WHAT IS “NORMAL?”
A BEETHOVENIAN RECONSIDERATION OF SOME OF TOVEY’S AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES

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THESIS
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ABSTRACT

Donald Francis Tovey’s writings on music continue to have a strong influence on scholarship seventy years after his death. In several of his essays, he mentions “normality” and “freedom” as meaningful aesthetic principles, but when one examines closely his use of these concepts, one discovers seemingly contradictory formulations. On the one hand, Tovey insists that “normality” in music is achieved by the resolution of internal conflicts, and that the process by which this occurs is one of “freedom”—in other words, the process is not formulaic but rather unique to each composition; as Tovey puts it, “an art form grows from within instead of being moulded from without.” On the other hand, his writings demonstrate clearly that he values convention in music, and his notion of “normality” is undoubtedly also informed by the fulfillment of certain expectations cultivated externally; he writes, for instance, that “nothing is more sterilizing than the critical conventions which demand originality as a *sine qua non* for all artists,” and that “it is stupid to use a convention in a way which shows that you have missed its point, but it is no cleverer to violate a convention because you do not understand it.”

Tovey applies his paradoxical conceptions of “normality” and “freedom” to Beethoven’s C♯-minor string quartet, Op. 131. In my thesis, I first demonstrate how Tovey’s ideas have informed and continue to influence scholarship on that work. I then probe the extent to which his principles can be applied to some of Beethoven’s other structurally abnormal compositions, the mature two-movement piano sonatas (Opp. 54, 78, 90, and 111) and the eleven bagatelles, Op. 119. Ultimately, I find that while Tovey’s concepts are helpful, they do not yield equally fruitful results when applied to several types of pieces.
I’d first like to thank my dear wife, Shannon Lewis, for being my best friend and a constant source of inspiration and encouragement, and the rest of my family for all their love and support over the years—my generous parents, my terrific siblings, and my wonderful grandparents. I would not be where I am today without the enduring warmth of my family, my favorite people.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the third edition of the *Music Lovers’ Encyclopedia*, the brief entry for Donald Francis Tovey reads:

**To’vey, Sir Donald Francis**, b. Eton, July 17, 1875; pianist; pupil of Sophie Weisse (piano), [Sir Walter] Parratt, [Henry Marcellus] Higgs and [Sir Charles Hubert Hastings] Parry (comp.); graduated at Oxford, 1898; began to compose at 8; at 19 gave a concert at Windsor with [Joseph] Joachim; from 1900 played in London and on the continent; 1914 succeeded [Frederick] Niecks as prof. at Edinburgh Univ.; 1917 founded Reid Orch. in Edinburgh; 1924, hon. Fellow of R. C. M., London; knighted, 1935; c. 4 pf. trios, pf. quartet, string quartet, pf. sonata and concerto; symphony; 3 vln. sonatas; incid. music to plays, choral and other pieces; writer on music.¹

The *Encyclopedia* was published in 1939, just a year before Tovey’s death, and it appears that he was at that time better known as a composer and performer than as a writer. Today, the opposite is true to such an extent that a reader aware of Tovey’s lasting influence on musicology might get a good laugh at the above entry, which, ironically, only mentions Tovey’s literary output in passing at the end. True, his writing style is heavy on colloquialisms that sometimes reveal interwar cultural attitudes of the West unpalatable to modern readers (e.g., “Of course, the general resemblances of Mozart’s hundreds of

examples of any form are as striking, on a superficial acquaintance, as the general resemblances of Chinamen. But people who know the Chinese well do not find them much more alike than Europeans”2), but his thoughtful, characteristically quirky musings on music of the Classical–Romantic tradition nevertheless remain relevant to scholars. This can easily be confirmed by a quick glance at the indices of some of this generation’s most prominent literature on nineteenth-century music. Charles Rosen’s books, for instance, mention Tovey quite often, and the former’s Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion surely owes something to the latter’s A Companion to Beethoven’s Pianoforte Sonatas, an indebtedness reflected not only in Rosen’s title and format but also by the frequency with which he cites Tovey. Contemporary Beethoven biographies by Barry Cooper, William Kinderman, Lewis Lockwood, and Maynard Solomon all reference Tovey, too, and it is rather surprising that of the four, Cooper’s does so with the least regularity, as it was him who edited the revised 1998 edition of Tovey’s A Companion to Beethoven’s Pianoforte Sonatas!

In Tovey’s oft-quoted essay, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” he asserts both the “uniqueness” of Beethoven’s “most normal” compositions and the “fundamental normality” of his “most unique” ones.3 At the risk of semantic pettifoggery, one may be tempted to fault Tovey’s usage of the word unique in a comparative (or rather, superlative) sense, but a reader familiar with the essay knows that its real difficulty—as Joseph Kerman has pointed out4—is the writer’s vague use of the word normal. Even in Tovey’s 1936

2 Donald Francis Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms” (1927), in The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 273.
3 Ibid., 288.
Romanes lecture, “Normality and Freedom in Music,” any semblance of a straightforward definition of “normality,” as Kerman discovered, is absent. This is not to say that Tovey altogether neglects to describe or illustrate the concept; on the contrary, using Beethoven’s Op. 131 string quartet in C# minor as his primary subject, he uses the term in various, often conflicting ways, and therein lies the difficulty of applying it to other compositions, which is my present objective. My subjects are some of Beethoven’s more structurally abnormal works—the four mature two-movement piano sonatas, Opp. 54, 78, 90, and 111, and the set of eleven bagatelles, Op. 119—but such a task necessitates first arriving at a satisfactory comprehension of “normality” according to Tovey.

I begin, then, with a brief textual analysis of “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms” and “Normality and Freedom in Music,” followed by a close examination of Tovey’s own example, Beethoven’s C#-minor string quartet, to demonstrate not only how he finds “normality and freedom” in the work, but also how his influential reading of it in such a framework has found virtually unanimous approval in subsequent musicological discourse on Op. 131. That kind of validation inspires my efforts to test the viability of Tovey’s ideas on some of Beethoven’s other structurally “unique” compositions. Along the way, I hope to offer some new interpretive insights into the pieces.

In “Normality and Freedom in Music,” Tovey posits that “normality” should be “our main criterion for music and for all works of art,” so it is clearly of the utmost importance to him. He further contends that “freedom” is “not opposed to normality. It is in every sense of the term a function of it.” But what does Tovey mean by “freedom?” Kerman, in

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5 Tovey, “Normality and Freedom in Music” (1936), in The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 184.

6 Ibid.
this regard, finds useful the following Tovey quote: “All art involves conflict. . . . The normal solution of all conflicts will be mutual service, and here alone we shall find perfect freedom.” Tovey seems to be referring to cohesion or synthesis of contrasting forces, but he is adamant that the means by which a skilled composer achieves such a “normal solution” is not formulaic. He writes, for example, that the “art forms of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven were not moulds in which music could be cast, but inner principles by which the music grew,” and that “an art form grows from within instead of being moulded from without.” According to Tovey, then, “normality” refers to a work’s inner logic, and since each work’s inner logic is distinctive and “grows from within,” the compositional process is one of “freedom.”

Were that the extent of Tovey’s discussion on the matter, my much ado would be about nothing. But the notion that form is internally generated is countered by his own statements regarding originality and convention: “Nothing is more sterilizing than the critical conventions which demand originality as a sine qua non for all artists”; Why waste your powers of invention on rediscovering ordinary trade methods? The great artist will not discard conventions until he finds them inconvenient, or unless he invents something better. It is stupid to use a convention in a way which shows that you have missed its point, but it is no cleverer to violate a convention because you do not understand it.

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7 Kerman, The Beethoven Quartets, 325–26; Tovey, “Normality and Freedom in Music,” 183, 184.
8 Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” 289.
9 Ibid., 296.
10 Ibid., 193.
In his insistence that great art need not be “original,” and in acknowledging approvingly that composers often adhere to conventional forms, Tovey contradicts his firm stance that form “grows from within instead of being moulded from without.” It seems, rather, that “normality” consists not merely of internally generated coherence, but also of the fulfillment of certain conventional expectations.

For confirmation of this reading, one need only turn to Tovey’s search for “normality” in Beethoven’s seven-movement string quartet, Op. 131, which Tovey dubs the composer’s “most unique work.”12 Yes, Tovey finds in this piece the internal logic he identifies as a key aspect of “normality,” most famously with his excited response to the finale’s Neapolitan tendencies that were so pronounced in the quartet’s beginning movements (“the second subject is going to be recapitulated in the flat supertonic! The wheel has come full circle. The whole quartet is a perfect unity . . .”).13 But he is also clearly concerned in his analysis with the fulfillment of certain expectations, and at times even attempts to justify places where Beethoven defies them. For example, Tovey feels the need to explain the dearth of expected development in the second movement’s sonata form, pointing to the opening fugal movement for a rationale: the “method of a fugue is argumentative”; “the development of a sonata-form movement is bound to be argumentative: and here again the fugue has forestalled us.”14 In a lecture given five years earlier, he had made the same point but was even clearer in his delivery:

[The second movement] has no development at all. Why? Because the introductory fugue is nothing but development. A fugue is a composition

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12 Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” 288.
13 Ibid., 294.
14 Ibid., 289, 290.
which, from the point of view of sonata style, is nothing but development from beginning to end, and therefore any development in this movement that follows it has been forestalled and is out of place.\textsuperscript{15}

Tovey thereby implies that the first two movements should be thought of as together constituting the sonata form expected of an opening. Furthermore, he views the third movement as “declamatory interlude”\textsuperscript{16} and the sixth as an “introduction to the finale,”\textsuperscript{17} rather than as independent movements in their own right; he reinforces this perspective when he glosses over them in his “survey [of] the keys which have been heard in the course of the work.”\textsuperscript{18} If one follows Tovey’s line of reasoning, one is left with the “normal” four movements instead of seven, in the expected order, in fact, of a sonata-form opening (nos. 1 and 2), a slow movement (no. 4, with no. 3 as a mere “interlude”), a dance movement (no. 5), and a dramatic finale (no. 7, with an introductory no. 6). Tovey has, in other words, “normalized” the abnormal structure of the work.

Elsewhere, he notes that despite the fifth movement’s “peculiar” qualities, its basic structure “might apply to half a dozen of Beethoven’s other scherzos.”\textsuperscript{19} And in his discussion of the finale, he writes, “And now at last it will be, at all events theoretically, possible to cover a wide range of key and have some expansive and argumentative


\textsuperscript{16}Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” 291.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 293.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 292.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.
development,” the implication being, of course, that Beethoven has delayed the fulfillment of these expectations for dramatic impact.20

Unquestionably, Tovey’s sense of “normality” is informed not only by a work’s free “inner principles” by which its conflicting elements resolve through “mutual service,” but also by the fulfillment of expectations cultivated externally (i.e., established through conventional use in other pieces), even if he would sometimes have his readers believe otherwise. Perhaps his reluctance to directly assert this seemingly paradoxical notion of “normality” is driven by a noble pursuit to emphasize the “uniqueness” of each work; maybe he simply wished to avoid the need to clarify what appears at first to be a contradiction. Whatever the explanation, his influential but rather elusive take on “normality,” “freedom,” and “uniqueness” in the context of the C♯-minor quartet has engendered very little in the way of disagreement among Beethoven scholars. The historiographical survey of musicological work on Op. 131 that follows reveals just how surprisingly smoothly Tovey’s apparently contradictory insights fit into the context of writings that preceded and followed his.

20 Ibid., 293.
CHAPTER 2

OP. 131, TOVEY, AND OTHER CRITICS

When Beethoven submitted the quartet to his publisher, Schott, in early August of 1826, he jestingly included the addendum, “patched together from pieces filched here and there.” The joke, prompted by the publisher’s superfluous specification that the new work be original, did not go over well, and Beethoven shortly thereafter sent a follow-up letter of clarification and reassurance. In light of the analytical treatment Op. 131 has received by scholars over the years, this amusing anecdote assumes a strikingly ironic quality, as William Kinderman has suggested. On the one hand, Beethoven’s humorous intimation that the work is but a conglomeration of bits stolen from various sources could not be more at odds with the strong tendency of musicologists to emphasize the innovative and unifying features of the work; on the other hand, those very unifying features are not readily apparent at first glance (or first listen), as demonstrated by the publisher’s genuine concern over Beethoven’s teasing note.

Despite the work’s particularly cohesive nature, then, Op. 131 may indeed come off as a sort of musical hodge-podge. Consisting of seven movements, only two of which—the first and last—share a key, this massive quartet is anything but typical. And though the movements are to be played continuously without pause, the transitions between them are often jarring or stark. Examine, for example, how Beethoven links the first two movements:

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22 Ibid., vol. 3, L. 1498.

the sustained C♭s that conclude the opening fugue shift unexpectedly to Ds to commence the second movement; although he foreshadows this Neapolitan key in the first movement (as I will later discuss in greater detail), he provides no connecting tissue to soften this half-step modulation. No wonder Beethoven’s note distressed his publisher.

Likewise understandable given its scope and apparent unconventionalities is that Op. 131 has historically proven to be something of an acquired taste, especially during its early years of existence. Its reception history has most often been addressed within the broader contexts of either Beethoven’s late music in general or his last quartets specifically. Though the scholarly dialogue of this reception history has really only begun to develop within the past twenty years, some excellent work has already been done.

In the two decades following Beethoven’s death, his late quartets were generally less favorably received than were his earlier works in the genre. K. M. Knittel catalogs many contemporary reviews to make this point, focusing on a critical tendency to link the works’ unpalatability with Beethoven’s deafness and poor health. She makes clear, however, that very few reviewers were willing to dismiss the late works outright, usually out of respect for the accepted greatness of Beethoven’s earlier music; she writes, in fact, that early critics “refrained from suggesting that Beethoven’s reputation should be based on these last pieces alone. Indeed, they apologized for them and encouraged readers to study the scores, listen to them many times, and play them through in piano arrangements.”

Despite acknowledging shades of gray in early reception, Knittel’s survey is perhaps too narrow. When she writes, for example, that “Beethoven’s final works provoked a wide

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25 Ibid., 59–60.
range of reactions, from vague discomfort to outright condemnation, among critics writing in the decades immediately following his death,” any reception more positive than “vague discomfort” is assumed to have not existed.26 This supposition supports her thesis that Richard Wagner’s 1870 “Beethoven” essay, which portrayed Beethoven’s deafness and suffering as essential—rather than as a hindrance—to his compositional maturity, provided the turning point in reception of the late works from unenthusiastic to reverential.

