Neoclassic and Anachronistic Impulses in Twentieth-Century Music

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PREFACE

Any attempt to work out a theory of neoclassicism in music, or even to give coherent content to the term, confronts a long history of careless or tendentious usage. Alone among the other arts—architecture, painting, literature—music has been unable to distinguish between genuine neoclassical works and those that wear a ruffle here or perform a dance step there as witty gestures or momentary satires in an allusive pantomime. This article works toward a theory of neoclassicism inductively, through four extended analyses meant to illustrate four distinct impulses or strategies by which early twentieth-century composers have created modern works that engage or reconstruct the past without sacrificing their own integrity in the history of styles. Because my aims are broadly synthetic, I have chosen pieces that have been much analyzed by others, and I draw on several published analyses to demonstrate how representative analyses can be organized into a broader and less technical understanding of neoclassicism.

I wish to express my gratitude to David Lewin for thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

The theoretical confusion surrounding neoclassicism in music mandates an introduction placing some of the various impulses that can be termed "neoclassical" in a general context of historicism in the arts. After a brief review of the confused usages of "neoclassicism" in music, I propose several categories helpful in talking about the uses of the past in twentieth-century music. I identify two general modes of returning to the classics—antiquarianism and accommodation—and argue that the latter is the more important in understanding twentieth-century music. I then describe two common modes of accommodation: allegory and what, for want of a better term, I call metamorphic anachronism. Allegorical interpretations have characterized several important recent discussions of neoclassicism in twentieth-century music, including those by Burkholder and Straus. Metamorphic anachronism, the less direct but more important access to the past, involves various kinds of imitation. Any imitation involves anachronism when two different period-styles confront each other, but not all uses of anachronism are neoclassic (as, for example, in parodies). I then identify four general types of imitation (reverential, eclectic, heuristic, and dialectical), each a mode of metamorphic anachronism, and each illustrated with an analysis meant less to be the last word, however temporary, on its subject, than to suggest a mode of attention and argument that others may want to explore.

THE USES OF ANACHRONISM

Whenever any kind of secular canon-formation occurs—whenever any choice of authorities or models for either pedagogy or new artistic creation is made—T. S. Eliot's question "What is a classic?" arises inescapably.[1] A classic is a past work that remains or becomes relevant and available as a model, or can be made so through various techniques of accommodation discussed below. When an age or an artist denies that there are classics or that they can serve as models (which is close to the same thing), then an old—even a classic—quarrel is joined: the ancients versus the moderns.[2] Among the modernisms of the early twentieth century, music is almost alone in striving to be modern *as well as* ancient—to be neoclassical.

Neoclassicism, of course, has another, narrower definition than the one suggested above: the borrowing of conventions and devices characteristic of what is generally agreed to be "Classical" style. Most Roman sculpture is neoclassical in this sense of the term. So is a courthouse fronted with Doric columns, although such a building invokes an idea of the state that goes beyond mere style. In music, classical style has nothing to do with Antiquity, of course, and we would not refer to a superb sonata in the style of Haydn or Mozart by a student in a model composition course as neoclassical. In music, as in poetry, mere borrowing of stylistic features, however successful, does not make a neoclassic, because mere borrowing does not involve an effort to resume or revive an out-of-date tradition. The Roman bust, the courthouse, and the model composition do not recognize or engage the historical processes that separate them from the "Classics"; they do not strive to put anachronism to work. By contrast, the more general varieties of musical neoclassicism explored here do not require any predetermined identification of classical style. What makes a classic in this broader sense is being chosen as a model for some sort of anachronism, some manner of crossing the distance that divides the new work from its model.

There is one difficulty in applying the term *neoclassical* in its broader sense to twentieth-century music. A twentieth-century recreation of a baroque suite is neobaroque, but also neoclassical in this broader sense. Although confusing, this is in fact ordinary usage in writing about twentieth-century music. Schoenberg's Piano Suite, op. 25, unquestionably follows a baroque model, but is commonly grouped among Schoenberg's neoclassical works. One might try to clear up this confusing usage by restricting *neoclassical* to the narrow sense, reserving it for imitations of models in the classical style. I do not choose this remedy, for two reasons. First, the general sense has too much richness of implication in other disciplines. We should not impoverish our professional discourse by cutting it off from questions like Eliot's, "What is a Classic?" Second, we impoverish our understanding, even of pieces within the narrow sense, if by emphasizing surface features our terminology encourages neglect of the meaning of the composer's engagement with the past. In the examples that follow, that meaning is sometimes political, but we should not simply substitute a set of political ideas for the old repertoire of stylistic conventions.

Nothing said so far should be controversial. But the works and scholarship of early twentieth-century music amply illustrate a confusing variety of answers to the question "What is a neoclassic?" The clearest instance of this confusion is among the standard surveys of twentieth-century music, which almost always include chapters entitled "Neoclassicism,"

[1]T. S. Eliot, "What is a Classic?" in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Noonday Press, 1968), 52–74.

[2]Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 15–16. *The Classic* rewards close reading for those interested in the vagaries of musical "classics."

though seldom without some sort of disclaimer.[3] No two historians seem to agree which composers ought to be called neoclassical. Bryan Simms in his recent survey lists the principal neoclassicists as Stravinsky, Poulenc, Milhaud, Honegger, Strauss, Hindemith, Britten, and Tippett.[4] Robert Morgan omits Strauss, but adds Bartók, Ravel (in his later music), and Schoenberg (in his twelve-tone music).[5] William Austin's even more extensive list includes, among others, Debussy, Reger, and Prokofiev.[6] Any of us so foolhardy as to ask students on a final exam "Name the major neoclassical composers of the twentieth century and defend your choices" would have to give credit for almost any list.

The confusion evident in historical surveys is matched by scholars' varied accounts of neoclassicism. Some argue that the ambiguities investing the term derive from semantic change, nationalistic prejudices, and the polemical torsion inevitable among composers vying to create a niche for themselves in the overpopulated state of the repertoire. Others believe that neoclassicism evolved as a reactionary ploy triggered by the social and political convulsions of the Weimar Republic. Still others—assuming a more formalistic stance—adapt Harold Bloom's Freudian "anxiety of influence" to revise radically the term's usual meaning.[7]

Negative evaluations of neoclassicism seem to find their most forceful proponents among composers, who have artistic agendas of their own that exacerbate the ambiguities investing historical assessment. Beginning with his notorious "Schoenberg is Dead," Pierre Boulez has relentlessly campaigned against the compositional schools that proliferated between the wars and were "distinguished from each other only by vague poetic principles as poor in definition as in content."[8] Composers continue to echo Boulez's attack. Not that long ago—in 1971—Milton Babbitt branded neoclassicism a meaningless slogan, an advertising gimmick in the marketing of modern music.[9]

Theorists typically have taken another tack, but not a more fruitful one. Most have dodged the issue of neoclassicism by treating it as a matter of surface mannerisms, divorced from "real" musical concerns like compositional structure. But not surprisingly, dissenters have surfaced, attacking this position as a conveniently simplistic ploy to justify mathematical or abstract methods that cannot accommodate the allusive surface gestures that characterize the styles of so many early twentieth-century composers.[10] Despite the many reports of its demise as a category in our professional discourse, then, neoclassicism shows a persistent, if messy and equivocal life.

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[3]William Austin, for example, presents neoclassicism as a "catchword" of twentieth-century music, but promptly dismisses its usefulness, in *Music in the 20th Century: From Debussy through Stravinsky* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 32.

[4]Bryan R. Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Schirmer Books, 1986), 274–303.

[5]Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1991), 126–27, 159–200.

[6]Austin, *Music in the 20th Century,* 31, 451.

[7]Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music from the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1988); Stephen Hinton, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik: A Study of Musical Aesthetics in the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) with Particular Reference to the Works of Paul Hindemith* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1989); Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1990); Richard Taruskin, "Revising Revision," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46 (1993): 114–38, and "Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology," *19th-Century Music* 16 (1993): 286–302.

[8]Pierre Boulez, "Schoenberg is Dead," *The Score* 6 (1952): 18–22. Boulez refers to *Gebrauchsmusik* and "some ideally purified 'classicism' " in *Orientations,* trans. Martin Cooper, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 31.

[9]Milton Babbitt, untitled memoir, *Perspectives of New Music* 9/2 and 10/1 (1971): 106–7.

[10]Pieter C. van den Toorn, "What Price Analysis?," *Journal of Music Theory* 33 (1989), 165–89.

The following discussion suggests how we might divest neoclassicism of some equivocation by considering how and for what purposes composers invoke the past by imitating an older piece or style and the kinds of relation to that past that such imitations suggest.

To speak very broadly, there are two modes of returning to the classics, two routes giving access to classical models. The first is philological or antiquarian; it asks what the classics meant in their original context to their creators and best readers, and what they may still mean to those with the requisite knowledge and skill. It is the route of much musicology and what we often call "authentic performance." The second access to the past—and for the history of the arts the more important—is translation or accommodation, both of which are anachronistic in the sense of incongruously linking different times or periods.[11] Reading our own concerns and needs into the classics, we recognize the classics advancing to meet us on the path we are following. No doubt the greatest example of this kind of accommodation occurs when Dante depicts and perhaps experiences his own reading of the *Aeneid* as an encounter with Virgil sent from hell to meet him.

Two modes of accommodation are worth comment here: allegory and what, for lack of a better term, I call "metamorphic anachronism." Historically, the chief technique of accommodation is allegory. In Antiquity and later, for example, philosophical disapproval of scandalous myths about the gods prompted interpreters to discover hidden philosophical meaning (*hupnoia, allegoria*) within those same myths.[12] Allegory has saved many an old story from cultural obsolescence by accommodating it to modern ideas. Thus we should not be surprised at the allegorical impulse which some scholars identify in much early twentieth-century music.

In a series of recent articles, Peter Burkholder argues that the unifying feature of twentieth-century music is not a shared style, but a shared preoccupation with the past, making this music essentially historicist in nature: "I wish to define 'modern music' as music written by composers obsessed with the musical past and with their place in music history, who seek to emulate the music of those we call the 'classical masters,' measuring the value of their own music by the standards of the past."[13] Shifting attention towards the impact of the musical past on the shared musical, social, and intellectual concerns of twentieth-century composers, Burkholder interprets compositional techniques as allegories (though he uses other terms) for a composer's perceived historical moment.[14] For example, Burkholder reads twentieth-century composers' avoidance of repetition and preference for continuing development as an emblem of their desire not to repeat what earlier composers had already done. Similarly, he argues that Babbitt's term "contextuality" signifies the composer's own engagement in *his* context—his moment in history, including the history of his own music. Contextuality, I might add, requires him to avoid repeating not only others, but also himself. In Schoenberg's music, Burkholder views the reinterpretation later events impose on earlier ones as reflecting the reinterpretation he seeks to impose on musical tradition. Similarly, in Burkholder's view, Stravinsky's use of interruptions and discontinuities refers to his own experience of displacement and exile. They are emblems of the isolation Stravinsky felt as a Russian composer "exiled from his native

[11]Kermode, *The Classic,* 40. Kermode defines the second mode, accommodation, somewhat differently: "any method by which the old document may be induced to signify what it cannot be said to have expressly stated."

[12]Jean Pépin, *Myth et Allégorie* (Aubier: Editions Montaigne, 1958), 97–98; Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1986).

[13]Peter Burkholder, "Brahms and Twentieth-Century Classical Music," *19th-Century Music* 8 (1984): 76.

[14]Peter Burkholder, "Musical Time and Continuity as a Reflection of the Historical Situation of Modern Composers," *Journal of Musicology* 9 (1991): 412–29.

land, engaged in a foreign musical tradition, and composing post-tonal music for audiences for whom tonality was still the norm."[15]

In *Remaking the Past,* Joseph Straus reads a more general allegorical plot in the features of early twentieth-century music. The "undermeaning" of this allegory is the struggle of the new against the weight of the old.[16] The classical tradition burdens modern composers with a powerful sense of anxiety and belatedness which Straus finds them representing in their music through a struggle for priority between new and old elements. The composers Straus values undercut and ironically comment on tonal conventions; they mimic tonal procedures; they evoke and then suppress the classics—all as a means of pushing their precursors aside and clearing creative space for themselves.

