Beethoven’s Janus-faced Quartet: Opus 130, the Große Fuge and the Allegro

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ....................................................................................................... ii

Introduction ..................................................................................................................1

Chapter One: The Late Style in the Quartets ...............................................................5

Chapter Two: The Quartet in B-flat, Op. 130: Overview ............................................9

  Movement I ..............................................................................................................9

  Movement II .........................................................................................................14

  Movement III .......................................................................................................17

  Movement IV .......................................................................................................20

  Movement V .......................................................................................................22

Chapter Three: The Große Fuge ..............................................................................26

  Grande Fugue, tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée .......................................................26

  The Structure of the Große Fuge .........................................................................30

  The Große Fuge as Finale ...................................................................................37

Chapter Four: The Alternate Finale ..........................................................................39

  The Structure of the Allegro ..............................................................................40

  The Allegro as Finale .........................................................................................43

Conclusion: Comparing the Finales ...........................................................................46

Bibliography .............................................................................................................51
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INTRODUCTION

Beethoven's Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 130 is unique in that it has two finales: two different faces, two different expressions. The original finale, the famous (and infamous) Große Fuge, failed to reach most early nineteenth century listeners. Indeed, it offended so many in its first months that even Beethoven's closest associate and publisher suggested that he amputate it from the limping B-flat Quartet, and instead preserve it as an independent opus. The composer at first adamantly refused, confident in the value of his work. However, his defenses quickly gave way and in the Fugue's place Beethoven composed a cheerful, witty, seamless sonata-rondo that is the antithesis of its predecessor. The Fugue, by contrast, dominates and is dominated by extremes, a characteristic closely reflected in the intense responses it has elicited over two centuries. Why should the Große Fuge alone of the six movements have incited such a strong reaction? The entire Quartet in B-flat is marbled with dissociation and contrast, yet the fugal finale alone struck listeners as so radical that even those people Beethoven most trusted could not unequivocally support his artistic vision.¹

As one delves deeper into the history of the Quartet's original finale – its conception, structure, relationship to the preceding five movements, and performance practice – more and more questions arise. The most alluring, of course, is: Why did the notoriously stubborn Beethoven capitulate to his friends' wishes and replace the

fugal finale with the sonata-rondo Allegro? Such a biographical question is difficult to answer with absolute confidence, though historical evidence suggests that a mixture of financial inducement, pragmatism, and artistry influenced Beethoven’s decision. As Alexander Wheelock Thayer notes in his biography of the composer, "Mathias Artaria, the publisher, who seems in this year [1826] to have entered the circle of the composer's intimate associates, presented the matter to him in a practicable light," offering to "remunerate him separately" for the publication of the Fugue as Op. 133. Drawing on an account of Beethoven's fierce disappointment after the B-flat Quartet's premier, Michael Steinberg assures the Fugue's supporters that "Beethoven of course never doubted the intrinsic quality of his fugue, only its function in the context [of the quartet]." To this, Joseph Braunstein adds that the composer had previously demonstrated a willingness to revise his work at his friends' request, citing his changes to the opera *Leonore* twenty years earlier. Pragmatism, Braunstein argues, won the day: "He probably realized that the audiences of 1826 … could not understand the language he spoke in the finale of the B-flat quartet," yet "he wished this work to be accepted by the musical world at large." Artaria's offer both enabled the quartet to succeed and earned him extra income. Braunstein goes on to say that Beethoven "did not consider this task a chore" and that on the contrary, the composer "wrote this movement in good spirit and even penned it with gusto." Perhaps this enthusiasm stemmed from having a worthy excuse to write a new

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2 Thayer, *Life of Beethoven*, 223.
3 Steinberg, "Notes on the Quartets," 239.
5 Ibid.
movement that may have been closer to his original conception, as Robert Hatten has observed.\(^6\) While these hypotheses alone could fill a volume, they address the biographical details of the music. This paper, on the other hand, seeks to address the music itself.

One might then ask: Which finale more fittingly ends the quartet? The answer is in many ways subjective; it depends on what kind of piece one wishes to hear or perform, to associate with late Beethoven, and with this moment in music history. Rather than favoring one or the other, I will show how each finale is connected to the previous five movements, and how each uniquely affects the overall shape and mood of the B-flat Quartet.

Beginning with a brief discussion of the late style in Beethoven’s quartets, I will then proceed to look more closely at each of the five movements leading up to the finales, identifying the common subversive thread that links their otherwise disparate narratives. I will then focus on each of the finales in turn, arguing that they provide opposing, yet equally convincing, endings to the same story.

The Große Fuge takes an underlying narrative in which chaos intrudes upon an orderly musical world and magnifies it to the point of near total breakdown. Its whimsical ending provides an unexpectedly innocent contrast to this destructive force, and leaves listeners feeling (perhaps intentionally) strangely unsatisfied. The alternate finale, on the other hand, is even subtler than the first five movements in its subversion of Classical language and expectations, situating those subversive elements under a rustic, unassuming surface. In this movement, Beethoven takes the

whimsy that concludes the Große Fuge and drapes it over the entirety of the Allegro.

To understand exactly how the composer builds such an evocative narrative around subversion and whimsy, we must now return to the beginning: to Beethoven’s late style and the first five movements of the Quartet in B-flat.
CHAPTER ONE
THE LATE STYLE IN THE QUARTETS

In his forties and fifties, Beethoven, like Haydn and Mozart before him, began to look back to the Baroque style for inspiration. To this, he added new stylistic touches of his own, including an affect Leon Plantinga describes as "reflective tranquility;"7 extreme, dissociative contrast that moves beyond Classical dualism; unique treatment of texture; an unabashed use of simple conventions; and caesurae. We will consider each of these briefly in turn, to provide context for our discussion of the Op. 130 Quartet.

In his late period, Beethoven became once again interested in the contrapuntal procedures he had studied with J. G. Albrechtsberger as a student. Although his earlier quartets, including Opp. 18, 59, and 95, do contain genuine counterpoint and fugue, Beethoven more innovatively expanded and integrated contrapuntal ideas, especially fugue and fugato, in the late quartets (Opp. 127, 132, 130, 131, and 135). Although the Große Fuge is perhaps the most extreme example of this innovative expansion, one can also find a poignantly beautiful example of integration of fugato and “baroque homogeneity of motion”8 in the prayerful Heiliger Dankgesang movement of the second Galitzin Quartet (Example 1).

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8 Ibid.
Example 1: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 132, movement III, mm. 168-72

That particular movement, a song of thanksgiving, also possesses a "reflective tranquility" that is not as common in the early or middle styles, yet permeates all of the late quartets. Plantinga contends that Beethoven at times produces this inward-looking state through the use of "muted dynamics" and "a leisurely continuity of ornamentation,"9 as the second theme from the Andante of Op. 130 shows (Example 2).

Example 2: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement III, mm. 62-63

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9 Ibid., 55.
Though such an intimate character is a significant feature in the late works, of perhaps greater importance is that character's relationship with its opposite, impulsive energy. The composer frequently deploys these conflicting moods with little transition between the two, and he "confronts us constantly with extremes—unisons and densely polyphonic textures, the odd and the straight, the propulsive and the hesitant." We will find examples of this in the first movement and the original finale of the Quartet Op. 130.