But as other scholars have shown, Knittel’s position is not entirely accurate. Kinderman, in a direct response, quotes an anonymous reviewer from as early as 1827 or 1828 who wrote that at least some contemporary listeners felt that “one can find nothing more beautiful and marvelous than this very quartet [Op. 127], which represents the highest that music can offer.”27 There seems indeed to have been early reception more positive than “vague discomfort.”

Even though Knittel’s argument is somewhat exaggerated, her point that early reception of the late works was, generally speaking, comparatively cool does ring true. Also convincing but perhaps overstated is her position on the influence of Wagner’s 1870 essay. While she demonstrates quite clearly that the writings of Theodor Helm, Vincent D’Indy, Edward Dannreuther, and Sir George Grove were almost assuredly indebted to it,28 other scholars such as Kinderman and Robert Winter have revealed that by the 1850s—over a

26 Ibid., 51.
28 Knittel, 68–73.
decade before Wagner’s essay—Beethoven’s late quartets had already gained a great deal of critical and public favor.

Kinderman in this regard refers to concert reviews, critical essays, analytical studies, and even “Wagner’s own [earlier] enthusiasm . . . for the C♯-Minor Quartet, op. 131” to support his argument. Wagner’s infatuation with Op. 131, in fact, led him to organize and coach a performance of the piece as early as 1854 in Zurich.29 A particularly persuasive piece of evidence Kinderman presents is Wilhelm von Lenz’s 1855 assertion that the late works “are now common property.”30

Kinderman and Winter both mention the Hellmesberger Quartet, founded in 1849, which performed the late quartets quite frequently in Vienna to considerable acclaim.31 Winter further discusses various ensembles and societies in England and France, likewise dedicated to the late quartets, a prime example being the Society for the Last Quartets of Beethoven founded in Paris, 1835.32

Examining the work of multiple scholars yields a clearer understanding of nineteenth-century reception of the late quartets than does a consideration of any individual study alone. Though the scholarly investigation may yet be in its infancy, the available evidence warrants at least some general deductions. Firstly, reception of Beethoven’s late quartets was relatively tepid but gradually becoming less so in the two

29 Kinderman, The String Quartets of Beethoven, 7–9.
30 Wilhelm von Lenz, Beethoven: Eine Kunststudie, reprint with notes by Alfred Kalischer (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1921), 174; quoted and translated by Kinderman in the introduction to The String Quartets of Beethoven, 7.
decades following the composer’s death, and by the 1850s, public performance and positive critical discussion were commonplace. Secondly, Wagner’s widely read 1870 “Beethoven” essay—largely inspired by his long-time love for Op. 131—helped heighten the (already) canonic status of Beethoven’s late music, influencing other writers who further propagated Wagner’s rather Romanticized glorification of Beethoven’s deafness and intense suffering. Regardless of how one feels about this idealization and idolatry, they seem to have played a crucial role in thrusting Beethoven’s late works, including Op. 131, into the canonic limelight of modern musicology.

It is in this framework that scholarship on the C♯-minor quartet has flourished, and I now return to the notion of “hodge-podginess” in the composition—a characteristic that post-Wagner writers have long argued actually reflects a deeper level of continuity and unity that binds the work together in a unique way. That is, these scholars have found that “hodge-podginess” in Op. 131 relates directly to its cohesiveness, or as Tovey might put it, its “freedom” relates directly to its “normality.”

Identifying unifying features is by no means a new trend in musicology, and particularly when it comes to the music of Beethoven, such practice predates musicology as a formalized field of study. One famous example is E. T. A. Hoffmann’s 1810 review of the Fifth Symphony (better known in its later but re-worked essay form), in which he describes in detail how the opening short–short–short–long motive pervades the later movements.33 But even in 1803, one anonymous writer claimed:

Symphonies are the triumph of [instrumental music]. Unlimited and free, the artist can conjure up an entire world of feelings in them. . . . However, this freedom is not lawlessness; also, these gigantic works of art are subject to the necessary conditions of the mutual determination of content and form and of unity in diversity . . . . Beethoven, a novice in art who is, however, already approaching the great masters, has in particular made the great field of instrumental music his own. He unites Mozart’s universality and wild, abundant boldness and Haydn’s humoristic caprice; all his compositions have abundance and unity.34

In an 1824 essay, A. B. Marx regards unity as a central characteristic of the Classical style in general, but especially of Beethoven’s:

As a rule the sonata was given three movements (one fast, one slow, and another fast). At first this was probably to enable it to display a greater fullness and variety in which, of course, unified character was to be striven for . . . . One soon recognized the sonata as the most useful medium for putting together one’s ideas in a rich, diverse, yet unified way . . . .

. . . [A] greater, more deeply founded unity became manifest in Beethoven’s compositions [than in Mozart’s or Haydn’s].35

And particularly intriguing is an essay written in October 1826—just a few months after Beethoven completed Op. 131—by an author identified simply as “F.,” staunchly defending


Beethoven’s innovative style and unorthodox musical structures, in large part by appealing to the aesthetic of unity. It is worth quoting at length, for it also touches on Tovey’s concerns about conventions and free “inner principles” (cf. F.’s “inner necessity” and “inner reason”), alludes to Beethoven’s two-movement piano sonatas (which I address extensively in Chapter 3), and briefly considers unity in works whose individual parts were not originally meant to go together (cf. my discussion on Beethoven’s Op. 119 bagatelles in Chapter 4):

The presentation of symphonies, concertos, and sonatas in three or four successive parts, separated from one another extrinsically, cannot [read: “should not”] be something accidental or arbitrary. Each of these parts is maintained in a key different from the others and stimulates a different feeling. Nevertheless, they are disposed to forming an entirety together and are therefore not independent of each other but rather are connected internally and sustained by a common idea. . . . If [the traditional three- or four-movement layout] is still maintained individually and is respected as a firmly established norm, the reason for that can probably only be a misunderstanding. How much do habit, patriotic love for the traditional, and the increasingly widespread acceptance of mediocrity of talent participate in the pursuit of the path that once was taken by great geniuses? It would be strange to assume that each musical idea is in need of expansion into a certain number of parts or could even tolerate it! It is obvious that, as a result of similar misunderstandings, in symphonies, sonatas, etc. of even the greatest masters one or the other part is inferior to the others in worth and
significance and indeed often appears to be superfluous. This provides proof that the author has paid homage to custom more than he has yielded to inner necessity....

... If we have already noted above that the development into several extrinsically separated parts could not be suitable for the expression of every feeling, then that must be even much more valid for the presentation of an objective perception, which cannot be pulled apart arbitrarily or limited, but has a completely circumscribed content. Beethoven also has often thrown off the shackles of custom if no inner reason induced an association with the traditional, and he did not add to two main parts a third when he had already said what he wanted to say. The fact that many works of music, even famous ones, have been put together out of several parts, which the author composed at various times and which originally didn't belong together, cannot negate the claim of criticism that works of art ought to be formed as a perfect whole and developed from one idea. That every author with a mind and intelligence will let himself be guided by the idea he wants to present throughout the entire piece when selecting whatever parts are at hand also confirms the truth of these remarks.36

Early critics of the late string quartets specifically, as Knittel demonstrates, often urged listeners to approach these works in a studious manner, making sure to hear them multiple times.

times and to examine the scores.\textsuperscript{37} In 1828, one such critic in Mainz wrote in the journal, \textit{Cäcilia}, in reference to Op. 131, “Nowhere is it less permissible . . . to content oneself with the appreciation of individual details. For it is precisely through the realization of the total impression that the single idea [of] the poet is revealed.”\textsuperscript{38} Leon Botstein suggests that such writers found in the late quartets “an organic totality” that, through “careful study and rehearing,” must be grasped in order to facilitate comprehension and appreciation.\textsuperscript{39}

For nearly two centuries, then, commentators have emphasized unity in Beethoven’s late quartets, and the C$\sharp$-minor work seems to have been (and to be) most prone to that approach. In post-Wagnerian scholarship especially, one begins to find substantial Op. 131-specific dialogue characterized by close examination of the score; when Wagner wrote of the piece in his 1870 essay, he did so in very vague descriptive terms, but his successors have tended toward greater specificity and a ceaseless search for unifying features.

It is important to distinguish between two separate but sometimes related concepts that are often discussed with no differentiation: continuity and unity. The former refers to a work’s lack of pauses where, given the idiom, one would expect to find them (usually between movements), while the latter refers to various (and variable) levels of constancy and/or interrelationship among separate parts of a work. But continuity and unity need not be mutually exclusive. Op. 131, for instance, lacks double bar lines between movements where one would expect them to be, and thus features continuity; yet, as the number of

\textsuperscript{37} Knittel, 59–60.
\textsuperscript{39} Botstein, 105.
movements is an unusually high seven, and as those double bar lines are absent between all movements, it would not be a stretch to view inter-movement continuity as a unifying feature of the work.

Quite revealing in regards to scholarly perception of continuity in Op. 131 is Dover Publications’ 1998 miniature score edition of the late quartets, which, as the title and copyright pages indicate, is “an unabridged reproduction of six works” “from the Breitkopf & Härtel Complete Works Edition.”40 Though the scores are photographic reproductions of the Breitkopf & Härtel originals, the (anonymous) Dover editor adds a table of contents with notes, new headings for each work, and measure numbers (absent in the originals). Just below the Op. 131 entry in the table of contents is an italicized note: “Movements are played without pause and are bar-numbered consecutively.”41 Indeed, the editor has taken the liberty of numbering the measures of Op. 131 continuously, rather than numbering the measures of each movement individually. For the other quartets, the editor uses the latter method.

It is possible that the Dover editor’s measure-numbering method somewhat reflects Beethoven’s original intentions. This is not to say that one can determine how Beethoven would have wished to number the measures in Op. 131, but a bit of autograph and manuscript history forces one to question Beethoven’s very conception of “movements” in this work. For this information I turn to another edition of the Op. 131 score: the 2002 G. Henle Verlag “urtext” edition. In the commentary, editor Emil Platen explains that

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41 Ibid., v.
Beethoven actually numbered the seven movements, "if somewhat ambiguously," in the copyist’s manuscript that served as the engraver’s copy.\textsuperscript{42} Platen writes:

These numbers must be respected as the composer’s intentions and were duly included. . . . In this case the sequence of numbers, rather than explicitly signifying a series of "movements" as distinct subdivisions within a larger entity, instead indicates "pieces," a term also used in Beethoven’s day to identify sections that reveal a certain independence in their motivic substance but are not formally self-contained (see especially nos. 3 and 6). To avoid confusion, the comments below use the term "piece" for all numbered sections in the quartet.\textsuperscript{43}

(I will still use the word "movement.") To say the least, Beethoven’s conception of "movements" in Op. 131 is unusual. Labeling sections with numbers is something he typically does in variation and bagatelle sets, but not in larger-scale more formal genres like the quartet. With this in mind, one could argue that the Dover editor, in numbering the measures of Op. 131 continuously, acknowledges the ambiguity Platen refers to by diminishing the importance of separate movements. And Platen’s choice of words to interpret Beethoven’s intentions (e.g. that the movements "are not formally self-contained") reveals an underlying assumption of unity. The point is that for these editors, the notion of continuity—and by extension, in this case, unity—in Op. 131 was prevalent enough to prompt such interpretive editorship.

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\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
It is unity more than continuity, however, that gets to the heart of Tovey’s ideas about “normality,” and so considering the theme of unity in Op. 131 on a more analytical level is necessary. Theodor Helm, who quotes Wagner extensively in his 1885 landmark study of Beethoven’s string quartets, examines each movement of the work in depth, and he makes one key observation that has strongly steered scholarship in the direction of theories of unity: the theme beginning in m. 21 of the finale consists of the same four notes (G♯, A, B♯, and C♯) that make up the first part of the fugue subject at the very beginning of the first movement. Though Beethoven scrambles the order of these four notes, he gives them exactly the same durational values that he does in the fugue subject.\footnote{Theodor Helm, \textit{Beethoven’s Streichquartette} (Leipzig: Verlag von E. W. Fritzsch, 1885), 250–51.} Compare Figures 1 and 2.

Joseph de Marliave’s book on the string quartets—which, unbeknownst to (and hence unacknowledged by) his posthumous 1925 publishers, was largely a French translation of Helm’s work—describes a “melancholy cast” that connects this theme in the finale to the overall mood of the first movement.\footnote{Joseph de Marliave, \textit{Les Quatuors de Beethoven}, trans. Hilda Andrews (1928; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 322.}

Helm’s observation has been enormously influential, and many other writers have elaborated on it. Harold Truscott, for example, examines the continuation of that theme in the finale over the subsequent two bars and observes: “Except that it stops short by two
notes the rhythm of this theme is precisely the same as that of the fugue subject in the first movement.” One could even take Truscott’s argument further and compare the subject/answer entries of the entire fugue exposition (I, mm. 1–16) to the sixteen measures (VII, mm. 21–37) in which the eight-bar period containing the aforementioned finale theme is repeated (compare Figures 3 and 4). The similarities between these passages in terms of rhythmic and melodic contour are striking.

![Figure 3. Op 131/I, subject/answer entries of fugue exposition (simplified to emphasize rhythm).](image)

![Figure 4. Op. 131/VII, theme from mm. 21–37 (simplified to emphasize rhythm).](image)

Although Helm does not interpret the finale’s recollection of the fugue within an explicitly stated framework of unity, later writers do. Joseph Kerman writes of the passage in Figure 4, “This is the famous theme that recalls or, I would rather say, retrieves the opening fugue.” He then briefly discusses ways in which previous scholars have

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approached this theme, concluding that most “have been so struck by the very fact of thematic transformation here that they have nothing to say about its quality. Sometimes they are struck dumb by the ‘unity’ it is thought to establish.”\textsuperscript{48}

For Kerman, then, the “unity” that binds Op. 131 is only worth exploring if one examines its significance. He dubs the passage in Figure 4 “uncanny,” particularly because of its arresting juxtaposition with what he calls the “anapestic” and “trochaic” motives of the finale (beginning in mm. 2 and 5 respectively). In tracing the “uncanny” theme’s four appearances throughout the movement, he posits that with each appearance the theme becomes less “uncanny” and closer in mood to the opening fugue. In its original form, this theme is accompanied by the unsettling “trochaic” rhythm in the viola, while the second violin’s melodic augmented fourth contributes to the passage’s eeriness. When the theme returns (transposed) in the recapitulation (m. 184), though, the incessant “trochaic” motive is absent, and the cello’s rhythmic motion is now in whole notes (rather than half notes, as in the exposition). Kerman finds that the overall creepiness of the passage is thus reduced, facilitating a closer bond this time around with the first movement’s mood of “sorrow” (not a far cry from Marliave’s “melancholy”).\textsuperscript{49}

Kerman’s analysis of the theme’s final appearance in m. 349 is pivotal to his thesis. In this instance, the first two bars of the theme are extracted and treated to harmonic sequencing where Beethoven indicates \textit{Ritmo di due battute}, “an approximation of the weary pace of the quartet’s first movement, \textit{Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo}.”\textsuperscript{50} In Kerman’s view, the unexpected calmness of this passage and the subsequent final fiftyish

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 265–68.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 269.
bars—the penultimate six of which are notated *poco adagio*, further evoking the fugue’s tempo—recall the pensiveness of the quartet’s opening number.