Allegory is not the only mode of accommodation comprised in what I am calling the second access route to the past. There are several others, one of which I call "metamorphic anachronism" and explicate in what follows. Despite the range of techniques analysts employ in describing neoclassicism in early twentieth-century music, these analytic techniques almost always concern imitation in some sense of the word: imitation of classical rhythm, phrase structure, harmonic progression, tonal centers, and the like. Moreover, analyses of neoclassical works tend to isolate the features they focus on, but at the same time seem uniformly to lack a theory of imitation that would help identify and categorize imitative resources and effects—that would, in other words, help us give content to the term "neoclassical." Literary criticism and art history, by contrast, have highly developed theories of imitation. We need to construct from the large body of analytical treatments of neoclassicism a theory that can do justice to the imitative ambition and richness of early twentieth-century music. In *Remaking the Past,* Straus adapts a theory from Harold Bloom that rightly stresses the unprecedented refusal of past masters to retire gracefully and make room for their early twentieth-century followers. Straus is convincing in a number of his interpretations, I think, but not in others. My aim here, however, is not to dispute Straus on his own ground by advancing sunnier views of some of the same works. Instead, I want to survey a broader territory, unrestricted by Freudian categories.[17] I seek a theory, or perhaps at this stage only a taxonomy, applicable to the less agonistic, more accommodative, engagements with tradition that, in different arts and different ages, have proclaimed themselves neoclassical. One place to find such a theory is in Thomas Greene's *The Light in Troy,* which develops several generally useful categories in the course of its discussion of the greatest of all revivals of the classical past, the Renaissance.[18] In what follows, I reshape several of Greene's concepts and terms to adapt them to a discussion of music.

Perhaps we can agree at the outset that neoclassicism in any of the arts contains an impulse to revive or restore an earlier style that is separated from the present by some intervening period. The Renaissance created itself by breaking one historical continuity in order to repair another broken continuity. That is, the Renaissance created the Middle Ages by recognizing that the Middle Ages had broken or fallen away from "classical antiquity." Any neoclassicism does the same, rejecting a prevailing period style in the name of restoring an earlier, more authentic, still relevant—and therefore classic—style. That is precisely what happened when

[15]Ibid., 428.

[16]Joseph Straus, *Remaking the Past,* 1–20.

[17]Kevin Korsyn offers a further application of Bloom's theories to musical analysis, but like Straus remains within restrictive Freudian categories in "Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence," *Musical Analysis* 10 (1991), 3–72.

[18]Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 28–53.

early twentieth-century French composers repudiated what they saw as the Teutonic excess and obscurity of Romantic music, which had itself lost the classical virtues. A neoclassical aesthetic reaches across a cultural gap and tries anachronistically to recover or revive a past model. It clears ground for modern artists by expelling intervening styles, and sometimes clearing ground is all it does. In such cases, neoclassicism is only a slogan or a marketing gimmick. But richer possibilities are inherent in this process of rejecting the immediate past in favor of a more distant past, and they are worth questioning.

A brief digression may help to clarify what I mean by anachronism or an anachronistic impulse. To perceive musical anachronism necessarily requires you to recognize that history affects period style and that period style affects composition. This is not controversial; we all are probably willing to assume that pieces are datable on internal evidence. But this recognition of historical change also suggests that pieces will become "dated" in the negative sense that they will eventually sound "out of date." Music, like the other arts, can incorporate or exploit this capacity for datedness, but only by juxtaposing or contrasting at least two different styles. That contrast or clash of period styles or historical aesthetics is the simplest definition of anachronism.[19]

Anachronism can be used in art in a number of different ways, often reflecting the degree to which a culture possesses or lacks a strong historical sense. Greene gives a good example of a serendipitous use of anachronism from the visual arts: Brunelleschi, mistakenly believing the Florentine baptistery to be ancient (that is, a classic), lifted some of its Romanesque elements to create his neoclassic masterpiece, the Pazzi chapel. Anachronism can also be used abusively, often because the artist wants to repress history, not out of ignorance but out of a misconceived or inflexible opinion of his own historical context.[20]

The type of anachronism most relevant to a neoclassic aesthetic is one that "confronts and uses the conflict of period styles self-consciously and creatively to dramatize the itinerary, the diachronic passage out of the remote past into the emergent present."[21] This is the type I call "metamorphic anachronism," as in metamorphic rocks which fuse or compress the old into the new. In music, metamorphic anachronism involves deliberate dramatization of historical passage, bringing the present into relation with a specific past and making the distance between them meaningful.

Is anachronism—that is, the conflict between period elements in a piece of music—put to use? Does a live phoenix spring from an imitation, or does only a corpse emerge, shrunken and mummified from the tomb, though perhaps ornamented with modern trinkets? The main question is not whether anachronism has been suppressed, but whether it has been controlled. If not, then no itinerary between past and present is opened, no genuine renewal occurs, and the revivalist impulse has to be seen as abortive or trivial.[22]

[19]Thomas Greene offers a fuller account of anachronism and its use in literary texts in "History and Anachronism," in *The Vulnerable Text: Essays on Renaissance Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 218–35. In part to clarify and extend the treatment of anachronism in *The Light in Troy,* Greene develops five categories of anachronism: naive, abusive, serendipitous, creative, and pathetic or tragic. Further study of musical anachronism requires an equally sophisticated typology, although the categories—with the possible exception of Greene's fourth—likely will require extensive reformulation.

[20]This usage has something to do with Straus's view that composers destroy or suppress history in order to validate themselves. But on a deeper level, "abusive anachronism stems from a failure to create a coherent itinerary from an understood past to a vital emergent present" (Greene, "History and Anachronism," 221).

[21]Ibid.

[22]Greene, *The Light in Troy,* 37–38. Henceforth, I avoid the term "neoclassicism" in this theoretical discussion (thereby avoiding some distracting ambiguities), using instead the term "metamorphic anachronism."

One mode of controlled anachronism—parody—is easily dealt with. Parody's favorite target is "an utterance that claims transhistorical authority"—that claims to transcend its own historical context.[23] Instead of insisting on historicity, such a target implicitly denies history by trying to escape its historical moment into sublime timelessness. This usage represents a kind of false neoclassicism and often creates works that become the most dated—in the negative sense of the word. Music contains many examples, and they do indeed seem to invite parodic anachronism, a kind of anachronism that does not restore or renew, but rather mocks. It should hardly surprise us that at the turn of the century and after, one of the most frequent victims of parodic anachronism was just that composer who claimed to be producing timeless and transcendental art, the artwork of the future: Richard Wagner. To choose just two examples from among many, Rimsky-Korsakov, who chided Wagner for "fritter[ing] his conscience away in his quest for grandiosity and novelty," at one point in his opera *Kashchei the Deathless* unambiguously recalls Wagner, but then deploys all of what he took to be Wagner's faults: "The form will be Wagnerian; there will be abrupt transitions and chords with incoherent voice leading."[24] A second, perhaps less esoteric example appears in Hindemith's puppet play, *Das Nusch-Nuschi,* op. 20, which surrounds a quotation from *Tristan* by obscenities to comment ironically on the plight of a character about to be castrated—representing perhaps the height of "anti-Romanticism." Such parodic or satiric imitation deliberately parades a mummified corpse and is ordinarily, though perhaps not categorically, incompatible with neoclassicism. If anachronism is controlled and not parodic, if the impulse to revive is successful, how are we to describe the imitative process? Here I want to describe four broad strategies of imitation, each of which employs a distinct response to the problem of controlling anachronism, as well as implicitly portrays one perspective on history.[25]

It would be easy to oversimplify the imitative strategies employed by early twentieth-century composers by seeking their origins or earliest uses. But these strategies need not represent new techniques for engaging the past, nor do they need to have occurred only in the early twentieth-century. Rather, we should regard them as "ideal types," what Dahlhaus defines as a group of features whose dynamic interplay uniquely engages the cultural and historical forces of a particular period. In the early twentieth century, these forces confronted "neoclassic" composers with a specific and urgent challenge: to create a *modern* work of art that reconstructed the past without sacrificing its own integrity in the chronology of styles. The four broad imitative strategies, while distinct from one another, nonetheless share this challenge as their principal concern and thereby distinguish themselves from earlier or unrelated uses of the musical past.

REVERENTIAL IMITATION: RAVEL'S *LE TOMBEAU DE COUPERIN*

The first and simplest strategy, reverential imitation, follows the classical model with a nearly religious fidelity or fastidiousness. A brief analysis of Ravel's "Forlane" from *Le tombeau de Couperin* will help develop a concise description of reverential imitation.

[23]Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 118; quoted by Greene in "History and Anachronism," 224.

[24]Rimsky-Korsakov, letters to his disciple, Vasilii Vasilievich Yastrebtsev (Iastrebtsev), dated June 15, 1901 and July 10, 1901, cited by Richard Taruskin in "Chernomor to Kashchei: Harmonic Sorcery; or, Stravinsky's 'Angle,' " *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38 (1985): 117.

[25]Greene, *The Light in Troy,* 37–38. Since Greene illustrates each strategy chiefly from Petrarch, accommodating these strategies to musical examples alters Greene's meanings.

In the spring of 1914, Ravel wrote that he was transcribing a "Forlane" by François Couperin—probably the very one that appeared in the April issue of *La revue musicale de SIM,* an issue to which Ravel also contributed.[26] By October he had decided to incorporate his own forlane into the suite later entitled *Le tombeau de Couperin.* Example 1a shows the opening of Couperin's "Forlane" and Example 2a Ravel's. At first glance, we might think that Ravel imitates only the nearly literal repeat of the four-measure phrases, some rhythmic patterns, the tonic pitch of E, and the *rondeau* design of refrain and *couplet.* But there are deeper similarities that have apparently not been recognized.[27]

The chordal sketch of Couperin's "Forlane" in Example 1b shows how the phrase repetition in mm. 5–8 begins with an ascending harmonic sequence of paired ascending fifths with a 10–5 outer-voice counterpoint supporting a staggered stepwise ascent in the soprano that culminates on scale-degree 5. A leap to scale-degree 3 followed by a stepwise descent to scale-degree 1 leads to the cadence in m. 8. Notably, the soprano descent through scale degrees 3–2–1 omits harmonic support for scale-degree 2 by moving directly from V_4^6 to I.

Ravel rewrites Couperin's "Forlane" by recreating the most essential features of the theme: an opening ascending sequence that emphasizes scale-degree 5 in the soprano, a soprano leap to scale-degree 3 followed by a stepwise descent to scale degree 1 that omits harmonic support of scale-degree 2. (Because Ravel inserts a full measure rather than half measure pick-up to the phrase, the eight-measure phrase extends to the downbeat of m. 9.) But Ravel's imitation of these structural features is scarcely evident on the surface, for Ravel has updated Couperin's theme with the modernisms of his impressionist vernacular, above all disrupting the functional norms of tonality. The least ambiguous tonal feature of Ravel's theme is the ascending sequential pairs of falling fifths in the bass that outline the conventional harmonic progression I–IV–II–V–I. As shown in Example 2b, the placement of $\sharp\hat{7}$ in the soprano suggests that the soprano will sequentially unfold a staggered stepwise ascent with an outer-voice counterpoint of 10–7. But what actually happens is that resolutions are transferred from the soprano to inner voices, and simultaneously inner voices are transposed to the highest voice. The result is an odd surface effect: a descending pattern in the soprano superimposed on an implied ascending sequential progression in the bass.

