

Beethoven's Last Bagatelle*

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On 24 November 1824, Beethoven wrote to the publisher Schott, offering (among other works) "six bagatelles or trifles for pianoforte solo, several of which are rather more fully worked out and probably the best of this kind which I have composed."¹ Of course the composer was courting a sale—and readers familiar with his business ethics can only be amused by the closing lines:

But I do earnestly beg you to let me have a reply at once, for another publisher would like to have these works (this is not boasting, a thing I never indulge in) . . . So do not suspect any cunning, double-dealing, or the like.²

As it turned out, Schott did publish the Bagatelles, op. 126 the following year.³ While we cannot be certain that the composer's self-congratulatory remarks pertain specifically to the E-flat bagatelle which closes the set, the existence of numerous sketches, two continuity drafts, and extensive corrections made during the preparation of the autograph score prove that Beethoven lavished considerable care upon this particular "trifle."⁴ In this essay, I use Beethoven's sketches to focus a discussion of formal design, phrase rhythm, motivic unity, and performance issues relating to

*This essay is respectfully dedicated to Edward T. Cone, whose lectures and writings have made me think again and again.

¹*The Letters of Beethoven*, trans. and ed. Emily Anderson (New York: Norton, 1961; reprinted 1985), 3:1151.

²*Ibid.*, 1152.

³For further information about the genesis of Beethoven's late bagatelles, see Barry Cooper, "A Creation in Three Phases: The Late Bagatelles," in *Beethoven and the Creative Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

⁴Nottebohm discusses some sketches for Opus 126 in *Zweite Beethoveniana* (Leipzig: Peters, 1887), 193ff, but a more comprehensive account is now available in *Ludwig van Beethoven: Sechs Bagatellen für Klavier, Op. 126* (Bonn: Beethovenhaus, 1984), 2 vols. Editor Sieghard Brandenburg provides facsimiles of the sketches, the autograph, and the first printed edition, together with transcriptions and commentary.

the last bagatelle. A series of provocative observations by Edward T. Cone suggested division of the essay into four subsections.

I. The Picture and the Frame

First among many remarkable features are the identical Presto flourishes that bookend the bagatelle (a score is provided in Example 1). In *Musical Form and Musical Performance*, Edward T. Cone pointed out how certain introductions and codas create an “internal frame,” citing this bagatelle (and “Consolation,” the ninth of Mendelssohn’s *Songs Without Words*) as extreme examples:

In each of these the introduction is complete and self-contained, arriving at a full cadence; in each the same material returns, without change, to form the coda. They are thus a part, yet not wholly a part, of the composition. They set off the rest like the depicted window frames through which we sometimes see the subject of a Dutch portrait.⁵

Cone goes on to suggest that he finds introductions and codas most effective when they are fully integrated into a work’s formal scheme. Indeed, some performances of op. 126, no. 6 make the boisterous Presto outbursts sound as if they do not quite belong with the remainder of the piece—but to play them so is (for several reasons) a mistake. Commentators differ concerning the degree to which they think the framing Prestos are integral to the work. Sieghard Brandenburg opines that this manner of beginning might be compared to the brief “cadenzas” with which J. B. Wanhal prefaced his simple sonatinas; they do little to prepare the listener for what will follow, other than to establish the key.⁶ John Rothgeb chides him for overlooking the “interesting ways” in which the Presto relates to the main body of the composition, but mainly limits his discussion to the latter.⁷

⁵Edward T. Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: Norton, 1968), 22.

⁶Brandenburg, 2:62-3.

⁷John Rothgeb, “Salient Features,” in *Music Theory in Concept and Practice*, ed. James Baker, David Beach, and Jonathan Bernard (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 181-196; see his note 9. On p. 192, Rothgeb mentions

Example 1.

Presto

f

Andante amabile e con moto

te nute

p

te nute

p

3

3

20

Example 1. (cont.)

Example 1. (cont.)

The musical score is written for piano, featuring a treble and bass staff. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The score is divided into six systems, each starting with a measure number in the upper left corner of the treble staff.