That Kerman devotes an entire essay to this theme and its significance is testament to the remarkable influence on Op. 131 scholarship that Theodor Helm’s observation has had. Virtually every informed twentieth-century study of the work, in fact, at the very least mentions it, even if Helm is never directly referenced.

Tovey, of course, is another key player in setting the stage for much of the twentieth-century dialogue concerning Op. 131. If Helm’s most significant contribution was pointing out the thematic link between the first and last movements—a link that Tovey also discusses—then Tovey’s is discussing the various key relations in and between movements, as well as the quartet’s “free” yet “normal” formal qualities. And unlike Helm’s analysis, Tovey’s of 1927 takes place within an explicitly stated framework of unity.

I have already addressed how Tovey “normalizes” the structure of the work by unearthing a conventional four-movement pattern embedded within Beethoven’s abnormal seven-movement scheme. Other scholars have since echoed this idea in various ways. In reference to the opening fugue and the subsequent Allegro molto vivace, for instance, Truscott uses even stronger wording than does Tovey: “in the deepest meaning of the music, these two movements are really one movement, each requiring the other to complete its sense.”51 And more recently, Lewis Lockwood has cut right to the chase in a manner so clearly influenced by Tovey that extended quotation is here warranted:

If we recognize that movement 3 is simply an eleven-measure transition between D major and A major—a formal and psychological bridge but not

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51 Truscott, 106.
really an independent movement—and also that movement No. 6 is a short, slow introduction to the finale (although it is in the dominant minor), then the quartet becomes a peculiar type of five-movement work, somewhat akin to Opus 132.

But another view can be advanced, construing the work in four large units:

**Unit 1.** Movements 1 and 2, where the first, fugal Adagio is construed as an immense slow introduction to an Allegro (although it is an introduction that outweighs the Allegro). The tonal sequence C-sharp–D for a pair of adjacent movements is unheard of in Beethoven and almost unique in the literature; only the adventurous Haydn had done it in his last piano sonata, where an E-major slow movement is flanked by E-flat-major movements. But in Opus 131 the C-sharp–D sequence is just the beginning of a tonal motion to far-flung regions. The short transition ("No. 3") leads from Unit 1 to Unit 2.

**Unit 2.** The Andante, a variations movement in 2/4; A major (one step up in the circle of fifths from movement 2).

**Unit 3.** The Scherzo; E major (another step upward in the circle of fifths).

**Unit 4.** The Adagio and Allegro form a second paired slow introduction and Allegro, entirely different from the pairing of movements 1 and 2; the keys are now G-sharp minor (relative minor of the E-major Scherzo) and the home tonic of C-sharp minor.
And there are grounds for hearing the whole as an enormously expanded four-movement structure, leaving out No. 3 as an independent entity and construing the slow sections as introductions. In that sense it seems like a distant parallel to Opus 127 or Opus 132 rather than to the authentic six-movement plan of Opus 130.52

Lockwood’s commentary, in effect, affirms Tovey’s “normalization” of the work’s structure. Along the same lines, Tovey finds a kind of tonal “normality”—and unity—hidden in Op. 131, and this, too, has proven to be influential. Tovey writes of the opening fugue, “the range of key is very small, being practically confined to directly related keys; that is to say, keys in which the chord of our tonic (C sharp minor) can be found.”53 A few pages later, Tovey makes the same point but now in reference to the tonal areas of the whole quartet.54 In other words, the keys of the various movements are first presented in the opening fugue, as if Beethoven were giving the listener a preview of what is to come, and furthermore, these keys, though sometimes unexpected, never venture outside of the family of keys closely related to C\# minor—with one important exception: the second movement’s Neapolitan tonality of D major.

Although the flat supertonic is not a closely related tonal area (by Tovey’s own definition), he contends that it is “not remote”:

- There is nothing out of the way in saying, ‘Well, if I have got a point of view where the note above the dominant is flat, I also have a note above the tonic that is flat too’; and that is what gives you your flat supertonic. . . . This

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53 Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” 290.
54 Ibid., 292–93.
artificial flat supertonic is not remote: it happens in the most direct way. You cannot indulge in any particularly melancholy sentiment in the minor, you cannot [make much of] that very easy flattening of [the sixth], without producing your corresponding flat supertonic.\footnote{Tovey, “Eight Lectures on Beethoven (1922): VI. Artificial Modulations,” 450.}

For Tovey, the Neapolitan, as counterpart to the lowered submediant, is a natural component of a fully functional minor mode. (And though Tovey never says so, the flat supertonic, D major, is a workable alternative to the un-flattened supertonic, D\# diminished, which is unusable as a key area.)

Even if the tonal areas and transitions are often unexpected, then, the keys are actually quite related; and the first movement operates as a sort of kaleidoscope in which one can glimpse, in miniature, a scrambled tonal map of the entire quartet. Tovey is making the case for unity on tonal and structural grounds.

As Tovey makes abundantly clear, Beethoven gives special significance to the Neapolitan D major in Op. 131. The first instance occurs at the outset of the work, in a way that mirrors very closely Tovey’s discussion of the flat supertonic as foil to the lowered submediant. When Beethoven answers the fugue subject in the subdominant (rather than in the more conventional dominant), one result is that the sforzando that fell on A (lowered submediant) in the subject now falls on D (flat supertonic) in the answer. Tovey even claims that the fugue answer “has been put into the subdominant . . . for this very purpose” of strongly emphasizing the Neapolitan.\footnote{Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” 290.}
This last assertion of Tovey’s is a bold one, given that a fugal answer in the dominant would have to be tonal rather than real. But in light of Robert Winter’s research on the Op. 131 sketches, Tovey’s claim seems entirely plausible. Beethoven’s first sketches of the fugue exposition, in fact, involved tonal answers at the dominant level! As Winter indicates, one can only conclusively prove with this evidence that Beethoven changed his mind later on, opting instead for a real answer in the subdominant.57 One cannot establish with certainty why he changed his mind, but Tovey’s reason is surely conceivable.

Tovey also devotes a great deal of attention to the finale of Op. 131. Expectedly, he discusses the theme that Helm connected to the fugue subject years before, dubbing it “the mournful theme” (recall that Kerman later calls it the “uncanny theme”)58. “Generally sceptical about . . . long-distance resemblances, where the composer has no means of enforcing his point,” Tovey is here nonetheless convinced that “the mournful theme” indeed “refers to the very beginning of the work.”59 Making this connection seems to be an almost universal trend among post-Helm scholars, and it is worth noting that Winter’s sketch studies indicate that throughout the compositional process, Beethoven was concerned with working the fugue subject into the finale—in some sketches, in fact, the subject’s unaltered first four notes appear there verbatim.60

Perhaps more surprising, given Tovey’s hesitation to accept theories of “long-distance resemblances,” are his feelings on the return in the finale of the ever-important Neapolitan harmony of D major. One of the motives in the first theme group briefly visits

58 Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” 293.
59 Ibid., 296.
60 Winter, Compositional Origins of Beethoven’s Opus 131, 146–57.
the flat supertonic (mm. 17–18) in “an ominous way.”61 If this passage is “ominous,” as Tovey puts it, then what is being foreshadowed? Later in the movement, Beethoven recapitulates the second theme group in the same Neapolitan key of D major, a move that greatly enthuses Tovey, prompting him to make the following oft-quoted remarks (parts of which I have, in fact, already quoted!):

The second subject is going to be recapitulated in the flat supertonic! The wheel has come full circle. The whole quartet is a perfect unity, governed by the results of the initial event of that modified first movement which maintained itself in the flat supertonic after the opening fugue had firmly established the key of C sharp minor. Hence the restraint in the matter of modulation . . . [Beethoven’s] power of modulation is really unsurpassed even by Wagner, but this fact is generally ignored or disbelieved, because the occasions on which Beethoven exercises the power in any obvious way are very rare.62

Reading this excerpt, one would never peg Tovey for a disbeliever in “long-distance resemblances.” And yet, he extends the inter-movement relationship to include the Neapolitan’s subsequent “reappearance [in the finale’s coda] . . . in a shuddering cadential passage that breaks in upon the height of the passion.”63

Where Tovey mentions Beethoven’s “restraint in the matter of modulation,” he is referring not to the inter-movement key changes, but rather to the fact that intra-movement modulation is rare—and rarely adventurous. Only at the end of the fourth

61 Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” 293.
62 Ibid., 294–95.
63 Ibid., 296.
movement, in fact, do such intra-movement modulations move outside C♯ minor’s circle of closely related keys, in what Tovey terms a “modulatory purple patch.”

In his seminal 1967 book on Beethoven’s quartets, Kerman picks up and runs with Tovey’s points concerning key relations and modulatory “restraint” in Op. 131. Kerman notes that Beethoven does not merely stick to the closely related keys of C♯ minor, but actually utilizes virtually all of them. A major, E major, and G♯ minor all feature as keys of movements, as does B (in the third movement), though rather ambiguously (it is technically B minor, but by the sixth measure of the movement, the third, D, is raised to D♯ in preparation for modulation; to label this movement as being firmly in any one key is futile). The Neapolitan D major—the key of the second movement—is the exception, but I have already shown that Tovey (Kerman’s main influence here) considered the flat supertonic an essential component of the minor mode; and again, the major Neapolitan, unlike the strictly diatonic diminished triad built on the un-flattened supertonic D♯, is usable as a key area.

Although the subdominant key, F♯ minor, does not get its own movement, Kerman is quick to point out that it, too, “has its substantial innings,” as the opening fugue’s answer is in F♯ minor and the key comes back to play a vital role in the finale. (And for what it’s worth, Winter’s sketch studies reveal that Beethoven abandoned a plan to write a

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64 Ibid., 292–93.
65 Kerman, The Beethoven Quartets, 328–29.
66 Ibid.
movement in the subdominant key.\textsuperscript{67}) As Kerman writes, the movements’ keys “cover almost exhaustively every tonal area that relates directly to the original tonic, C\# minor.”\textsuperscript{68}

Concerning Tovey’s point that Beethoven shows modulatory “restraint” within the individual movements, Kerman has much to add. He agrees with Tovey that the first six movements are inherently “flat,” largely devoid of the inner conflicts and modulations one would expect in this idiom, thus giving the finale a special dramatic significance.\textsuperscript{69} The slow fourth movement, for example, almost never deviates from A major, only briefly exploring C major and F major in its coda “as though in compensation for this lack.”\textsuperscript{70} For reference, this movement typically takes approximately fifteen minutes to perform, indeed a long time to stay in one key, not even venturing into the minor mode.

Kerman also demonstrates how Beethoven downplays the expected drama in the subsequent fifth movement, the scherzo in E major, by fizzling out each attempt to modulate to the B-major dominant. The music “ fusses inordinately, slows down, expostulates with this key and persuades it (against its better judgment) to try being G\#.”\textsuperscript{71}

According to Kerman, then, Beethoven undercuts the dramatic significance and independence of these movements. As Kinderman later puts it in a direct reference to Kerman’s work, “Every one of the movements yields up part of its autonomy in the interest of the work as a whole.”\textsuperscript{72} Beethoven achieves this not only through modulatory “restraint,”

\textsuperscript{67} Winter, \textit{Compositional Origins of Beethoven’s Opus 131}, 140–57.
\textsuperscript{68} Kerman, \textit{The Beethoven Quartets}, 328–29.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 333.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 337.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 339.
\textsuperscript{72} Kinderman, “Beethoven’s Last Quartets: Threshold to a Fourth Creative Period?” in \textit{The String Quartets of Beethoven}, ed. Kinderman, 310.
but also, as Kerman shows, by means of inserting bits into each movement that foreshadow the next, or, depending on one’s perspective, recall what has already occurred. One of Kerman’s prime examples occurs in the sixth variation of the slow fourth movement, when the cello takes up “a striking new sixteenth-note figure” (m. 196). Kerman argues that the first four notes of the following movement, played staccato by the cello, “[echo] back to the unforgettable cello figure in that climactic variation.” His favorite passage of this type, however, is what he calls the “uncanny” theme of the finale, which so many writers have linked with the fugue subject of the opening movement.

Though Kerman’s is perhaps the most well known study of Beethoven’s late quartets today, Tovey’s influence is apparent. In turn, Helm’s influence (perhaps via Marliave?) on Tovey is likewise apparent. Helm, an early post-Wagner scholar, connected that now legendary theme in the finale of Op. 131 to the opening fugue’s subject; Tovey incorporated that connection into his discussion of the work’s unifying features, its “normality,” and its “freedom,” focusing on formal, structural, and tonal design; Kerman stands on Tovey’s shoulders and shows how unity in the quartet is achieved by means of thematic linkage, tonal coherence, foreshadowing, and the sacrifice of intra-movement autonomy for the sake of the whole work.

Major Op. 131 studies, then, concur that unity exists in the quartet. Various scholars contribute to the dialogue from slightly different angles, but genuine disagreement is readily apparent only on an interpretive level—i.e., what the unity signifies. As an example, I will closely address a common thread I have already presented in the work of Kerman,

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73 Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets*, 336.
74 Ibid., 338.
Tovey, and Winter: Beethoven’s treatment of the subdominant harmony (F♯ minor) in the finale of Op. 131.

