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The Representational Impulse in Late Beethoven, I: An die ferne Geliebte

CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS (DAVIS, CALIFORNIA)

Nineteenth-century depictions of people, ideas, and natural or supernatural images exist publicly and openly in works of Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner, and privately or enigmatically in works of Mendelssohn, Schumann, and, it now seems, also Brahms. The distinction between public and private largely affects whether we perceive the works as programmatic, or as occupying a middle ground "between absolute and program music".[1] In either case one of the principal means Romantic composers used to represent an idea or person in music was to devise a characteristic motive for the non-musical entity. If public, as with Berlioz's *idée fixe* for Harriet Smithson or a Wagnerian *leitmotif*, then the motive was subjected to limited transformations throughout the course of a multi-movement work. This insured that returns of allusive motives were audible. But if private, as with some of Schumann's cryptic motives or the *Dominus* motive in Brahms's first piano concerto,[2] then the rhythmic and melodic transformations were more substantial, extending even to inversion and retrograde. Evidently private transformations were not constrained by what a listener could be expected to recognize.

The more substantial the transformation, the greater the difficulty for analysts interested in showing a link between two or more motives. In order to substantiate a transformational relationship, it is essential to establish a distinctive musical context for the related motives. ‚Musical context' can be defined in several ways: *(1)* by identifying a group of motives with distinguishable connections in either their melodic position (beginning, middle, or ending of a theme), or their contrapuntal position (top, middle, or bottom voice); *(2)* by demonstrating a correspondence between their broader structural function (e. g., first, second, or closing theme);[3] or *(3)* by establishing a particular dramatic character, through rhythm, tempo, orchestration, etc. Verbal associations for a motive can create a dramatic persona, whether the associations are private or made public in a vocal text or printed program. These contextual factors may at times have a greater influence on the strength of an analytical argument for motivic transformation than similarities of

[1] This phrase is taken from two important studies of nineteenth-century musical expression: L. FINSCHER, *'Zwischen absoluter und Programmusik': Zur Interpretation der deutschen romantischen Symphonie*, in: *Über Symphonien: Beiträge zu einer musikalischen Gattung. Festschrift Walter Wiora zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. C.-H. Mahling (Tutzing 1979), p. 103–15; and W. WIORA, *Zwischen absoluter und Programmusik*, in: *Festschrift Friedrich Blume zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. A. A. Abert and W. Pfannkuch (Kassel 1963), p. 381–88. On the development of the concepts of absolute and program music, see C. DAHLHAUS, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik* (Kassel 1978).

[2] I discuss the motivic relations in Brahms's first piano concerto in *A Choral Symphony by Brahms?*, in: *19th-Century Music* 9 (1985), p. 3–25.

[3] The importance of a connection between structural function and motivic transformations is argued by L. MISCH, *Die Faktoren der Einheit in der Mehrsätzigkeit der Werke Beethovens* (Munich 1958), p. 27–8; and D. COREN, *Structural Relations Between Op. 28 and Op. 36*, in: *Beethoven Studies* 2, ed. A. Tyson (London 1977), p. 81–3.

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melodic or rhythmic contour, especially when the composer intended the presence of extra-musical allusions to remain private.

The music of Beethoven has attracted dramatic interpretations ever since his own day. Associates of Beethoven told of "fundamental ideas" or "definite objects" underlying his works, referring not to the content of specific compositions but to Beethoven's professed approach to composition in general.[4] Wagner often expressed his view of the poetic subject matter underlying Beethoven's instrumental music. In the following passage Wagner stresses the error of interpreting Beethoven's poetic representations as absolute music, a term he uses here to refer to music conceived as *l'art pour l'art*, as a self-referential manipulation of form.[5]

> The characteristic of the great compositions of Beethoven is that they are veritable poems, in which it is sought to bring a real subject to representation [*Darstellung*]. The obstacle to their comprehension lies in the difficulty of finding with certainty the subject that is represented. Beethoven was completely possessed by a subject: his most significant tone pictures are indebted almost solely to the individuality of the subject that filled him; the consciousness of this made it seem to him superfluous to indicate his subject otherwise than in the tone picture itself. Just as our literary poets really address themselves only to other literary poets, so Beethoven, in these works, involuntarily addressed himself only to tone poets. The absolute musician, that is to say, the manipulator of absolute music, could not understand Beethoven, because this absolute musician fastens only on the "how" and not the "what".

Wagner's description of a non-musical subject represented in music is particularly apt for two works from Beethoven's last decade, the song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* and the String Quartet in F major, Op. 135. In the song cycle Beethoven uses motives to represent the essential idea of the text; in the quartet, it is not a vocal text, but a verbal epigraph that supplies the poetic image.

The details of the formal scheme Beethoven devised for his song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* have obscured his primary organizational principle. These well-known details include the innovative transitional passages which link the six songs together, the circular key scheme (e♭, g, a♭, a♭, c, and e♭), and the return of music from the opening song at the end of the last. Largely on the strength of these foreground characteristics, *An die ferne Geliebte* has enjoyed a reputation as a pivotal work, a "quiet herald", in Joseph Kerman's apt phrase, of Beethoven's late-period predilection for integrated, multi-movement compositions.[6] Within individual songs Beethoven depends on variation techniques for diversity, supporting the strophic repetitions of the vocal line with a series of figural variations in the piano accompaniment. Only the climactic fifth song departs from this methodical plan, as the piano becomes subservient to the singer for three curiously straightforward stanzas. Yet beyond stringing together individual strophic variations, Beethoven

[4] F. E. KIRBY, *Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony as a 'Sinfonia caracteristica'*, in: *MQ* 56 (1970), p. 605–23, cites several nineteenth-century references.