To expand, Beethoven manipulates texture in novel ways in many of the movements of the late quartets. There are contrasts between the thinness of single lines or unisons and the full saturation of "densely polyphonic textures" (Steinberg, see above), for instance. For example, in the variation movement of Op. 131 (IV), the first variation begins with a conversation between the lower three instruments and the first violin, the former taking on a homophonic texture, and the latter rising above with an ornamented, soloistic melody. As the variation develops, however, the bottom three voices gradually take on more individual roles, adding a new dimension to the "conversation," and increasing the saturation of the texture to a richer effect. As we will see, this textural effect reappears in the Cavatina of Op. 130.

Conventions and caesurae likewise riddle the late quartets, and for philosopher and writer Theodor Adorno they signify a change in Beethoven's artistic philosophy. He muses on them at length, contending that because "the same chords [said] the same thing over and over again," Beethoven began to leave bare conventions — decorative trills, cadences, fiorituras, and even harmony itself —

standing. This, he says, forced the conventions to "become expression in the naked
depiction of themselves," aided by the "often-noted abbreviation of [Beethoven's]
style," which aimed to free his phrases from "the illusion of subjective control."\textsuperscript{12}

No artist, of course, can completely escape his own subjectivity, and Adorno
articulates a poetic solution to that paradox: Beethoven "no longer draws together the
landscape [dotted with conventions], now deserted and alienated, into an image. He
illuminates it with the fire ignited by subjectivity as it strikes the walls of the work in
breaking free, true to the idea of its dynamic."\textsuperscript{13} Rather than placing conventions in
familiar, meaningful contexts, Adorno is saying, the composer instead inserts them in
arbitrary places, willfully making no attempt to bring about a "harmonious
synthesis."\textsuperscript{14} Hence the "dangerous innocence" and "even more dangerous
sophistication" Joseph Kerman describes in his discussion of Op. 130.\textsuperscript{15}

Adorno goes on to define caesurae, "the abrupt stops which characterize the
latest Beethoven more than any other feature"\textsuperscript{16} and nearly bring the Große Fuge to a
halt on several occasions (see mm. 511-32, 609-25, 651-57), as moments where
listeners can most viscerally hear the composer breaking apart the fundamentally
connected nature of Classical language. Like unexpectedly placed conventions, they
open fissures of understanding in the music, and it is the pattern in which these
fissures appear in the B-flat Quartet that ultimately draws its incongruent movements
together.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 126.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
CHAPTER TWO

THE QUARTET IN B-FLAT, OP. 130: OVERVIEW

The Op. 130 Quartet presents listeners with a sort of multi-movement divertimento, for instead of only two inner movements, it has four, bringing the work's total to six. Metaphorically speaking, the quartet is like a bookshelf, with the first movement acting as one bookend, the finale acting as the other, and the four inner movements serving as books, each with its own distinct narrative. However, which finale is used as the second bookend makes all the difference in how weight is distributed across the bookshelf, so to speak, and how the larger narrative running through the whole quartet ends. As Klaus Kropfinger vividly affirms, the Große Fuge "arches over the entirety of the work, from beginning to end. It draws everything in its path toward itself."\(^{17}\) Though the alternate finale does take up residence in the vast space the Fugue has vacated, it is more a star than a black hole, holding the earlier movements in orbit around it rather than obliterating them with its very presence. Because both finales have such a strong influence on the meaning of the quartet, it is important to discuss the first five movements on their own before viewing them in light of either the Große Fuge or the Allegro.

Movement I

The opening movement is in a large-scale sonata form, containing two prominent musical ideas that are diametrically opposed in character: the section

containing the first is labeled *Adagio ma non troppo*, the second (which is also the first theme) *Allegro*. When Beethoven began sketches for the B-flat Quartet, he started with this movement and the succeeding Presto, in the tonic and tonic minor respectively. ¹⁸ Though the first movement seems conventional enough in form and key, Beethoven's execution of sonata form in this movement is highly eccentric, both structurally and harmonically.

Beethoven was a master at manipulating listeners' sense of expectation, and he begins this quartet in a characteristically unpredictable, even strange, manner (Example 3). Indeed, when the four voices enter in unison, both rhythm and genre put up a false front. Although the *Adagio* is in triple time, a quarter note upbeat tricks the ear into dividing the first four quarters into 2+2, rather than 1+3. ¹⁹ Although this subtle disguise of the time signature reveals itself in the second bar, where we expect a quarter rest instead of an eighth rest, Beethoven does now allow his listeners to get too comfortable. After making sure we feel completely at ease in 3/4 time, the composer abruptly changes both the mood and the time signature (to common time) at the collision between the *Adagio* and the *Allegro* theme.

The *Adagio* section, moreover, initially seems to fit into the genre of the slow introduction, a technique Beethoven frequently employed at the beginning of sonata form first movements. However, after the first “weird disturbance” of the *Allegro* “flashes across the screen,” ²⁰ the *Adagio* inexplicably returns (just after Example 3), confounding listeners' sense of both what the *Adagio* actually is, and where the exposition begins. To make matters even more complicated, the first appearance of

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¹⁹ Steinberg, "Notes on the Quartets," 228.
²⁰ Ibid., 307.
the Allegro is in the tonic key, and the second (which actually begins the exposition) is in the dominant. That latter statement eventually resolves to the tonic in m. 37 with no harm done, but this tonal ambiguity sets up a problematic recapitulation some hundred bars later.\textsuperscript{21}

Example 3: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement I, mm. 1-19

According to Daniel Chua, not only are these issues not easily resolved, but they also extend beyond the boundaries of the first movement. Rejecting the idea that the first two sections are "staged as a simple binary opposition," he instead purports that the best way to describe the double appearance of the Adagio introduction is "‘duplicitiy’ … a strange kind of ‘double-mindedness.’" The result is "confusion arising from the blur of double images,” and a breakdown of “the clarity of events in the Classical language." Chua rightly goes on to say that this breakdown does not just characterize the first movement. Rather, the entire Op. 130 Quartet has a "split personality," one half an upstanding Classical citizen, the other an anarchist bent on the destruction of the former’s predictable, orderly world. Accordingly, "Things simply happen twice" in this quartet: there are two sonata-form movements, two dance movements, two slow movements, and even two finales.

Nowhere is the “double-mindedness” of this first movement clearer than at the recapitulation, where we witness what Joseph Kerman describes as a "forced wedding" of the Adagio and Allegro. Not only does the length of each section telescope in proportion from 4:1 to 1:1, making the contrast more immediate, but the two actually begin to bleed into one another structurally (Example 4). To explain, at the recapitulation of the first Adagio entrance, we hear a deceptive cadence from vii°7/vi to vi (m. 217), followed by what sounds like a reiteration of the same cadence. However, the second time, the Allegro bursts in unexpectedly, so that the vi chord now functions as both end and beginning. This overlapping of cadence and

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22 Ibid., 204.
23 Ibid.
opening chord happens twice more, as Beethoven literally welds together the otherwise irreconcilable themes.