Many writers have mentioned the subdominant’s privileged status at the end of the quartet. Beginning in m. 349 with the harmonic sequential treatment of what Kerman calls the “uncanny” theme, one begins to see a teetering between C♯ major (and sometimes dominant seventh) harmonies and F♯ minor harmonies, as plainly outlined in the cello. In his 1965 study, Philip Radcliffe writes of these measures, “There is a series of plagal cadences ending on the chord of C♯ major.”⁷⁵ True though that may be, the tonic C♯ harmonies have been chiefly minor until this point, and the C♯-major sonority is not prepared by a dominant G♯ chord. One could therefore construct a strong argument that these late cadences are not iv–I in C♯ major, but rather V–i in F♯ minor. Daniel Gregory Mason, largely influenced by Tovey, views the nature of these cadences as at the very least vague: “is this G sharp, after all, the second step of F sharp minor it sounds so strangely like? And is our quest, as in the fugue, ending with a question?”⁷⁶ In his 1967 book, Kerman echoes Mason’s sentiments regarding this tonal uncertainty, yet interprets the final few bars in an entirely different manner:

Meanwhile the whole scene clouds over ambiguously with subdominant harmony; and this ambiguity simply provides the last great binding force of organic interrelation. For from the moment it suffered its answer in the subdominant, the opening Fugue was similarly clouded… The ultimate page of the quartet finds itself poised half in the tonic, half in the subdominant—

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until six bars sweep up five octaves in still another abrupt gesture of assertion. The question is closed; and with it the seven movements complete their perfect mutual trajectory.\textsuperscript{77}

Though Kerman also finds “ambiguity” in the quartet’s coda, his interpretation of the final six bars that “sweep up five octaves” to the major tonic differs from Mason’s. For Kerman, “the question is closed,” whereas Mason implies that the final cadence on C\# major lacks the conviction to settle matters.

Mason is not alone in his reading. Kinderman suggests that the final six bars of faux-closure “had already been fully prepared” by m. 347, when the “thirty-five-bar passage beginning at ‘Ritmo di due battute’,” which he terms “parenthetical,” interrupted the cadence with its subdominant meanderings.\textsuperscript{78} In other words, Beethoven could have essentially ended the quartet by placing the work’s final six bars directly after m. 347, forgoing completely those thirty-five measures of tonal haziness; but he chose, instead, to insert the “parenthetical” passage that, as Kerman has shown, recalls the opening fugue not only in its subdominant tendencies, but also through its thematic character and tempo indications. Kinderman further points out that the diminished-seventh chords found in mm. 363–64 mirror those found at the end of the fugue (mm. 116–18).\textsuperscript{79} For him, tonal ambiguity and conspicuous allusions to the first movement prevent the finale from ending forcefully:

This last important example of parenthetical enclosure in Beethoven’s music undercuts the triumphant conclusion and considerably deepens the

\textsuperscript{77} Kerman, \textit{The Beethoven Quartets}, 349.
\textsuperscript{78} Kinderman, \textit{Beethoven}, 354–55.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid.}, 353–54.
expressive power of the coda. . . . By holding fast to the memory of the fugue
Beethoven's closing Allegro brings about a synthesis of contemplation and
action. . . . The note of triumph at the end of the C♯ minor Quartet is
momentary, however, and scarcely conceals the profound duality of the coda,
which reflects in turn the deep tensional interdependence of the outer
movements.80

Kinderman clearly does not believe, as Kerman did in 1967, that the “question is closed,”
and he addresses this interpretive point of divergence (albeit with Tovey rather than
Kerman specifically in mind): “The link between the fugue and closing Allegro is direct and
tangible. . . . In this respect some earlier critics, such as Tovey, have been rather too
cautious in assessing the extent of the kinship.”81 And in another instance, Kinderman is yet
more insistent:

In a fundamental sense, the coda of this movement strives toward circularity,
by conjuring up such a powerful presence of the fugue that the experience
and process of memory is reenacted. The denial and weakening of closure
allows for a paradoxical continuity, a kind of continued life in the imagination
of the work as a whole. The quartet invites itself to be replayed in the mind’s
ear, as an experience that transcends merely linear concepts of time and
termination.82

Beethoven, in Kinderman’s analysis, does not merely leave the “question”
unanswered; he implores the listener, rather, to ask it once again, starting afresh with the

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80 Ibid., 355.
81 Ibid., 351.
82 Kinderman, “Beethoven’s Last Quartets: Threshold to a Fourth Creative Period?” 315.
opening fugue! Robert Hatten’s observation that the C♯-major harmony that concludes the first movement “is undercut by the context of its appearance—as resolution of an inverted augmented-sixth sonority, instead of closing a dominant chord in root position” supports Kinderman’s interpretation, especially because the C♯-major harmony that concludes the final movement is likewise “undercut,” as discussed above. It is quite interesting, then, that Kerman’s 1967 analysis—so profoundly influential on later writers such as Kinderman—concludes with an opposite interpretation. Even more interesting is that in “Opus 131 and the Uncanny,” written four decades after his book on the quartets was published, Kerman seems to have changed his mind:

It is true that op. 131 does not end heroically in the major mode, with affirmation, or tragically in the minor, with defiance. It ends with plagal accents of pathos, albeit with the addition of a sudden fortissimo whiplash in the last bars.

He later adds that the coda “promises . . . defiant apotheosis, but . . . fails to deliver. What happens is much more equivocal.”

Worth mentioning is Kerman’s stated purpose for writing his essay: to dispute, on an interpretive level, Theodor Adorno’s claim that the finale of Op. 131 is a “‘Late Work without Late Style’” (also the name of Adorno’s chapter that Kerman addresses). This complements my observation on the nature of scholarly dissent—namely that differences of opinion generally emerge from the discussion of how to interpret the well-established

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84 Kerman, “Opus 131 and the Uncanny,” 262.
85 Ibid., 275.
qualitative traits of the quartet. My investigation has revealed, in fact, a striking lack of serious disagreement about what those qualitative characteristics are and whether they exist.

Chief among those traits is unity, and many writers have found Op. 131 to be the most unified of all of Beethoven's works, the paragon, indeed, of musical coherence. Here is Tovey, for whom unity, like a hologram, is characterized by the reflection of the parts in the whole and the whole in the parts:

This essay deals with form, and therefore does not profess to discuss emotional contents. But true form is as inseparable from emotional contents as the plot of a play. What, after all, is the strictest possible notion of form? Are there any pieces of music so constructed that a complete definition of their form will account for every note? Would not such pieces achieve the theoretical ultimate possibility in the way of strictness? Strange to say, this is no mere theoretical possibility. . . . The forms of Beethoven's last works show, the more we study them, a growing approximation to that Bach-like condition in which the place of every note can be deduced from the scheme. . . . As to the 'strictness' of poor Spohr's projected set of quartets with shakes at the end of the passages, it compares with the strictness of Beethoven's C sharp minor Quartet as railway trains in a fog compare with stars in their courses.87

And Kerman:

87 Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven's Art Forms,” 297.
The uniqueness of this quartet lies exactly in the mutual dependence of its contrasted parts, or as some will prefer to put it, in their organic interrelation.... The Quartet in C♯ minor is the most deeply integrated of all Beethoven’s compositions. ... In Beethoven’s œuvre, this work stands out as the paradigm of expressive coherence and “mutual service” among all parts and all elements.\textsuperscript{88}

Yet despite the scholarly focus on unity in Op. 131, many writers have also mentioned what I have referred to as the work’s “hodge-podge,” a characteristic that the composer hyperbolized in his joking letter to the publisher. “What may have amused Beethoven is the thought that this most integrated of compositions would appear to the uninitiated as a confused potpourri, particularly with the suggestion to that effect from him himself,” offers Kinderman.\textsuperscript{89}

But even if Beethoven exaggerated for the sake of personal amusement, there does seem to have been some truth to his jesting letter to the publisher. He is reported to have said of Op. 131, in fact, “Thank God there is less lack of fantasy than ever before.”\textsuperscript{90} As Kinderman points out, Beethoven’s use of the word “fantasy” here is telling, as his music had sometimes been criticized in his day for “formlessness” as a result of “his alleged overindulgence in fantasy.”\textsuperscript{91} It seems quite likely, therefore, that Beethoven was fully conscious of Op. 131’s “hodge-podge,” and it also seems likely that this quality is

\textsuperscript{88} Kerman, \textit{The Beethoven Quartets}, 326, 376.
\textsuperscript{89} Kinderman, \textit{Beethoven}, 361.
\textsuperscript{90} Kinderman, “Beethoven’s Last Quartets: Threshold to a Fourth Creative Period?” 317.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 309.
directly related to Beethoven’s decision to physically number the movements, an action that acknowledges their simultaneous disparateness and interdependence.

Writers have explained this heterogeneity in a number of ways, such as pointing to the often unexpected and sometimes startling transitions between movements and discussing the recitative-like nature of the third and sixth (certainly more convincing in the case of the third than the sixth, the latter being strictly metered and in a binary form). Truscott takes a different perspective on the issue, finding that “the work, thematically, has a good many quotations from [Beethoven’s] own earlier works.”92 He details quite a few examples, one of which actually traces what Kerman calls the “uncanny” theme back to the C-minor string trio from Op. 9.93

The most commonly addressed “hodge-podgy” element, however, is simply the extremely varied nature of the movements, their keys, and their dispositions. As Kinderman puts it, “The fugue and finale . . . act like stern outer columns framing a fantastic range of diverse inner episodes.”94 Even the writers that do not mention this diversity generally discuss the character of the individual movements, labeling the fugue tragic, the scherzo humorous, and the finale dramatic. And it should come as no surprise, having examined in some detail unity as an underlying theme of Op. 131 scholarship, that writers have often viewed this variedness as cooperative with, or even reflective of, the work’s inner coherence. Radcliffe writes:

Certainly it would be hard to find any other work of [Beethoven’s] containing so wide a range of mood. . . . It may be that the C♯ minor Quartet contains

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92 Truscott, 100.
93 Ibid., 103.
94 Kinderman, Beethoven, 355.
nothing that makes quite as overwhelming an impact as the Cavatina from Op 130. But taken as a whole, it may be said to be at the same time the more varied and the more closely unified of the two quartets.\textsuperscript{95} Kerman agrees: “The seven movements of [Op. 131] employ six [keys]… This diversity is another sign of the integrative powers that Beethoven brought to bear on the Quartet in C\# minor.”\textsuperscript{96} Even Kerman’s chapter title, “Dissociation and Integration,” is quite telling. Since the diverse keys in Op. 131 are all part of the C\#-minor family, and since each movement, though thematically and expressively different from the others, gives up part of its independence for the sake of the whole work and flows continuously (without pause) into the next, it is easy to comprehend why critics often connect the quartet’s “hodge-podge” to its cohesiveness, despite the apparent paradox inherent in such an undertaking.

With a solid historiographical understanding of the critical discourse surrounding Op. 131, one sees clearly that Tovey’s seemingly paradoxical ideas of “normality” and “freedom” in the quartet both build on prior work and, more importantly, have found almost unanimous acceptance in scholarly writing since. His bipartite conception of “normality” as, firstly, internally (“freely”) generated coherence, and secondly, the fulfillment of certain externally dependent expectations, is something that writers such as Truscott, Kerman, Kinderman, and Lockwood have subsequently discussed in various ways in relation to Op. 131, and often with direct reference to Tovey, though usually with terminology that differs from his.

\textsuperscript{95} Radcliffe, 164.

\textsuperscript{96} Kerman, \textit{The Beethoven Quartets}, 328.
CHAPTER 3

“NORMALITY” AND “FREEDOM” IN THE TWO-MOVEMENT PIANO SONATAS

Given the success of Tovey’s ideas about “normality” and “freedom” in Op. 131, one of Beethoven’s most structurally atypical pieces, it seems worthwhile to apply similar principles to analyses of some of Beethoven’s other structurally abnormal works. I will first focus on the two-movement piano sonatas, Opp. 54, 78, 90 and 111, all mature compositions. I ignore the Op. 49 works not because they are unworthy of study, but because they are arguably more sonatinas than sonatas, for which expectations of a Beethoven piano sonata consequently have less relevance. And what are these expectations? The most immediately obvious one is a three- or four-movement structure, an expectation that Beethoven clearly leaves unfulfilled in these pieces, at least on the surface. I will show, however, that Beethoven hints at the “missing movements” in various ways, much as Tovey finds in Op. 131’s seven movements a skeleton of the expected and more “normal” four. One expects the form of the first movement to be sonata, and that of the last either sonata or rondo (or a combination thereof). One expects contrast—of mood, texture, tempo, rhythm, and otherwise—between movements, as well as some connections and coherence within and between them. One expects, possibly above all, what Tovey terms “dramatic fitness, . . . implying action.”

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97 Tovey, “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” 275.
The first piece to consider in light of “normality” is Beethoven’s F-major sonata, Op. 54. As Martha Frolich and others have stressed, contrast is a central theme of this work. In the first movement, the melodious quasi-minuet (I will call this “A”) is abruptly juxtaposed with the harsh, triplet-laden quasi-trio (“B”) in two-part counterpoint. The overall structural plan amounts essentially to a Haydnesque double variation form: A (mm. 1–24), B (mm. 24–69), A’ (mm. 69–93), B’ (mm. 93–105), A” (mm. 105–36), coda (mm. 136–54). With each return of the A section, rhythmic diminution ensues, and while the second B section is considerably shorter than the first, the final A section is actually extended by sequence, leading to a cadenza-like passage with trills before the coda. The effect is that the minuet subtly and gracefully intensifies as the ever ill-mannered trio makes an early and awkward exit, losing its potency quite unexpectedly.

After the cadenza, whose time-suspending quality provides a moment to reflect on the amusing balancing act just played out between the conflicting sections, the “climax occurs in the coda with a fusion of these two themes and the surprising preeminence of the more dainty minuet.” With the triplets of the trio now serving only as pedal accompaniment, the humor vanishes, and the minuet’s moving melody is finally given room to sing, succeeding at last in hushing its impetuous counterpart. To drive the point home, Beethoven grants the trio’s triplets one last fortissimo interjection on a diminished ninth chord (m. 148), but since he now so thoroughly prepares and resolves the outburst—rhythmically, dynamically, texturally, registrally, and phrasally—the impression is no

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98 Martha Frohlich, “Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in F Major Op. 54, Second Movement: The Final Version and Sketches,” The Journal of Musicology 18, no. 1 (Winter, 2001): 100. This is a highly informative article, not only for its content but also for its plethora of relevant footnotes.

99 Ibid., 101.
longer one of impulsiveness, but rather one of resigned if rough-edged integration into the minuet's song (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Op. 54/I, mm. 133–154 (coda).
This movement, in its synthesis of conflicting forces, perfectly illustrates Tovey’s notion of “mutual service.” As such it is quite “normal,” despite its unique (or “free”) form. It also possesses qualities typically reserved for inner movements. Variation technique, for example, is more characteristic of slow movements than opening ones, and dances like the minuet are likewise almost always found somewhere in the middle of a work. That the movement is not in a sonata form is particularly odd; of Beethoven’s other piano sonatas, only three begin with a movement not in sonata form, and two of them (the Op. 27 duo) bear the explanatory subtitle, “quasi una Fantasia.” Even so, the movement is full of drama, as I have demonstrated.