[5] This is from a letter Wagner wrote to his disciple Theodor Uhlig (13–15 February 1852). For the German text see R. WAGNER, *Sämtliche Briefe*, IV, ed. G. Strobel and W. Wolf (Leipzig 1979), p. 285. The translation is by H. A. ELLIS, from *Wagner on Music and Drama*, ed A. Goldman and E. Sprinchorn (New York 1964), p. 160.

[6] J. KERMAN, *An die ferne Geliebte*, in: *Beethoven Studies* 1, ed. A. Tyson (New York 1973), p. 123–57.

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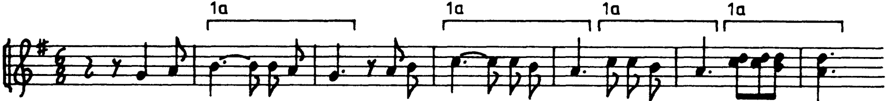
surreptitiously employs motivic transformations to derive songs two through six from the melody of the first song. Variation and transformation complement each other. Beethoven relies on figural variations to provide diversity within songs and on motivic transformations for a subtle continuity between them.

Melodic material for the entire cycle exists in the first ten bars of *Auf dem Hügel.* Successive motives in this stanza later return one-by-one, systematically transformed into the principal themes of the remaining five songs. In addition to the four motives present in the vocal line (one for each line of text), a fifth appears in the initial notes of the piano accompaniment. I have marked this falling third (b♭, a♭, g), the only divergence from the vocal line that Beethoven allows the piano in this opening statement, along with the other motives in Example 1. The themes they adumbrate follow in Examples 2–6. Once Beethoven's game is recognized, there is little mystery to it.

Example 1: *Auf dem Hügel* (b. 1–10) – Motives

Motives become themes with surprisingly few alterations. Indeed, in *Wo die Berge so blau* the predominant alteration applied to Motive 1a is simple transposition. Beethoven packs thirty-six statements of falling thirds into forty-five bars (Ex. 2 has four of them), fourteen more in an inverted rising form, and in the transition to the next song, one statement drawn out in augmentation. In the third song, *Leichte Segler,* Motive 2 returns a third higher with some of its leaps filled with step motion, an *échappée* figure added to emphasize the falling third, and the third scale degree repeated rather than the fifth (Ex. 3). Yet the distinguishing contour survives: down a third, up a fifth and back down. Beethoven also prepares the c-b♮-c turn that begins *Leichte Segler* in the third and fourth stanzas of *Auf dem Hügel* by introducing the same figure as a rare departure in the first song from the original vocal line. Both of these inflections forecast the shift to a♭ minor that occurs at the third stanza of *Leichte Segler,* with b♮ enharmonically reinterpreted as c♭.

Example 2: *Wo die Berge so blau* (b. 4–10) – Motive 1a



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Example 3: *Leichte Segler* (b. 5–7) – Motive 2

Motive 3 emerges in a transparent disguise as the main theme of the fourth song, *Diese Wolken in den Höhen*. Transposed up a fourth, each note of the motive is presented in rhythmically uniform quarter notes, separated and echoed by eighths a third below (Ex. 4). As if to point a finger at the underlying motive, Beethoven places a mordent over the skeletal notes in the accompaniment, two octaves above the singer; but at that altitude they also serve as representations of the little birds "in the clouds high above". After the mordents grow into trills in the introduction of the penultimate song, *Es kehret der Maien*, Motive 4 takes over, now descending from high g instead of e♭. Beethoven also wrote a new harmonization, removed the appoggiatura, and changed the rhythm – hardly drastic alterations (Ex. 5).

Example 4: *Diese Wolken in den Höhen* (b. 3–7) – Motive 3

Example 5: *Es kehret der Maien* (b. 14–16) – Motive 4

With one song remaining, *Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder*, Beethoven reintroduces the only motive left unvaried, Motive 1. Because this motive has a prominent place at the beginning of the cycle and at the very end, it is easier to hear the relationship between it and the derivative theme which begins the sixth song, despite a more substantial transformation of this motive than of any other. Example 6 presents the new theme in three of the variants Beethoven uses: *(a)* the piano introduction, *(b)* the beginning of stanza one, and *(c)* the beginning of stanza three. They share a contour that moves from c up to e♭ and down to g. Unlike the original motive from the first song, the downward leap of a sixth is partially filled in,

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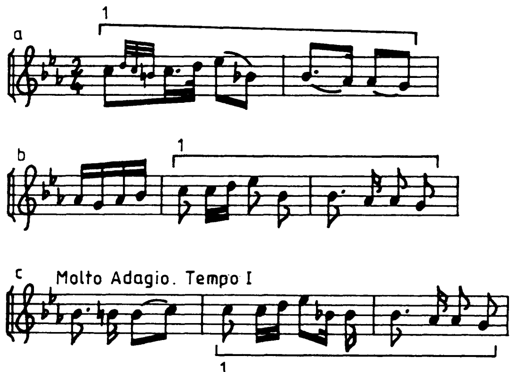
for reasons discussed later; and the starting note, at least initially is c rather than b♭. By the final transformation at *"und du singst"* (Ex. 6c) the b♭ has reappeared, but until then Beethoven only hints at it, first in the turn figure that incorporates a b♮ (Ex. 6a), then in the piano's sixteenth-note passage that serves as a pick-up to the singer's entrance (Ex. 6b). The fourth and final stanza of *Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder* then brings a da capo of the music heard previously with the final stanza of *Auf dem Hügel*; the da capo in turn gives way to a coda.

Example 6: *Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder* (b. 1–2, 8–10, 26–28) – Motive 1



This reconstruction of the plan Beethoven devised for his *Liederkreis* is only partially complete, but it provides sufficient insight to amplify and verify some observations Joseph Kerman made in his study of the cycle. Commenting on the interconnection of the songs he noted that the "inner songs hardly have enough lyrical distinction [...] to sustain them simply on their own terms."[7] In part this is due to the way in which Beethoven's rigid segmenting of the first melody effectively relegates the interior songs to developmental status. More than the others the first song (and therefore also the last) has a head motive of melodic distinction. The succeeding motives had first of all to realize the melodic implications of the head motive in *Auf dem Hügel*; their subsequent roles as head motives of separate songs required them also to have a degree of individuality, yet too much individuality would make them unsuitable for their original function.