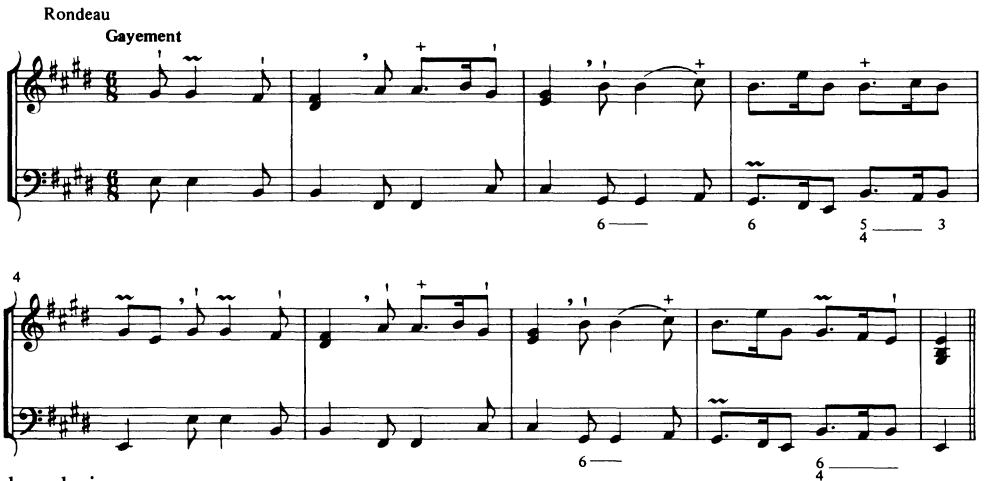
This oddity prompts the question of what purpose Ravel's unconventional soprano serves in his imitation of Couperin's theme. Example 2c shows a simplified harmonic and rhythmic reduction of the theme (with figures added) that offers one plausible interpretation of the voice-leading, although I would argue that Ravel also suggests several others.[28] Example 2c clarifies how Ravel's theme imitates the structure of Couperin's. Even though Ravel's theme, unlike Couperin's, begins on scale degree $\sharp\hat{7}$, its descent arrives on scale-degree 5, like Couperin's, and is followed by a leap to scale-degree 3 and a stepwise descent to scale-degree 1 that omits

[26]Ravel wrote that he was transcribing a "Forlane" by Couperin in a letter to Cipa Godebski in the spring of 1914. Ravel could also have known this "Forlane" by Couperin from an edition of the *Quatrieme concert* of the *Concerts royaux* by Georges Marty that appeared before 1908. A fuller account of the circumstances of Ravel's transcription and his likely use of Couperin's "Forlane" as a model appears in Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music,* 50–52.

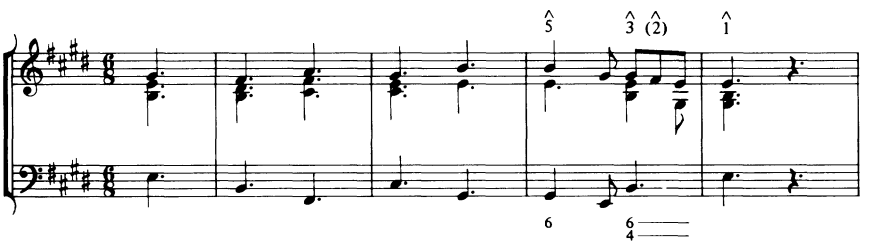
[27]Messing greatly understates the similarities between Ravel's and Couperin's "Forlanes": "Ravel's response to his model resembles the general attitude of his contemporaries toward their eighteenth-century tradition to the extent that the most overt sense of similarity derives from the recurrence of a rhythmic gesture" (*Neoclassicism in Music,* 51).

[28]Ravel's carefully balanced tonal ambiguities allow for several plausible interpretations of the theme's voice-leading, as became evident when I consulted Jonathan Bernard, Pieter van den Toorn, and Charles Smith in preparing Example 2c.

Example 1. a) François Couperin, *Concerts royaux, Quatrième concert,* Forlane, mm. 1–8



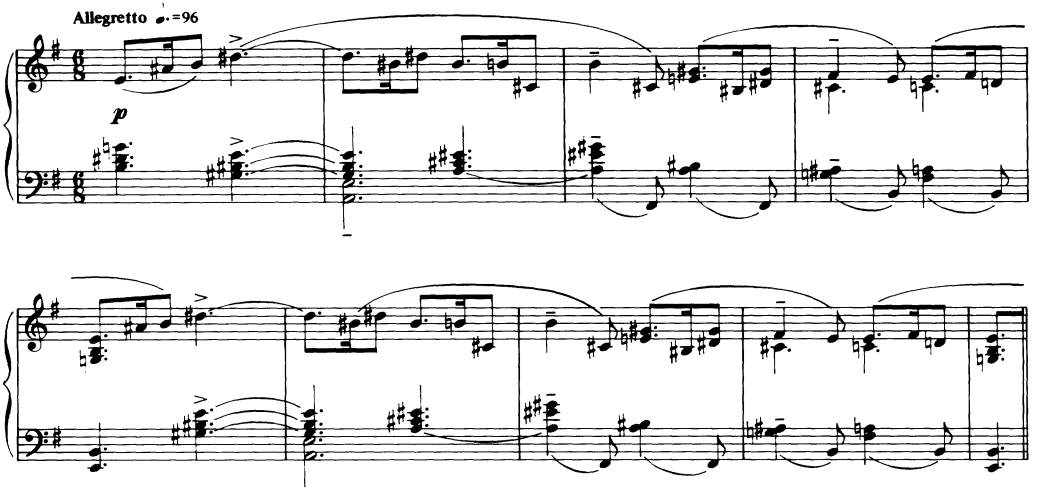
b) Mm. 5–8: chordal analysis



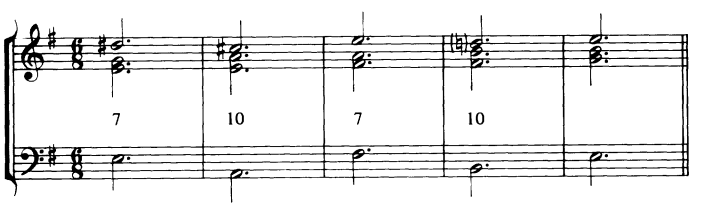
harmonic support of scale-degree 2. But this point of imitation seems purposely clouded by at least three disruptive processes that together threaten the functional norms of tonal voice-leading.

First, as mentioned above, in mm. 5 and 6 inner-voice pitches are transferred into higher registers (marked with arrows in Example 2c), and soprano pitches are transferred down to inner voices, as for example in mm. 6 and 7. Second, essential resolutions seem to move simultaneously in opposite directions, or to be frozen in time beyond their normal point of resolution, or not to resolve at all. Consider, for example, how difficult it is to follow the descending resolution of D♯ (♯$\hat{7}$) that appears in m. 5. First it extends to the middle of m. 6 and then resolves to C♯ in an inner voice; but C♯ itself is preceded by an ornamental B♯, a suspended ascending chromatic passing tone (B–B♯–C♯). Simultaneously, the suspended B♯ in m. 6 is transferred to the soprano and returns to B♮; thus B♯ seems to resolve both to C♯ and to B♮ simultaneously. Another example of an ambiguous or irregular resolution occurs on the downbeat of m. 7 where the soprano

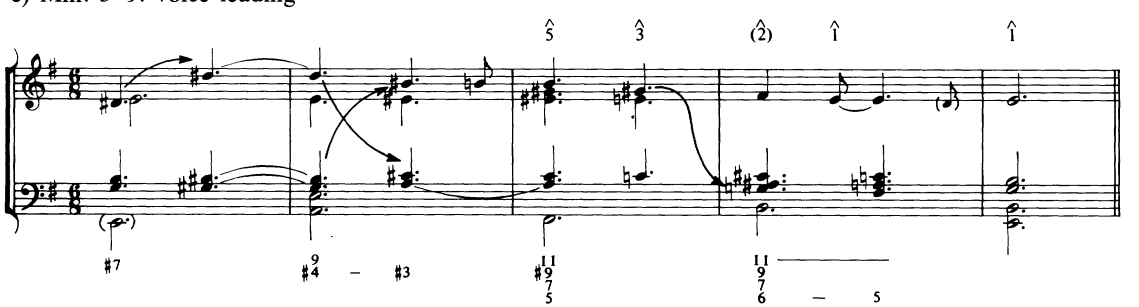
Example 2. a) Maurice Ravel, *Le tombeau de Couperin,* Forlane, mm. 1–9. © 1918 by Éditions DURAND Paris avec l'aimable autorisation des Éditions ARIMA Corp. et DURAND.



b) Mm. 5–9: chordal analysis



c) Mm. 5–9: voice leading



projects scale-degree 5 (B♮) as a chordal 11th; because scale-degree 5 enters in the previous measure as a 9th, it appears either not to resolve in m. 7 or to be suspended beyond its normal resolution. Measure 7 accentuates this effect when, as an 11th, the B♮ again fails to resolve, as if somehow frozen in time. A final example occurs in m. 8 where the resolution of the soprano G♯ (♯9) in m. 7 is transferred to an inner-voice G♮; in fact, it is this motion that prevents scale-degree 2, F♯, in the soprano from being harmonized by V, for it delays the resolution of G to F♯ and makes it occur later in an inner voice. A third disruptive process involves extensive use of modal mixture. For example, in m. 5 ♯$\hat{7}$ is borrowed from the major mode; in m. 6 IV is major instead of minor; in m. 7 II could be either minor or diminished; and in m. 8 the leading tone D (scale-degree 7) is not raised. This final instance of mixture throws into question the resolution of the cadential 11th (E–D) in m. 8; again, the dissonant 11th seems frozen in time, made consonant only with its suspension into the final tonic.

Thus a number of modernisms affect Ravel's imitation of Couperin's theme, including chordal 9ths and 11ths, omitted or freely transferred resolutions, and modal mixture—all of which interact to disrupt or make ambiguous the functional norms of tonal voice leading. Nonetheless, Ravel's imitation of the essential structural features of Couperin's theme represents in one sense a reverent recreation of the classical model, perhaps implying a sacramental version of history; the imitation celebrates the classical model by almost ritual repetition, "as though no other form of celebration could be worthy of its dignity."[29] For Ravel, the model exists in its own perfection as a sacred text on the other side of an abyss (in this instance Romantic music)—accessible, but beyond alteration or criticism. Just this kind of religious tone colors statements by the contemporaries of Ravel who championed the music of Couperin and Rameau. Debussy, for example, when lamenting his aesthetic distance from Rameau and Couperin, "the most poetic of our harpsichordists," acknowledges a fall from grace and fixes blame on the barbaric (Teutonic) influence of the Romantics. "It is annoying," he writes, "that we should have forgotten these ways which were once our own, replacing them with our barbarous attitudes."[30] "In fact, since Rameau, we have had no purely French tradition. His death severed the thread, Ariadne's thread, that guided us through the labyrinth of the past. Since then, we have failed to cultivate our garden, but on the other hand we have given a warm welcome to any foreign salesman who cared to come our way . . . We begged forgiveness of the muses of good taste for having been so light and clear, and we intoned a hymn to the praise of heaviness."[31]

But this kind of reverent reproduction of a model has difficulty, I think, functioning transitively, for the reproduction must be made in an idiom that is alien or unbecoming to the original and whose violations of the model's norms threaten to remain out of artistic control. For example, in his "Forlane" Ravel makes the tonally disruptive processes interact in such a way that augmented triads are repeatedly projected in right and left hands, giving the theme an overall dissonant, unresolved quality. The recreated tonal theme must co-exist with a structure antithetical to tonality itself, a feature that accounts for several plausible interpretations of the voice-leading that on some level structures this theme. This sort of unresolvable ambiguity is perhaps the reason why reverential imitation did not, in itself, produce a large body of masterworks, a predicament that Ravel mourns shortly after completing *Le tombeau*: "I have failed in my life . . . I am not one of the great composers. All the great have produced enormously. There is everything in their work: the

[29]Greene, *The Light in Troy,* 38.

[30]Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music,* ed. and trans. Richard Langham Smith (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 231; originally in *Le Figaro,* May 8, 1908.