Example 4: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement I, mm. 214-26

Moreover, the first movement of the quartet also introduces the semitone idea, which plays a strong connective role in the quartet's narrative. Although the half step can be found in nearly every Western harmonic composition, Beethoven situates single chromatic lines and fragments throughout the B-flat Quartet such that they form an ongoing narrative of subversion. In other words, their appearances highlight manipulations, sometimes subtle and sometimes overt, of the Classical language. The very first four notes of the quartet, played in striking octave unison by all four instruments (a technique mirrored in the fugal finale), presage this prominence: Bb to
A, then on down through Ab to G (Example 3; m. 1). Also, to return for a moment to
the recapitulation, we can see a chromatic line ascending through the section in which
the Adagio and Allegro combine (Example 4, mm. 217-24), from Bb in m. 217 all the
way to G in m. 224.

Movement II

The second movement, in the tonic minor, is a high-speed Presto in simple
ternary form. It is the first of two dance forms, the scherzo "a kind of galop over a
chaconne bass line," and the trio "a perverse gigue---6/4---with oratorical accents on
the second part of each measure."\(^{24}\) Beethoven displays great economy with his
musical material, as the scherzo (A) occupies all of thirty-six bars: two pairs of
repeated antecedent-consequent phrases. It flies breathlessly by, and without pause,
the trio begins. Its first period is equal in size to that of the scherzo, but in the second
half of the trio, the "breakdown of Classical language" introduced in the first
movement reemerges as Beethoven begins to play with rhythm (Example 5).

Given the presto tempo, we may easily hear the bars as beats and four bars as
a “4/4” hypermeasure. We then expect to hear even 8-bar phrases. Instead, in the
antecedent phrase, Beethoven gives us only seven, tripping up the otherwise regular
metric structure. A sudden drop in dynamic from forte to pianissimo at the eighth
measure (m. 32) emphasizes this instability. Then, becoming more overtly disruptive,
Beethoven has the first violin impishly lead the transition from the trio back to the
scherzo proper through a series of slippery chromatic descents. Each time the

\(^{24}\) Leonard G. Ratner, The Beethoven String Quartets: Compositional Strategies and Rhetoric
mischievous voice fails to return to the A’ section, it is halted by three forceful shouts from all four voices, as if the ensemble is crying out to remind the wayward voice of its transitional task (Example 6).

Example 5: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement II, mm. 25-33

As we saw in the first movement, chromatic lines like that of the violin (and like the opening motto of the first movement) tend to herald subversive moments in Op. 130. In this case, they throw off the orderly periodic and metric structure of the movement, start from ever-higher points (Example 6; mm. 54, 58, 62) as if to try and manipulate the arrival point (F), and significantly delay the return to the scherzo.

Of course, the chaos Beethoven conjures is subtle, and in this lightning-fast movement, it disappears as quickly as does lightning itself. The forte statements that follow each of the chromatic plunges succeed on the third try in driving the chaos back toward order: iterating a simpler form of the opening motive of the scherzo.
proper (Example 6; m. 64), it is ultimately they who ground the music and transition it back to the A' section.

Example 6: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement II, mm. 54-64

The disruptive whimsy of the voice from the transition continues to make its presence felt into the A' section, as decorative trills and octave hiccups abound in the repeats of both antecedent-consequent phrases (the repeats are written out in mm. 72-79, 88-95). Then, to bring the movement to a rousing close, Beethoven adds a ten-bar coda that drops to a suspiciously tentative whisper, only to jump shockingly back to forte at the last moment. After the rather epic first movement, the clownish quality and miniature stature of the Presto is rather jarring. At the same time, however, the
movement acts as a sort of palate cleanser between the two rich sonata form courses on either side of it.

Movement III

The third movement of the B-flat Quartet, Andante con moto ma non troppo, gave Beethoven a great deal of conceptual trouble, because he had not yet decided whether to write four or more movements for Op. 130. As Barry Cooper explains in his discussion of Beethoven's sketches from 1825-26, the composer's main goals would most likely have been that "the overall structure should be well-balanced, that each movement should contrast well with the previous one … and that there should be in his solution some element of novelty by which his art would be advanced." These broad goals would have left Beethoven a good deal of wiggle room, and indeed, he initially intended the Cavatina to take on the role of a slow third movement. However, when he decided on writing six movements in August of 1825, he moved that operatic movement to the fifth position, replacing it with the emotionally lighter Andante. This lengthy, indecisive organizational process fittingly parallels the density of action and digressive nature of that movement.

In the third movement, we are again presented with a sonata form movement whose slow introduction unexpectedly gives way to an opposing mood. In this case, instead of a busy Allegro, the somber introduction slides into the charming, moderate Andante. Beethoven connects this sonata-form movement with its predecessor by imbedding the chromatic motto from the first movement (Bb-A-Ab-G) in the soprano

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26 Ibid., 209.
Here, however, he obscures its reappearance by straddling the four notes between the introduction and the first theme, the cadence on the downbeat of m. 3 diffusing its tension (Example 7). Beethoven also uses this two-bar slow introduction, whose key hovers ambiguously between B-flat minor and D-flat major, to smooth the harmonic shift between the second and third movements. It is one of several subtle transitions that the composer utilizes to connect the movements both rhetorically and expressively.

Example 7: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement III, mm. 1-3

Robert Hatten discusses the connections between the paired inner movements (II with III and IV with V) in terms of "expressive doubling." The "obsessive drive" of the Presto does indeed find its expressive double in the "leisurely paced," subtly humorous Andante. Leonard Ratner pinpoints this humor as coming from the "pleasantness of the principal thematic material" combined with "the textural and structural eccentricities that throw the essentially regular layout off-balance." These irregularities are numerous, including a two-bar false start in the viola (mm. 3-4), the

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29 Ratner, *The Beethoven String Quartets*, 222.
peculiar pizzicato transitions between the first and second themes (mm. 10, 45, and 69), and two non-developing, cadentially oriented themes that offset the progress of the first theme (mm. 11-13, 14-16). As Hatten proposes, just as the Presto “experiences a series of dramatic reversals in its transition from the trio back to the scherzo proper,” so the Andante “expressively doubles this idea with its own series of reversals and deferrals, distractions and interruptions, that affect that otherwise contented forward progress of its texture.”

That forward progress does entail the expected second theme (see Example 2) so vital to sonata form. However, because of the thematic and harmonic digression of the exposition, it does not appear until halfway through the development. We know that it functions as a second theme, and is not merely another digression, because it arrives on the dominant, has a flowing, reflective character that contrasts with the bubbly geniality of the first theme, and appears repeatedly throughout the rest of the movement (mm. 62-63, 86).

Thus, just as the duplicitous appearance of the slow introduction in the first movement disrupted the Classical language of sonata form, so too do the thematic and harmonic “reversals and deferrals, distractions and interruptions” of this movement. And in case the connection between those two movements was not clear enough, Beethoven hid the chromatic motto from the opening of the first in the opening of the third.

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Movement IV

The Alla danza tedesca, like the Andante, is expressively and rhetorically tied to the slow movement that succeeds it (Cavatina), and Beethoven reinforces this pairing by sharply separating it from movements II and III with a “highly disjunctive tonal shift from Db major to G major.” Hatten particularly highlights the relationship between the scherzo-like German waltz and the operatic Cavatina, noting that while there is no harmonic transition between the pair (as there was between the second and third movements), there are nonetheless "indicators that support an explicitly framed opposition."  