Consequently, the most difficult song for Beethoven was the first. The shape and ultimate success of the whole cycle depended on his efforts to achieve a balance between too much and too little distinction for the individual motives of the first song. This effort bears directly on Kerman's observation that the sketches Beethoven made for the cycle consist "mainly of dense work on a single tune, *Auf dem Hügel*." For the other songs "a different method of sketching was used [...] they could be roughed out swiftly and surely, without the careful work of melodic modeling that

[7] KERMAN, p. 155.

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the first song seems to have required."[8] Now that *An die ferne Geliebte* can be recognized as an intricate set of variations on a segmented theme, we can see that the pains Beethoven took with the first song were his customary practice when sketching an original theme for a set of variations. The comparative ease of sketching the ensuing variations (in this case songs) stems from the careful design of the theme.[9] This is not to say that Beethoven had to sketch the theme in all its details before starting work on the variations; indeed, ideas could develop in the course of sketching the variations that would necessitate revisions of the theme, revisions to insure that the theme would anticipate any idea later exploited in the variations. As Kerman found, this reciprocal sketching process occurred in the sketches for *An die ferne Geliebte*, and it apparently also happened in sketches for the variation movements of the Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 30, no. 1, and the Sonata for Piano, Op. 109.[10]

In traditional variation sets, of course, the theme shapes not just the initial motive of each variation, but also the thematic and harmonic foundation of the entire variation, as well as the phrase structure and length. For the songs of *An die ferne Geliebte*, these last features depend more on the textual dimensions of each stanza than on an abstract musical form; other issues such as range, register, and the tonal direction of separate songs and of the cycle as a whole, Beethoven must have determined arbitrarily. Kerman noticed a song-by-song rise in the tessitura, especially in the upper limit of the singer's range: after rising to an e♭ in *Auf dem Hügel*, songs two through five ascend to vocal peaks of d, e♭, f, and g, respectively. In the last song there is a momentary retreat to f before returning to high g in the operatic coda. At the same time the lowest note is only e♭, and it looms as the final note of melodic lines in all but the second song (g is low) and the fifth (f is low). It is as though Beethoven was intentionally writing for the restricted range of an amateur. The evidence of this registral control, as well as the symmetrical key scheme, the consistent de-emphasis of the key of the dominant (b♭), and the derivation of song beginnings from the motives of the first song, all indicate a conscious planning of the overall cyclic structure. And once Beethoven had decided to start each song with a motive from *Auf dem Hügel*, none of the other structural guidelines aided his completion of the song themes. For this he had another plan.

To complete each song Beethoven even chose internal motivic material with one eye on the shape of the individual song and the other on the form of the cycle as a whole. Once again Beethoven makes telling use of motives based on ideas introduced in *Auf dem Hügel*. Thus the lack of "lyrical distinction" Kerman finds in the inner songs probably stems as much from the limited number of new melodic

[8] KERMAN, p. 149–50. Kerman's view is supported by the numeration of relevant sketches given in P. MIES, *Der Titel von Ludwig van Beethoven's Op. 98*, in: *Beethoven-Jb.* 9 (1973/77), p. 339–46.

[9] On the revision of variation themes see J. KERMAN, *Beethoven's Early Sketches*, in: *MQ* 56 (1970), p. 527; L. LOCKWOOD, *Beethoven's Sketches for 'Sehnsucht'* (*WoO 146*), in: *Beethoven Studies* 1, p. 101–2.

[10] KERMAN, *An die ferne Geliebte*, p. 150. I discuss the same process in the sketches for Op. 35 below. Regarding Op. 30, no. 1, see my *Ends and Means in the Second Finale to Beethoven's Op. 30, no. 1*, in: *Beethoven Essays: Studies in Honor of Elliot Forbes*, ed. L. Lockwood and P. Benjamin (Harvard University 1984), p. 127–45. Beethoven also appears to revise the theme of Op. 34 based on sketches for the variations.

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ideas in the interior phrases as it does from the derivative nature of their opening phrases. Perhaps the economical use of motives was Beethoven's response to the poet Alois Jeitteles's reuse of poetic imagery from one song to the next;[11] perhaps it was in keeping with Beethoven's conception of this cycle as a set of variations. But more likely, he restricted the number of ideas because this helped him to define formal areas within the cycle. Beethoven, clearly enthusiastic about his structural intricacies, used the interior phrases either to develop the original motives or to recapitulate them in a varied form. His varied reprise of opening material in several interior phrases sets the stage for the literal return at the end of the cycle. The result is a circular motivic plan that complements the cycle's symmetrical key scheme, as a brief look at the melodic lines of songs two through six will show.

Beethoven starts the motivic development slowly and methodically in *Wo die Berge so blau.* There are no secondary motives in this song, only diatonic permutations of the three-note Motive 1a sung and played *pianissimo* at ever higher elevations. After the singer ascends from g to d in stanza one, the piano continues the methodical climb up to high g while the singer intones stanza two on a monotone g below. The piano transition to stanza three then steps down an octave (g-g) repeating alternate notes, apparently anticipating the main theme of the fifth song. In contrast to the static melody of *Wo die Berge so blau,* the next two songs have reasonably distinct phrases. Long paired by their shared tonality (a♭) and by their poetic meter and content as well (Kerman has suggested that Jeitteles wrote them as one song),[12] *Leichte Segler* and *Diese Wolken* also have essentially the same melodies, except for their first phrases. Example 7 presents the secondary phrases for each song; for *Diese Wolken* there are only two, since the first two lines of text are part of one musical phrase. In both songs the first phrase concludes on c, and the succeeding phrase begins by repeating the same note before moving down to a cadence on e♭. Each stanza then finishes with a phrase that spans the identical fifth, ending on the tonic a♭. With his first use of these secondary phrases in *Leichte Segler,* Beethoven has reached the half-way point, the far arc of his motivic circle; with his varied repeat of these same phrases in *Diese Wolken,* Beethoven effectively begins the return journey, relying more and more on transformations of previously stated material.