[31]Ibid., 322–23; originally in *L'intransigeant,* March 11, 1915.

best and the worst, but there is always quantity. But I have written relatively very little."[32] We need not take so bleak a view of Ravel's achievement to recognize that reverential imitation of the sort represented by *Le tombeau de Couperin* can celebrate rather than control anachronism. But it may embalm rather than revive the past model, and perhaps Ravel's title carries both these implications. Each movement of *Le tombeau* is dedicated to the memory of a friend killed in World War I. *Le tombeau* honors Couperin's memory too; it stands in for the monument the composer apparently never had—but it cannot revive the dead.[33] Consider, for contrast, Ben Jonson's poem to the memory of Shakespeare, greatest poet of the language, who nevertheless lacked a monumental tomb in Westminster Abbey:

> Thou art a monument, without a tomb,
> And art alive still, while thy Booke doth live,
> And we have wits to read, and praise to give.[34]

ECLECTIC IMITATION: STRAVINSKY'S OCTET

A second, quite different type of imitation characterizes the compositions most often called neoclassic. They are pieces in which allusions, echoes, phrases, techniques, structures, and forms from an unspecified group of earlier composers and styles all jostle each other indifferently. Such an eclectic mingling features prominently in the early neoclassic works of Stravinsky, which often join both diatonic and octatonic pitch structures and self-consciously imitate classical phrase structure, simple dance patterns, various tonal forms, and Baroque contrapuntal textures. We can call this type of imitation *eclectic* or *exploitative*.[35] It treats the musical past as an undifferentiated stockpile to be drawn on at will, and it permits the kind of brilliant manipulation of new and old that produced some of the most undisputed masterpieces of early twentieth-century music. Stravinsky himself acknowledges this imitative process when he borrowed a term from Kurt Schwitters in remarking of *Oedipus Rex* (written in 1927) that "much of the music is a *Merzbild* [construction of random materials], put together from whatever came to hand," including "such little games as . . . the Alberti-bass horn solo accompanying the Messenger" and "the fusion of such widely divergent types of music as the *Folies Bergeres* tune" that occurs when "the girls enter, kicking" and the frequent use of "Wagnerian 7th chords." He defends this procedure by asserting that "I have made these bits and snatches my own, I think, and of them a unity. 'Soule is form,' Spenser says, 'and doth the bodie make.'"[36] Stravinsky's allusion to Spenser, who wrote the first English epic in a made-up language designed to seem archaic, reflects on Stravinsky's playful anachronism.

Eclectic imitation describes a process by which sources and models are compiled. Rather than a well organized museum, tradition becomes a warehouse whose contents can be rearranged and plundered without damage or responsibility. That is, of course, also a way of freeing the modern composer. After all, nothing new gets created in a museum. At its weakest, of course, this kind of eclectic imitation simply sports with anachronism or wallows in it, but when used with precision it can create a vocabulary of a new and higher power—a power that gains strength from rhetorical skill, rather than from a necessarily unified or integrated vision.[37]

[32]Ravel's comments appear in a letter to Claude Delvincourt quoted by Victor I. Seroff in *Maurice Ravel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953), 207.

[33]If Couperin was buried in the church of Saint-Joseph, no monument survives.

[34]"To the Memory of My Beloved, the Author Mr. William Shakespeare: And What He Hath Left Us," 11. 22–24.

[35]Greene, *The Light in Troy,* 39.

[36]Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and A Diary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1963), 11.

[37]Greene, *The Light in Troy,* 39.

Stravinsky's Octet for wind instruments, written in 1922, is a particularly successful example of eclectic imitation, a work whose effect derives from a kind of rhetorical confrontation between various classical forms—set forth in Baroque-like textures—and the composer's idiomatic use of diatonic and octatonic pitch structures. Stravinsky confirms some of these historical models when he commented that the Octet was influenced by the terseness and lucidity of Bach's two-part Inventions and by his own rediscovery of sonata form.[38] Of the numerous imitative strategies at work in this piece, the focus here is on how Stravinsky joins diatonic and octatonic pitch structures to create an analogue for tonal closure (or cadence).

One clear example occurs at the opening of the second movement ("Theme and Variations"), whose variation form features a theme and an initial variation that recurs in a rondo-like design. (To safeguard against slanting the analysis to fit better the imitative category, the analysis here follows Pieter van den Toorn's discussion of this passage in *The Music of Igor Stravinsky*.[39]) Example 3 shows van den Toorn's abridged reduction of the complete variation theme. The theme's first part, presented by the flute and clarinet at No. 24, uses seven of eight pitches from an octatonic scale and stresses A as the central pitch-class. The octatonic scale, labeled Collection III, appears at the beginning of staff no. 5 at the bottom of Example 3. Typical of octatonic structures in Stravinsky's neoclassical works, the theme exploits the (0,1,3,4) tetrachord which here structures the initial contour of the theme, using the pitches (A, B♭, C, C♯) (shown on stave no. 3 in Example 3). The second part of the theme, presented by the second trumpet at No. 25, begins with a transposition of this same tetrachord on C, thereby making use of the last remaining pitch of Collection III, D♯. The theme then continues with the tetrachord's return to the central pitch A by the first trombone three measures before No. 26 (staff no. 3a).

The complete theme uses all eight pitch-classes of Collection III's octatonic scale. The transposition of the theme's initial tetrachord to C and the subsequent emphasis of that pitch identify C as a symmetrically defined partitioning element which approaches the weight and independence of the central pitch, A. The theme thus embodies a wholly octatonic structure, one which emphasizes the (0,1,3,4) tetrachord, its transposition, and the subsequent symmetrical partitioning by pitches A and C.

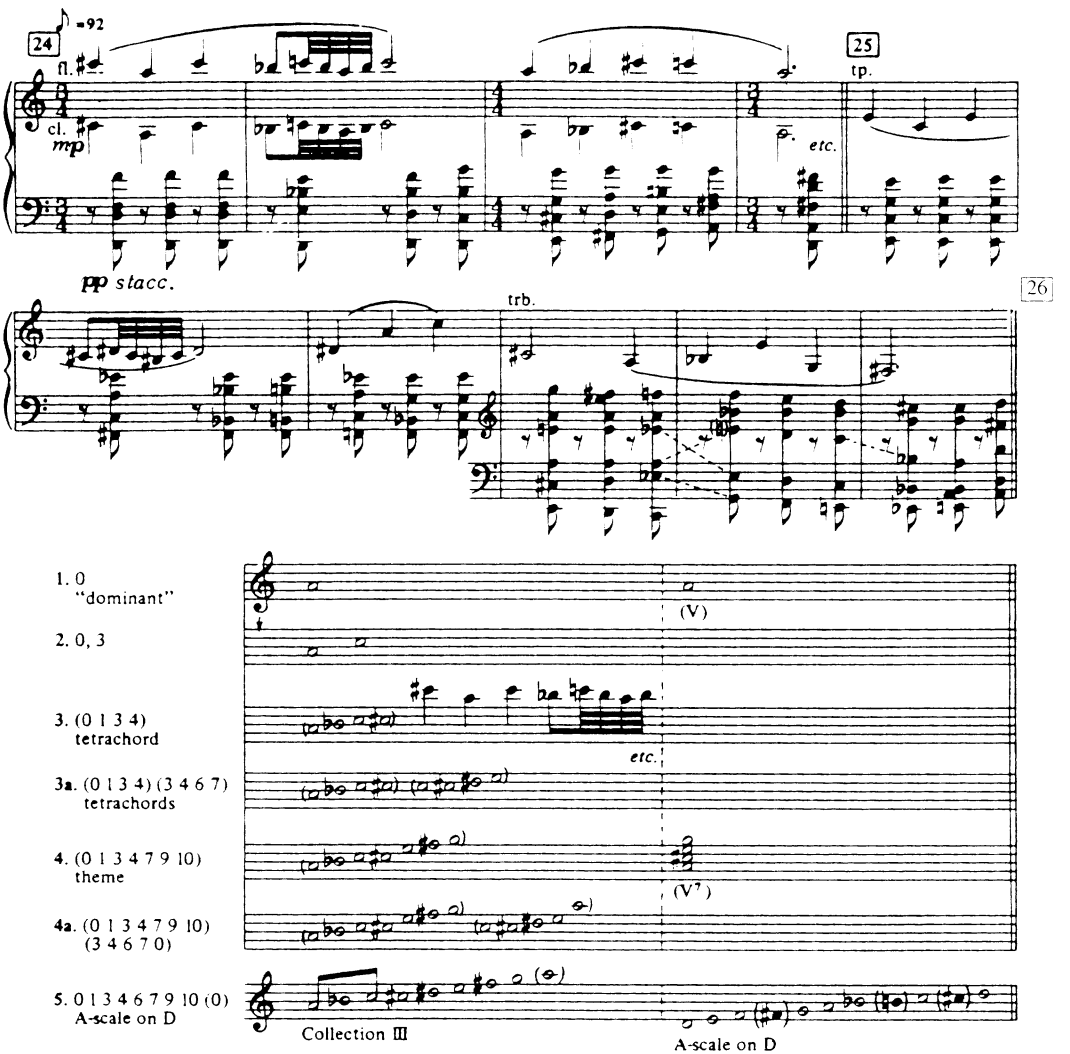
However, beneath the theme (beginning at No. 24) there appears an accompaniment that unambiguously alludes to a diatonic structure, one that stresses D and implies what van den Toorn calls "an A-scale on D, or a kind of pseudo D-minor reference." The bassoons' ascending bass line moves stepwise up from D to an implied dominant, A, and then returns to D, suggesting a I–II–V–I harmonic progression. But neither D nor the tonic triad (D–F–A) is part of Collection III, the octatonic collection that structures the theme. Consequently, among other tonal ambiguities—such as the B♭–A in the theme's main tetrachord which overlaps with scale-degrees 5 and 6 in D minor—Stravinsky forges a bond between the variation theme and its accompaniment that creates the allusion to a dominant-tonic relation. The allusion is consummated in the final measure (No. 25+6) by what sounds like a cadential dominant-to-tonic resolution on D, in which the variation theme's last pitch, F♯ (which appears only twice, as the final note of theme's two principal phrases), neatly unites Collection III with a traditional Picardy-third closure of the implied D-minor tonality.

Apart from the "Theme and Variations" form and its conventional texture of theme plus accompaniment, the imitative strategies one can call neoclassic derive from the Octet's join-

[38]Stravinsky, *Dialogues*, 71.

[39]Pieter van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 333–36.

Example 3. Igor Stravinsky, Octet, Tema con Variazioni: excerpts from variation theme and analysis from Pieter van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 334. Used by permission.



ing of diatonic and octatonic structures. The bond is loose, comprising only several elements held in common, but the overall effect creates an allusion to a dominant-tonic cadence, appropriately consummated only in the theme's final measure with the intersecting F♯. Still, the allusion is only approximate, for octatonic structures intrude and block an authentic tonal cadence; octatonicism here remains superimposed over a D-minor tonality, both octatonicism and tonality maintaining their identities despite their superimposition. The inevitable ambiguities this superimposition creates are essential features of the theme. The clash of diatonic and octatonic elements creates an equilibrium that resists fusion or synthesis. No definite meaning emerges from their melding since for their effect both must maintain their independence; they function primarily as rhetorical counters. The movement, as a whole, reveals an allusive sophistication, but its dexterity remains a little cold. It does not achieve—and probably does not attempt—a cultural or historical continuity that transcends the anachronisms so freely introduced. Such a continuity is usually beyond the aspiration of eclectic imitations. Because their past is fragmented, jumbled, and in effect dehistoricized, they have difficulty mediating between past and present. They tend to evade the problem of anachronism or to play with it within a hospitable texture; they seldom confront it directly. Eclectic imitation can reconcile within its framework momentary conflicts among heterogeneous elements—as in Stravinsky's Octet—but it cannot easily arrive at a deeper, more dramatic conflict and engagement with the past.[40]

[40]This description of eclectic imitation closely follows Greene, *The Light in Troy,* 40.