Op. 54’s second movement contrasts greatly with the first in that it lacks contrast. That is, its sixteenth-note perpetual motion and nearly monothematic two-voice contrapuntal texture give it a kind of rhythmic and motivic uniformity. Sudden and frequent dynamic changes, idiosyncratic accents, and far-reaching harmonic exploration keep the music interesting and are certainly more responsible for its “dramatic fitness” than is its sonata form. Its form, in fact, is hardly recognizable at first as sonata, as Frohlich explains:

A perpetuum mobile that sounds more like an étude or toccata than a sonata-form, the movement exhibits an architectural plan that is singularly appropriate for furthering this strategy. While the first half is unusually terse (the exposition is 20 mm., or 40 mm. with the repeat), the second half is extremely long (the development is 94 mm.; the recapitulation is 47 mm., and the whole 141 measures are repeated); finally, the coda is 27 mm., only
slightly longer than half the size of the repeated exposition. The overall proportions are thus in a distorted relationship of 1:7:\(\frac{1}{2}\).\(^{100}\)

Even with its repetition, the exposition elapses so quickly that it sounds more like a rondo theme. That the transition between the tonic and dominant regions is itself motivic and the source of much future development heightens the formal inconspicuousness of the movement.

Given the brevity of the exposition and the unrestrained harmonic meanderings thereafter, the first-time listener stands little chance of retaining a tonal memory of the F-major tonic through the development. The opening theme is as short as a rondo’s, but unlike a rondo’s, this one does not return periodically in its home key to orient one’s tonal sense. Consequently, the recapitulation (m. 115) does not sound much like one, especially with its many divergences from the movement’s beginning; the quirky sforzandi from the exposition, for example, have disappeared, roving harmonies abound (see mm. 130–51), and the second theme is not even recapitulated in the tonic key! Beethoven cleverly saves this last stroke for the very end of the coda. (Interestingly, he had recently employed a similar strategy in the first movement of the more popular “Waldstein” sonata, Op. 53.)

In both movements, then, formal ambiguity plays a significant role. Perhaps Beethoven finds that a rather “free,” multivalent structural approach to one or both movements of a two-movement work somewhat compensates for the “missing” middle, either by directly evoking inner-movement attributes or by leaving unfulfilled certain expectations of an opening or a finale, thereby undercutting, respectively, its “beginningness” or “endness.” The dizzying second movement of Op. 54, for instance, lacks

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\(^{100}\) Ibid., 102.
the contrast and formal perspicuity or tangibility one would expect of a sonata-allegro or rondo finale, and the music is less end-like for it. It does, however, contrast greatly with the first movement, as expected, but the movements are also related: the second movement’s *dolce* rhythmic vigor seems to derive from the first movement’s synthesis of the tuneful minuet and unruly trio, and, moreover, the trio’s accentuated two-part canonic texture foreshadows the finale.

The movements of another bipartite sonata, Op. 78 in F♯, too, are quite contrasted. While the first, in a clear-cut sonata form, has been described as fantasy-like,101 “idyllic,”102 and “one of Beethoven’s rare works that depend entirely on lyrical charm,”103 the second, full of scherzo-like wit, is distinguished by staccato, fragmented phrasing. If the second movement brings to mind a dance movement, then the first, with its uncharacteristic lyricism, is rather evocative of a slow movement. Its short introductory Adagio cantabile, out of which the movement’s entire motivic material sprouts, reinforces this reminiscence (see Figure 6).104

Charles Rosen is quite keen on the Adagio, but for different reasons altogether: It is like no other introduction – or, rather, it is not an introduction at all, but a fragment of an independent slow movement. It is a fragment only because it is too short to exist on its own, but it is, indeed, complete. In fact, that is why it is not an introduction: in an eighteenth-century classical form, an

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104 See L. Kramer, 43.
introduction is never complete. There are no models or precedents for these opening bars, and they have never been successfully imitated.\textsuperscript{105}

![Adagio cantabile.](image)

Figure 6. Op. 78/I, mm. 1–4.

Rosen boldly suggests that the first four bars of the work are “not an introduction,” despite their deep motivic connection with the rest of the movement. The notion that they are akin to an “independent slow movement” by virtue of being more “complete” than a typical introduction is probably an exaggeration, but the sentiments that motivate Rosen to hyperbole here are insightful nevertheless, and further strengthen my assertion that the first movement has something of a “missing” inner slow movement about it.

Lawrence Kramer has written convincingly on the motivic content of Op. 78, demonstrating not only how the Adagio introduction and the first movement proper are linked, but also how the second movement parodies elements of the first in an instance of what he calls “expressive doubling.”\textsuperscript{106} The opening gestures of the second movement, for example, humorously rework the dotted rhythms and stepwise motion so emblematic of the first movement and its introduction. Particularly comical in these phrases is their commencing with augmented sixth harmonies, as in the very first chord of the movement. This specific type of dissonance had special climactic significance in the first movement,

\textsuperscript{105} R. Rosen, \textit{Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion}, 197.

\textsuperscript{106} L. Kramer, 44–45.
when the second theme area was approached (mm. 26, 85), and the opening forte chords of
the finale unambiguously bring to mind the interjectory harmonies in the second theme
area of the Allegro ma non troppo (mm. 31–32, 33–34, 90–91, 92–93). The second
movement is therefore in a sort of dialogue with the first, simultaneously celebrating and
poking fun at its idyllic introspectiveness. Elaine Sisman has observed that the narrative
quality of the first movement “returns with an image of peroration” in the sustained chords
in mm. 175–77 of the finale, the last one rolled and sounding like “the bard’s harp”;\textsuperscript{107} one
could add, though, that Beethoven brings back the first movement’s lyrical mood as early as
m. 150, when the music takes a new decidedly legato turn, but the recollection proves to be
merely tongue-in-cheek, and the ultimate six bars that take the listener suddenly back to
the finale’s original rollicking disposition are like a nudge in the ribs. Tovey might regard
such “mutual service” between the two contrasting movements as quite “normal.”

It is fitting that a movement with so much wit and irony eludes straightforward
formal classification. Kramer has called the finale a sonata form,\textsuperscript{108} Rosen has called it an
“eccentric rondo form,”\textsuperscript{109} and Malcolm Cole, hesitant to call it a sonata-rondo form, has
instead listed it in a table headed, “Finales of questionable formal structure.”\textsuperscript{110} As with the
first movement of Op. 54, there seems to be some multivalency at work here. Although Op.
78 contains only two movements, it is pregnant with features evocative of the inner
movements that a more “normal” sonata would contain.

\textsuperscript{107} Sisman, 95–96.
\textsuperscript{108} L. Kramer, 40.
\textsuperscript{109} Rosen, \textit{Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion}, 200.
While Cole has difficulty formally pigeonholing the finale of Op. 78, he has no
trouble whatsoever with the finale of Beethoven’s E-minor piano sonata, Op. 90, which he
labels a straightforward sonata-rondo. As he explains, in fact, both Tovey and Vincent
D’Indy considered it a model of the form, and Cole treats it as such throughout his article on
unexpected elements in Beethoven’s sonata-rondo finales.\textsuperscript{111} In discussing all of the ways
he can conceive of in which Beethoven inserts surprises into such movements, he finds
none of them at all in the second movement of Op. 90. At one point, Cole even finds its
absence of surprise surprising: in most sonata-rondos, Beethoven varies the main theme’s
reprise after the central couplet, so “the literal restatement of the leisurely, 32-measure
reprise of the Sonata, Op. 90 functions as a reverse surprise (beg. meas. 140).”\textsuperscript{112}

Despite the expressively lyrical world it inhabits, the second movement does bear
some relation to the tragic first movement in sonata form—or rather, despite its tragic
character, the first movement does occasionally reveal glimpses, however brief, of the
sweeter music to come in the finale. These glimpses do not come in the second theme
group, which is where one would normally expect to find such passages in a minor-key
sonata form, but rather in the middle of the first theme area (mm. 8–16 in the exposition;
mm. 151–59 in the recapitulation), and again when this material appears in the
development (beginning in m. 108). The gentle major-key detours these short sections take
foreshadow the second movement generally, but as Kramer points out, the counterpoint in
these passages strikingly resembles specific transitional moments in the finale (mm. 212–

\begin{flushend}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 234.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 255.}

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21, 266–75), especially in the use of repeated notes in the upper voice as phrasal connective tissue.\textsuperscript{113}

The autograph manuscript of Op. 90, a source only made available to scholars in the early 1990s when it was acquired by the Beethoven-Haus (and subsequently published thereunder in facsimile with commentary by Michael Ladenburger in 1993), reveals yet another fleeting instant of foreshadowing in the first movement: in m. 164, the bass note on beat one should be a G\# dotted half (nearly all editions incorrectly give G for the first two beats, with G\# coming only on beat three as a chromatic passing tone) (see Figure 7). In his recent edition of the piano sonatas, Barry Cooper commendably restores the G\# dotted half note and in his commentary helpfully provides a photographic reproduction of the relevant page from the autograph. His explanation is convincing and concludes with a thought about the foreshadowing nature of the accidental:

After 20 bars of \textit{come sopra} [“as above,” a shorthand indicating that portions of the recapitulation should simply replicate parallel passages from the exposition], Beethoven suddenly diverges from the exposition for this single chord (and \textit{cres:} sign), before further \textit{come sopra}. . . . Unfortunately, the original engraver ignored this divergence, simply continuing the \textit{come sopra} instruction, and so 164.lh matches 21.lh in [the first edition]. This error was overlooked during the proofreading, and persists in almost all modern editions. The \#, which is unmistakable though rather untidy in [the autograph

\textsuperscript{113} L. Kramer, 47–48.
score], creates a wonderfully unexpected sound, and provides the first

Figure 7. Op. 90/I, mm. 146–67 (autograph score); G♮ in bass is clearly visible in the third bar of the last system.

Aside from those few passages that foreshadow the finale’s character, the first
movement is relentlessly dramatic and stormy, its second theme group staying in a minor
key in both the exposition and the recapitulation. Yet there is an unusual stop-and-go
quality about the opening material that undercuts this movement’s “beginningness,” as
evidenced by the expressive dynamic changes, ritardandos, and fermatas that abound.
Rosen in this regard is fascinated especially by Beethoven’s decision to conclude the first
theme area with a “complete tonic close and a pause,” which “he generally avoided, except in slow movements [emphasis added]”;¹¹⁵ the very gestures that in combination weaken the “beginningness” of this short but extraordinarily weighty opening also supply its multivalency, imported as they are from Beethoven’s “normal” inner-movement lexicon. It is little wonder, then, that Beethoven chose to pair the movement with such an unfussy finale—another movement that Kramer deems “idyllic”¹¹⁶—that effectively relieves the music of its unease. Cole identifies the finales of Opp. 7 and 22 as other examples of lyrical rondos,¹¹⁷ but both of those sonatas have four movements! In Op. 90, the overly simple and lyrical sonata-rondo finale is made possible by an exceedingly powerful opening movement whose “dramatic fitness” renders inner movements unnecessary. And though there is indeed something “idiosyncratic”¹¹⁸ about the sonata, there is also a tangible dualistic logic to it, a synthesis of contrasting forces that is unique but nonetheless perfectly “normal” in a Toveyian sense.

I turn now to Op. 111, one of Beethoven’s most famous late works for piano. Fugal textures dominate much of the first movement, which, like the first movement of Op. 90, is volatile and dramatic. Like so many C-minor works by the Viennese Classicists, this movement is very much about struggle, emphasizes diminished-seventh harmonies, juxtaposes the third and raised seventh scale degrees, features A♭ major as a secondary key area, and ends in the parallel major, which in this case serves to transition smoothly into the C-major second movement.

¹¹⁵ Rosen, Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion, 208.
¹¹⁶ L. Kramer, 47.
¹¹⁷ Cole, 241.
The second movement provides great contrast, being at first perfectly static and serene. Unlike the other movements I have examined, this one does not merely hint at “missing” middle movements; the Arietta is the middle movements! It is simultaneously a slow movement in variation form, a dance movement in triple meter, and a finale to end all finales. That it is a slow movement and a finale is obvious enough, but one could conceivably argue that the Adagio tempo is just too slow for the Arietta to also be considered a dance. But as Rosen has pointed out:

The contour of the theme . . . resembles in many respects the waltz that Diabelli sent to so many Central European composers in 1819, asking each of them to contribute one variation for a charity publication. It would not be unfair to say that Beethoven profoundly reshaped Diabelli’s theme for his sonata . . . Unless we think that the extraordinary resemblance of the Arietta to Diabelli’s waltz is entirely coincidental – and this is unlikely since he worked at both of them around the same time – we must admit that not only did Beethoven realize that he could create a grand work with Diabelli’s trashy tune, but he also, perhaps unconsciously, rethought the principal elements of the tune into a melody of great beauty.¹¹⁹

So although the Arietta is slow, Beethoven in all likelihood conceived it as a transformed dance. As the variations progress through a series of rhythmic diminution, the dancelike character becomes quite apparent.

Several features of the finale hark back to the first movement, but before exploring these relationships, some elements of the first movement alone should be considered. The

¹¹⁹ Rosen, Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion, 246, 248.
Allegro is nearly monothematic, given the brevity of its secondary theme. When, in the recapitulation, the second theme is expanded, its material refers back to the introductory Maestoso, and Beethoven wastes little time in transforming it into the closing group at m. 135, which is simply a varied version of the primary theme. Throughout the movement, in other words, the main theme is inescapable, not terribly unlike the so-called “fate” motive is in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony, also in C minor. The technique in both instances strongly suggests inevitability. If, as Robert Hatten has suggested, the theme of Op. 111’s second movement is an “extreme case” of a sacred hymnal style, then perhaps the insistent first movement represents a struggle with the acceptance of mortality.\(^{120}\)

The finale offers a spiritual solution to the first movement’s existential anguish. Any variation form is inherently unified by its theme, but there is more happening here. The movement culminates, for instance, in two partial variations with addenda (mm. 130–61, 161–78), each of which synthesizes elements of previous variations (e.g., thirty-second triplets, extreme registral contrast, and extended trilling). And some of the musical elements one encounters throughout the movement can be traced back to the opening movement: the long-short-long rhythms that characterize the middle variations, as well as the theme’s upbeats, derive both from the dotted and double-dotted rhythms in the Maestoso and from the Allegro’s secondary theme; sforzandi in mm. 26–28, 67–68, and 144–47 of the first movement presage those in the Arietta’s third variation; and the ominous trill on G that rumbles in the bass in the transition from the Maestoso to the Allegro has its counterpart, of course, at the end of the second movement, when the extended trill on G occurs in the high registral extreme.