Example 7: Interior phrases of songs 3 and 4 (b. 7–12)

[11] KERMAN, *An die ferne Geliebte,* p. 127.
[12] KERMAN, p. 126.

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Es kehret der Maien intensifies the sense of return. Beethoven does not intend for this song to serve as a recapitulation of *Auf dem Hügel* – it lacks the distinctive first motive – but rather as a preliminary summary of songs two through four. In Example 8 the phrases used to set the last five lines of the stanza have labels to identify the song beginning they recall. Beethoven proceeds in sequential order, but instead of reshaping the original motives, he varies the songs which were themselves variations of the basic motives. Therefore he derives the second phrase of the song not from Motive 1a, but from the second song, *Wo die Berge so blau.* Like the song, the vocal range of the phrase is confined to the fifth g–d and articulates phrases by stepping up or down thirds. Phrase three similarily draws on the third song. Although it appears now in f rather than a♭, the resemblance is unmistakable (compare Ex. 3). Finally, the relationship between the fourth phrase and the fourth song is freer, though no less real. Both are comprised of two half-phrases sequentially related by step, and both separate the notes of the original motive with leaps down a third, leaps which have become fully triadic in the fifth song. The strongest connection, however, is the underlying contour of each phrase. In the fourth song the essential movement is a step up a second and then down a fourth: e♭, f, e♭, d♭, c. In the fifth song the downward fourth remains the same, but there is an extra note added at the beginning: d, e, f, e, d, c.

Example 8: *Es kehret der Maien* (b. 16–29) – Motives related to previous songs

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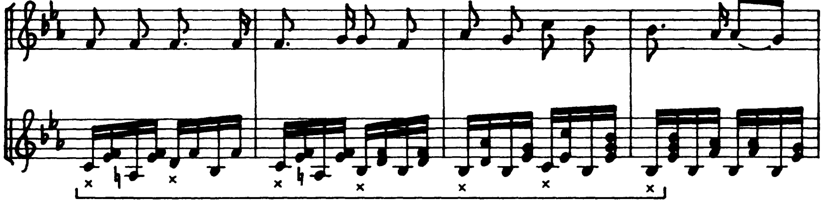
Es kehret der Maien is the one strictly strophic song in the cycle. Only the short piano interludes are varied, and even then just barely. The absence of any figural variation in the accompaniment underscores the novel function of the song, the shift away from the continuous elaboration of individual phrases towards the reunification of those ideas. Beethoven also restores the underlying harmonic movement of the first song. *Auf dem Hügel* concludes the four phrases successively on VI, V, I, I, and *Es kehret der Maien* on I, VI, V, I. In light of the dependence of this song on its predecessors, the brevity of the sketches for it is understandable.[13] Once he had the conception, Beethoven had only to assemble the pieces.

The two strands of the masterplan intertwine in the sixth song, *Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder*. Having worked his way through all of the other motives, Beethoven at last turns to a variant of Motive 1 for the beginning of a theme; and he does so just as the secondary phrases return to variants of their original forms. Kerman noticed important motivic correspondences between songs one and six, chiefly the similarities of the first two phrases.[14] Given what we now understand about the cycle, his observations can be refined. The first stanza of this last song recapitulates four of the five motives from *Auf dem Hügel*, saving the final cadential phrase (and its conclusive descent to the tonic e♭) for the da capo. These are identified in Example 9.

Example 9: Reprise of motives in song 6 (b. 9–16)



[13] KERMAN, p. 144.
[14] KERMAN, p. 146.

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Beethoven constructs the opening phrase not simply by filling in the leap of a sixth, but by joining Motives 1 and 1a in a different configuration, combining them into one melodic line instead of placing one in the vocal line and the other in the accompaniment. Throughout the song Motive 1a has a new prominence, with five statements of it before the start of the second stanza. Motive 2, on the other hand, follows with a lower profile than it had before. Here the up-and-down fifth is the same (f-c-f), but the original descent from a♭ is removed, bumped by the a♭ and g that now end the first phrase. And Motive 3 strays still further into the background (it will have its moment in the coda). Beethoven slips an intimation of it into the accompaniment (the notes are marked by an × in Ex. 9), while the singer hovers on an f before answering with his own bare-bones version of the motive, a diatonic fall from c to g that manages to include Motive 1a. As we are to discover in the coda, the association of Motive 1a with Motive 3 is neither coincidental nor gratuitous.

With the da capo setting of stanza four, Beethoven comes full circle. The fourth song had reiterated motives from song three, and the fifth song had offered a summary of the preceding songs, less as a synoptic look backward than as a preparation for the undisguised return of the motives from *Auf dem Hügel*. Then in the first stanzas of *Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder*, Beethoven takes the penultimate step. All but one of the original motives return, transformed, but in sequence. Thus when the singer proffers his gift ("Take them then, these songs") the songs are figuratively there, represented by their motivic proxies. According to the sketches, this was initially the moment Beethoven had planned to start the da capo;[15] by postponing the return of the cadential fourth phrase he greatly increased the sense of resolution when the vocal line finally descended past f to e♭; and at the upper end of the vocal range, by being free to take the singer up to an f in stanzas two and three, he made the climactic g in the coda all the more forceful and inevitable.