HEURISTIC IMITATION: BARTÓK'S IMPROVISATIONS, OP. 20

When a deeper engagement does occur, a third type of imitation, called *heuristic,* arises. Heuristic imitation accentuates rather than conceals the link it forges with the past. It advertises its dependence on an earlier model, but in a way that forces us to recognize the disparity, the anachronism, of the connection being made. Heuristic imitation dramatizes musical history and relies on the datedness of musical styles for aesthetic effect. It provides composers a means to position themselves within a culture and a tradition. It opens a transitive dialogue with the past by which composers can take, and take responsibility for, their places in music history.[41]

Bartók provides the best examples of heuristic imitation in early twentieth-century music, mostly because of the music he wrote, but also because he so clearly understood and explained his use of past models.

> Every artist has the right to sink roots in the art of the past. It is not only his right, but also his duty. Why should we then not have the right to regard folk-art as such a rooting ground?[42]

For composers eager to bring about "the blossoming of a national musical art," folk songs are the true classics.[43] They are, of course, national, and—according to Bartók—suggest in their distinctive rhythms and modal and pentatonic elements the cultural history of eastern Europe.[44] They thus offer an alternative to the immediate, and western European, past—that is, to the "ultra-chromaticism of the Wagner-

[41]Ibid., 40–41.

[42]Béla Bartók, "On the Significance of Folk Music," in *Bela Bartók Essays,* ed. Benjamin Suchoff (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), 346, as quoted in Austin, *Music of the 20th Century,* 229.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Béla Bartók, "Hungarian Peasant Music," *Musical Quarterly* 19 (1933): 272–73.

Strauss period" which grew, not from deeply rooted popular tradition, but in the hothouse of Romantic individuality.[45] Even more important, however, folk songs are the true classics because they have the classical virtues:

> Every single [authentic] melody of the peasant music . . . is perfection itself—a *classical* [*klasszikus*] example of how the musical thought can be expressed in the most ideal manner with the simplest means and in the most finished form.[46]

Again and again in his writings, Bartók contrasts his own use of earlier models with what is here termed eclectic imitation. "It is not enough," he writes, "to study [peasant music] as it is stored up in the museums."[47] It is not enough "to have something to do with folk art and to graft its formulas onto those of Western music."[48] That kind of imitation, according to Bartók, "will only lend our music some new ornaments, nothing more."[49] In contrast, Bartók recommends study of folk music, not in museums, but "in the country as part of a life shared with the peasants."[50] This passage suggests why Bartók thought he was sinking roots into the past in his use of folk music, even though that music was still alive in the village life of the countryside. In a museum, folk music would be categorized and made subject to history. As "part of a life shared with the peasants," its past endures in what must seem an anachronism to one who is not a peasant. Fruitful use of such timeless material requires genuine cultural and anthropological engagement, not antiquarian study and not facile or formal imitation.

All this is implicit in the metaphor of folk classics as a rooting ground for new organic growth. The growth Bartók imagines is a tree, not a flower bed. What kind of tree? Perhaps a chestnut like Yeats's "Great rooted blossomer."[51] At any rate, a tree whose flowers are "the blossoming of a national musical art," deeply rooted in tradition, organically connected, but also transforming the soil, the model, into something new, tall, enduring, and fecund.

One example of heuristic imitation occurs in Bartók's *Eight Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs,* op. 20. This work belongs to a larger group of pieces that Bartók completed during the five years following World War I, in which he experiments with placing folk melodies in complex atonal settings derived from the intervallic and linear features of the original melodies. Some readers may find it odd not to have picked one of Bartók's later compositions that more clearly derive from classical tonal forms, but this essay is less concerned with the term *neoclassic* than with the various impulses and strategies that have been confusingly lumped under the term. Bartók's early *Improvisations,* like Ravel's *Le tombeau* and Stravinsky's Octet, dates from the period immediately following World War I, just when the so-called neoclassic style was beginning to emerge. Imitative experiments seem clearer in this period than later on. Finally, the war itself created a break with the past that encouraged a radical and anxious awareness of a broken continuity affecting all the arts.

This discussion focuses on the first two improvisations of op. 20. To discourage tendentiousness, the analysis follows

[45]Béla Bartók, "The Relation of Folk Song to the Development of the Art Music of Our Time," in *Bartók Essays,* 323; Béla Bartók, "On the Significance of Folk Music," 346.

[46]Bartók, "Hungarian Peasant Music," 270 (italics added).

[47]Béla Bartók, "The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music," in *Bartók Essays,* 341.

[48]Van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky,* 333–36.

[49]Bartók, "Hungarian Peasant Music," 272–73.

[50]Ibid. An acute discussion of the background and implications of Bartók's advocacy of Hungarian folk music appears in Judit Frigyesi, "Béla Bartók and the Concept of Nation and *Volk* in Modern Hungary," *Musical Quarterly* 78 (1994): 255–87.

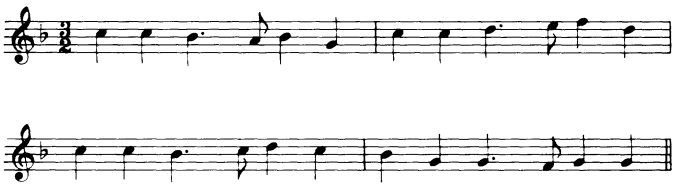
[51]W. B. Yeats, "Among School Children," stanza 8.

a published analysis by Paul Wilson.[52] The first two improvisations are based on the Magyar folk songs that appear in Examples 4a and 5a. As is clear from comparing the two improvisations that appear in Examples 4c and 5b with their respective folksongs, the melodies have been transposed and some rhythms are altered slightly. The two-fold dramatic function of the opening piece is (1) to advertise the piece's historical model and (2) to portray in miniature its passage through time, leading the listener by progressive stages from the monophonic modal realm of pure folksong to the threshold of Bartók's idiomatic atonality. This miniature historical journey in the first piece turns out to mirror the diachronic passage among the pieces as a group. Each improvisation becomes progressively more modern, gradually incorporating more complex harmonies, rhythms, and forms.

Within the first piece, the repetitions of the folk song mark the stages of the historical journey, while the changing character of the accompanying sonorities accomplish the actual movement. Example 4b offers Paul Wilson's structural graph of the unaccompanied folk tune, in which higher rhythmic values indicate greater structural weight and beams indicate important connections, but do not imply any particular kind of voice leading. We should not be surprised that the melody has some sort of underlying structure, but neither should we expect a structure that falls into a particular format, such as a descending stepwise line. The graph shows F as the midpoint of two conjunct fourths which move symmetrically to lower C and upper B♭ in turn. The symmetry around F is reinforced by the lower and upper neighbors, E♭ and G, in the third measure. The song ends in the fourth measure with

[52]Paul Wilson, "Concepts of Prolongation and Bartók's Opus 20," *Music Theory Spectrum* 6 (1984): 79–89. Elliott Antokoletz discusses only sections from various of the Improvisations, using a different means to show how Bartók derives his setting from the original song; but a more extended analysis would show a similar imitative strategy (*The Music of Bela Bartók* [Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1984], 55–62).

Example 4. a) Folk song used in Béla Bartók, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs,* op. 20, first movement

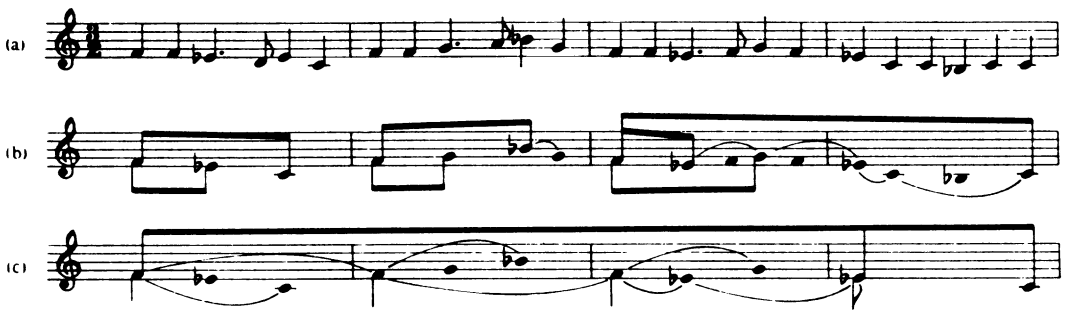


a descent by major second to E♭ and then by a minor third to C. The lowest system of Example 4b presents a higher-level graph which posits a more general structure to the melody, the large descending fourth F to C with an intervening E♭. The criteria for this structure are primarily rhythm and meter, which directly reinforce the song's symmetry of contour. Notice that this underlying structure is also present as a motive in m. 1, that its contour is inverted in m. 2 and reversed in m. 4. Motivically, then, the folk song is integrated on two separate levels, and this structural feature motivates the three successive settings in Bartók's first Improvisation, shown in Example 4c.

The sonorities Bartók chooses to accompany the first statement of the song are spare and unobtrusive, as is appropriate for this initial stage of diachronic passage. The intervals and pitches derive exclusively from the primary pitches of the melody: the dyads E♭–F and B♭–C. The second statement introduces triads as elaborations of the important melodic pitches of the tune. There is no chord progression in a tonal sense. Rather the movement of chords mimics the contour of the melody, sharing its symmetries and structure. Minor triads dominate the setting, except for four major triads that Bartók uses to emphasize the song's main structural pitches: F, G, E♭, and C.

The third and final repetition of the tune presents the last stage of this piece's introductory journey. The initial D-minor

Example 4. b) Analysis of the folk song from Paul Wilson, "Concepts of Prolongation and Bartók's Opus 20," *Music Theory Spectrum* 6 (1984): 80.

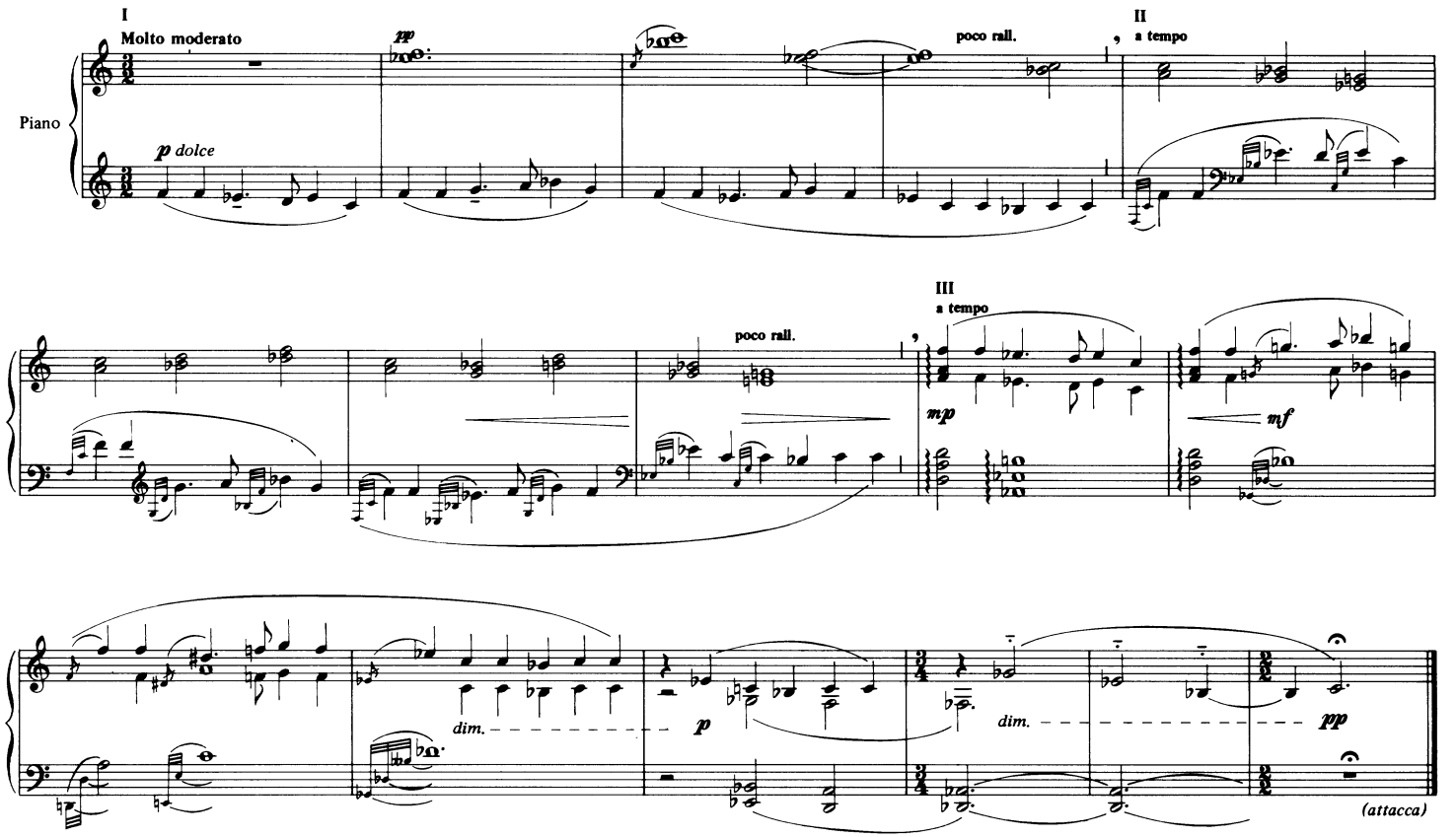


triad at first seems to provide the same sort of harmonic elaboration already heard, but the setting soon veers off into simple atonal sonorities. Example 4d breaks each measure into an initial chord followed by a second sonority, which in each case presents the pitch-class (pc) set 4–18, tetrachord (0,1,4,7). In each measure except m. 11, pc set 4–18 becomes part of a larger harmony, pc set 5–16 (0,1,3,4,7), that recurs in the second piece and is further developed.