- System 1 (Measures 25-28):** The treble staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords. A *cresc.* (crescendo) marking is placed above the treble staff between measures 27 and 28.
- System 2 (Measures 29-32):** The treble staff continues the melodic line. The bass staff has a steady accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *dim.* (diminuendo) above the treble staff at measure 29, *p* (piano) below the bass staff at measure 30, *più p* (pianissimo) below the bass staff at measure 31, and *pp* (pianissimo) below the bass staff at measure 32.
- System 3 (Measures 33-36):** The treble staff has rests in measures 33 and 34, followed by a melodic phrase in measures 35 and 36. The bass staff has a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. A *2da* (second ending) marking is below the bass staff at measure 34, and an *** (star) marking is above the treble staff at measure 36.
- System 4 (Measures 37-40):** The treble staff has rests in measures 37 and 38, followed by a melodic phrase in measures 39 and 40. The bass staff has a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. A *cresc.* (crescendo) marking is placed above the treble staff between measures 39 and 40.
- System 5 (Measures 41-44):** The treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes. The bass staff has a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. A *p cresc.* (piano crescendo) marking is placed above the treble staff between measures 42 and 43. A *3* (triple) marking is above the treble staff at measure 44.
- System 6 (Measures 45-48):** The treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes. The bass staff has a continuous eighth-note accompaniment.

Example 1. (cont.)

The musical score is presented in six systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

- System 1 (Measures 49-53):** Measure 49 begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand features a series of eighth-note chords, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.
- System 2 (Measures 54-57):** Measure 54 is marked with a crescendo (*cresc.*) and a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur, and the left hand continues the accompaniment. The system ends with a decrescendo (*dim.*) and a piano (*p*) dynamic.
- System 3 (Measures 58-61):** Measure 58 is marked with a crescendo (*cresc.*) and a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur, and the left hand continues the accompaniment.
- System 4 (Measures 62-66):** Measure 62 is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur, and the left hand continues the accompaniment. The system ends with a decrescendo (*dim.*) and a piano (*p*) dynamic.
- System 5 (Measures 67-70):** Measure 67 is marked with a decrescendo (*ritard.*) and a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur, and the left hand continues the accompaniment. The system ends with a decrescendo (*ritard.*) and a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic.
- System 6 (Measures 71-74):** Measure 71 is marked with a decrescendo (*ritard.*) and a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur, and the left hand continues the accompaniment. The system ends with a decrescendo (*ritard.*) and a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic.

Additional markings include a slur over measures 54-57, a slur over measures 58-61, a slur over measures 62-66, and a slur over measures 67-70. The tempo marking "Tempo I" appears above measure 67.

William Kinderman hears both registral and pitch connections across the tempo change:

The bass pedal on E-flat and B-flat comes from the sustained tremoli of the Presto, whereas the register of the treble line and the harmonic texture in thirds are outlined in the rapid eighth-note figures of the Presto.⁸

Beethoven's sketches indicate that the framing passages preoccupied him to no small degree as he shaped the piece. It is surprising how many times he revised these seemingly uncomplicated measures, and the successive changes he made provide a way to interpret the function of the frame. Distinctive Allegro flourishes are already present at the beginning and end of the early draft shown in Example 2.⁹ Although this draft features a well-developed version of the first Andante theme, already with pedal indications, it differs in many important ways from the final version. Here, the initial flourish is accompanied by a simple octave tremolo, and the melodic line is almost mechanical in its articulation of a series of descending thirds, lacking both the extremes of register and the graceful changes of direction that characterize the final version. Also note how, on the last system, the final Allegro resolves a cadential trill on the second scale degree (presumably over dominant harmony). In the revised draft of the initial flourish shown in Example 3, several important changes are evident. First, the accompaniment is now a chordal tremolo (including Kinderman's E-flat and B-flat fifth, and showing a change of harmony in the second bar). Second, there is a new shift to the higher register (albeit in m. 3, not m. 2 as in the

that his "motive x" (up one step, then down three, as in mm. 9 and 12) first occurs in the Presto (mm. 3-4). Readers may wish to compare also Janet Schmalfeldt's reading of op. 126, no. 6 in "Towards a Reconciliation of Schenkerian Concepts with Traditional and Recent Theories of Form," *Music Analysis* 10 (1991): 233-287.

⁸"Beethoven," in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. R. Larry Todd (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 91.