But there is a still more fundamental impetus for Beethoven's varied beginning of this last song, an impetus rooted in the text. After bidding his distant beloved to "take these songs" (stanza one) and to "sing what I sang" (stanza three), the lover arrives in the fourth stanza at his final vision: when you (the beloved) have done all this, "Then what has kept us far apart, | Must give way before these songs." This hope of a spiritual union is the text Beethoven saves for the da capo and the coda. With the da capo he achieves a sense of completion both in the restatement of motives and in the long-delayed melodic and harmonic closure on e♭. Yet whatever symbolic significance there is in the completion of his musical circle, the da capo is just a precondition for moving on to the coda. In terms of the text, only when the beloved has sung the lover's songs back to him can they overcome what has separated them. The resinging of the songs – namely, the da capo – makes possible the union; it is not the union itself. That emerges in the coda, as fuel for the climax.

[15] KERMAN, p. 136–7.

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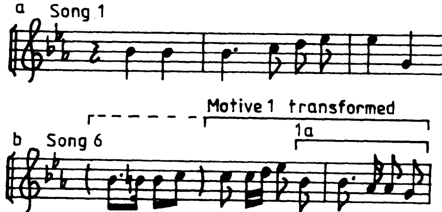
Example 10: Motives in the coda

Devising new motivic configurations in the coda, Beethoven leaves only one of the familiar motives unaltered, Motive 3. After slighting it in the fifth song and the first stanzas of the sixth, he dwells on it, repeating it three times consecutively in the transition from the da capo to the coda and four times more in the coda (see Ex. 10). No other motive compares. Motive 4 appears once in the transition to the coda, but in the coda itself Beethoven cuts it in half. Motive 2 is absent entirely, and Motive 1a, ubiquitous in the first and third stanzas, never returns in its original shape, though one variant is prominently situated at the peak of the climax. It is curious that the coda also appears to minimize the presence of Motive 1. Although Motive 1 closes the cycle – fittingly for such a circular work – in its only other occurrence Beethoven truncates the motive, starting the coda with two free elaborations of the rising fourth, b♭ to e♭.

Example 11: Motive 1 and transformations



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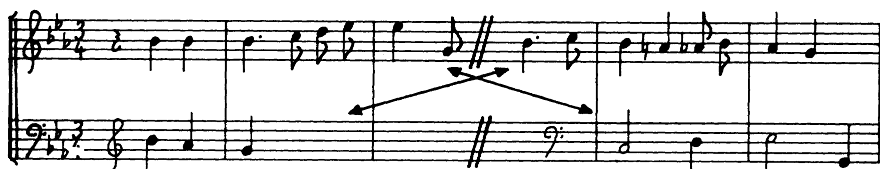
Motive 3 fulfills the same role in the coda that Motive 1a had assumed at the beginning of *Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder*. Beethoven takes advantage of their obvious similarity, the descent from b♭ to g, to construct a spacious new form of the motivic hybrid heard in the first stanzas. By beginning the sixth song with this synthesis of Motives 1 and 1a,[16] Beethoven provided an important link between the original form of Motive 1 and the lengthy concluding elaboration of it he wrote in the coda. There he uses Motive 3 to descend to g, three times, as an insistent answer to the repeated ascent from b♭ to e♭ that begins the coda. The combination of these two motives, shown in Ex. 11c, leaves the contour of Motive 1 intact. The original descending leap from e♭ to g, partially filled by steps at the beginning of song six (Ex. 11b), now has all intervening steps represented. Beethoven's final transformation of Motive 1 completely reverses the original pattern of leaps and steps: initially there were steps up and a jump down, while in the coda the upward skip leads to downward steps. The chromatic movement of Motive 3 intensifies the push to continue the falling line from g down to the tonic e♭. Beethoven supplies the expected resolution, pushed up an octave to project a climatic fervor.

Example 12: Motivic transformation in *Auf dem Hügel* (b. 1–3, 5–7)



The synthesis of motives in the coda concludes the final song as it had begun; i.e., with a linear combination of motives originally heard simultaneously in *Auf dem Hügel*. Beethoven had first presented Motives 1 and 1a in separate voices, then joined them together in one line. Remarkably, he followed the same plan with Motives 1

[16] C. HATCH, *Ideas in Common: The 'Liederkreis' and other Works by Beethoven*, in: *Music and Civilization: Essays in Honor of Paul Henry Lang*, ed. E. Strainchamps, M.R. Maniates and C. Hatch (New York 1984), p. 56–77, also sees a transformation of Motive 1 in song six, b. 5–8 (see his Ex. 19 on p. 70).

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and 3, because while the singer introduced Motive 3 at the start of the cycle, the piano offered Motive 1 as counterpoint in the bass. This pair of motivic combinations is juxtaposed in Example 12. Here is musical corroboration for equating Motives 1a and 3, for identifying one as a transformation of the other. The possibility that Beethoven attached special significance to Motive 3 is raised by a report from Sir George Smart. On 11 September 1825 he heard Beethoven improvise "for about twenty minutes in a most extraordinary manner..." on the same motive transposed down a minor third to g-a-g-f♯, f♮-g-f-e.[17]

Whether included in the melody as Motive 3 or played in the accompaniment as Motive 1a, this descending line was doubly separated from Motive 1 in the first song: physically, by the separation of voice and piano; temporally, by the intervention of verse 2 and Motive 2 which interjects a musical and poetic barrier between corresponding motives and rhymes. Thus the motivic syntheses in song six overcome two obstacles, musical obstacles Beethoven had created to represent the physical and temporal separation of the two lovers. Time and space are both vanquished just as predicted in the last stanza of *Auf dem Hügel*:

> Denn vor Liedesklang entweichet
> Jeder Raum und jede Zeit,
> Und ein liebend Herz erreichet,
> Was ein liebend Herz geweiht!