The tentative incursion into atonality in the first piece becomes much bolder in the second. Like the first piece, the second (the opening of which appears in Example 5b) comprises repetitions of a folk song (shown in Example 5a) whose atonal accompaniments become increasingly complex. Unlike the first piece, however, the repetitions are now transposed; the folk tune first occurs on C, is then transposed to E (m. 14), next to A♭ (m. 30), and then returns on C (m. 42). The transpositions divide the octave symmetrically, creating a more complex form than that in the first piece. Comparison of the original folk song with Bartók's setting shows that he uses meter, rhythm, and dynamics to determine pitches having greater structural weight. Example 5c shows that as in the first folk tune, the structural pitches of the second (G–F–E♭–C) follow a descending—but not always stepwise—motion that Bartók uses as a cue for a series of parallel movements in two or three lower voices. The single Arabic figure "6" below the graph shows the parallel movement between melody and bass, while the atonal set names identify the vertical harmonies, pc sets 4–19 (0,1,4,8) and 4–12 (0,2,3,6). The parallel movement is not continuous, as the graph shows; rather, the voices move apart and come together repeatedly to form successive statements of pc set 4–19 at precisely those points needed to set the primary structural pitches of the tune. The special importance of the cadential sonority, pc set 4–12, becomes apparent only as the piece progresses, but the relative complexity of this setting compared to those preceding illustrates how atonal structures gradually become more complex, thereby slowly coaxing us along a diachronic path from pure modality toward Bartók's emerging atonality.

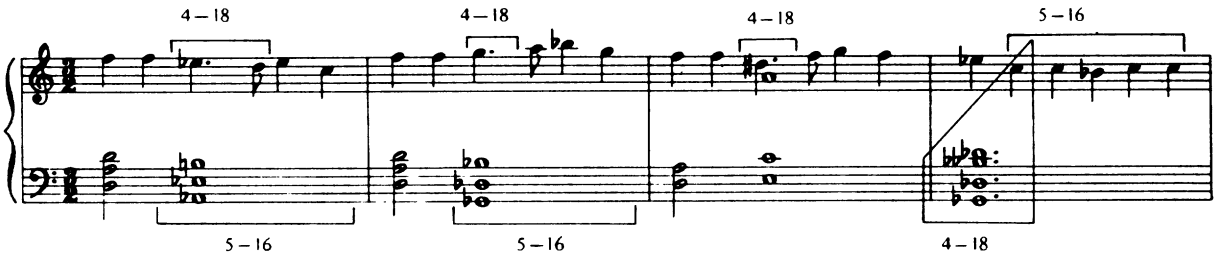
As shown in Example 5d, Bartók uses the increasing atonal complexity to develop and connect successive settings of the folk song. For example, recurrences of earlier structural harmonies (pc sets 4–19 and 4–12) now join a new pc set, 5–26

Example 4. c) Bartók, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs,* op. 20, first movement. Roman numerals show the three statements of the folk song. Copyright 1922 by Hawkes & Son (London) Ltd., by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

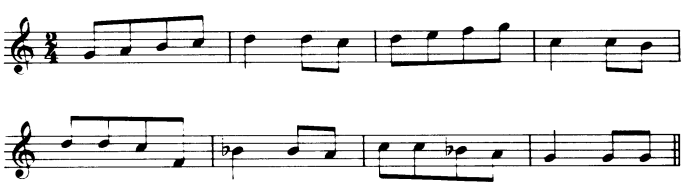


(0,2,4,5,8). In addition, the presentation of structural harmonies becomes more varied, occurring not only vertically —as before—but also horizontally, structuring individual voices. (One instance occurs with the separately stemmed alto voice that unfolds pc set 4–19.) Most importantly, new harmonies tend to appear at cadences, a technique that Bartók uses to bind together forms of successive pieces. To appreciate more fully how Bartók structures the song's increasingly complex settings, the reader should review Wilson's detailed analysis. But these few examples suggest how Bartók leads us from a relatively pure modal setting to the more complex atonal structures that make up his modern

Example 4. d) Mm. 9–12: analysis from Paul Wilson, "Concepts of Prolongation," 81.



Example 5. a) Folk song used in Béla Bartók, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs,* op. 20, second movement



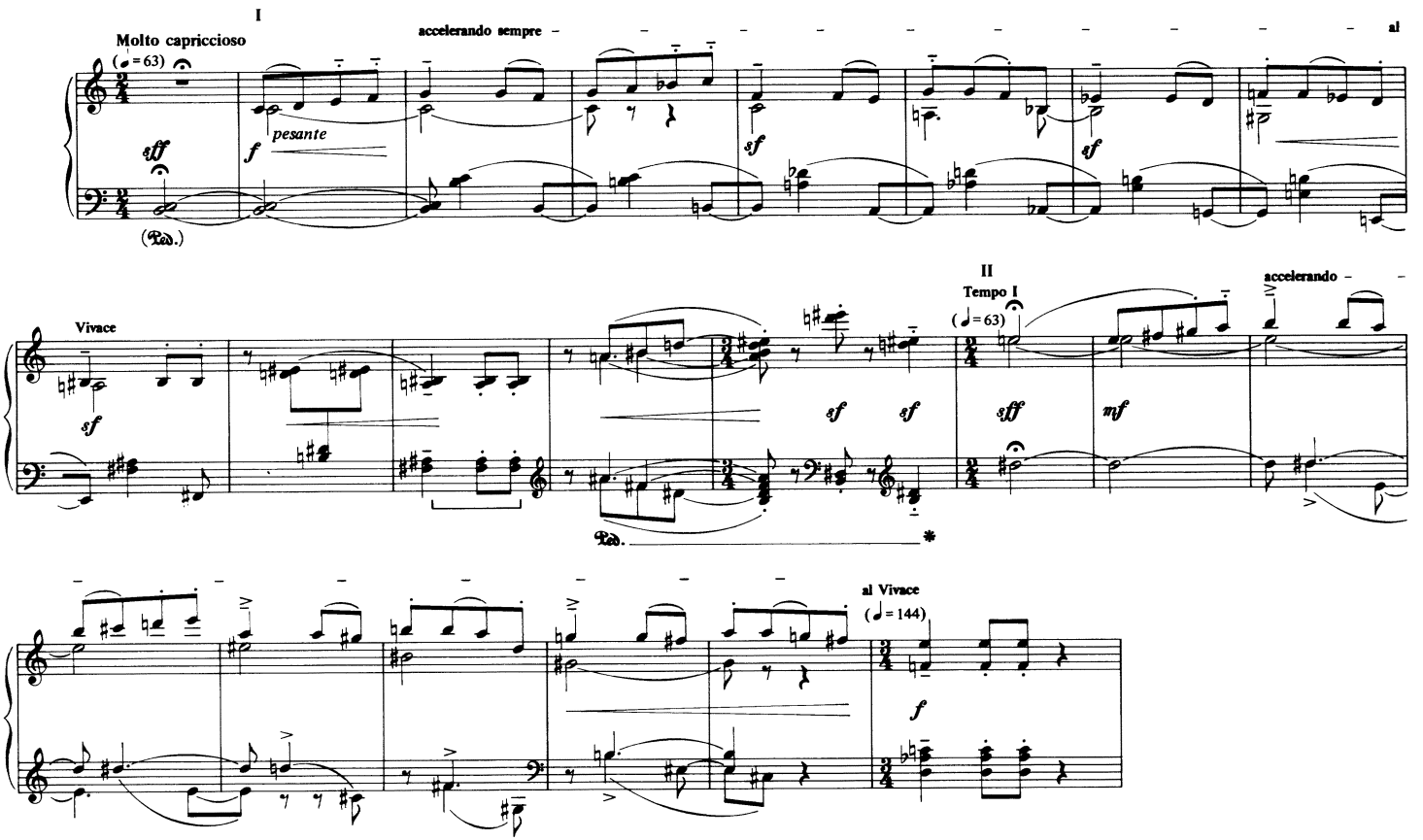
vernacular. Through this process, Bartók also reveals a particular historical perspective—a specific route from past to emerging present: as atonal structures become more complex, they also become more powerful and gradually weaken the modal structures from which they derive.

Bartók's *Improvisations* represent heuristic imitation. The piece singles out a folk source separated from Bartók's style by a cultural divide and defines itself by making that folk source up-to-date. The piece invites specific comparison between two traditions; it proclaims an inheritance that it puts to new use. The piece enacts a historical and cultural journey from a specified past to an emerging present, from an earlier semiotic matrix to a modern one. Through this diachronic drama, through this acting out of passage, this kind of neoclassic exhibits its own cultural awareness and creative memory. Because heuristic imitation defines itself through its relationship to one source or model, it sketches far more explicitly than eclectic imitation its own etiology, its own historical passage and artistic emergence. But by invoking the past so explicitly, the composer also makes the work vulnerable to comparison with the past and to criticism for being derivative or engaged in mere repetition compulsion.[53] Fear of such criticism no doubt prompted Bartók's repeated assertion that, contrary to what many assume, "to [harmonize] folk melodies is one of the most difficult tasks; equally difficult if not more so than to write a major original composition."[54] To succeed, a heuristic imitation must *be* heuristic; it cannot lead to a dead end in the past. It must lead somewhere new; it must liberate rather than constrict. A composer who uses imitation in this way need not be seen as an Oedipal son in a Freudian family romance, which is to say he is not Romantic in Straus's or Bloom's terms. He may be like the

[53]Greene, *The Light in Troy,* 42.

[54]Bartók, "On the Significance of Folk Music," 345.

Example 5. b) Bartók, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs,* op. 20, second movement, mm. 1–22. Roman numerals show two statements of the folk song. Copyright 1922 by Hawkes & Son (London) Ltd., by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.



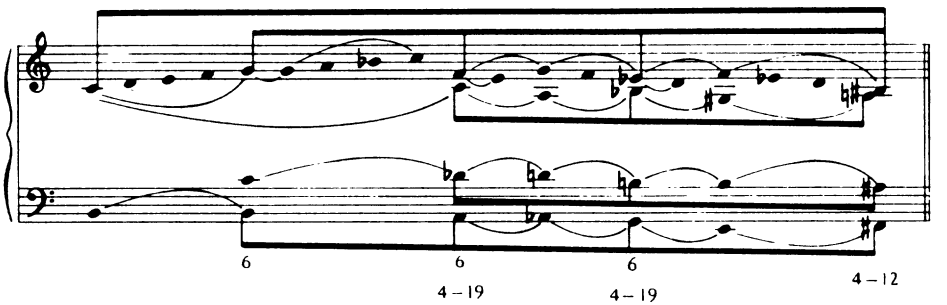
son in a classical comedy to whom the wise father entrusts the fortune and the girl at the moment of recognition or reconciliation.[55]

[55]Greene, *The Light in Troy,* 41.