First, the latter two inner movements are each "based on an imported topical genre." The Alla danza tedesca recalls the “Ländler-like deutscher Tanz, a low-style peasant dance,” which “contrasts with the high-style vocal genre of the Cavatina.” On the other hand, both of these genres "draw on simplicity as a means of achieving their expressive effects," and Hatten suggests that the Cavatina might be understood "as responding to the dance's relatively surface expression with a greater depth of emotional intimacy." That is not, of course, to say that the waltz lacks the power to stir emotion. Rather, it precedes the quiet passion of the Cavatina with a less intimate, but no less touching, quality of sentimentality. Its simple, balanced structure is tinged with nostalgia for an uncomplicated state of being that exists only in memory. However, though the idyllic memory begins in perfect time, its

31 Ibid., 36.
32 Ibid., 39.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 39-40.
exaggerated, caricature-like hairpin dynamics foreshadow the eventual unraveling of the theme (and the idyll with it) in m. 129.

That particular section “sounds like a rather quirky Webernesque palindrome,” each structural piece of the theme turned on its head (Example 8).

Example 8: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement IV, mm. 1-8 and 129-43

Original Theme:

Palindromic Theme (see mm. 129-43):

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35 Chua, The "Galitzin" Quartets of Beethoven, 191.
The first four bars (mm. 129-32) present the consequent phrase of the theme in reverse order, each instrument playing one bar so that the multi-octave range exaggerates the sense of discontinuity. The second four bars (mm. 133-36) present the antecedent phrase of the theme in its original form, completing the palindrome, and paving the way for further thematic disturbance in mm. 137-42, which not surprisingly comes in the form of chromatic movement. The cello, having ended the antecedent phrase of the theme in its forward orientation, does not immediately pick up the consequent phrase, but rather continues downward by half step (mm. 136-38), the viola beginning its own chromatic descent in m.138. The violins nudge the wayward two voices back toward the second half of the theme in mm. 139-40, which eventually regains its footing in m. 143. However, though the movement ends with a sense of finality (if a delayed one: V7-I6/4-I), the ripples created by the breakdown of the theme leave one with an uncomfortable awareness that the warmth of nostalgia is always evanescent, as it is grounded in the imagination and not in reality.

Movement V

The heartbreakingly intimate Cavatina follows the sentimental German waltz. According to Karl Holz, Beethoven's friend and violinist of the Schuppanzigh Quartet, merely the thought of this movement could bring the composer to the brink of tears.36 “Of the overwhelming depth of the Cavatina,” Radcliffe writes, “there have never been two opinions, but … writers have reacted to it in different ways; some have felt it to be a profoundly tragic piece of music, while others have stressed

its serenity, or its religious fervour.” That the movement imitates an operatic aria there is little doubt, but who the singer is and what they are singing about is made abstract by the medium through which the song is conveyed. Thus, by scoring such a genre for string quartet, Beethoven expands the aria’s field of meaning by rendering the singer and the specific subject of their song anonymous. Simply put, the music has the power to convey different narratives to different listeners.

Structurally, the movement is composed of three main sections, the first and last of which are self-enclosed, “each so isolated within its contrapuntal and harmonic uniformity that they become autonomous, 'homotonal' textures, without internal contrasts.” The central melody passes back and forth between the two violins, though at times melody and accompaniment merge into a chorus of four complementary voices (mm. 17-22), a subtle but poignant effect possible only in a setting where soloist and accompaniment have such similar timbres.

Both structurally and expressively, this first A section breaks down into subsections \(a\) (mm. 1-9), \(a'\) (mm. 10-22), and \(b\) (repeated; mm. 23-30, 32-39). The \(a'\) section complicates the harmonic and textural serenity of \(a\), as if the soloist’s pure thoughts are giving way to doubt, and the \(b\) section introduces a new melody that resolves that unease through epiphany. This epiphany is marked by a rise in the soloist’s line from \(piano\) to \(forte\) on G (mm. 27, 36), the note that the soloist could not quite reach in \(a'\) (m. 21), and the highest note yet in the movement. The achievement is so relieving that the “singer” repeats it twice, as if running the pleasant thought

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37 Philip Radcliffe, Beethoven’s String Quartets (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 133-34.
38 Chua, The "Galitzin" Quartets of Beethoven, 194.
over and over again in their mind. However, the emotional crux of the movement has yet to come.

The central *arioso* section, marked *Beklemmt*, presents a stark contrast to the warm, contemplative A section. One can be beklemmt, as Steinberg describes, “by the air just before a storm, by a nightmare, by an agonizing wait.”39 At m. 40, the bottom three voices coalesce, shivering, into a barely audible triplet murmur on Eb. Then the cello steps down to Db and shifts both the harmony and the mood from this world to another, the tender flat submediant world of Cb major. Here we are faced with another breakdown, this time not so much of the Classical language as language itself (Example 9).

**Example 9: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement V, mm. 40-49**

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The violin, having imitated the human voice for the first 39 bars, suddenly seems so overcome by its own emotion as to be at loss for words. It trembles, stammers poignantly downward in a chromatic line from Ab to Fb (m. 44), and then slowly regains control in the following four bars (mm. 45-48). Though the return to the A section (this time only a and closing material) returns warmth to listeners after the ethereal chill of the Beklemmt passage, that “look into the abyss” leaves a lasting impression, and like the appearance of chromatic lines in the previous four movements, marks a fissure in Beethoven’s musical dialect. Radcliffe rightly points out that of “the first five movements of this work the Cavatina undoubtedly provides the culminating point, and even for a Beethoven the task of finding a suitable successor to it cannot have been easy.” Yet find a successor he did, first in the titanic Große Fuge, then in the less abrasive Allegro.

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40 Ibid.
41 Radcliffe, Beethoven’s String Quartets, 134.
CHAPTER THREE

THE GROßE FUGE

The Große Fuge has been and continues to be a problematic subject of scholarly discussion for many reasons; the most basic is that its very form defies categorization. It has elements of sonata form, fugue, variation, symphonic poem, and even a Baroque suite, yet it does not fit exactly into any one of those recognizable moulds. Its German title, which translates as Great Fugue (“Great” literally referring to its size), suggests that its contrapuntally rigorous character is central to its expression. However, the Fugue’s enigmatic French subtitle and first heading, “Grande Fugue, tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée,” and “Ouverture,” bring with them connotations outside the realm of the traditional fugue genre, as Kramer observes.42

Grande Fugue, tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée

The subtitle “tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée” – sometimes free, sometimes studied or worked – has had a strong impact on expressive interpretation. Warren Kirkendale compares Beethoven’s use of recherchée with the hidden word Ricercar in Bach’s Musical Offering, “a work extraordinarily rich in contrapuntal devices” for which a “historical term [ricercar] has become a theoretical one.” Applying this idea

42 Kramer, “Between Cavatina and Ouverture,” 172. In this passage, Richard Kramer suggests that “Perhaps Beethoven had in mind some lines in the entry 'Ouverture' in Heinrich Christoph Koch, Musikalisches Lexikon ... 'In the narrower sense of the term...this older French species of Ouverture consists of a passage in slow tempo, not excessively worked out, but of a sublime and passionate character, in 4/4 meter, and which gives way at once to a fugue in a more vigorous tempo, and in some other meter. This fugue is commonly treated as a free fugue and interspersed with various interludes that do not flow directly from the subject or the countersubject'.”
to the Große Fuge, he purports that “with the word recherché Beethoven underlined
his intention ‘to employ all’ the artifices ‘at once in a single fugue.’”