Kerman's conclusion that this stanza "was almost certainly an addition by the composer," takes on new meaning.[18] Not only does the similarity of this stanza to the last stanza of the poem give impetus to the symmetrical repetition of music at the end of the cycle, but the promise that "The sound of singing banishes | all space and all time" provides a textual image for Beethoven to depict musically. He would have inserted this stanza as a textual representation of his long-range compositional goal: to end the cycle with a melody built from the two motives that are kept melodically and contrapuntally separate in the first song. Beethoven's inspiration for this motivic expression of the lovers' union may come from Jeitteles' poem. After writing stanzas with alternating rhymes for the whole cycle (excepting only the final verse of song one), the rhymes in the last stanza are suddenly uniform. The four verses have the same end rhyme (*-ei-*) as well as the same internal rhymes (*-ie-en-*), the latter present for the first time:

> Dann vor diesen Liedern weichet,
> Was geschieden uns so weit,
> Und ein liebend Herz erreichet,
> Was ein liebend Herz geweiht!

The synthesis of motives in the final song culminates the extraordinary synthesis of music and text that guided Beethoven throughout the entire cycle. Parenthetically, the idea of the poem and the musical setting bear a striking resemblance to three

[17] E. FORBES, *Thayer's Life of Beethoven* (Princeton 1964), II, p. 963.
[18] KERMAN, p. 126.

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fairy tales inserted into the novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1799) by the early Romantic poet Novalis. The first two tales demonstrate the power of song over fish and man, and the third describes an otherworldly music:[19]

> Soft but deeply moving music was heard in the air that seemed to originate from the wondrous interweaving of the stars... Like patterns on the table, the music changed ceaselessly, and peculiar and difficult as the transitions not infrequently were, still only one simple theme appeared to unite the whole.

At the end of the cycle the lover claims that his songs have come from his heart "*ohne Kunstgepräng'*," without artistic display. Kerman noted the "brute simplicity" with which Beethoven set these words.[20] Indeed, the entire cycle shuns ostentation. Yet Beethoven's simplicity is cultivated, studied. The folklike quality of the songs masks a complex rhetorical construction. Underlying this combination of simplicity and complexity are two opposing modes of variation: one which is to be perceived immediately, the figural variations of entire verses in the accompaniment; another which is unobtrusive, if not deliberately concealed. Because Beethoven applies the latter approach to individual motives rather than entire themes, and because he avoids audibly perceptible connections between related motives, this process is more appropriately termed transformation than variation. In *An die ferne Geliebte* Beethoven casts the first verse of *Auf dem Hügel* as a segmentable theme which he transforms, motive by motive, into new themes with new characters.

Beethoven's remarkable subdivison of a theme into quasi-autonomous units has two previously unrecognized precedents among his earlier variation sets. From the beginning of his so-called heroic phase, the slow variation movement of the Kreutzer violin sonata, Op. 47 (1803), and the Variations for Piano in E♭, Op. 35 (1802), each has a theme that Beethoven treats in segments. The *Andante* of the Kreutzer sonata has an unusually lengthy theme of fifty-four bars, along with four variations. In the theme each repetition of the first phrase is varied, so that the overall form, a a^1 b a^2 b^1 a^3, yields four distinct versions of a. Although the differences are modest, and lie chiefly in the first bars of each phrase, they are sufficient for Beethoven to exploit in the four variations. Thus, the inconsequential violin part in Variation 1 relates directly to the absence of the violin during the first statement of a in the theme; in a^1 and in Variation 2 the violin doubles the piano an octave higher until the fifth bar when the piano relinquishes the tune, the violin enters an eighth note before the piano, and the left hand of the piano starts the dominant pedal in eighth-note pulses; in a^2 and in Variation 3 the piano plays the melody alone for the first bar, and the violin begins by stressing the dominant; and finally, the grace notes added to the downbeats of a^3 become mordents in Variation 4, and the new trill in the theme likewise elicits trills throughout the variation. In comparison with *An die ferne Geliebte*, the scope of these relationships is narrow. They are not different motives,

[19] This translation is taken from a stimulating book: J. NEUBAUER, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: The Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven 1986), p. 204.
[20] KERMAN, p. 147.

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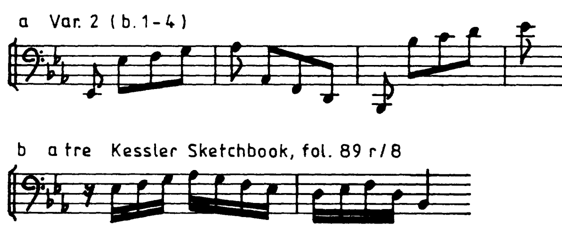
only slight variants of a single phrase. Nevertheless, the principle of linking successive sections of a theme to successive variations (or songs) is important, even if superficially applied in the Kreutzer sonata.

Still earlier are the Op. 35 variations that Beethoven composed on the Prometheus tune he later featured in the Eroica symphony. The grand conception of this variation cycle, its innovative form, and its designation as the first fruit of a *"neue Manier"*, have prompted numerous interpretations about its formal design and its relation to other works.[21] In addition to the fifteen variations, fugue, and concluding *Andante* that follow the *Tema*, Beethoven precedes it with the *Basso del Tema* (the bass line alone) and what appear to be three pre-variations of the *Tema* in two, three, and four-part counterpoint, namely the *a due*, *a tre*, and *a quattro*. However, in view of the organizational procedures discussed above, rather than pre-variations of a theme, they are better understood as parts of a thematic complex, as Beethoven's earliest use of a segmented theme. Probably no other variation work by Beethoven derived so many details of the theme from the variations, rather than vice-versa; of the five thematic sections, only the *Tema* and its bass were composed before he started sketching the variations. The contrapuntal versions of the *a due*, *a tre*, and *a quattro* emerged after Beethoven had preliminary drafts of Variations 1, 5, 8, 10, 11, 14 and 15, almost half of the numbered variations.[22] In all he made four drafts of the thematic complex, alternating them with work on the variations.