⁹The transcription in Example 2 is from Brandenburg, 2:37-38.

Example 2.

9 all[egr]o

10

11 [andante]

ped.

12

13

14

Example 2. (cont.)

[?] 15 oder

16

100

100

1

2

3

4

6

4

7

Vi =

[=de]

Example 3.

The musical score for Example 3 consists of two measures, 10 and 11. Measure 10 is marked with a '10' at the beginning and an '8va' with a dotted line at the end. The treble staff contains a melodic line of eighth notes, while the bass staff contains a single note. Measure 11 is marked with an '11' at the beginning. The treble staff continues the melodic line of eighth notes, and the bass staff contains a single note. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of two flats.

final version).¹⁰ Finally, the right hand no longer employs parallel sixths, but a single melodic line, a revision that presumably relates to the increase in tempo from Allegro to Presto.

Ultimately, while preparing the autograph score, Beethoven found it necessary to recopy one double leaf, upon which he made multiple compositional amendments.¹¹ In m. 68, Beethoven adjusted the harmonic rhythm, replacing B-flats on the first two beats of the bass with E-flat. He also added the two thirty-second notes in the bass, ensuring a smooth link with the final flourish in spite of the authentic cadence and ritard. Thus in the final version, the otherwise identical Prestos are importantly distinguished: the one at the opening stands apart (by virtue of the rests and fermata in m. 6), while that at the end is smoothly conjoined with what comes before. Although the frame is symmetrical, the picture meets it differently at the edges—as was

¹⁰Brandenburg's transcription is in vol. 2: 38. Through an oversight, the sign for the octave displacement is missing; it is clearly present in the facsimile (1:60).

¹¹Ms. 81, Bibliotheque nationale, Paris. Brandenburg's transcription is in vol. 2: 41-43.

already the case in Beethoven's earliest conception of the piece and remained so throughout numerous revisions.

II. Phrase Rhythm and Hypermeter

In an essay entitled "Beethoven's Experiments in Composition: The Late Bagatelles," Cone demonstrates parallels between specific techniques and devices in selected bagatelles and the composer's other late works.¹² Cone submits that some of these "experiments" had important precedents in Beethoven's earlier works, but that the late bagatelles carry unorthodox procedures to new extremes, if not to greater lengths. Cone argues cogently that in the late bagatelles, Beethoven was

putting to the test a number of generally received ideas, raising doubts as to the universal usefulness, for instance, of clear phrase articulation, of metrical uniformity, of immediately perceptible recapitulation, of thematic contrast and harmonic balance.¹³

In due course we shall take up matters of thematic contrast, harmonic balance, and immediately perceptible recapitulation. Let us deal first with the highly unusual phrase rhythms of the last bagatelle. Beethoven's sketches provide a dramatic illustration of how this unique characteristic developed. The draft shown in Example 2 combines a six-measure Allegro flourish and a six-measure Andante theme, which was to be repeated: already an interest in balanced, non-quadruple bar groupings is clearly evident. In a second continuity draft (shown in Example 4), Beethoven advances in bold steps toward a larger and less conventional formal design.¹⁴ Initial steps were swift and secure: the first repeated segment is expanded from six to fifteen bars,

¹²First published in *Beethoven Studies* 2, ed. Alan Tyson (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 84-105, the essay was reprinted in a collection of Cone's essays entitled *Music: A View from Delft*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 179-200. Subsequent citations are from the latter source.

¹³Ibid., 181.

¹⁴Brandenburg, 2:38-39.

Example 4.

Example 4 is a musical score consisting of 13 staves. The notation is as follows:

- Staff 5:** Treble clef, key signature of two flats (B-flat, E-flat). It begins with a series of eighth notes, followed by a half note, and ends with a quarter note.
- Staff 6:** Bass clef, key signature of two flats. It begins with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and ends with a half note.
- Staff 7:** Treble clef, key signature of two flats. It begins with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and ends with a half note. An annotation "(5) [erst:]" is placed above the first measure.
- Staff 8:** Bass clef, key signature of two flats. It begins with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and ends with a half note. An annotation "(7) 2" is placed above the first measure.
- Staff 9:** Treble clef, key signature of two flats. It begins with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and ends with a half note. An annotation "(1)" is placed above the first measure.
- Staff 10:** Bass clef, key signature of two flats. It begins with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and ends with a half note. An annotation "7" is placed above the first measure.
- Staff 11:** Treble clef, key signature of two flats. It begins with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and ends with a half note. An annotation "8" is placed above the first measure.
- Staff 12:** Bass clef, key signature of two flats. It begins with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and ends with a half note. An annotation "7" is placed above the first measure.
- Staff 13:** Treble clef, key signature of two flats. It begins with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and ends with a half note. An annotation "13" is placed above the first measure.

