sup> Lockwood (2003), 397. Marston (1986) attempts to discern an element of through-composition in numbers 7-11 of op. 119, as they were written together in 1821-22.

expressive and psychological moods comes forth with something of the same artistic conviction we find in a larger complex work...<sup>10</sup>

The tonal plan of op. 126 fully reflects their time of composition in the late period, shortly after the completion of the ninth symphony and amidst the plans for the three Galitzin quartets. The concatenation of thirds that relate their individual keys fully embodies the notion of a 'Ciclus' in the context of the 'late style':

No.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Key	G major	G minor	E $\flat$ major	B minor	G major	E $\flat$ major

Just as in the string quartets, opp. 130 and 131, the succession of pieces is neatly arranged into common-tone third relations by Beethoven; this relation between the Bagatelles is broken only by the flattened-submediant relation separating the third and the fourth, a technique of emphasising the middle portion of the overall cycle similar to the aforementioned in op. 130. The dances and songs of op. 126, however, hark back to the Baroque instrumental suite. Of course, this is only superficial, as the key scheme suggests. But the accumulation of small, pre-sonata form pieces makes the process of integration across these six 'Kleinigkeiten' more intriguing, for there are no expansive movements to compensate for smaller designs, as in the two aforementioned quartets.

A main idea of the first three Bagatelles involves a typically late Beethovenian abstraction. The first was seen to involve an unusually heavy implication of the dominant (D major); of course, this dominant does not threaten the stability of the tonic (G major), but thrives on the tonic's stability at a background level, and hence the dominant remains dissonant at a foreground level, both in the opening theme over a prolonged dominant pedal and in the hyperbolic functions of the 'hypertrophy.'

In the second Bagatelle, however, the dominant was seen to be absent from the binary design on a structural level (from the essential I-V-I tonal arch). The dominant never articulates the form; its retreat into the formal process itself, as a motivic 'thread,' is nowhere more patent than when it emerges not as a driving force of the middle section but, re-harmonised, as scale-degree 3 of B $\flat$  major. Charles Rosen's assertion that Beethoven remains essentially a Classical composer, even in his late works, is justified

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<sup>10</sup> Lockwood (2003), 397

here: the salient *Bb* major is so only because Beethoven still relies on the dominant as a key of contrast to the tonic, however loose the relationship. Here, Beethoven sets up the expectations of a normative structural V in the form's exposition. Instead of functioning as a dissonant foreground key over the structural background of the dominant, then, *Bb* major stands in a peculiarly prominent position.

The firm opening of the third Bagatelle, in *Eb* major, confirms the function of the preceding anomalies in terms of the 'whole' up to this point: Beethoven has obliquely 'composed out' a *d-eb* resolution, a long-range cadence onto the *Eb* major of number 3. The strong dominant of the first Bagatelle is reduced to an obsessively recurring melodic note and a subthematic 'thread' that pervades the music in the second. The 'incorrect' *Bb* major of this Bagatelle is now prominent not only for its role in the dissolution of a structural dominant but as the V of a long-range V-I, of which the *Eb* major of the third Bagatelle is the I (Ex. 5.1). Harmony becomes melody, melody becomes cadence; the *Eb* major, therefore, becomes a sort of tonic at this point of the cycle.

Ex. 5.1: Long range V-I of op. 126, nos. 1-3

The image shows a musical score for three Bagatelles. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The first Bagatelle (labeled '1') starts with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a tonic of D major. The second Bagatelle (labeled '2') has a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb) and a tonic of Eb major. The third Bagatelle (labeled '3') has a key signature of three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab) and a tonic of Ab major. A dashed line labeled 'THREAD' connects the D note in the first Bagatelle to the Ab note in the third Bagatelle. Above the treble staff, there are handwritten annotations: 'V of major' with an arrow pointing to the D note, and '3 of Eb' with an arrow pointing to the Ab note. Below the staves, the text 'CYCLE: V-I' is written, indicating the long-range dominant-tonic relationship between the first and third Bagatelles.

This interpretation further justifies that the halfway point of the cycle be demarcated by a contextually remote tonal relation (*Eb-B*). If a tonic has been reached, and hence relative stability felt with regard to the tonal events of the first three Bagatelles, the second half of the overarching design throws the music into unstable territory; this sets up expectations of a more strongly felt resolution of some kind in the second half, beginning with the scherzo of number 4.