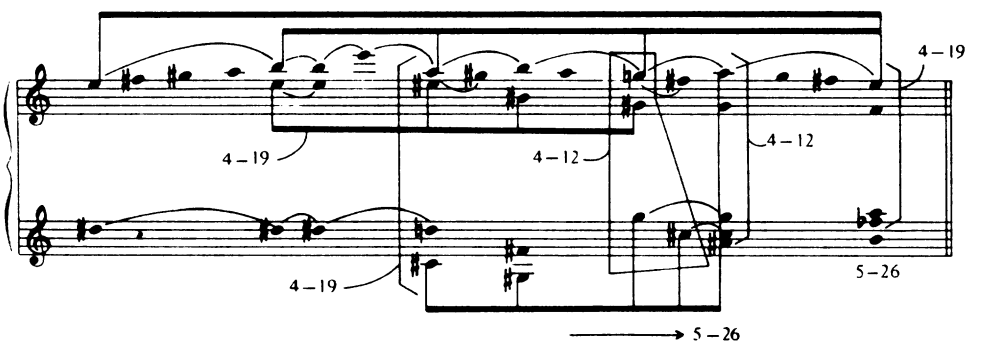
DIALECTICAL IMITATION: SCHOENBERG'S THIRD QUARTET, OP. 30

A fourth kind of imitation is the "dialectical" (although I do not maintain that there are only four kinds, or that their boundaries are clear and unchanging). Here the connections with literary imitation are weaker. The term "dialectical" is

Example 5. c) Mm. 2–9: analysis from Paul Wilson, "Concepts of Prolongation and Bartók's Opus 20," *Music Theory Spectrum* 6 (1984): 82.



d) Mm. 15–22: analysis from Paul Wilson, "Concepts of Prolongation," 83.



not completely satisfactory because in discourse about music, "dialectical" usually carries its more restrictive meaning drawn from Hegelian philosophy, where it describes the process of thought that develops by a continuous unification of opposites. This is not the meaning I intend; rather, I invoke the word's earlier and broader meaning, in which dialectic is the process of critically examining the truth of an opinion through discussion or debate or dialogue. This broader meaning of "dialectic" characterizes Renaissance music theorists who, as part of their attempts to revive ancient theories of music, also revived the form of the Platonic dialogue. Claude Palisca argues that this dialectical form "had the advantage of airing both sides of a controversial subject, and . . . introducing novel methods or *indirectly* attacking previous authors or the opinions or deeds of the powerful."[56] The term "dialectical" here carries this broader meaning, emphasizing

[56]Claude V. Palisca, *Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 9 (italics added).

the dialogue of at least two voices or positions and involving their indirect or oblique comparison.

There is a unique tension or ambivalence in heuristic imitation to which dialectical imitation seems to respond. It should be no surprise that artists and composers responding to revivalist or neoclassic impulses also experience resistance or ambivalence toward imitation in general. Such resistance emerges in the frequently defensive or contradictory statements by just those composers most strongly associated with twentieth-century neoclassicism. Scholars have typically attributed such contradictions to political pressures and professional ambitions, rather than to genuine aesthetic ambivalence. But these explanations, I think, can obscure the natural resistance, even hostility, in any effort to create the new by copying the old. Imitation, after all, was not merely a compositional technique; it was an aesthetic stance, a sometimes polemical definition and recreation of a tradition that provoked and tolerated tangled attitudes and intense ambivalences.[57]

Each kind of imitation nourishes some ambivalences more strongly than others. Heuristic imitation, for instance, is most vulnerable in the fictive nature of its diachronic passage. Bartók uses folk music as his authenticating model, but succeeds only to the extent that we intuitively accept the essentially fictive passage he makes from one semiotic or cultural region to another. This kind of neoclassic piece does not compete against its model; it pretends to be directly descended from the model—the historical and natural heir to its cultural authenticity. Schoenberg targets just this vulnerable point in his attack on "folklorists" in the foreword to *Three Satires,* op. 28:

> With delight, I also attack the folklorists, who want to apply to the natural, primitive concepts of folk music a technique which is suitable only for a complex way of thinking—obliged so to like it (since to them proper themes are not at their disposal) or not (although an existing musical culture and tradition could even still ultimately sustain them).

Schoenberg criticizes not the potential strength of heuristic imitation—its ambition to enact an historical and cultural journey—but its distinctive limitation: an incompleteness or fictiveness in the purported relation between the "primitive" and the "complex," between cultures too distant or estranged for their relation to be entirely free of make believe.

Dialectical imitation responds directly to this lack of exchange or contest in heuristic imitation by initiating more aggressive dialogue between a piece and its model. It is often historically and culturally savvy, acknowledging anachronism but exposing in its model a defect or irresolution or naiveté. But at the same time dialectical imitation invites and risks reciprocal treatment—a two-way dialogue, a mutual exchange of criticism, a contest between specific composers and specific pieces. Dialectical imitation implicitly criticizes or challenges its authenticating model, but in so doing leaves itself open to the possibility of unfavorable comparison. Most importantly, this kind of critical exchange as a rule does not lead to a clear-cut final synthesis, for dialectical imitations create a contest that is neither free of ambiguity nor easily resolved. This feature is essential, for by withholding easy resolution, dialectical imitation acknowledges its own historicity and thereby protects itself from its own anachronistic fate.[58]

[57]Greene discusses such resistance among writers and poets in *The Light in Troy,* 43–45. Messing identifies numerous examples of contradictory or ambivalent statements by early twentieth-century composers associated with neoclassicism in *Neoclassicism in Music*; Taruskin discusses Stravinsky's neoclassicism as the result of political attitudes and pressures in "Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology."

[58]Greene argues that in literature dialectical imitations exhibit a sense of nostalgia for the model's lost power, thereby distinguishing themselves from parodic or satiric imitations (*The Light in Troy,* 45–46). In music, dialectical

How can a piece imitate and sustain a dialogue with another piece or a dead composer? How can a piece enter a contest with its model? Or put differently, how can a piece reveal an artist making sense of—telling the story of—his or her place in the history of music? In poetry, the devices are better understood, but nonetheless require interpretation. Satan, awakening in hell in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost,* wonders at the change that has overcome his fellow rebel Beelzebub in a phrase that translates Aeneas's wonderment when he recognizes the ghost of Hector in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*:

If thou beest he; but O how fallen, how changed / From him
(*Paradise Lost,* I.84–85)
ei mihi, qualis erat! quantum mutatus ab illo
(*Aeneid,* II.274).

Milton uses the echo to establish a link to the tradition he both invokes and transforms; it invites the reader to notice how changed that tradition is from what it was in Virgil. The effect is repeatable; Pope, for example, echoes Milton's echo of Virgil to describe the death of the Duke of Buckingham in the *Epistle to Bathurst* (305). These are allusions, but they accomplish more than merely paying incidental homage or flattering the memory of a class of classically educated readers. In each instance, the echoed line suggests the newer poem's place in a history of styles, modes, and values. But the imitation is dialectical because the older poem seems to demand a say in locating the newer one.

Music critics and scholars have long recognized allusions to earlier pieces, of course, but have seldom interpreted those allusions as signs of an imitative relationship, and have never, to my knowledge, explained how that relationship can be dialectical or reciprocal. Even as acute a critic as Charles Rosen, for example, sees Schoenberg's use of Schubert's famous A-minor Quartet, D. 804, in his own Third Quartet, op. 30, as the height of Schoenberg's neoclassicism, but misses the depth of the relation Schoenberg establishes. Rosen concludes that Schubert's Quartet is only a general "paradigm . . . a form to be filled with a new content that is intended in no way to recall the older work."[59] On the contrary, I argue that Schoenberg's imitation of Schubert's Quartet is so integral to op. 30 that to dismiss it as an ornament for initiates is to ignore an intense and far from comfortable dialogue with the past that accounts for much of the later work's structure and should deepen anyone's appreciation of its achievement.

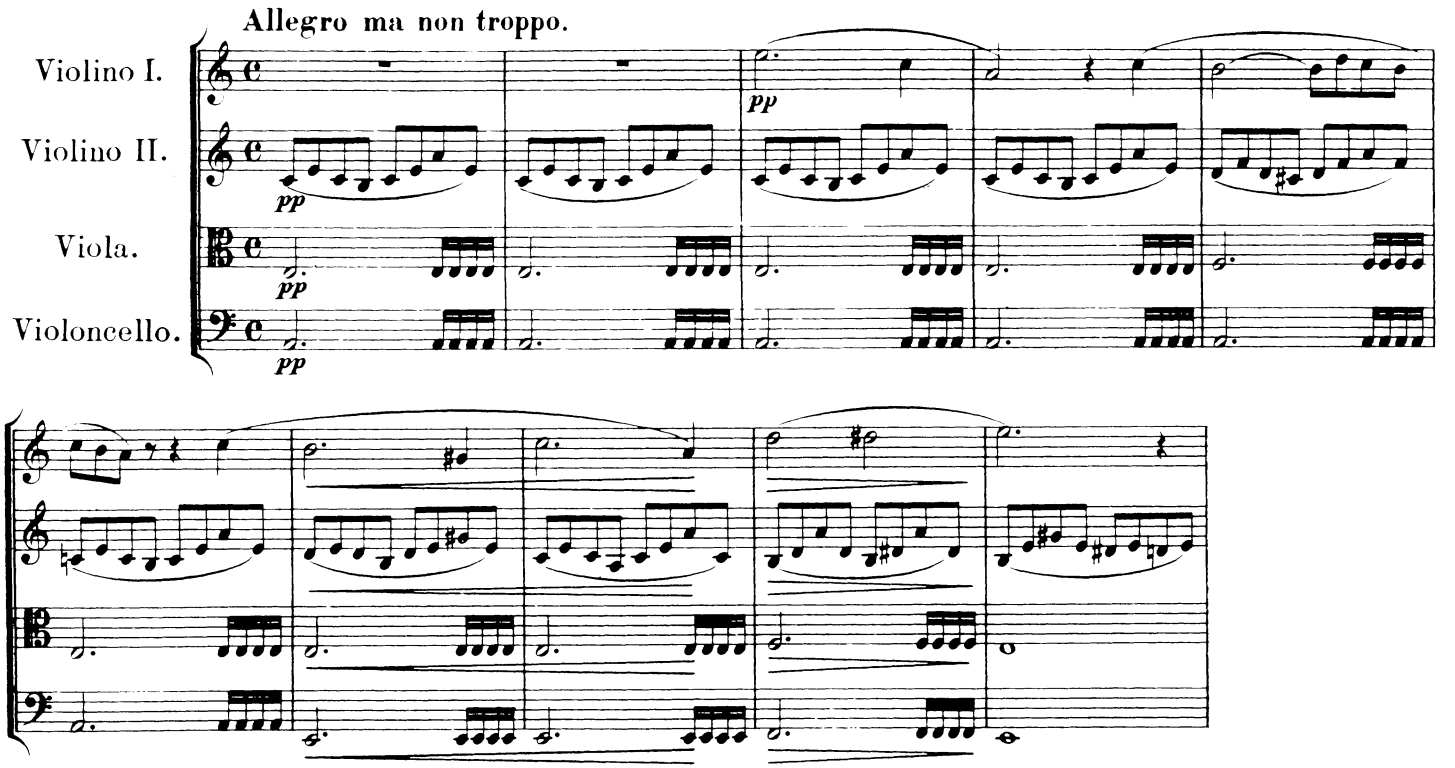
There is no question that Schoenberg's Quartet imitated Schubert's. Schoenberg's relentless, anxious, and exceptionally dense opening echoes many classical gestures and forms, as well as other works by Schoenberg. What identifies Schubert's A-minor Quartet as the primary model are recurring structural reflectors, approximations, or echoes that persistently emerge, fade, and then return. Instrumentation, texture, motivic style, and contour all signal the imitation of Schubert's opening theme. These overt allusions serve to highlight other parallels that might otherwise remain undetected, but that initiate and sustain Schoenberg's imitation of Schubert. The musically literate listener will not miss the surface similarities between Schubert's and Schoenberg's opening themes (shown in Examples 6 and 7). Both open with a repeating, arpeggiated figure in eighth notes, followed by a sustained lyrical theme in the first violin. Both themes are dominated by gestures with descending contour set forth in similar periodic phrase structures, and both are supported by a slowly changing bass line that uses only four pitches to accompany the first eight-bar phrase.[60]

imitations are less nostalgic, but their critical stance is easily distinguished from parody or satire.