Scholars Philip Radcliffe, Michael Steinberg, and Joseph Kerman, on the other hand, apply the
phrase to the music itself, rather than arguing that it has a particular historical
meaning.

Of the Fugue, Radcliffe notes that “on the whole the first of these adjectives
[libre] is the more significant,” as it “would be impossible to expect a work of this
size to maintain a strictly fugal texture throughout,” and Steinberg opens his
analysis of Op. 133 by saying that “the beginning, which Beethoven titles Overture,
is as libre as can be. In its thirty measures it changes tempo twice and character more
often than that.” Finally, Kerman delves a bit deeper into the French phrase by
noting that it puts “into motion much mystical speculation about Freedom and
Necessity, das Ich und das Walten, and so forth.”

Though the aforementioned scholars make astute observations about the work,
Kerman’s idea of freedom and necessity may have an additional historical meaning
that neither Kirkendale nor the other scholars discuss. To explain, fugue as a genre
underwent a reassessment in the early 1800s. Czech composer Antoine Reicha, a
contemporary of Haydn’s, made what was viewed as a radical “attempt to update the

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44 Radcliffe, *Beethoven’s String Quartets*, 138.
45 Steinberg, “Notes on the Quartets,” 239.
46 Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets*, 281-82.
technique in light of post-Baroque compositional innovations,“47 spurring a theoretical split among composers and theorists.

As Paul Walker explains, “Fugal theory came to focus increasingly on one of two strains: either fierce, partisan debate about what constituted a ‘proper’ fugue, principally for the purpose of evaluating music of the past, or the establishment of a rigid model to be followed to the letter by any student wishing to master the ideal fugue.”48 The second strain was called the fugue d’école and was (and still is) associated with the Paris Conservatoire. Though Beethoven’s opinion of Reicha’s thirty-six fugues was that in them “the fugue is no longer a fugue,” the composer remained ambivalent about how much freedom to allow in his own fugal composition.49 Thus, I propose that in addition to telling musicians and analysts how to interpret the work, the phrase “tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée” (notably in French) is a sort of proclamation of Beethoven’s own awkward stance between Reicha and the fugue d’école, and perhaps even a subtle criticism of the debate.

In that sense, the Große Fuge is an appropriate ending to the quartet’s overall narrative. In each of the previous five movements, Beethoven presented and then subverted a common form or genre (sonata form, dance, aria), creating opposition between that which was accepted and expected in the 1820s, and his own desire to stretch or break down those archetypes. With the Fugue, he again presents a common genre, and in the context of the early nineteenth century fugal debate, subverts its function to an extreme degree. Not only does Beethoven distort the homogenous

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
motion of the traditional fugue by using a peculiar subject constructed of semitones and sixths (which makes for wide leaps requiring awkward string crossings), but he also uses a device mentioned in his teacher Albrechtsberger’s treatise on counterpoint, called unterbrechung (interruption). This device creates a version of the subject (Example 10) that is “gapped,” and by shifting where we hear the downbeat, creates the Fugue’s most visceral sense of rhythmic confusion.

Example 10: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 133, mm. 30-32

Moreover, in spite of the Große Fuge’s title and contrapuntal governing idea, Kirkendale observes that no more than 45 percent of the composition is actually fugal, leaving more than half of the 741-bar work still in need of explanation. Thus, we must now look at the structure of the Fugue in order to gain insight into what it is, how it works, and what it may express as the capstone of the quartet.

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The Structure of the Große Fuge

Though different scholars use a variety of wording to describe the Fugue’s structure, all agree that it is a sectional work with minimal transition between its contrasting parts:51

**Ouverture** (or *Overtura*): mm. 1-30; G major, F major, B-flat major
A: *Fuga* (Double Fugue on x¹); mm. 30-158; B-flat major
B: *Meno mosso e moderato* (Double fugato on x²); mm. 159-232; G-flat major
C: *Allegro molto e con brio* (“march-like episode” or “gigue” on x³); mm. 233-72; B-flat major
D: Fugue on x⁴ and fantasy on x and *Fuga* countersubject; mm. 273-413 and 414-92; A-flat major, E-flat major, A-flat major
B’: *Meno mosse e moderato* (reprise of B and transition); mm. 493-532; A-flat major
C’: *Allegro molto e con brio* (reprise of C and initial coda material); mm. 533-656; B-flat major
Coda Proper: *Allegro, Meno mosso e moderato*, and *Allegro molto e con brio* (reminiscences of A and B followed by the resolution of the main subject and closing material); mm. 657-741; B-flat major

The first section, labeled *Ouverture* in the autograph copy and later published as the Italian *Overtura,*52 combines the first movement idea of an introduction with the palindrome effect of the fourth. Taking up the final G that ended the Cavatina, all four voices pound out the subject in an arresting four-octave unison texture. That subject and the following 20 bars present us with foreshadows (that is truly what they are, as none return verbatim later in the movement) of the four versions of the

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subject.\textsuperscript{53} Those versions, which I will hereafter refer to as Kirkendale does (as $x^1$, $x^2$, $x^3$, and $x^4$), appear in the reverse order from which they appear in the movement, and in the manner of a table of contents (Example 11).\textsuperscript{54}

Example 11: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 133, mm. 1-32

Once $x^1$, the unterbrechung version of the subject, has completed its quiet opening statement (mm. 26-30), the first violin makes a shocking fortissimo entrance

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

(m. 30) above it, heralding the beginning of the fugue proper. Though only the first of three fugues in Op. 133, this double fugue in the tonic key of B-flat fills 158 bars with by far the densest and most aesthetically difficult material in the movement. Beethoven crushes together four main textures (the gapped version of the theme, its leaping countersubject, triplets, and slurred eighth and sixteenth note figures) in nearly every possible combination (Example 12), propelling the music forward with a relentless forte dynamic and the inexorable beat of a giant mechanical heart.

Example 12: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 133, mm. 58 and 111

At m. 158, the double fugue does not slow down, but rather smashes head-on into the double fugato Meno mosso e moderato, mediated only by a tenuto G-flat chord, the tonic key of the new section. If Beethoven had moved from B-flat to any one of its closely related keys, the nearly transition-less effect would still have been noteworthy, but by jumping straight from I to bVI (the same modulation used in the Cavatina), Beethoven truly grabs listeners with a crook and yanks them from one world to another. The new world of the Meno mosso could not be more different from its predecessor. Smooth, serene, and rising above pianissimo only at its climax, it is like entering the eye of a hurricane. Again the subject wends along beneath the
upper voice, but this time it appears in the $x^2$ version, flowing legato beneath a
delicate melody that moves by step and by thirds. No longer jumping in the erratic
fashion of the double fugue, this new melody shows that the subject is not inherently
violent, and can even be made to sound ethereal in the proper context.

Some 74 bars later, we arrive on the other side of the hurricane’s eye, and are
once again smashed against a new, contrasting section. Beethoven, Truscott asserts,
“knows that the only way we can return from the sublime is suddenly, and so, after
the wonderfully drawn out cadence on the dominant of B-flat minor, we are jerked to
daylight, or B-flat major again.”\(^{55}\) In mm. 229-32, just before that jerk, Beethoven
lures listeners into a false sense of security as all four instruments fall to a piano, then
\textit{pianissimo}, sixteenth note murmur, the first violin quavering uncertainly between Db
and C. Only in the very last bar (m. 232) does the harmony shift to B-flat major, a
huge harmonic leap turning on one chord: $V^7$ of B-flat. Then, quite abruptly, the
\textit{Allegro molto e con brio} erupts in m. 233.