Not just the section specifically labelled *Tema*, but each section of the theme individually generates some of the fifteen numbered variations. Beethoven actually derives only three of the fifteen variations directly from the *Tema*: number 1 (the ornamented melody and the plodding accompaniment), number 6 (a fairly strict rendition in c minor), and the most flamboyant and ornate, number 15; then after the fugue, all of the unnumbered variations in the *Andante con moto* finale adhere to the *Tema*. With the exception of Variations 9–12, the order of the five thematic segments does not dictate the sequence of the variations, unlike Beethoven's later practice in the Kreutzer sonata and in *An die ferne Geliebte*.

Example 13: Op. 35, Var. 2 and sketches for the *a tre* and *a quattro*



[21] For example, L. LOCKWOOD, *Beethoven's Sketches for the 'Eroica'*, in: *MQ* 67 (1981), p. 457–78. For other citations see my *Beethoven's Sketches for the Variations in E♭, op. 35*, in: *Beethoven Studies* 3, ed. A. Tyson (Cambridge 1982), p. 47–8.

[22] Beethoven made these and other fragmentary sketches before the contrapuntal draft of the *a due*, the *a tre*, and the *a quattro* on fols. 89r–89v of the Kessler sketchbook. They have been transcribed and published by S. BRANDENBURG, *Kesslerisches Skizzenbuch*, 2 vols. (Bonn 1976 and 1978).

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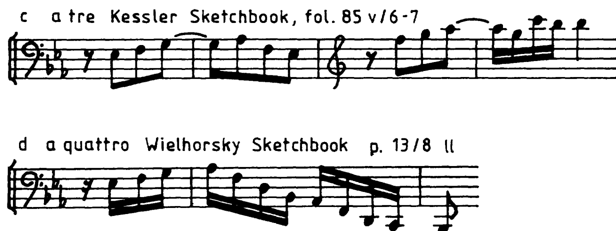

To review the variations in numerical order, the idea for Variation 2 emerged from drafts for the *a tre* and *a quattro* (see Ex. 13). In Variation 2 Beethoven's treatment of this motive in the left hand recalls the *a tre*, with leaps from one register to another giving two voices the character of three, while the cadenza in bar 12 has precedents in both the *a due* and the *a tre*. The next two variations elaborate material from the *a quattro*, Variation 3 the rhythmic gesture of two sixteenth notes and an eighth (♬♩), Variation 4 the rapid scales and arpeggios in the left hand. Variation 5 imitates the two-voice counterpoint of the *a due*, even taking the treble line from an early discarded draft of the *a due* (see Ex. 14a and b). After the *Tema* returns in Variation 6, Beethoven inserts another derivative of the *a due*, a two-voice canon, as Variation 7. And the changing registers of the *a tre* provide material for Variation 8, once again making two parts sound like three.

Example 14: Op. 35 – *A due* and related variations (b. 1–5)

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Variation 9 then commences a series of four variations that recall in order the first four sections of the theme, beginning with the *Basso del Tema* (this internal group is also defined by a b♭ pedal that remains through four of the next five variations). In Variation 9, beneath the pedal and the acrobatic arpeggios in the right hand, Beethoven plainly states the original bassline for the first time since the *Tema*. Variations 10, 11, and 12 mimmick the growth of the *a due*, *a tre*, and *a quattro*, expanding in turn from two to three to four voices. Aside from using two voices, Variation 10 recalls the contrapuntal line of the *a due* with its c♯ inflection (compare Ex. 14c and d); Variation 11, like the *a tre*, also has registral shifts; and the mildly antiphonal beginning of the *a quattro* is developed in Variation 12, along with paired sixteenth notes. Then, rather than proceeding to a variation of the *Tema* in number 13, Beethoven closes the group of 'pedal' variations as it began, with another variation of the *Basso del Tema*. Again this leads to a recollection of the contrapuntal variations. The *Minore* Variation 14, a double variation, repeats the pattern of invertible counterpoint that Beethoven designed for the *a due* and *a tre*, both in the melodic shape of the two first phrases, and in the alternation of the *Basso del Tema* from top register to bottom. Finally Variation 15, like the first of the numbered variations, is a variation of the *Tema*.

The Op. 35 variations and *An die ferne Geliebte* are both pivotal works in Beethoven's stylistic development. They are to some degree experimental efforts, early attempts to forge a new compositional aesthetic. One led to the extroverted works of his heroic decade, the other to the intimate and personal creations of his final years. That they are both exercises in variation techniques only emphasizes the fundamental importance of such techniques to Beethoven throughout his career. The sectional theme, innovative in Op. 35, is refined and compressed in *An die ferne Geliebte*. Independent sixteen-bar segments become interdependent motives just one or two bars long. And in both works, in addition to varying the theme, Beethoven also varies variations of the theme, a technique Schoenberg called "developing variation".[23] The *a due*, *a tre*, and *a quattro* are at once variations of the *Tema* and entities sufficiently distinct to germinate variations of their own; similarly, the motives of *Auf dem Hügel* spawn the themes of the succeeding songs, and then the themes of songs two, three, and four, are varied anew within song five.

Yet another important compositional feature of *An die ferne Geliebte* is present in both the Op. 35 variations and the Kreutzer variation movement. The return of Motive 1 in the bassline of *Auf dem Hügel*, shortly after it was heard in the melody, occurs in both of the earlier themes. This interplay between outer parts stands out in Op. 35 because of the formal separation of *Tema* and *Basso del Tema*. The first five bars of the *Tema* move steadily up a third, g-a♭-b♭-b♭, repeating the top note. Beethoven places the same notes at the end of the *Basso del Tema* (bars 13–15), so that the end of the bass outlines the first bars of the *Tema*, contributing to the sense

[23] W. FRISCH, *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* (Berkeley 1984).