The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines. There are also annotations in parentheses and brackets, including "(5) [erst:]", "(7) 2", "(1)", "7", "8", and "13".

Example 4. (cont.)

Vi = [→ = de Z. 16]

(15) ②

15 ①

1 [8va.....] loco

2

4 7 8

5

10 8va

11

now modulating to the dominant instead of closing in the tonic. The newly added motives include a three-bar model plus its sequential copy, and a three-bar codetta (corresponding to mm. 13-21 of the final version). Dynamic and phrase markings in the finished score leave no question as to the grouping structure Beethoven intends in mm. 13-18. The introduction of triplet sixteenths in the codetta is especially apt: now beats, bars, and motives all project tripartite groupings or subdivisions.¹⁵

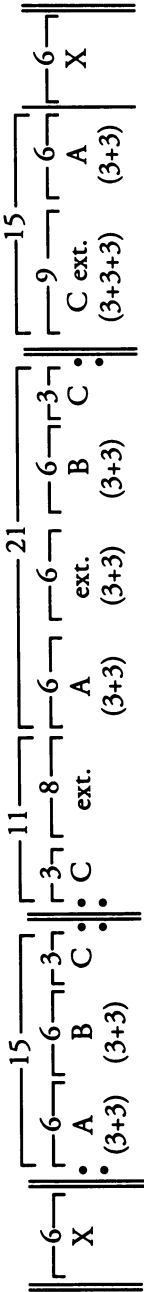
The continuation after the repeat gave Beethoven more trouble. In Example 2 he proceeds in four-bar groups,¹⁶ but quadruple bar groupings are entirely absent from the draft shown in Example 4. After the first repeat in this second draft, Beethoven experiments with a rising stepwise sequence, moving in three-bar units from B-flat to C minor; he later rejected this solution, but the final version does begin with a three-bar group after the first repeat. The concluding bars of the draft comprise eight consecutive three-bar groups. Beethoven's sketches for the coda (not shown) ran first six, then twelve, and finally fifteen bars.

Example 5a provides a bar-grouping analysis of the entire bagatelle. The repeats are written out in Example 5b with superscripts added for variations of the motives, in order to emphasize the way in which different successions of motivic material create longer sections. (The four principal motives are shown in Example 6, which will be discussed below.) Note, for example, how the succession A-B-C-C occurs three times, each time followed by another A, but always involving different variants of the motives. A succession of no fewer than twelve three-bar groups precedes the final Presto. The coda hypermetrically stabilizes Motive C for the first and only time in a succession of four three-bar groups (mm. 51-62), with the

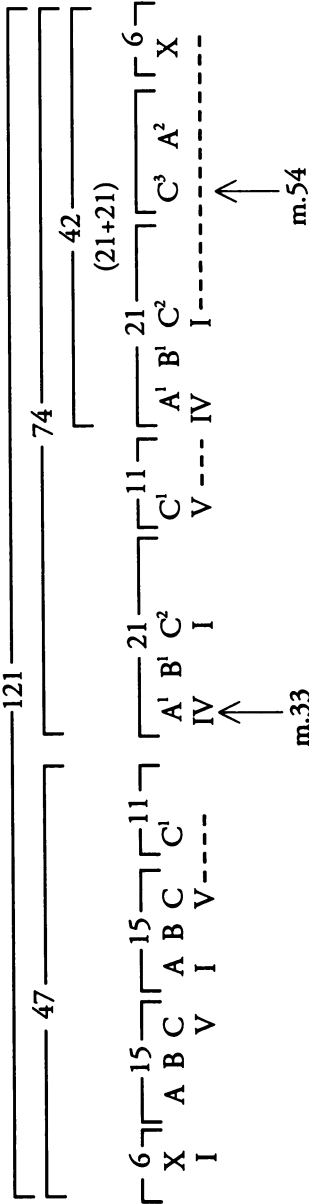
¹⁵Rothgeb makes brief reference to the triple hypermeter of the bagatelle in "Salient Features," (186), but does not explore the matter at any length.