Although it is not abnormal practice to repeat the trio after the restatement of the minuet or scherzo (resulting in scherzo-trio-scherzo-trio), Beethoven's repeat of the B major trio attracts attention, not only because of the consequent length of this Bagatelle. Apart from the particular detail of the trio section, which Adorno describes as "deceptive, horrifying

simplicity,” it has bearings on the course of the cycle, which I believe is the reason for Beethoven’s decision to repeat it (ending in B major) rather than to finish with the reprised scherzo (ending in B minor).<sup>11</sup> Particularly conspicuous is the *c#-a#-b* figure whose last appearance is in bar 215 of the trio. This figure functions as a ‘motivic signpost’: its *a#-b* appoggiatura motion played a significant role in elaborating the note *b* within the ‘hypertrophy’ of the first Bagatelle, first as *bb-b-natural*, then as *a#-b* (bars 25 and 28 respectively). An abstract link is thus created between the two tonally separated halves of the cycle.

More importantly, however, is that this ‘signpost’ represents the most direct exit out of B major/minor. Notated as *cb-bb* in *Eb* major, the ‘tonic’ key of the cycle thus far, it had heralded the arrival of the variation in the third Bagatelle. In the fifth Bagatelle the motion *a#-b* is incorporated into the imperfect cadence in E minor that closes the first section of the form (bars 15-16). It is another formal non-congruence, then, a salient tonal anomaly, that carries the strongest thread of through-composition between the individual Bagatelles (the first being the *Bb* major of number 2 as a large-scale V to the *Eb* of the third): the cadence onto B major of bar 16 carries through the B major of the trio (Ex. 5.2). The disruption to the formal rhythm of the fifth Bagatelle retro-actively justifies the concluding trio of the fourth, the most remote tonal area of the cycle: Beethoven is balancing out what at first seemed a brash tonal juxtaposition used to mark the middle of the cycle.

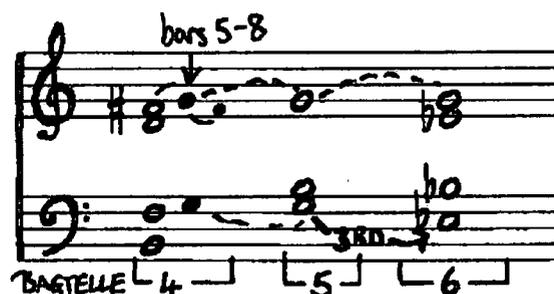
Ex. 5.2: Through-composition of B major in op. 126 nos. 4 and 5



All the Bagatelles, with the exception of the third and fourth, are linked by the common-tones that bind their mediant related keys. The decision to end the fourth Bagatelle in B major, however, establishes a pivot of  $d\#$  ( $eb$ ) *post hoc*. Seen retrospectively, the third of the closing harmony ( $d\#$  of B major, enharmonically  $eb$ ) is a delayed pivot between the third and fourth Bagatelles, that is, a common-tone relation.

The most important process of the second half of the cycle is of a similar kind to that of the first. In the second half, however, it does not involve a long-range dominant-tonic resolution but a true third relationship projected onto the three Bagatelles. The fifth Bagatelle represents a tonicisation of the G major 'slip' from the scherzo. Typically of mediant related keys, the tonic key of number five (G major) becomes a common-tone, allowing the sixth Bagatelle to slip into  $Eb$  major, reinterpreting the pervasive  $g$  of the second half of the cycle as the third scale-degree (Ex. 5.3).

Ex. 5.3: Common-tone of  $g$  in op. 126 nos. 4-6



This process reaches its culmination in the recapitulation of the sixth Bagatelle. The music rises from the tonal and registral depths of  $Ab$  major/F minor by suddenly sliding back into  $Eb$  major at bar 48. The understated preparation of this return is counterbalanced by the ascent in register and the dynamic swell of these bars. This is the 'home-coming' of the cycle: the tonic iteration ( $Eb$  major) of bar 49 is the pivotal moment. Two ideas running through the cycle are here synthesised: a resolution onto an ultimate  $Eb$  and the emergence of the note  $g$ . In Beethoven's late music the third scale-degree is as much a tonic as the triad itself. This was strongly asserted in the piano sonatas, opp. 109 and 110, where the prevalence of the third scale-degree across the harmonic vacillations and structural functions of the 'whole' justified the 'return home' as a drive towards re-establishing this note.



plan and the oblique associations and links that yield a sense of integrity without a loss of individual character and formal process within the six Bagatelles.