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of continuity between individual variations. Likewise in the Kreutzer sonata, the variation theme begins with steps from f down to c and back (bars 1–3), and syncopated accents on the weak second eighth notes of each $\frac{2}{4}$ bar. The bassline responds in bars 4–7 with ascending fourths (first of all from c to f) that begin on the same accented off-beat.

Despite the compositional similarities between Op. 35 and *An die ferne Geliebte*, there is a fundamental difference in Beethoven's mastery of the techniques used in both works. The greater sophistication and refinement of his compositional skills in *An die ferne Geliebte* is evident in the complete integration of variation techniques and formal design. Any change in the order and melodic content of the songs is unthinkable, having been determined in the first ten bars. No motivic idea in the melody or the accompaniment is extraneous. Everything moves along a prescribed path towards a predetermined goal in the coda. And each step is calculated to embody musically the physical separation and spiritual union described in the text. In contrast, while there is also an obvious plan in Op. 35 – the contrapuntal progression from invertible counterpoint at the beginning, to canon (Var. 7), and then fugue – the movement from variation to variation and from variations to fugue does not project the same aura of inevitability. It is not surprising that Beethoven's sketches reveal a great deal of indecision about the number of variations and their order. Lastly, even if Beethoven intended Op. 35 to express some aspect of the Prometheus story, he left no textual clues to his musical design.

One of Beethoven's great achievements in *An die ferne Geliebte* was his success in disguising the underlying variation structure. His integration of variation techniques into the melodic lines of each song is so thorough that it has been overlooked for 170 years. Beethoven, like Haydn and Mozart before him, had many times demonstrated the ability to derive one melody from the motive of another, and in the process to alter completely the dramatic impact of the tune.[24] From the late 1790s on, this ability was more or less evident in the majority of his cyclic works. But in *An die ferne Geliebte* Beethoven set a new standard for relating the melodies of separate formal units to one another, for building what Rudolph Réti scientifically termed an "organic" unity.[25] The motivic links between each song and the first ten bars of the cycle are comprehensive; furthermore, the connections he makes are now harder to recognize because they involve melodic *and* rhythmic transformations of neutral motives. They do not leap out at the listener like the transformations of the rhythmically consistent knocking motives in the fifth symphony and the Appassionata sonata, or, in the third piano concerto, like the recasting of the angular and distinctive c minor rondo theme in the c major coda. These two features are mutually dependent: the pervasive motivic connections and the neutrality of the *ur*-motive go hand-in-hand. Of the motivic transformations in *An die ferne Geliebte*,

[24] On motivic transformation in the works of Haydn and Mozart, see C. ROSEN, *The Classical Style* (London and New York 1971), p. 198–214; in early Beethoven, see COREN, *Structural Relations* (cf. note 3 above).
[25] Despite his excesses, R. RÉTI, *The Thematic Process in Music* (New York 1951), has many valuable insights.

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the only one previously identified involves the motive with the strongest profile, a rising fourth and falling sixth. The others become recognizable – and unusually so – only after identifying Beethoven's complex of motives, and his systematic manipulation of them. Melodic and contrapuntal position, structural function, and textual associations all contribute to a strongly defined musical context. Private motivic transformations are thus made public. Subtle motivic derivations, when identified individually and outside of their musical contexts, are often most visible to the eye of the discoverer.[26]

The broader benefit of unmasking Beethoven's methods in *An die ferne Geliebte* is that it provides a precedent for tracing motivic transformations in other works, and for interpreting these transformations on the basis of a text. Such texts need not be vocal, as I will demonstrate with Op. 135.

[26] Since writing this analysis of *An die ferne Geliebte*, I have realized that one of the two principal motives, Motive 3, has enjoyed a special notoriety among biographers seeking to identify Beethoven's Immortal Beloved. (Cf. M.-E. TELLENBACH, *Beethoven und seine Unsterbliche Geliebte Josephine Brunswick, ihr Schicksal und der Einfluß auf Beethovens Werk* [Zürich 1983], p. 206–7; M. SOLOMON, *Recherche de Josephine Deym*, in: *The Beethoven Newsletter* 2/2 [1987], p. 21–26, disputes her methods and findings; while V. O. BEAHRS, *The Immortal Beloved Riddle Reconsidered*, in: *MT* 129 [February, 1988], p. 64–70, offers support.) Beethoven apparently first used a motive similar to Motive 3 in his *Andante favori* (WoO 57) of 1805, a work he sent to Countess Josephine Deym, calling it "*your – your* –– Andante." The recurrence of this motive in *An die ferne Geliebte* has been interpreted as evidence of Beethoven's continuing love for Josephine, a continuation which in turn is seen as evidence for identifying Josephine as the Immortal Beloved. Subsequently Beethoven used the same motive in the variation movement of the E major piano sonata, Op. 109 (1820), as well as at his extemporized performance for Sir George Smart in 1825 (cf. footnote 17 above).

There is not space here for me to enter the argument over the identity of the Immortal Beloved, other than to observe the following. My motivic analysis of the coda in the sixth song of *An die ferne Geliebte* is an investigation of how Beethoven manipulated motives to represent successively the ideas of separation and reunion (or union) within a single work. Further, given the course of Beethoven's relationships with women, it is clear that these ideas have a relevance to his own life circumstances. But whether or not these motives contain conscious references to specific people is a separate matter. Beethoven's evident adaptation of the *Andante favori* motive later in his life may indeed indicate that the motive carries extra-musical, biographical associations for Beethoven. But if my analysis of the coda is correct, one cannot take the extra step to conclude that Motive 3 represents Josephine Deym without also arguing that the opening motive represents Beethoven himself. Beethoven may indeed have anticipated Schumann and others in this regard, but that has yet to be convincingly demonstrated.

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