¹⁶In part of this draft, Beethoven omits every other bar line, so an apparent succession of eight six-eight bars leads to the tonic recapitulation of the Andante theme.

Example 5a.



Example 5b.



climax (m. 56) marking its midpoint.¹⁷ This bagatelle may well be the most thoroughgoing example of triple hypermeter in the tonal repertory.

III. "Taming the Subdominant" and Motivic Parallelisms

In the course of shaping the motives of the last bagatelle, Beethoven created a deep parallelism that unites all of the thematic material. Example 6 aligns tonic statements of the four principal motives: Motive X (the Presto), and Motives A, B, and C (from the Andante). As shown, each contains a rising arpeggio, followed by a stepwise descent using scale degrees 5-1-3-2-1.¹⁸ Here again, sketches provide evidence of Beethoven's growing interest in this particular *Gestalt*. For example, the heavily deleted sketch in the middle of Example 4 varies and combines the rhythms of Motives A and B while preserving their common shape. Beethoven uses this version of the theme, decorated with a trill, on the next to last system of the draft, in an early experiment with a subdominant recapitulation. This particular variant of the theme disappears in later sketches, but the idea of bringing back some form of the main theme in the subdominant remains fixed in all subsequent versions.

Of course, this unusual formal feature has been noted by every commentator on the last bagatelle. Cone relates it to the composer's "strong interest in taming the subdominant" in the late string quartets (especially op. 131 in C \sharp minor).¹⁹ He astutely points out an early appearance of the subdominant (at the end of m. 15 of the bagatelle), and underscores the harmonic deception at work here: one actually expects the submediant (C minor having been tonicized in the previous bars).

¹⁷The bar-grouping analysis in Example 5b suggests that in spite of its different meter and tempo, the final Presto's six bars combine with the previous fifteen to make a 21-bar unit, and thus balances the immediately preceding 21-bar group.

¹⁸Rothgeb finds statements of this motive in mm. 13, 16, and 19, but he does not relate them to the Presto or to the overall design of the bagatelle. See his example 13, (192).

¹⁹"Beethoven's Experiments," 191.

Example 6.

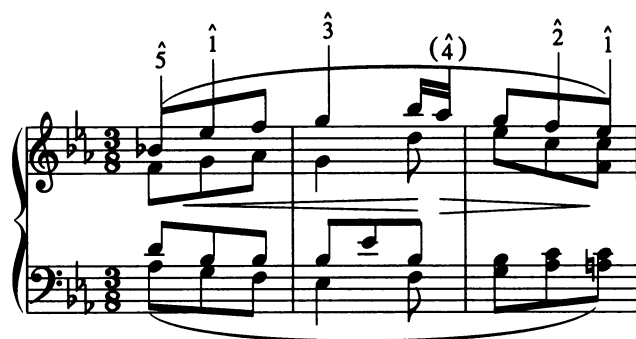
Motive X $\hat{1}$ $\hat{3}$ $(\hat{4})$ $\hat{2}$ $\hat{2}$

Motive A $\hat{1}$ $\hat{3}$ $(\hat{4})$ $\hat{2}$ $\hat{2}$ $\hat{1}$ $\hat{2}$ $\hat{1}$

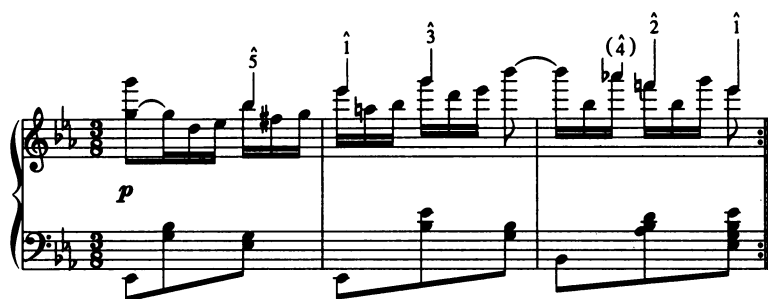
[inner voice]

Example 6. (cont.)