\(^{120}\) Hatten, 14.
Expectedly, each of the sonatas I have examined demonstrates “mutual service” of its conflicting parts in a unique, or “free,” manner, such that it possesses “normality” in one sense that Tovey describes. My search, though, was also for the aspects of “normality” that involve the fulfillment of certain expectations based on convention. In all four of the two-movement piano sonatas considered, Beethoven compensates for the “missing” inner movements by imbuing one (or both) of the extant movements with multivalent qualities that challenge expectations of a conventional beginning or ending, or at least hint at the absent middle movements. Much as Tovey “normalized” the abnormal seven-movement structure of Op. 131, I have used his principles to demonstrate the “normality” embedded in these abnormal two-movement works.
CHAPTER 4

“NORMALITY” AND “FREEDOM” IN THE BAGATELLES OF OP. 119

Applying Tovey’s concepts to Beethoven’s Op. 119 bagatelles is more complicated. That there was very little precedent for that genre before Beethoven makes examining the extent to which Op. 119 fulfills expectations quite challenging, if not altogether moot. Lewis Lockwood’s concise outline of the early history of the bagatelle is worth perusing:

The term “bagatelle” from the French means “trifle” but also refers to a game something like billiards, played with four to nine balls on a flat table with cups at the corners. The word was rare in music before Beethoven. It first appeared in a few French titles in the eighteenth century, for example, a 1717 rondeau by Couperin and a set of dances issued by the publisher Boivin around 1753. Later, and more relevantly for Beethoven, a certain Carl Wilhelm Maizier issued a set of Musikalische Bagatellen in 1797 that combine dance pieces with songs. But Beethoven was the first to use the term for detached, short piano pieces, at first for his collection of seven Bagatelles pour le Pianoforte (using the French form of the term), Opus 33, published in 1803 by the Viennese Bureau d’Arts et d’Industrie.121

So the bagatelle was far from a firmly established genre in Germany when Beethoven reinvented it in his Opp. 33, 119, and 126. There is thus little to discuss in terms of the fulfillment of expectations as part of “normality” in Op. 119, at least in terms of structure and form.

121 Lockwood, 395.
Investigating the other half of Tovey’s “normality”—“freely” internally generated coherence—also poses a challenge in the case of Op. 119. Its eleven individual bagatelles are too disparate and varied to be approached in the same manner as the dramatically interconnected movements of, say, a quartet or sonata by Beethoven. Yet, compared with the bagatelles of Op. 33, those of Op. 119 are generally considerably shorter and surely less independent overall. One must therefore take care to neither overstate nor understate the extent to which (and the ways in which) Op. 119 demonstrates unity among its parts. Unfortunately, the work’s compositional and publication history is rather muddled, which makes comprehending even Beethoven’s most basic intentions very difficult.

The case has often been made that Op. 119 consists of two distinct collections of bagatelles—nos. 1–6 and nos. 7–11—whose pairing resulted not from artistic considerations, but rather from chance or convenience. Nos. 7–11 were first published together in Vienna, June 1821; over the following two years the composer (unsuccessfully) marketed as a group various configurations of then unpublished bagatelles sketched much earlier, ultimately settling on what are now known as nos. 1–5 of Op. 119 with a newly-composed closing piece, no. 6. On a fundamental level, then, Beethoven surely conceived of nos. 7–11 and nos. 1–6 as independent assemblages.

Yet the fact remains that in late February 1823, when Beethoven dispatched nos. 1–6 to Ferdinand Ries for publication in England, he sent with them nos. 7–11 as well, writing to his former pupil, “You are also receiving six bagatelles or trifles, and again another five, which belong together, in two parts.” As Nicholas Marston points out, Beethoven’s wording is rather vague, especially in the original unpunctuated German (“zugleich

erhalten Sie sechs Bagatellen oder Kleinigkeiten und wieder fünf zusammengehörend in zwei Teile"; was Beethoven indicating that the “two parts” “belong together?” Or that nos. 1–6 “belong together,” as do nos. 7–11?

Understandably, modern scholarship has almost universally sided with the latter interpretation. And perhaps the question is moot, given that Beethoven instructed Ries, somewhat indifferently, "Dispose of them as favorably as you can." But if one is concerned with analyzing the bagatelles and better understanding the composer’s conception (or conceptions) of them, then one should investigate the possibility that Beethoven had, indeed, considered that an English firm might be more willing to publish a larger set of trifles than a mere handful of them, and accordingly sent all eleven bagatelles to be published together (“in two parts”) for that reason. This possibility is consistent with the fact that Beethoven waited until he had a more substantial musical offering—some twenty months after their initial Viennese publication—to send nos. 7–11 to England.

Such an interpretation would take into account the trouble Beethoven encountered trying to sell nos. 1–6 Continentally from the summer of 1822 onward, and that said difficulty evidently predates the composition of the concluding sixth bagatelle in late November of the same year. This being the case, it is plausible (pending an examination of internal evidence) that Beethoven composed no. 6 not merely as a finale to nos. 1–5, as

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125 See Anderson, vol. 2, L. 1091 for Beethoven’s unfruitful correspondence with Diabelli regarding these works; see Anderson, vol. 2, L. 1079 for the June 1822 start of Beethoven’s rocky back-and-forth with C. F. Peters over the bagatelles, which can be further traced through Anderson, Ls. 1085, 1092, 1100, 1106, 1111, 1137, 1145, and 1324.

has previously been assumed, but also with the prospect of linking them with nos. 7–11 to create a larger batch, albeit one “in zwei Teile,” that would be not only more profitable for himself, but also more attractive to a publisher. Judging by the indifference he expressed to Ries, Beethoven probably did not care whether or not his English publisher (Clementi, as it turned out) actually published the bagatelles in this manner, but if he felt that eleven trifles would sell more easily than five or six, he may well have wished to leave the option open.

In any case, when Beethoven wrote to Ries that he was “quite satisfied” with the pay received from the bagatelles, he was likely aware that they had been published as one collection.\(^{127}\) And when, in 1824, he informed the Archduke Rudolph that the latter would soon receive the trifles, Beethoven gave no indication that his esteemed musician-friend should regard them as two distinct sets.\(^{128}\) Granted, by this time the Op. 119 bagatelles had appeared in at least one, and maybe two, Continental editions, but as Alan Tyson demonstrates, these publications were unauthorized reproductions of Clementi’s;\(^ {129}\) so regardless of the edition that the Archduke Rudolph was to receive, it would have included all eleven compositions, ordered and numbered as they today still are—and Beethoven surely would have known this.

“It was not normally possible,” Barry Cooper writes, “to sell works to two different Continental publishers because they tended to compete for the same market.”\(^ {130}\) Since nos. 7–11 had already been published in Vienna, Beethoven would not have authorized

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128 Ibid., L. 1339.
publication of all eleven pieces together Continentally. The foreseeable objection that Beethoven marketed nos. 1–6 alone on the mainland is consequently inconsequential. A more valid one is that even if Beethoven mailed all eleven bagatelles to Ries as a safety-in-numbers strategy, he may not have considered doing so until after completing no. 6, in which case there would be no reason to suspect that no. 6 was conceived both as a finale to nos. 1–5 and as a link to nos. 7–11.

To effectively address the question, one must examine the internal evidence, which is fortunately quite revealing. The matter hinges most crucially, though not exclusively, on nos. 6 and 7. Dominant–tonic key relations between successive pieces are surprisingly rare in Beethoven's late bagatelle collections, there being none at all in Op. 126. That the key areas of nos. 6 and 7 in Op. 119 (G major and C major, respectively) form such a continuity-friendly relationship, then, does not necessarily indicate intended linkage. There is, however, one other instance in Op. 119 of a dominant–tonic transition between adjacent bagatelles: the G-minor no. 1 ends on a plagal cadence in the parallel major (or is it an unresolved suspended authentic cadence in the subdominant?), which functions as dominant to no. 2's C-major tonic. The subtleties of this joint have been well described by Barry Cooper, who also notes that “the keys of the first two, G minor and C major, are neatly balanced by those of [nos. 5 and 6], C minor and G major.”\(^{131}\) If one considers that Beethoven may have written no. 6 with both nos. 1–5 and nos. 7–11 in mind, one can supplement Cooper's statement with the observation that the G major–C major transition between nos. 1 and 2 is duplicated by the G major–C major transition between nos. 6 and 7.

\(^{131}\) B. Cooper, *Beethoven and the Creative Process*, 268, 272.
Aside from a smooth tonal shift between them that recalls exactly an earlier one, nos. 6 and 7 exhibit other characteristics that merit present consideration. The beginnings of no. 6’s Allegretto leggermente (see Figure 8)—that bagatelle’s main section—and no. 7 (see Figure 9) both feature a tonic pedal point in the bass. In each piece, the low tonic pedal disappears as intermediary material is introduced, only to return with renewed import—as a trill in the case of no. 7—just after the main theme is restored (no. 6: mm. 33–43; no. 7: mm. 17–27). At this moment, something rather special yet characteristic of Beethoven’s late piano music happens in no. 7: the theme undergoes what William Kinderman calls a process of “Verwandlung, understood as transformation or metamorphosis . . . capable of shifting levels, projecting a change of kind rather than degree, and fundamentally altering thereby the basic qualities of a phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{132} More specifically:

The remainder of [no. 7] is the realization of a gradual intensification through several means: a rise in pitch in the treble through the whole tonal space; a process of rhythmic diminution, with subdivisions and faster and faster motion; and of course a long crescendo, reaching fortissimo at the climax at the beginning of the last measure, whereupon the accumulated energy begins to be dissolved through the cessation of the trill and the falling back across five octaves of this tail-end of the chain of figuration that had been built up.\textsuperscript{133}


Figure 8. Op. 119, no. 6, mm. 6–end.
Figure 8 (cont.).

Figure 9. Op. 119, no. 7.
Kinderman likens these final eleven bars to “a conflagration” that “rapidly builds and then consumes the musical structure, bringing about the decisive ending.”¹³⁴ Note the stress Beethoven places on thirds throughout this transformative process, and that they are at first presented mostly vertically but become progressively more horizontal, as though the individual voices, which along the way coalesce into one compound line, are being stretched out or, to borrow an evocative astrophysics term, “spaghettified.”

With this in mind, I will now consider the parallel passage in no. 6 in which its main theme and low tonic pedal reappear (beginning in m. 33). Here, as in the similar spot in no. 7, one finds a crescendo. The pedal Gs are momentarily syncopated, which Beethoven emphasizes by briefly shifting up an octave what in bars 6–10 was the middle voice, thus harmonizing it with the upper melody at a third (rather than a tenth or sixth) below; the syncopated Gs, thereby left alone in the bass clef, heighten registral contrast by dipping down an octave lower than their non-syncopated counterparts at the beginning of the bagatelle. When the syncopation ends just a few beats later, the middle voice returns to the bass clef and introduces a new chromatic element (F♭). All of this gives the phrase, repeated once almost verbatim, an anticipatory and perhaps even nervous energy, as well as establishing an emphasis on thirds akin to that in no. 7 described above.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 209.
In bar 37, the main theme is further transformed when the middle voice again joins the upper one in the right hand, the tonic pedal plunges yet another octave, and, most noticeably, the rhythm intensifies into an eighth-note triplet pulse. Three measures later, at the change in time signature, the rhythm is treated to a second dose of diminution; the upper voices merge into one compound line, causing the formerly vertical harmonies—thirds, mostly—to sound horizontally.

Virtually the same metamorphic invigoration sequence, or “Verwandlung,” was observed in no. 7. In each bagatelle, the main theme returns with its tonic pedal point, and a series of rhythmic diminutions ensues, supported by crescendo, enhanced registral contrast, increased chromatic coloring, and a “spaghettifying” process by which thirds and other vertical sonorities are unstacked and heard linearly. This all happens progressively in phases, of which there are quite a few in the case of no. 7 but only three in no. 6. Perhaps, then, the passage in no. 6 is merely an example of miniature or quasi-Verwandlung, but the similarity of means between it and the parallel section in no. 7 is conspicuous enough that when listening to the bagatelles consecutively, this listener, at least, recalls the first during the second.

If, as Kinderman indicates, the end of no. 7 is like an inextinguishable fire, then the analogous passage in no. 6 is like a flare that peters out almost harmlessly. Upon coming to an abrupt halt in m. 43, the music starts to sputter like wisps of smoke from a dying flame, and the rhythmic diminution begins a process of reversal. When the original duple meter and anapestic lilt return in m. 55, one senses that the main theme is near, and after a few more bars of sputtering, it comes back sans pedal point but with a new trill figure—a fragment left over from the music’s energized state. Finally, in the concluding four
measures, the pedal Gs reappear and the main theme is heard almost exactly as it first was at the Allegretto, except that Beethoven now writes the right hand an octave higher and adds one last trill halfway through the theme. On the one hand, the music has come full circle and the “fire” has been put out; on the other hand, the registral gap and ornamentation subtly remind the listener of the preceding events, gone but not forgotten. (Perhaps the listener’s brows have been singed!)

The fire simile helps illustrate that nos. 6 and 7 have in common not only Verwandlung, but also, and far more significantly, the means by which the process transpires. Any of the various shared elements alone is not particularly revealing, but in combination they must be reckoned with. Furthermore, a narrative or at least descriptive understanding of the bagatelles, especially in conjunction with the dominant–tonic relation between them, implores one to consider following their combined dramatic flow. Having already examined them individually and compared them, this is not a difficult task. The overzealous and failed invigoration sequence in no. 6 anticlimactically reverses course until the singsong main theme is recapitulated with mere traces of the heightened rhythmic activity in the form of ornamental trills. No. 7, whose Allegro ma non troppo approximates the tempo of no. 6, then begins with an enchanting theme that features revitalizing extended trills on G₄—the very note on which no. 6’s middle voice ended—and after a cadential passage and a bouncy scherzando middle section reminiscent of the anapestic theme in no. 6, the trills resume and usher in a successful and highly climactic invigoration sequence.

In a nutshell, the explosive force of no. 7 is a counterbalancing and satisfying dramatic response to the petering out of no. 6, as is the former’s tonality to the latter’s.
Given the strength of the internal evidence, it is difficult to accept that the connections between these two bagatelles are coincidental, though one must remain open to that possibility.