*Prototypical Models?: The Bagatelles as Late Works*

This study has now come full circle. I started with Adorno's conviction that the Bagatelles, op. 126, are 'splinters' among the 'crystals' of the 'late style.'<sup>12</sup> I have attempted to verify Adorno's claim that the Bagatelles conform to the stylistic constraints of the 'late style,' as it is recognised within the major works of Beethoven's last decade (especially in the piano sonatas and string quartets). Yet in order fully to explore the place of the Bagatelles in Beethoven's 'late style' one needs to consider the nature of the genre; the genre of a composition is relevant to the way in which it is analysed. Indeed, along these lines Adorno himself dismissed the *Missa Solemnis* as a "Late work without late style" in his famous essay.<sup>13</sup>

To employ the same tools for the analysis of these 'Kleinigkeiten' as, say, the string quartet, op. 130, would be to risk overlooking integral qualities of the genre of the Bagatelle in the search for stylistic uniformity. Recognition of the Bagatelle's historical sources, in terms of genre and the presupposed conventions of style and musical construction, provides a more informed approach. Correlatively, the elements of 'late style' within the Bagatelles can be more fully understood with knowledge of the quintessential and historically defined 'type' that is being affected. In turn, the norms of the genre may allow for unique musical invention within and not beyond the Bagatelle, of the kind not plausible in types that adhere to divergent principles. Furthermore, the presupposed, fundamental conditions of the Bagatelle could serve as 'models' themselves: the laws of its type could perpetrate the bounds of the style and induce a change or shift in emphasis of musical thought, both within works of the same type and in subsequent works built from different historically defined laws.

An increased interest in the music of the past, in what Beethoven saw as his musical ancestry, brought not only the high contrapuntal practices of Bach and Handel to bear on his music, but also a predilection for the small dance and song forms of the early and

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 130

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-153

middle eighteenth-century. The Bagatelles he published as op. 33 in 1803 show little of the circumstances that surround the later Bagatelles. This early set was constructed mainly from the wealth of little pieces that Beethoven had among his notebooks and sketch leaves as possible material for major compositions; indeed, many of these were rejected sketches for projected larger works, ones that obviously bore no fruit in the context of the 'heroic' period's endeavour to push the limits of musical form and expression.

The return to the composition of Bagatelles in 1820-22 throws a different light on the composer's attitude to small forms. The note to numbers 7-11 of op. 119, published as part of Friedrich Starke's *Wiener Pianoforteschule* in 1821, tells the performer that these 'trifles' will be enlightening for the musician, "as they will provide the most perfect insight into the spirit of composition."<sup>14</sup> Rather than 'padding out' unsuitable ideas, Beethoven here seems to genuinely take an interest in the delights of smaller forms. They are not fragments, of the sort the early generation of Romantics were to compose, but are 'miniatures' in the eighteenth-century meaning of the term.

As the note to the pedagogical book implies, they are exercises in basic musical construction, as postulated by the Classical theorists of composition. The short length and naivety of their construction harks back to pre-sonata form 'models.' It is not implausible that the ninth Bagatelle, for example, could have served as a paradigm of the symmetrical construction of periods, typical of small dance forms, in Koch's *Versuch*. The conventions by which they are governed were historical at the time of their composition, at least for most composers of the 1820s. The prototypical construction of these small, pre-sonata form 'models' is used by Beethoven as an 'old' part of music in the standard old-new dichotomy that is assumed to be the basis of the 'late style.' The standard **ABA** designs of the mid eighteenth-century provide a literal 'backbone' to op. 119 nos. 7-11, and a metaphorical 'backbone' to the later, more fully worked-out Bagatelles of op. 126.

The Bagatelles, op. 126, are to be understood in this sense, as an engagement with an old mode of musical organisation; to put it crudely, they explore the new from the old. The first Bagatelle uses the prototypical 'model' to derive its meaning: taken as an essentially eighteenth-century song form, in a typical **ABA** mould, its particular, individual content can be interpreted in terms of both archetypal and proscribed features of the 'model' on

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Lockwood (2003), 396

which it is based. The salient events of the first Bagatelle (in particular, the 'hypertrophy') may point towards techniques that are common in the late works, in this case the alienation of a conventional gesture in order to expose its objectivity; but when understood in context it represents an elaboration of a prototype, a re-working of a widely understood 'model.' The meaning of the hyperbolically articulated dominant of this Bagatelle is significant only when viewed as departing from some abstract archetype. In terms of the 'late style,' this elaboration of a presupposed schema is congruent with the presumption that Beethoven is calling on old ideals of musical organisation in the 'late style,' just as he does more obviously in the larger works of the period. In short, the relationship between method and interpretation is reciprocal: an analysis working on the norms of the genre corroborates the theory of Beethoven as reconstructing musical history, of using simple models as well as the exalted practices of the High Baroque.