Motive B



Motive C



However, Cone leaves untold another tale, one as full of deception and intrigue as his beloved Italian operas and detective stories. This plot hinges on the dual identity of A-flat as the subdominant and as the submediant of the submediant. As Cone notes, we first meet A-flat (in m. 15) in the latter capacity—as the deceptive resolution of the dominant of the submediant.²⁰

²⁰Beethoven had employed the very same deceptive progression to somewhat different ends in a much earlier essay in “taming of the subdominant,” the first movement of the Waldstein sonata. The first phrase of the second theme ends with a deceptive resolution of V/vi to IV. On a much broader scale, the exposition moves from C major through E major to a statement of the main theme in F major at the beginning of the development.

Note how vigorously G major harmony is prolonged in mm. 25-29. There are indeed E-flat harmonies in mm. 31-32 which serve as local dominant preparation for the subdominant recapitulation. But especially the first time around, one recalls this long G pedal and may hear in the arrival of A-flat recapitulation an echo of the earlier deception. Given the structural importance of the subdominant in the overall design, it is perhaps not surprising to find that all four of the principal motives shown in Example 6 include scale degree 4 as a neighbor or as a passing tone, decorating the basic *Gestalt*. The motivic parallelism is both deeper and richer than has previously been noted, and its working out over the course of the entire bagatelle involves a sophisticated treatment of register as well as voice leading, as we shall see.

IV. Playing It Again

Cone offers an uncharacteristically harsh assessment of several bars in the recapitulation of the last bagatelle:

[T]he return to the tonic (mm. 48-51) is probably the weakest passage in the piece, perhaps in the entire opus. Instead of the originally straightforward melodic descent G-F-Eb-D, contributing to the dominant modulation (mm. 17-19), it offers a line that revolves lamely around a static G, relying at one point on a facile chromatic passing tone (m. 50).²¹

Beethoven's sketches show that the passage in question gave him considerable trouble, requiring numerous revisions even as late as the preparation of the autograph manuscript.²² The problem was, quite simply, how to accomplish a convincing return to the tonic

Finally, in the coda (mm. 285), the tonic transposition of the second theme presents this deceptive progression (C, E, F) yet again. The original second movement of the sonata, it may be recalled, was the *Andante Favori* WoO 57, a large rondo in F major with a central episode in the subdominant.

²¹"Beethoven's Experiments," 192.

²²Brandenburg provides a facsimile of the autograph in vol. 1: 32-36. The most extensive revisions begin at m. 43, where Beethoven prepares the return to the tonic. See also pp. 61-62 for a facsimile of the rejected double leaf which had to be replaced: revisions here affect the same passage.

in the midst of the subdominant recapitulation. Cone's dismay over Beethoven's solution may reflect the composer's difficulties with the passage, but it also points up a challenge for performers: how might one circumvent the purported melodic aimlessness? One answer may lie in an artful performance of the repeats.

Yet once more, Cone's words echo:

Is there such a thing as literal repetition in music? I mean to imply nothing so profound as the Heraclitan impossibility of stepping into the same river twice, nor anything so trivial as the obvious fact that one can never play the same passage twice exactly alike.²³

He goes on to explain that every musical statement is influenced by its relative position—by what precedes and what follows—and enjoins us to consider this simple fact when we decide whether or not to observe repeat signs in performance. Many recorded performances of this bagatelle (and surely too many live ones) omit the second repeat—as if life were too short and too fast-paced to allow the minute or less it would take to play what Beethoven wrote. Omitting the repeats destroys the bagatelle's thematic and rhythmic equilibrium, and robs listeners of the opportunity to fathom its considerable and charming mysteries. Playing the repeats offers opportunities for variations of tempo and articulation which can highlight subtle features of design.²⁴

For example, the first time through, a performer could de-emphasize the metrically weak tonic at the end of m. 53, in effect linking the strong beat dominant harmony of that measure to that in m. 22, and securing a melodic connection between Cone's troublesome G6 in mm. 49-52 and the F6 in mm. 23 and following.²⁵ Take no ritard in m. 53; rather, press ahead slightly and play the third beat lightly.