At that point, the dynamic level shoots from \textit{pianissimo} to \textit{fortissimo}, and we
are now introduced to the third version of the subject ($x^3$). From here to the end, the
sections become shorter and more difficult to parcel out, embodying that artistic
moment sometimes referred to as the “awkward stage,” and eventually leading to the
seemingly implausible resolution of the subject. As a case in point, the “march-like
episode”\(^{56}\) at m. 233 lasts all of 40 short bars, after which a fugue on the last version
of the subject ($x^4$) takes over in A-flat. The trill on the last beat of the subject
becomes increasingly drawn out to the point of neuroticism (mm. 340ff), and as that

\(^{55}\) Harold Truscott, \textit{Beethoven’s Late String Quartets} (London: Dobson Book Ltd., 1968), 97.
ornament grows ominously obsessive, the fugue subject begins to splinter into smaller and smaller pieces until all that is left is the trill and the note that follows it. This is the point at which Adorno’s theory about the late style comes to fruition: Beethoven rips the subject and its sole ornament, the trill, into smaller and smaller pieces, until they no longer retain their original function. If a breakdown in the events of Classical language is indeed what ties the earlier movements together, then this fugue on \( x^4 \) is that narrative’s stunning climax.

At last, having whittled the subject down to its last meaningful unit, we reach a section that Kirkendale describes as a fantasy. One could view it as a continuation of the previous fugue, as the subject never returns in its full form, though the modulation from A-flat to E-flat and the return of the \( x^1 \) countersubject suggests that yet another phase has begun. At m. 453, we abruptly shift back to A-flat again, and the first violin screams to a climax in the oft-quoted passage from mm. 477-84 (Example 13).

Example 13: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 133, mm. 477-84

At last, having made it through each “chapter” lain out in the Ouverture’s table of contents, we briefly revisit each main section (\( B' \) and \( C' \) in the outline),
beginning with a reprise of the *Meno mosso e moderato*. At m. 493 that previously ethereal section returns in A-flat, this time with newfound confidence and resolve, expressed with a *forte* dynamic and *sforzando* accents on all of its downbeats. At m. 511, the caesurae that are one of the hallmarks of Beethoven’s late style exert their power to build tension. The instruments pause uncertainly on the dominant, proceeding with caution almost to the point of stagnation until the *Allegro molto e con brio* reappears to speed things up. That section is, as before, interrupted prematurely, this time by an initial attempt at a coda in m. 565. Again, caesurae intervene, nearly bringing the music to a halt, and again, the music revs back up to *forte* in m. 629. However, instead of more coda material, Beethoven does something altogether peculiar.

At m. 657, the coda proper begins, but not in the way one might expect. The two violins seem to make an attempt at restarting the whole movement over again, playing the first three bars of the double fugue in B-flat. Failing at that, they instead try the first three bars of the double fugato (in its first incarnation). That too trails off, incomplete. Then, quite suddenly, all four instruments take up the unison subject as they did at the beginning of the *Ouverture*, this time on Bb rather than G, and the coda proper gets fully underway. Ironically, it is the material of the *Allegro molto e con brio*, the short section that was interrupted twice on earlier occasions, that has the final word.

According to Rumph, the *Allegro molto e con brio* stands outside of the main structural core, which is composed of the first fugue in B-flat (x₁), the double fugato
in G-flat ($x^3$), and the fugue in A-flat ($x^4$).\footnote{Stephen Rumph, \textit{Beethoven After Napoleon: Political Romanticism in the Late Works} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, Ltd., 2004), 144.} However, he also argues that the double counterpoint of the \textit{Allegro molto e con brio} “combines elements from both the Bb and Ab fugues” in its final appearance; thus, the fusion of the \textit{Allegro} and \textit{Adagio} themes from the first movement has come full circle, returning in a contrapuntal context.\footnote{Ibid., 149.}

Regarding the mood of the coda, Joscelyn Godwin shrewdly observes that in spite of the return of the unison statement of the subject, which would end the movement triumphantly, instead “Beethoven chooses to give his most titanic work an explicitly untitanic ending [with the \textit{Allegro molto e con brio}]… He ends the \textit{Grosse Fuge} as he ends every one of the late quartets: with a sublime whimsy, an elusive mercurial joy.”\footnote{Joscelyn Godwin, “Prelude to a Fugue: Reflections on Beethoven's \textit{Grosse Fuge}, Opus 133,” \textit{Temenos} 10 (1989): 75.} Because of this whimsy, which as Kerman observes, “implies that we do not quite follow the composer's line of thought, even though we are keeping faith with it,”\footnote{Kerman, \textit{The Beethoven Quartets}, 305.} there is something in the coda’s cheerfulness that feels oddly uncomfortable. It is as though Beethoven is smiling at us, but we cannot discern whether it is a genuine smile or an ironic smirk, and we are therefore unsure quite how to respond. After the terrifying, unearthly characters of the fugues on $x^1$, $x^2$, and $x^4$, the bright, childlike innocence of the \textit{Allegro molto e con brio} seems too simple to be sincere. Yet that is how Beethoven leaves us: unable to get behind the whimsy, an outsider in his artistic world, and ineffably unsatisfied.
The Große Fuge as Finale

How, then, does the Große Fuge respond to the previous five movements? In one respect, it obliterates them and their narrative of subtle subversion with disruption of the Classical language so extreme and visceral that they seem pitifully insignificant beside it. As Rumph points out, “The search for stability that the Grosse Fuge reenacts does not so much balance the rest of the quartet as reconsider it at a transcendental level.” Comprising a full third of the performance time of the quartet, the Fugue is practically a full quartet in its own right. Complete with several interior “movements” that journey through the tonic, flat submediant, flat subtonic, and subdominant keys, it seems a natural progression from finale to separate opus.

However, does the Fugue have the same meaning without the Allegro, the Presto, the Andante, the Alla danza tedesca, and most especially, the Cavatina? I concur with several scholars who have said that it does not. As Kramer eloquently puts it, the Fugue is “an extravagant essay toward both the reconciliation and the renunciation of all those disparate musics in op. 130. Severed from op. 130, the sublime idiosyncrasies of the fugue are debased, made eccentric. It is a finale in concept.” Godwin too makes a strong case along these lines when he notes, “the most profound slow movements of [the late quartets] … are all followed by something wry, clumsy, or bizarre,” and the latter “may take on quite a different meaning when prepared for by prayerful contemplation.” Even if a listener knows that the Fugue is forthcoming, that finale is still far more shocking when it comes

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61 Rumph, Beethoven After Napoleon, 148.
63 Godwin, “Prelude to a Fugue,” 74.
immediately after the serene, emotionally vulnerable Cavatina than when it erupts out of thin air. To use an analogy, a giant does not loom nearly as large without an average person beside him for comparison, and likewise, the Fugue’s narrative of destruction and resurrection seems far more powerful when heard directly after the rest of the quartet.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE ALTERNATE FINALE

The buoyant alternate finale, substituted in place of the Große Fuge several months after the B-flat Quartet’s premier, is so antithetical to its predecessor that it is surprising that it too is able to provide a convincing conclusion to the work’s overall narrative. Leonard Ratner defends the newer movement, arguing that its legitimacy, “apart from key, rests upon its topic – a rustic, down-to-earth contredanse.”64 His statement, of course, is dependent on the idea that the previous five movements comprise a retrospective dance suite in the style of the sonata da camera.65 If, as I argue, the first five movements of the quartet are primarily linked by their subversion of common forms, we must look for the alternate finale’s legitimacy elsewhere: in its structure, harmonic movement, and fulfillment or evasion of expectations.