The influence on the op. 126 Bagatelles of Beethoven's penchant for probing old modes of formal articulation represents one way of elaborating the prototypical schemata of each form. The loosening of the Classical style's tight formal articulation is felt within most of Beethoven's larger works of the period. Also, the compression of 'tricks' that manipulate and rhetorically subvert the congruent formal articulation of high Classical form, tricks (such as the 'false reprise') that are usually associated with Haydn's instrumental music, are obvious features of the smaller movements from the late string quartets.

In the Bagatelles this simply means that moments of articulation are blurred: the convergence of melody and harmony to articulate a traditional reprise of the A section in a small ABA form becomes obscured, staggered, split, or altogether absent. Of course, this adds a deeper expressive meaning to the small forms of the op. 126 Bagatelles. The fourth, fifth and sixth of the opus, for example, are more flexible than symmetrical dances, accommodating the incongruent articulation of formal functions. Moreover, each one assumes a more sharply defined individual character, setting up an internal musical argument (the thorough re-working of a subdominant in the fourth, for example) that moves significance from beyond the superficial construction of the genre. It is in this sense of creating a more complex musical discourse, rather than alluding to the greater length of the op. 126 Bagatelles, when Charles Rosen claims that "the individual pieces [of the cycle] are no longer miniatures."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rosen (1999), 88

The exclusiveness of genre does not hold in late Beethoven. Elements of the fugue are present in sonata form movements, and variation techniques enter the process of fugal movements and sonata forms alike, to cite just two examples. The Bagatelle is no different. At this point of the discussion one can truly speak of the Bagatelle, as constructed in op. 126, as a 'late work.' The presuppositions of the Bagatelle (its prototypical **ABA** construction) are penetrated by historically disparate genres. The employment of varied or transformed reprises in the Bagatelles, for instance, elevates the genre from 'elaborated prototype' to a product of the late Beethovenian compositional process.

An important element of the 'late style' resides in the equality of musical language (the specific techniques used to articulate the building blocks of music) and genre (the arbitrary delineation of certain techniques of articulation within certain styles of composition). The simple fugal process that transforms the principal melody of the first Bagatelle or the circular conception of the sixth Bagatelle corroborate this when judged against the prototypicality of the genre, which begins to withdraw in these instances. They represent on a smaller scale the techniques and inter-genre manipulation of both the earlier and later works of the 'late style.'

In the final chapter I moved this interpretative process to the last level: the Bagatelle as a model itself. Taking the aforementioned norms and presuppositions of the genre (the musical construction as a prototype of eighteenth-century dance and song forms) to an abstract level, the Bagatelles actually develop stylistic constraints that are later to be worked out more fully in the late string quartets. In particular, the new relationship between theme and form, implicit in Beethoven's penchant for composing canons in this period, produces a new conception of formal process. This was adducible, in a basic realisation, within the tiny two-part song form of op. 119 no. 8; as a *bona fide* process of subthematicism it bound the disjointed form of op. 126, no. 2. In the latter work, a purposeful preclusion of the rules of the genre (an audible **ABA** design) gave rise to the process that was to reach its culmination in the first movements of opp. 132 and 130.

An interpretation of this sort dismisses the Bagatelles, op. 126, as being mere 'trifles,' even if this is the term used by the composer himself. The Bagatelles were first considered as 'models' in which Beethoven could test facets of his evolving style before inclusion within the more expansive works. A detailed consideration of the nature of the

late Beethovenian Bagatelle and its particular use of the prevalent stylistic constraints, its musical 'Idea,' induce a shift in emphasis from prototype to model. The importance for the 'late style' of certain facets within the Bagatelles, such as the subthematicism in op. 126 no. 2, would seem to confirm Adorno's construal of the late Bagatelles as "splinters and documents of the mightiest productive process in music."<sup>16</sup>

The Bagatelle as just a 'model' for larger, more 'important' compositions, then, seems to offer a nebulous image in place of the true nature of these pieces and of the op. 126 'cycle' as a whole. As I hope to have shown through the course of this study, the particulars of the op. 126 Bagatelles, the specific 'Idea' of the discourse beyond the conventional presuppositions of construction, were influential in the shaping of the musical language we now know today, mainly from the major works of the period, as Beethoven's 'late style.' The Idea is the Model.

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<sup>16</sup> Adorno (1998), 130

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