²³*Musical Form and Musical Performance*, 46.

²⁴See David Smyth, "Balanced Interruption and the Formal Repeat," *Music Theory Spectrum* 15 (1993): 76-88 for more about the importance of performing repeats.

²⁵Compare Cone's suggestion concerning how to play first and second endings in op. 126, no. 5 in "Beethoven's Experiments" (188). For another opinion on the same passages, see Janet Schmalfeldt, "On the Relation of

Although Cone specifically speaks of melodic weakness in these bars, the source of his discomfort may also involve the harmony. As Example 7a shows, the progression from A-flat via F minor to Eb major is accomplished very rapidly, without recourse to a root position dominant—hardly the most convincing way to restore the structural tonic. The simplification in Example 7b illustrates how the voice exchange figure which prolongs F minor in mm. 45-46 occurs in diminution in m. 47, now asserting itself as an upbeat to the subsequent tonic leg of the sequence. Some degree of ambiguity may actually have been Beethoven's aim here: perhaps this tonic is not yet supposed to function as tonic, but rather more as the dominant of the subdominant, in preparation for the climactic arrival on that harmony in m. 55. Especially the second time around, the melodic revolving around G (and the associated high B-flats in mm. 49, 52, and 53) can effectively prepare the climactic high C over subdominant harmony in the coda. Give the last high B-flat its full value and an extra accent the second time around, and it will meet the high C at the top of your crescendo three bars later.

Example 8 presents a deep middleground sketch of the bagatelle, showing that underpinning the whole is an elaborated version of the *Gestalt* projected by each of the four principal motives. The fundamental line is interrupted and expanded through the interpolation of the subdominant recapitulation, the remoteness of which is emphasized by a dramatic drop into the lowest register and the transfer of the triplet sixteenths to the accompaniment. This reading suggests that the Gs around which Beethoven "revolves lamely" in mm. 49-51 are in fact the restored *Kopftön* of the interrupted fundamental structure, now intensified by doubling at the octave above. The climax in the coda relocates the tenth (A-flat and C) of the subdominant recapitulation to the

Example 7a.

Musical score for Example 7a, measures 45-49. The score is written for piano (p) and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. The notation includes staccato marks and dynamic markings. The key signature is one flat (B-flat).

Measures 45-49 are shown. Measure 45 begins with a circled measure number (45). Measure 46 contains a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 47 features a staccato mark. Measure 48 includes a dynamic marking *p*. Measure 49 begins with a circled measure number (49).

Example 7b.

45

etc.

(6) 6 5 6—5 3 4—4 6 6 5 3

highest register, after which final references to Motive A are heard several octaves lower, providing the last explicit resolution of A-flat to G (mm. 67-68). The detail in Example 8b encapsulates the voice leading of mm. 22-33, showing how F is transformed from a consonance (over B-flat) into a dissonant seventh (over G). Stepwise descent to A-flat (m. 31) coincides with the first arrival of subdominant harmony, to be confirmed in the following bars by the onset of the subdominant recapitulation.

Such a reading underscores an extreme disjunction between tonal structure and the registral projection of the thematic/motivic design.²⁶ Read thematically, the bagatelle displays a fairly normative A-BA¹ layout (within the repeat signs). Example 8a.

Because of the subdominant recapitulation, however, the work's thematic and tonal returns do not coincide. I would suggest that this disjunction may carry further still—that, in a performance that includes both repeats, the apparent subdominant at the recapitulation may also function as a deceptive resolution (as VI of vi), and that the apparent tonic at

²⁶Others have noted disruptive tendencies of varying kinds in the late bagatelles. See for example Christopher Hatch, "Normality and Disruption in Beethoven's Bagatelle, Op. 119, No. 8," in *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, ed. Christopher Hatch and David Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 341-355.

Example 8a.

Example 8a is a musical sketch for piano. Above the staff, fingerings are indicated: ∞ 5-1-3, 4, 2-1, and 3 2 ||. The sketch consists of two staves. The upper staff has measure numbers 9, 19, 35, 49, 55, 67, 68, 72, and 73. The lower staff has a Roman numeral IV below measure 35. An arrow points from measure 35 in the lower staff to measure 49 in the upper staff.