As Ratner’s comment indicates, the Allegro finale carries with it, like a shadow, issues of legitimacy and authenticity, which in turn hinge on the even more nebulous topic of tradition. Based on performance practice, Klaus Kropfinger identifies three phases of a tradition regarding the Quartet: Op. 130 with the fugue finale, performed at the 1826 premier; Op. 130 with the new finale, played throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century; and Op. 130/133, the reconstituted original, which has been in favor from the early twentieth century to the present.66 However, Kropfinger does not offer his own view as to which of the latter two phases of

64 Ratner, The Beethoven String Quartets, 230.
65 Ibid.
66 Kropfinger, "What remained unresolved," 543.
tradition is more legitimate or authentic. With no conclusive evidence regarding
Beethoven’s reason(s) for writing a new finale or his opinion on resurrecting the
original quartet, the question of authenticity will always remain one open for debate.
Perhaps a more relevant consideration is how we hear the quartet and its finales
today; in other words, how they speak and what emotion(s) or narrative(s) they
convey to early twenty-first century listeners. In that spirit, let us look to the music
itself to see how the Allegro accords, if indeed it does, with the previous five
movements.

**The Structure of the Allegro**

One can approach the alternate finale, whose unique structure is
A\(^1\)BCA\(^2\)B'C'A\(^3\)\(^67\) as a slightly eccentric version of the common sonata-rondo form:\(^68\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonata form elements:</th>
<th>Rondo form elements:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposition (A(^1)+B)</td>
<td>Refrain (A(^1))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development (C)</td>
<td>Episode I (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapitulation (A(^2)+B')</td>
<td>Episode II (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda (C'+A(^3))</td>
<td>Refrain (A(^3))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reprise of Episode I (B')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reprise of Episode II (C')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final Refrain (A(^3))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A\(^1\): Theme I/Refrain; mm.1-32; B-flat major
Transition; mm.33-50

B: Theme II/Episode I; mm.51-78; F major
Closing material/Transition to C; mm.79-96

\(^{67}\) The superscript numbers differentiate the refrains, as A is not repeated in exactly the same form each
time. The prime marks refer to the resolution of structural dissonance between the exposition and
recapitulation; B and C first appear in F and A-flat, but return in the tonic key of B-flat.

\(^{68}\) A similar outline can be found in Leonard G. Ratner, *The Beethoven String Quartets: Compositional
Lead-in to C; mm.97-108  
C: Theme III/Episode II; mm.109-60; A-flat major  
  Theme I/Refrain developed; mm.161-206  
  Retransition-like material; mm.207-22  
A₂: Theme I/Refrain; mm.223-68; E-flat major to B-flat major  
  Transition; mm.269-90  
B’: Reprise of Theme II/Episode I; mm.291-318; B-flat major  
  Reprise of closing material/transition to C’; mm.319-36  
  Lead-in to C’; mm.337-52  
C’: Coda; Reprise of Theme III/Episode II; mm.353-409; E-flat major to B-flat major  
A₃: Coda; Final Refrain; mm.410-93; B-flat major

Although in the above outline I differentiate the sonata and rondo elements of the form, the typical sonata-rondo form *par excellence* is only slightly different from sonata form. Typically, it includes a first theme in the tonic key (A) and a second theme in the dominant key (B), and then returns to the tonic for the refrain (A). The development (C) modulates freely, and the refrain (A) returns at the recapitulation, the second theme (B) reappearing in the tonic as well. Finally, there is one last repeat of the refrain as a coda. The standard sonata-rondo form is therefore ABACAB’A.⁶⁹

In Beethoven’s finale for the Op. 130 Quartet, the composer manipulates this form in interesting ways. The C section (development) includes an extended lyrical theme (Example 14; mm. 109-16), much like the second theme in the third movement. This in and of itself is a structural link tying this finale into the framework of the previous five movements. Also, as a result of section C taking on its own theme, Beethoven repeats it in the coda, but leaves out the refrains after the B and B’

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sections. He thus moves the sonata-rondo form closer to true sonata form, but a sonata form with an extra theme in the supertonic key (C).

Example 14: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement VI, mm. 105-16

Not only does Beethoven add a new theme (C) where we expect either developmental material (sonata form) or a refrain (sonata-rondo form), but the context in which he deploys the second theme (Example 15) also has the ability to trick listeners into hearing it as part of the transition to the third theme.

This second theme arrives in the dominant as expected but it is a partially sequential, transitional-sounding passage, without the contrasting character typical of a second theme in sonata form. The third theme provides that contrasting character, and as a result, sounds more like a second theme than the true second theme does. Therefore, while harmonically the first two themes are purely in sonata form, the opposing characters of A and C make them sound like the two main themes.
Beethoven is playing a trick on us. What clues listeners in to the fact that something is amiss is that the closing material and repeat of the exposition arrives before C.\textsuperscript{70}

Example 15: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement VI, mm. 51-59

The Allegro as Finale

Now that we have teased out the aspects that make Beethoven’s sonata-rondo form unique, we can ask: How does this sonata-rondo movement conclude a narrative of opposition between the expectations established by form and the subversion of those expectations? In one sense, the smooth, artless-sounding interlocking of two different forms (sonata and rondo) resolves the tension present in the earlier movements, especially the first. Recall that in the first movement, Beethoven set two musical ideas against one another (the \textit{Adagio} and \textit{Allegro}),

\textsuperscript{70} The extent of Beethoven’s trick is partially dependent on performance practice. For example, while the Takács Quartet (2004 recording) repeats the exposition, the Alban Berg Quartet (1983 recording) does not. Taking the repeat more clearly differentiates the exposition and development, and leaving it out could potentially cause the third theme (C) to sound more convincingly like a second theme.
ultimately forcing them together, but crudely. Beethoven undertakes a similar challenge in this finale, though on a structural, rather than a thematic, level. Here, he succeeds in modifying the traditional sonata-rondo form so masterfully that in spite of its deviation from the norm, it still speaks an unbroken structural and harmonic language that we can understand in retrospect (i.e. after we solve the riddle of the form). However, Beethoven does disrupt our ability to follow the musical narrative in the way in which he combines the two forms. The most prominent example, of course, is when he uses semi-sequential, transitional-sounding material for the second theme, which would not sound like a theme at all if it were not for its arrival on the dominant.

Nevertheless, because the tension between form and fissure, the Classical citizen and the anarchist, does not reach its climax in the Allegro, this movement is potentially a less powerful and conclusive finale for the Op. 130 Quartet. The Große Fuge brings that tension to a breathtaking head, taking the subversive chromatic lines of the previous five movements and breaking those down still further into a series of semitone pairs. It then enacts a narrative of chaos, out of which we emerge with a strange, ironic sense of musical catharsis. The Allegro, on the other hand, is witty, intricately thought out, and duplicitous in its hybrid form, but it is not viscerally disruptive. Its subversive elements lie beneath an approachable, aesthetically pleasant surface, and in the conflict between its two forms and the harmonic complexity born of that fusion. In other words, it is not lightweight, but it sounds as though it is.