Expectedly, there are connections, too, between no. 6 and nos. 1–5, and also between no. 7 and nos. 8–11. Barry Cooper has written extensively on the inner workings of nos. 1–6, arguing forcefully for a case of unity. Fundamental to his line of reasoning is that when compiling this group of six pieces in 1822, Beethoven had a working portfolio of at least twelve (and probably fourteen) unpublished bagatelles, dating variously from many years earlier. Cooper points out that of the many trifles in the portfolio, Beethoven attempted to carefully select a handful that would go together well after some revisions, eventually deciding on what are now known as nos. 1–5 (no. 6 was newly composed). The very fact that the composer spent a considerable amount of time and effort choosing and modifying a few bagatelles rightly indicates to Cooper Beethoven’s “desire to produce a coherent series of pieces rather than a random collection of oddments.”

Cooper then examines the internal evidence to support his claim for unity. One of his strongest points is that “the joins between the movements . . . are carefully planned.” As already mentioned, he admirably demonstrates the subtleties in the transition between nos. 1 and 2, but he also, for instance, shows how Beethoven edited the final four bars of no. 2 such that a higher register is reached, providing a sense of continuity to the stratospheric opening of no. 3. Apt, too, are Cooper’s remarks on the overall tonal balance of the six

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136 Ibid., 267–71.
137 Ibid., 271.
138 Ibid., 272.
bagatelles, namely that nos. 1–2 and 5–6, with their G and C key areas, effectively frame the sharp keys of nos. 3 and 4, whose tonic-dominant relationship is further evidence of planned continuity.¹³⁹

Less convincing are his arguments concerning tempo: firstly, that the “moods of the pieces are . . . strongly contrasted, the first five being alternately fast and slow and No. 6 rounding off the pattern by having a slow introduction to a fast movement”; and secondly, that “each piece that begins slowly leads on smoothly from the previous one, while the fast pieces, Nos. 3 and 5, contrast sharply with those preceding them.”¹⁴⁰ While the moods of the pieces are surely contrasted, the trifles’ tempos do not actually alternate between fast and slow. The triplet sixteenth notes throughout no. 2, for example, make the bagatelle’s Andante con moto—not a particularly slow indication to begin with—seem at least as fast as both the Allegretto of no. 1 and l’Allemande (no. 3), whose tempo, though not labeled, may be safely assumed to be moderate or moderately quick. Throughout the six bagatelles, in fact, Beethoven only supplies two types of tempo indications (sometimes with qualifiers), and relatively temperate ones at that: Allegretto in nos. 1 and 6, and Andante in nos. 2 and 4 (and 6’s introduction). Charles Rosen, who has written at length about Beethoven’s tempo indications, has demonstrated that at least for this composer, Allegretto is slower than often thought, and “should be . . . not too far from Andante.”¹⁴¹ And even if no. 5, marked Risoluto, is meant to be one of the fastest of the bunch, its rhythmic drive and intricacies lose their impact at too quick a pace. If the tempos of nos. 1–6 are notable, it is because they are not notable at all!

¹³⁹ Ibid.
¹⁴⁰ Ibid.
Cooper’s claim, then, that no. 6’s combination of slow introduction and Allegretto somehow sums up the diverse tempos of nos. 1–5 is unpersuasive. Certainly more compelling is his observation that the three time signatures of no. 6, one duple, one triple, and one compound, touch on the various meters of the preceding bagatelles.\textsuperscript{142} He also finds in no. 6 “subtle motivic references to the main theme of No. 1”\textsuperscript{143}, while relationships between nos. 1 and 6 do exist (they both begin, for instance, with a dotted upbeat, as he mentions\textsuperscript{144}), Cooper drastically overstates this particular case. To demonstrate that their main themes are similar, he locates in the G-major no. 6 the opening $\hat{5} – \hat{6} – \hat{5} – \hat{4} – \hat{3} – \hat{2}$ melodic sequence of the G-minor no. 1 by selectively choosing mostly neighboring notes from the former’s anapestic principal phrase (mm. 6–8). His attempt to identify such a literal (and ultimately inaudible) thematic connection is a stretch. Cooper’s more basic assertion that “the main theme of No. 6 has approximately the same outline as that of No. 1—a brief rise and longer descent beginning on [D$\flat_5$]” is flawed, as well.\textsuperscript{145} If one counts, in no. 6’s main theme, the first neighboring figure as part of the melodic outline, then one must also count the others, revealing an outline characterized not by “a brief rise and longer descent,” but rather by erratic ups and downs. If one instead ignores the neighboring figures altogether and focuses only on the main accented notes of the melody, one sees a gradual E–C–C–B descent with no initial rise. Either way, Cooper’s analysis of the melodic contour, too, breaks down.

\textsuperscript{142} B. Cooper, \textit{Beethoven and the Creative Process}, 272–73.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 274.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 274–75.
A similar problem plagues his effort to find in mm. 22–25 of no. 6 the melody from no. 1’s middle section, G–G–G–F–(leap up to C)–B♭–A♭–G (mm. 17–19). Even if one overlooks for the moment that B♭ and A♭ in no. 1 are B♭ and A♭ in no. 6, the connection Cooper draws remains questionable. In no. 6, there is a harmonically significant and unignorable E between the F and C, so the leap actually spans an interval of a minor sixth, not a fifth. This is no small detail, as the leap is the most distinguishing feature of the melody at hand. Furthermore, the chordal underpinnings of the relevant passages could hardly be more disparate: while mm. 17–19 of no. 1 consist of a I–IV–V7 progression in Eb, mm. 22–25 of no. 6 developmentally cycle quickly through various harmonies mostly by fifth (A7–d–G7–C–F♯–E7–a–D7–G). The difference is not merely a matter of minor versus major mode, and the correlation on paper Cooper detects here is aurally imperceptible.

Truthfully, dwelling on the shortcomings of Cooper’s analysis is neither easy nor fair, as his landmark work on the Op. 119 bagatelles, and Beethoven’s creative process generally, is first-rate. And yes, nos. 1–6 go together quite nicely as a set, and there are certainly some elements of coherence and continuity among them. But Cooper is too bold in writing that no. 6 “provides the perfect [emphasis added] counterbalance to No. 1,”146 and his overall endorsement of unity in nos. 1–6, though informative and often perceptive, is ultimately rather forced. While he convincingly demonstrates that it would be erroneous to “conclude that Op. 119 consists of a collection of unrelated works,”147 he is not quite

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146 Ibid., 274.
147 Ibid., 276.
justified in positing that it is “best heard—and played—” as two distinct “cycle[s],” “rather than as a group of eleven.”

Perhaps the faults in Cooper’s otherwise brilliant investigation result from what Jonathan Dunsby describes as “a long-standing tradition [of] concentrating on whole pieces of music . . . [that] has diverted our attention from an interest in music in sections which do not make a whole in every sense but which are not entirely unconnected.” To describe such musical entities—groups of related but not completely unified miniatures—Dunsby coins the term “multi-piece” and positions it in a series of “new distinctions—between pieces, multi-movement pieces, multi-pieces and collections,” the last of which would indicate random assemblages of unrelated short works. Though he grants that the “new categorization is really as coarse as the old one,” he adds that the “nature of the unity of [multi-pieces] need not be the same in each case, and it may be this proviso beyond any other that has been forgotten.”

In other words, if a set of short works, such as Op. 119 or its subsets nos. 1–6 and 7–11, shows some signs of cohesion and continuity but not the extent of “organic unity” one would expect from more substantial works by Beethoven, one need not force the issue. And if the multi-piece Op. 126, which Beethoven himself referred to as a “cycle,” seems more unified than the Op. 119 bagatelles, which in turn seem to demonstrate greater overall coherence than those of Op. 33, then that is just fine. Dunsby proposes that musicologists

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148 Ibid.
150 Ibid., 169.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., 187.
acknowledge the intrinsic differences between pieces, multiple-movement pieces, and multi-pieces, but also realize that the gaps between them are spectral in nature, such that one must analyze each work on its own terms without preconceived assumptions of unity.

Dunsby’s views are comparable to Kinderman’s distinction between “synthetic” and “analytical” unity:

The problem lies . . . in a failure to distinguish between a rich, synthetic unity, whereby perceived relationships are carefully tested against the sound of the work, and a merely schematic, analytical unity, whereby a piece is made to conform to a system external to it.153

Both scholars warn against applying a cookie-cutter concept of cohesion to a musical work, and Kinderman adds that if one cannot successfully test aurally the relations one unearths, then one may be barking up the wrong tree, so to speak.

Nicholas Marston, directly influenced by Dunsby’s conception of the multi-piece, offers a detailed and original analysis of Op. 119 nos. 7–11. His most creative assertion is that these five bagatelles possess an overarching key of B♭ major, which is also the key of no. 11. In this interpretation, the C-major tonality of nos. 7 and 8 functions as V/V. To support his position, Marston argues that both nos. 7 and 8 display strong tendencies toward F major (V in B♭) such that an orientation toward B♭ is apparent from the get-go.154

Marston must be applauded for “thinking outside of the box” in approaching nos. 7–11 as a multi-piece, but his overarching-key analysis has its shortcomings. First of all, the A-minor and A-major keys of nos. 9 and 10 (respectively) do not fit into the scheme at all. He

attempts to reconcile this issue by encouraging a viewpoint that simultaneously regards nos. 7–11 in two ways: one in which bagatelle boundaries are ignored (the overarching-key interpretation), and one in which they are not. In the latter perspective, the tonal centers of nos. 7–10, C–C–a–A, form a double-neighboring figure around B♭, the key of no. 11. The double-neighboring figure is significant because, as Marston demonstrates, exactly such a motive can be found internally in all five bagatelles (see his Ex. 7), thus providing a link between the bagatelles individually and the bagatelles as a whole.155

In this view, the key areas of nos. 9 and 10 seem to make sense, but only if one agrees with Marston that the double-neighboring figures truly function as a unifying motivic element. But with the notable exception of their role in no. 7, double-neighbors are actually rather sporadic in these pieces, and typically no more motivically or formally significant than in other works in which such figures appear. And such figures are quite common in Beethoven’s piano music, as it turns out; considering that they can also be identified in all six of the other Op. 119 bagatelles (nos. 1–6), and even in all six of the Op. 126 set, one must conclude that this portion of Marston’s analysis is on shaky ground. (As an interesting aside: of the eleven trifles in Op. 119, nos. 6 and 7, the two that I have drawn connections between at length, feature the double-neighbor most prominently by far.)

Now, even when one ignores the bagatelles’ borders in Marston’s overarching-key perspective, one still must somehow account for the A-minor and A-major tonalities of nos. 9 and 10. Marston rhetorically avoids the problem by stating that one must “adjust [one’s] notions concerning the tonality of individual pieces,”156 yet he himself locates a linear V/V–

155 Ibid., 201–2.
156 Ibid., 204.
V–I progression, a rather “orthodox tonal structure”\textsuperscript{157} by his own admission, cutting through nos. 7–11. As aforementioned, the V/V in his reading is found chiefly in the C-major tonality of nos. 7 and 8, which “push towards F major” but never resolve to it satisfactorily. He then completely skips over nos. 9 and 10 to no. 11, in which the V/V finally resolves satisfactorily to V in mm. 9–10, with a resolution to the tonic Bb coming shortly thereafter. This broad V/V–V–I progression, furthermore, mirrors the tonal design of the microscopic no. 10.\textsuperscript{158}

The connections he draws between nos. 7, 8, and 11 are in many ways quite convincing. His observation that no. 7 “ends on the dominant of F,” with mm. 17–27—the metamorphic passage with the C pedal point—functioning as one long dominant prolongation, is astute.\textsuperscript{159} Perhaps, though, he underestimates in those measures the dizzying effect created by relentless chromaticism, rhythmic diminution, and seemingly endless motivic ascension, and he may also underestimate the forcefulness of the final plateauing cadence on C, which Beethoven milks through arpeggiation and a damper pedal directive with no release (some editions erroneously add a release)—the only damper pedal indication in nos. 7–11, in fact; yet if Marston hears this final C as the dominant of F, he is not unjustified, and he is not alone (Edward Cone seems to be of a similar opinion\textsuperscript{160}).

Nevertheless, neither the A-minor and A-major tonalities of nos. 9 and 10 nor the stark half-step transition from A major to Bb major between nos. 10 and 11 can be adequately reconciled with Marston’s insightful but problematic über-tonic hypothesis.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 197.
Still, one can accept many of the inter-bagatelle connections Marston makes without forcing what does not fit. He is right to point out, for instance, the striking B♭s and pull toward F major in nos. 7 and 8 (see mm. 9–12 in the latter), and also the important Neapolitan harmony in no. 9 (B♭), all of which presage no. 11. And of course he is spot-on in stating that the C-major nos. 7 and 8 form a pair, as do the A-minor and A-major nos. 9 and 10. The 7–8 pair is actually further evidenced in a way that he does not mention: both bagatelles likely derived from Beethoven’s work on the *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120.161 Even if nos. 7–11 are not as unified as Marston claims, his conclusion that they “satisfy to a high degree the criteria for a multi-piece advanced by Dunsby” and should therefore not be regarded merely “as parts of a collection” rings true.162

Both Cooper, in his examination of nos. 1–6, and Marston, in his of nos. 7–11, persuasively demonstrate the existence of cohesive elements in their respective bagatelle bunches, which suggests that Dunsby’s concept of the multi-piece can apply to the “zwei Teile” of Op. 119. Both scholars, however, also overstate their respective positions on unity. Each group independently coheres to some extent, but neither exhibits a degree of “organic unity” that would have precluded Beethoven from composing no. 6 with the intention of linking one batch to the other. Though each group can be considered a multi-piece in itself, the compositional and publication history—as well as the internal musical evidence—suggests that Op. 119 in its entirety can also be considered a legitimate and “authentic” multi-piece.


In other writings, Cooper and Marston have shown greater sensitivity to the potential pitfalls of overstating a case for unity. Cooper’s impressive monograph on Beethoven’s folksong settings deals with song order of those collections in a particularly thoughtful and open-minded way. Using Beethoven’s letters to the publisher George Thomson regarding general song order recommendations as a guide, Cooper concludes that, with the exception of Op. 108, song order in Beethoven’s collections of folksong settings must be left up to the performer:

In performance today, therefore, there is only one ideal order for the songs in Op. 108—the order prescribed by Beethoven in the printer’s copy…. For the remainder there is no ideal order, and neither the manuscripts, nor Thomson’s editions, nor the current numerical order provide a wholly satisfactory sequence. There are many acceptable orders, however, and also many unacceptable ones, and it is essential to avoid the latter. Performers would be well advised to observe Beethoven’s recommendations to vary the key, time, tempo, and character as much as possible, while retaining some sense of tonal relationship between consecutive songs where this is feasible. Juxtaposition of contrasting songs in this manner will provide mutual enhancement of their characters, while avoiding all risk of ‘tasteless monotony’.163

While I would not advocate that pianists choose their own order when performing the Op. 119 bagatelles, I do think Cooper is spot-on in his approach to order in the folksong setting

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collections. He takes great care to accurately assess the extent to which these collections may be considered unified wholes, and when it comes to the controversial issue of unity, I hope to have kept as open a mind in my Op. 119 analysis as Cooper does in his monograph. In his biography of Beethoven, too, he recognizes the necessity for musicologists to approach the issue of unity with caution (see in his index the sub-subentry “unity in dissociation” under the subentry “MUSIC,” filed under “Beethoven”).