Example 8b.

Example 8b is a musical sketch for piano. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has measure numbers 22 and 31, followed by "etc.". The lower staff has Roman numerals V, vi, IV, and VI/vi below measures 22, 23, 31, and 32 respectively. A vertical line connects V and V/vi, and another connects vi and VI/vi. A dashed line connects the first note of measure 22 in the upper staff to the first note of measure 22 in the lower staff.

m. 49 may also function as the dominant of the subdominant, which will arrive at the climax in the coda.

If each of the work's principal motives carries within itself a potentially closed tonal *Gestalt*, what prevents the piece from stopping sooner? Clearly the opening flourish cannot stand as an entire work—it is simply too short. The sketches in Examples 2 and 4 show that Beethoven soon rejected the idea of repeating Motive A with its tonic cadence as a first formal segment, perhaps

in part because it posed the threat of premature closer—or at least failed to establish sufficient forward momentum. By introducing a modulation in the first reprise, he incurred a responsibility to bring back Motives B and C in the tonic at some later point. And Beethoven's later decision to employ a subdominant recapitulation of Motive A strongly hints that an additional tonic appearance of this material will be forthcoming as well, quite probably in a coda. What is both unpredictable and truly masterful is the precise way Beethoven carries out each of these obligations.

As we have seen, the return to the tonic using Motive B (in mm. 45-50) is deeply undercut, both by virtue of the precipitous harmonic progression, and by melodic changes which rob the motive of its stepwise descent to the tonic: instead of descending, the melody "revolves lamely" around the third scale degree. The tonic restatement of Motive C in mm. 51-53 has only the most perfunctory cadence, much weakened by the metrical location of its final tonic. I have suggested that these features are not compositional weaknesses or oversights, but rather, they serve to prepare a more effective climax: the subdominant apotheosis in the coda.

After the climax in m. 55 and a dizzying chromatic skid from the highest register, Beethoven provides the expected (albeit abbreviated) tonic restatement of Motive A (mm. 63-68) in the lower register. Here it lacks the initial ascending arpeggio of the *Gestalt*, and is harmonized (mainly) over a dominant pedal, but cessation of motion in triplet sixteenths and the halting rhythms of the melody effectively recall mm. 7-12 in spite of the differences. We have seen how Beethoven adjusted the harmonic rhythm at the cadence in m. 68 and added a melodic link (a minuscule reference to the impending completion of the fundamental line?) to the final Presto. Somewhat ironically, then, it remains for Motive X—the only motive *not* to have been transposed or varied at all—to accomplish final closure. Melodic descent to the tonic (in what I take to be the obligatory register) occurs in mm. 72-73, over V-I harmony complicated only by the tonic pedal point in the bass. Thus when the Presto music

ultimately fulfills its original potential to achieve formal and tonal closure, we may perhaps appreciate how fundamentally different this music is the second time we hear it.

Conclusion

The composer's sketches and revisions point clearly toward some of the most remarkable features of the last bagatelle. Multiple revisions of the six-bar framing passages reveal Beethoven's careful adjustments of tempo, register, and texture. When the decision was taken to expand the first repeated portion of the form from six to fifteen bars by adding two new motives (both based upon three-bar groups), Beethoven also introduced triplet sixteenths for the first time, embedding triple grouping structure at still another level. A deep motivic parallelism involving the scale-degree succession 5-1-3-4-2-1 unites all of the principal motives of the bagatelle, and also appears in an unused variant of the main theme in the sketches. The appearance of the fourth scale degree in each of the motives foretells the important role that the subdominant will play as the key of the rumbling, low-register recapitulation and at the brilliant climax at the opposite registral extreme. I have suggested several ways performers might vary their presentation of repeated passages in order to project the multiple meanings of various harmonic puns (tonic as V/IV and subdominant as VI/vi) and to bring out registral connections (between the high B-flat in m. 53 and the climactic high C in m. 55, for example). All in all, Beethoven's assertion that his last bagatelles include music that is "probably the best of this kind which I have composed" seems fully justified: the last bagatelle is a highly polished gem.