Certainly, Beethoven must have been aware of this façade of rustic naïveté, but what did he mean by it? On the one hand, the composer had sketched at least a
dozen ideas for a finale while working on the Andante and the Cavatina, and all were more similar to the Allegro than to the Große Fuge in structure and mood.\textsuperscript{71} This indicates that whatever he meant the Quartet to convey, Beethoven felt that a light finale such as the Allegro was an (if not \textit{the}) appropriate vehicle. On the other hand, we cannot expect conventional aspects of Beethoven’s music to mean what they typically mean at this point in his career. What seems like a smile could in fact be a smirk. Perhaps, therefore, the best way to determine what element(s) Beethoven thought most important in a finale for Op. 130 is to look at what characteristics the two competing finales share.

\textsuperscript{71} Cooper, \textit{Beethoven and the Creative Process}, 208-09.
CONCLUSION: COMPARING THE FINALES

In spite of their radically different modes of expression, the Große Fuge and the Allegro have a few key elements in common. Both pick up the G that ended the Cavatina, the Fugue in a shocking octave unison texture, and the alternate finale in a much lighter, Haydn-esque fashion. This suggests that Beethoven considered the connection between the fifth and sixth movements an important one, and that the finale does in fact respond to the Cavatina’s emotionally elusive narrative.

Also, the fugal subject itself reappears in the new finale, as cleverly disguised as the motto of the first movement when it appears at the beginning of the Andante. At mm. 132-38 and mm. 376-82 of the Allegro (Example 16), each of the instruments imitates the downward-moving semitone fragments from the Fugue subject, and though not all of the fragments are half steps (mm. 134-36), the contour (down a second, up a sixth) unmistakably hints at the original finale.

Example 16: Beethoven String Quartet Op. 130, movement VI, mm. 132-38

Moreover, the harmonic structure of the alternate finale (B-flat, F, A-flat) is nearly identical to the Fugue’s (B-flat, G-flat, A-flat). The only difference is that
instead of modulating from the tonic (B-flat) to the dominant key (F), necessary in establishing the sonata aspect of sonata-rondo form, the Fugue moves from the tonic to the flat submediant (G-flat), echoing both in key and in mood the modulation from the Cavatina’s *Adagio molto espressivo* section to the *Beklemmt* passage. Thus, while the harmonic movement of the alternate finale recalls the two earlier sonata-form movements (I and III) that go to the dominant, the harmonic movement of the Fugue recalls the Cavatina.

What does the above comparison tell us? Clearly, Beethoven conceived of the finale as expressively doubling the first movement, and more immediately, as responding to the emotional depth of the Cavatina with either the “high spirits” of the Allegro or “extreme complexity” of the Fugue.\(^{72}\) Also, the broken chromatic line in the Fugue subject responds directly to the other chromatic passages throughout the quartet. The Fugue answers those subtle formal fissures with an exaggerated, catastrophic breakdown of Classical language, the semitone-driven subject itself breaking apart structurally until all that exists at the end of the third fugue is the trill. The alternate finale, on the other hand, integrates pieces (no longer chromatic) of the fugue subject into its texture without allowing them to open a fissure in its perfectly assimilated sonata-rondo form.

In conclusion, Leopold Mozart called the thread running through and binding a work together ‘il filo,’\(^{73}\) and in the case of the Beethoven’s Quartet in B-flat, Op. 130, I argue that that thread is a breakdown in Classical language heralded by chromatic motion in single lines. In the first movement, the opening four notes (Bb,

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\(^{72}\) Radcliffe, *Beethoven’s String Quartets*, 136.

\(^{73}\) Kramer, “Between Cavatina and Ouverture,” 178.
A, Ab, G) of the Adagio sag chromatically downward, and it is the Adagio that twists
the sonata form into a duplicitous tangle, reappearing when it should not, and thereby
throwing a kink in the movement’s thematic and harmonic structure.

Then, in the Presto, clownish chromatic descents in the first violin’s line
prolong the transition from the trio back to the scherzo proper, rising higher and
higher (C to Eb to Gb) as if hoping to harmonically distract or confuse the rest of the
ensemble. The Andante con moto ma non troppo returns to the idea of subverting
sonata form, and appropriately, the four-note motto from the first movement
reappears in its second and third bars. This time, instead of employing a slow
introduction to open a fissure in the form, Beethoven uses multiple digressive themes
that go nowhere, and that force the true second theme out of the exposition and into
the development.

The Alla danza tedesca, like the Presto, is in a type of ternary form (two-
reprise), but it displaces its formal implosion to the coda. There, the theme is turned
on its head in the manner of a palindrome, and the cello and viola lines thereafter slip
chromatically downward, unable to regain their grip on the theme. The violins
successfully guide them back, but the ensemble does not quite recover, skipping the
antecedent half of the theme and concluding with just the consequent. The Cavatina,
whose form is a type of subversion in itself (as it takes a vocal genre and applies it to
a string quartet), nevertheless includes its own unique breakdown. The first violin
carries the aria-like melody, and in the middle (Beklemmt) section teeters, at loss for
words, on the brink of emotional collapse. A downward chromatic sob fractures not
the language of Classical structure or harmony, but language itself; however, that
moment is transformed from a linguistic breakdown to a musical one by virtue of the “singer” being not a human but an instrument. Then, at last, we come to the finales.

As we have seen, the two finales tie off the thread of formal subversion in completely opposing ways: the Große Fuge takes the recurring theme of subversion of form and multiplies it exponentially, while the alternate finale integrates it to create a structurally and harmonically complex, but nevertheless seamless, movement. The chromatic lines that tend to appear at moments of subversion in the first five movements neither grow nor diminish in prominence as the quartet’s narrative proceeds, but rather hover quietly in the background, making brief appearances from time to time to hint that all is not well. In response, the Fugue, taking up and violently ripping apart the chromatic idea, brings about the explosion and eventual reconciliation of that tension. The Allegro, oppositely, recognizes the tension in the earlier subversions of form, but instead of “having it out,” so to speak, instead laughs and embraces the “double-mindedness” of the earlier movements by combining two forms and integrating aspects of the fugal finale into its exuberant character without losing itself in them.

Is it possible to say that one finale is better or more appropriate than the other? As Radcliffe rightly asserts, the “answer to the question is bound to depend to some extent on individual temperament.”74 In 1826 the public, musical scholars, and performers unequivocally favored the Allegro, while today those same groups tend to favor the Fugue. Stravinsky famously wrote: The Fugue is “the most absolutely

74 Radcliffe, Beethoven’s String Quartets, 136.
contemporary piece of music I know, and contemporary forever.”75 Who, then, knows if history may once again circle back on itself, but perhaps that, in the end, is the point. Just as we cannot know whether Beethoven is smiling or smirking at us in his music, neither can we know which finale fits his own conception of the Quartet’s narrative; which most perfectly balances the “bookshelf” upon which the individual movements, the “books” and the “bookends,” rest. And after all, if duplicity is the underlying concept of the Op. 130 Quartet, then we need not choose at all.

75 Igor Stravinsky, “My Reflections on Being Eighty,” The Observer 17 (London: June 1962)


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