Likewise, Marston has written on the importance of balancing unity and disunity in analysis. In a review of Cooper’s and Lockwood’s Beethoven biographies, he acknowledges Cooper’s attempt to consider “dissociation,” but nonetheless criticizes him for considering it too little, and for considering it always within the context of “unity”:

Again and again, from the discussion of the Piano Concerto in C, op. 15 onward (see pp. 54–55), Cooper emphasizes Beethoven's mastery of long-range tonal, motivic, and thematic connection and transformation; even the rarely discussed “Namensfeier” Overture, op. 115, is redeemed through its demonstrating Beethoven’s “customary skill in motivic manipulation, with a two-note falling figure heard in the first bar of both the slow introduction and the main Allegro being developed in all kinds of ingenious ways, even to the extent of generating the second subject” (p. 234). Not all readers will be consistently convinced by Cooper’s examples, though in highlighting this element of his commentary I do not in any way mean to suggest that I regard the techniques at issue as anything other than central in many respects to

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Beethoven’s compositional means. That said, I also want to stress the increasing importance of a drive towards “disunity,” or the confrontation of opposites, particularly in much of the late music. Cooper is alive to this tendency too; in terminology no doubt derived from Kerman’s book on the quartets, he tends to write of “dissociation” and “integration.” But he is uncomfortable with dissociation tout court: even the Fantasia, op. 77, evinces “a sense of gradual progress from instability to stability” and reveals a degree of “motivic cohesion” (p. 187), while in the case of the neue Kraft fühlend episodes of the Heiliger Dankgesang in op. 132, the absolute contrast between these and the modal theme and variations “becomes the unifying factor of the movement: the dissociation is the integration” (p. 329; my emphasis).166

I have quoted these excerpts because although I find both Cooper’s and Marston’s cases for unity in their respective Op. 119 portions somewhat overstated, I do not mean to suggest that this is symptomatic of their writing in general.

In a brief essay summarizing Op. 119, Theo Hirsbrunner claims that a marked stylistic shift occurs not after the sixth trifle of the set, but rather after the fifth.167 Considering that nos. 6–11 were written much later than nos. 1–5, one certainly would expect to find in them more hallmarks of Beethoven’s “late style,” and one does. Note, for example, the searching and pensive quality of nos. 8 and 11, the aforementioned

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Verwandlung processes that take place in nos. 6 and 7, the recitative-like passage in the introduction of no. 6, and the abnormally short length of no. 10. One could argue that Hirsbrunner’s early-Beethoven-late-Beethoven split between nos. 5 and 6, in offering a structural turning point in Op. 119 other than that between nos. 6 and 7, strengthens my case. Perhaps it does. But it would be a mistake to conclude from Hirsbrunner’s observation that there is much stylistic consistency among nos. 1–5 or among nos. 6–11. To the contrary, despite their occasional subtle motivic connections and elements of continuity, the Op. 119 bagatelles generally demonstrate remarkably varied stylistic features.

Jürgen Uhde wrote that of all of Beethoven’s works, Op. 119 is the one for which the question of unity is most difficult to address.168 He finds several subtle motivic connections in the bagatelles, the most notable among them being a recurring sequenced melodic third, which is certainly a more distinctive and therefore convincing unifying gesture than Marston’s double-neighbor figure. In Uhde’s highly original interpretation, Op. 119 consists of three groups, each containing bagatelles in loosely related key areas: nos. 1–4 (whose keys move gradually to the sharp side), nos. 5–10 (whose keys center around C major; as in Marston’s analysis, the A-major no. 10 does not quite fit), and no. 11, in which Uhde identifies motivic echoes of every one of the preceding ten trifles.169 I am inclined to argue that Uhde overstates his case to some extent, like Cooper and Marston, but he chooses his words very carefully and acknowledges that subjective interpretation plays into his analysis. At any rate, I am in agreement with Uhde that Op. 119 presents a formidable

169 Ibid., 1:170–74
interpretive challenge, and that one perfectly valid solution is to regard all eleven miniatures as a multi-piece.

It is entirely plausible that, when writing no. 6, Beethoven’s intentions were to simultaneously conclude nos. 1–5 and leave open for an English publisher the option of connecting them to nos. 7–11. One is reminded of the 1826 essay I quoted in Chapter 2 by the critic known only as “F.”: “The fact that many works of music, even famous ones, have been put together out of several parts, which the author composed at various times and which originally didn’t belong together, cannot negate the claim of criticism that works of art ought to be formed as a perfect whole and developed from one idea.”

Op 119 is no “perfect whole,” and it certainly wasn’t “developed from one idea,” but the fact that its individual parts were “composed at various times and . . . originally didn’t belong together” does not preclude them from together forming a multi-piece. After all, more famous works that show greater cohesion, such as Schubert’s song cycle Winterreise, have similarly complex compositional histories.

Furthermore, although the compositional and publication history of Op. 119 is problematic and ambiguous, one finds that in Beethoven’s oeuvre, other works exist in various legitimate manifestations, too. Maynard Solomon has written extensively on what he terms the “mutability” or “noninevitability of Beethoven’s structures,” pointing to works such as the piano sonatas, Opp. 53 and 106, the string quartet, Op. 130, the song, “An die Hoffnung,” and, of course, Fidelio, as examples of pieces that the composer heavily revised.

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or rewrote altogether after completion. Completion is actually an inadequate word here, for how can a work be complete if revisions are later made to it? This is precisely Solomon’s point: Beethoven often sketched out re-workings of, or considered alternate possibilities for, his music, even after “complete” copies had been drafted, and so “the question of what constitutes a finished work is thrown open.”

With Beethoven, not only is there no prospective inevitability, there may even be no inevitability after the fact. His sketches and autographs may well be a series of rough maps to a multiplicity of universes, to a jammed network of paths taken and not taken.

The “Waldstein” sonata, “An die Hoffnung,” and Fidelio are rather uncomplicated examples of revision and/or recomposition: Beethoven’s decision to replace the so-called “Andante favori” (WoO 57), originally the middle movement of Op. 53, with the shorter Introduzione, has historically been met with little critical controversy—that is, few if any musicians or scholars have insisted that the longer rondo in F is somehow the more proper slow movement for the “Waldstein”; as far as the song is considered, Beethoven set the Christoph August Tiedge poem to music on two separate occasions, and since this is not really a case of revision but rather total recomposition, there is no need for a debate over authenticity; and Beethoven, as is well known, redrafted his Op. 72 opera twice over the course of a decade, but because he unambiguously regarded the final version as the

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173 Ibid., 215.
174 Ibid., 216.
definitive one, there is little scholarly hullabaloo over which of the three versions is most authentic.

Solomon’s examples of Opp. 106 and 130, however, are more problematic. Of Beethoven’s revised or recomposed works, the “Hammerklavier” sonata is seemingly most pertinent to my Op. 119 discussion, because the original English edition of Op. 106, like that of Op. 119, differs markedly from the original Continental edition of it. When he sent the sonata to Ries, Beethoven instructed him, if necessary, to offer a publisher only the first two movements, only the final movement without its slow introduction, or only the first three movements rearranged such that the slow movement would precede the scherzo, in the event that the mammoth work with its four-movement structure could not otherwise attract an English printer in a timely fashion.175 Ultimately, the Regent’s Harmonic Institution published the sonata in two separate parts simultaneously: one consisting of the first three movements in the I–III–II order that Beethoven had discussed with Ries, and the other consisting solely of the fugal finale, but with the introduction that Beethoven had asked Ries to omit were the movement published alone.176 As Solomon points out, scholars have not historically contended that the spliced and scrambled English editions of Op. 106 are more definitive than the Continental version. On the contrary, musicologists have tended to dismiss the English editions as a mutilation of the organically unified sonata, consented to by the composer not for artistic reasons but chiefly for financial ones. Solomon courageously raises the possibility that, given Beethoven’s history of revising and recomposing works post-“completion,” the composer may have had artistic misgivings

about Op. 106—perhaps especially its finale—and that the English manifestations may, indeed, represent alternative but valid conceptions Beethoven had of the music.

Such a remarkable notion deserves and demands consideration on an analytical level, for scholars have long argued that the work in question coheres in a variety of ways, most notably in Beethoven’s motivic use of the interval of a third in each movement. It is thus regrettable that Solomon offers no such analytical investigation, although the omission is certainly understandable, for the “Hammerklavier” sonata is not the focal point of his discussion. And neither is it mine, for that matter, but without a convincing argument based on some engagement with the musical texts, Solomon’s proposal is intriguing but unpersuasive. Maybe a critical analysis could change that, though one may find difficulty in reconciling Beethoven’s wish that the fugue’s introduction be excluded with the English publisher’s inclusion of it; Solomon is surely aware of this discrepancy but does not address it. Regardless, his basic premise that differing English editions—and after-the-fact revisions or recompositions in general—may reveal more of Beethoven’s artistic conception than usually thought parallels my own examination of the Op. 119 bagatelles. Even if Solomon’s position regarding Op. 106 is premature, and the original English editions of that work were, indeed, something of an artistic sacrifice for the sake of profit, the internal and circumstantial evidence surrounding the case of Op. 119 suggests that Clementi’s edition of the bagatelles represents no such musical perversion.

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Op. 130 presents another instance in which Beethoven made a post-“completion” alteration to a work. Unlike the historical uncontroversiality associated with the Opp. 53 and 106 examples, however, there has long been considerable debate over whether one should regard the Grosse Fuge or the substitute rondo Beethoven composed as the rightful finale to the quartet. Two writers I have already quoted, in fact, are split on the divisive issue: Kinderman sides with the fugue,\textsuperscript{179} while Barry Cooper sides with the rondo.\textsuperscript{180}

I shall not presently delve into the details of that question, but its very existence gets to the heart of what Solomon posits and I second, namely that with Beethoven’s late works in particular, completion is often a rather elusive characteristic, and especially so when perplexing publication histories cloud matters. Pre-conceived assumptions of unity may further lead one to practice a sort of selective analysis, in which one finds in a musical text what one wishes to find, perhaps even at the expense of contemplating other possibilities worth exploring. The Op. 119 bagatelles are a prime example of these issues and pitfalls, as overstatements of the coherence of its “zwei Teile” and insufficient probing of its publication history have effectively precluded consideration that the trifles may, in fact, exist in more than one legitimate “completed” state. Moreover, given Beethoven’s propensity to continue formulating ideas for already “completed” works, one wonders to what extent one can rely on musical texts of necessarily limited autonomy in attempting to understand what makes the composer tick. As is apparent from my investigation of Op. 119, internal evidence may certainly prove helpful in studying a composer’s intentions and creative processes, but more information—historical, biographical, epistolary, sketch-

\textsuperscript{179} Kinderman, \textit{Beethoven}, 332–33, 336–41.

\textsuperscript{180} B. Cooper, \textit{Beethoven and the Creative Process}, 197–214.
related, and otherwise—is needed. A call may be in order for so-called “genetic criticism,” with its emphasis on the creative process rather than what its practitioners recognize as the problematic “finished product.” “Genetic criticism might appear to destabilize the final text, undermining the work-concept by privileging genesis over structure,” Kinderman writes; “However, such an approach opens perspectives that serve as a promising platform for critical interpretation, and analysis remains vitally important to the evaluation of sketches and drafts, whose content is often elusive and enigmatic.”  

In approaching Op. 119 and Beethoven’s conceptions of it from various angles and with an open mind, I hope to have demonstrated just that.

Applying Tovey’s concepts of “normality” and “freedom” to Beethoven’s two-movement piano sonatas worked quite well and yielded new perspectives on the pieces. With those structurally “abnormal” works, a plethora of precedence allows one to examine the extent to which Beethoven fulfills expectations, and the sonatas certainly demonstrate synthesis of contrasting forces. Applying the same principles to the likewise “abnormal” eleven bagatelles of Op. 119, however, proved less useful. Discussion of the fulfillment of expectations is meaningless without precedence on which to base those expectations, and though Beethoven employs some subtle unifying devices, it would be a stretch to say that the bagatelles exhibit the same kind of (“normal”) dramatic coherence that Tovey finds in the Op. 131 string quartet, regardless of whether one is discussing Op. 119 as a whole or in its “zwei Teile.” Yet, by using Tovey’s framework as a starting point in analyzing Op. 119, my investigation led me to reconsider the work’s compositional and publication history, as

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well as the internal musical evidence, allowing me ultimately to offer a fresh take on the trifles—namely, that all eleven may legitimately be thought of as belonging together. Amusingly, most performers would of course simply take that for granted, as the Op. 119 bagatelles are typically published together anyway! The new perspective I offer is not really new at all, in that sense, but rather reasserts an assumption held for nearly two hundred years by amateur and professional pianists alike. Only relatively recent scholarship has posited that the “zwei Teile” should be properly regarded and performed as two completely separate multi-pieces, and though the scholars who have advanced that notion make some excellent points, a closer look at the evidence suggests that the “zwei Teile” themselves—not just their constituent trifles—together form a multi-piece, too.

Although I do not find that applying Tovey’s formulations to different types of compositions yields equally fruitful results, my findings do in a way affirm one of Tovey’s most deeply held aesthetic principles: a cookie-cutter approach to musical analysis will not suffice. In “Some Aspects of Beethoven’s Art Forms,” Tovey not only “normalizes” the abnormal Op. 131 string quartet, but he also insists that even the B♭ piano sonata, Op. 22, perhaps Beethoven’s most “normal” work on the surface, is, in fact, “unique.” Tovey’s general reluctance to put stock in long-range unifying devices in music, furthermore, is much to the point of my discussion. Perhaps his tentativeness is too unyielding at times, for I am certainly more comfortable than he was attributing (audible) long-range motivic or thematic similarities to a composer’s desire for cohesion, an aspiration that, in the case of Beethoven, is made all the more apparent in his sketchbooks, to which one presumes Tovey’s access was quite limited. But Tovey’s inclination to exercise caution in such matters is one I wholeheartedly embrace.