[59]Charles Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 89.

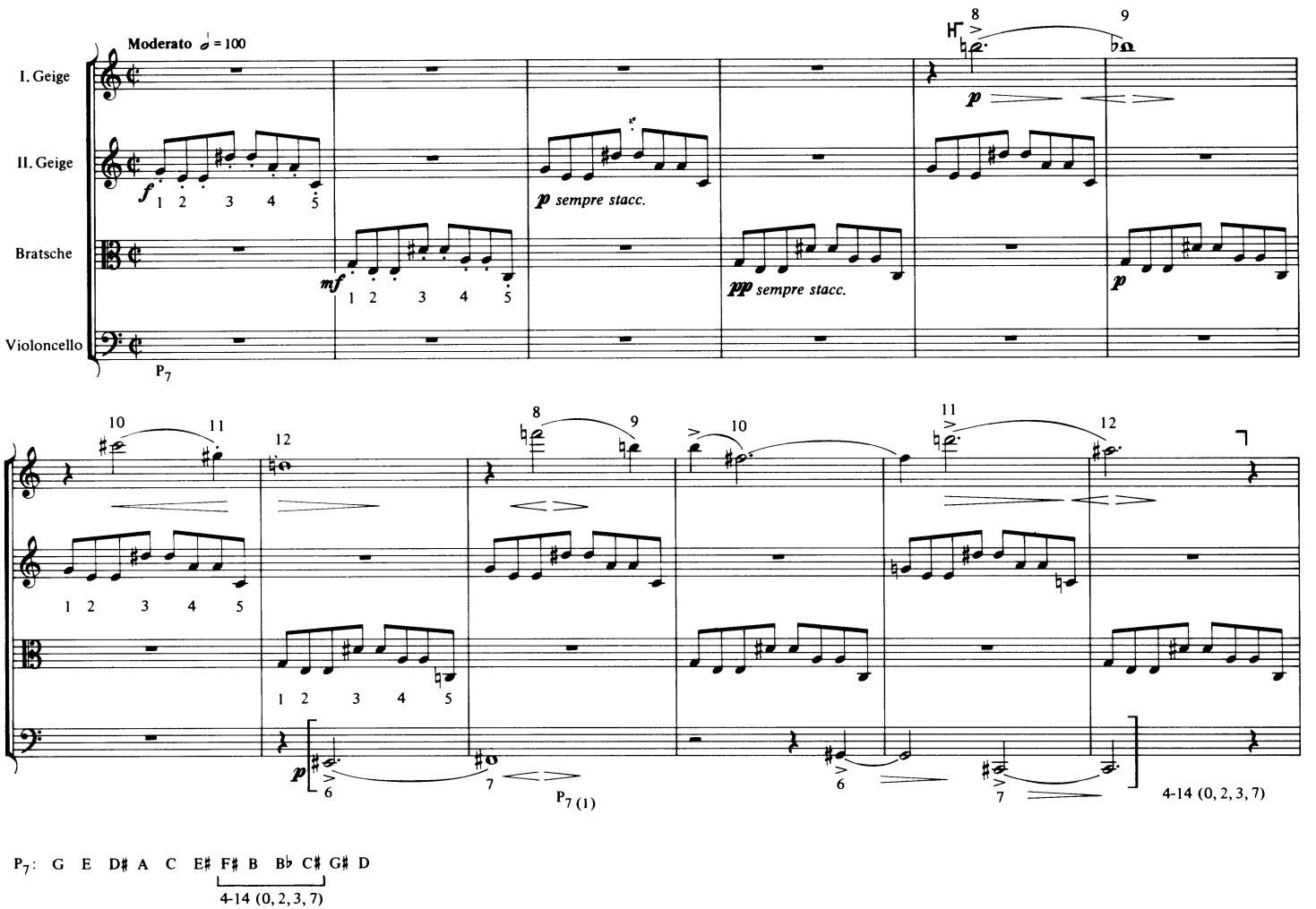
[60]Straus discusses the surface similarities between these two themes in more detail in *Remaking the Past,* 161–65.

Example 6. Franz Schubert, String Quartet in A minor, D. 804, first movement, mm. 1–10: first theme



Schoenberg reinforces the thematic allusions in his opening theme by imitating almost exactly the function, texture, and length of the various sections that make up Schubert's sonata form. In both movements, the first theme ends in m. 32, followed by a transition whose texture, in contrast to the unchanging texture of both first themes, consists of thematic entries alternating among the four instruments. Atypically, both transitions approach the length of the first theme: Schubert's spans twenty-five measures, Schoenberg's twenty-eight measures. Schoenberg's second theme again replicates Schubert's in style, texture, and structure: both are sustained and lyrical and return to the opening texture; both use gestures whose contours now predominantly ascend; and both use a periodic phrase structure that groups an odd rather than an even number of measures. Schoenberg's development section continues to imitate Schubert's in duration, texture, and in-

Example 7. Arnold Schoenberg, String Quartet No. 3, op. 30, first movement, mm. 1–12: first theme. Used by permission of Belmont Music Publishers, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.



P7: G E D♯ A C E♯ F♯ B B♭ C♯ G♯ D

4-14 (0, 2, 3, 7)

ternal structure. Both development sections comprise four sections and both end in m. 173. Most strikingly, the final section of Schubert's development (the retransition) prepares the recapitulation not with increasing intensity and climax, but with a decrease in rhythmic and harmonic motion, a *decrescendo* in dynamics, and a gradually emerging textural stasis. The final section of Schoenberg's development mimics this pattern precisely.

Until the end of the development, a listener attentive to the allusions to Schubert will expect Schoenberg's form to sustain the imitation. The beginning of Schoenberg's recapitulation will therefore come as a surprise. Unlike Schubert, Schoenberg begins the recapitulation with the second theme, which the first then follows. Other than reversing the order of the two themes, the two recapitulations correlate in texture and length much like the two expositions.

So much is readily apparent once a listener begins to follow Schoenberg's piece as an imitation of Schubert's. The challenge comes in the coda. But a discussion of the dialectical nature of the relationship between Schoenberg's piece and Schubert's must precede addressing that issue. Imagine the challenges Schoenberg faced in attempting to write the first quartet ever to use a twelve-tone sonata form. One challenge must have seemed primary: how to compose a three-part form that depends fundamentally on thematic contrast using a compositional system that seems to preclude just such contrast.[61] Schubert provided the answer to this dilemma in his A-minor Quartet, a piece that Schoenberg studied closely and mentioned repeatedly.[62] Schubert's first movement, unconventionally for a Romantic sonata form, is not based on contrast between principal themes. The lyricism of Schubert's first theme, as well as its continuous and static texture, make it stylistically closer to the second theme of a Romantic sonata than the usual first theme. In contrast to this unconventional opening theme, much of the movement's form seems entirely conventional, especially when compared to Schubert's other late chamber works.[63] The movement's conventional form makes even more striking the unconventional lack of thematic contrast.

If Schubert could build a conventional sonata form using themes too similar to provide the conventional contrast, why could Schoenberg not compose a sonata form using a compositional method that precludes such contrast? Schubert's quartet does more for Schoenberg's than simply suggest an answer to a compositional problem, however. It is a model, almost a partner, not just an inspiration or source.

Schoenberg's piece responds to Schubert's in more detail and at deeper levels than have yet been recognized. For instance, Schoenberg makes the stylistic similarity of Schubert's principal themes a structural principle of his piece through the partitioning of his 12–tone row. Throughout the first movement, the row is partitioned into two principal segments: the first segment contains five pitches, order numbers 1 through 5 (hereafter, ONs 1–5), the second, seven pitches, ONs 6–12. This partitioning makes a general tonal allusion, for the larger segment contains all seven pitches of a harmonic-minor scale.[64] In I_3 (shown in Figure 1), for instance, the row divides

[61]That Schoenberg shared the usual late-romantic understanding of sonata form (a three-part form whose dramatic force derives from contrast between principal themes) is clear from *Fundamentals of Musical Composition,* ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), 200.

[62]Schoenberg, *Fundamentals,* 131, and *Structural Functions of Harmony* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1954), 156–58.

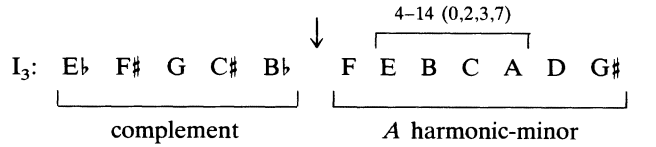
[63]The quartet's sonata form uses a straight-forward tonal scheme, key changes are prepared and not abrupt, the exposition uses only two key areas instead of three, no tonal instability occurs in the second key area, there is no introduction, and the internal proportions of the various sections are unexceptional. John Gingerich discusses Schubert's A-minor Quartet and other late chamber music further in "Genre and Style in Schubert's Late Chamber Music" (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1996).

[64]Schoenberg's twelve-tone rows rarely include segments whose unordered pitch-classes comprise tonal scales. There is only one other instance:

into a group of seven pitches that together make up an A harmonic-minor scale and a group of five pitches that complete the twelve-tone aggregate. (The label I_3 designates the inversion of the row whose first pitch-class, ON 1, is pc 3, or D♯.) This tonal segment of the row allows Schoenberg to make the imitation of Schubert's themes explicit, for the ordering of its pitches simultaneously alludes to each of Schubert's three principal themes, including that of the development section. As shown in Examples 6 and 8, the first four notes of Schubert's first theme (excluding pitch repetitions), E–C–A–B, and the first four notes of the second theme, E–F–G–C, both represent forms of pc set 4–14 (0,2,3,7). The two forms are not identical: the ordering of their respective pitches differs and they relate by inversion. Any listener will hear the tonal quality of both forms, however, for they unfold a minor triad with the lower third filled in diatonically and, in the inverted form, the major triad with the upper third filled in diatonically. This pc set 4–14, which refers to both of Schubert's first and second themes, occurs as a segment of Schoenberg's row, ONs 7–10, as if Schoenberg were remarking on the unusual stylistic similarity between the beginnings of Schubert's principal themes (Figure 1).

The seven-note tonal segment of the row contains other clear allusions to Schubert's themes.[65] Most explicit is the

Figure 1. Schoenberg, String Quartet No. 3: partitioning of basic set

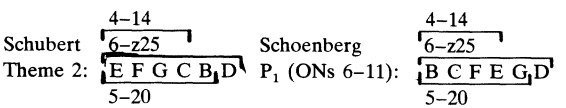


almost exact duplication, in the final hexachord, of the new theme that Schubert unconventionally introduces at the beginning of his development section and brings back in the coda to structure the movement's final climax (mm. 282–88). Example 9 shows this correlation by aligning Schubert's new theme with the inversion of the row, I_{11}, that duplicates its pitch content. Only one pitch in the row, E, appears out of order in relation to the new theme. Schoenberg must tolerate this reordering, however, to maintain pc-set 4–14 as a linear segment, the set that simultaneously alludes to Schubert's first two themes. It seems clear, then, that the seven-note tonal segment of Schoenberg's principal row is ordered so as to allude *simultaneously* to all three of Schubert's themes. Schoenberg thus makes the unconventional stylistic similarities among Schubert's principal themes a structural feature of the row that generates his twelve-tone sonata form.

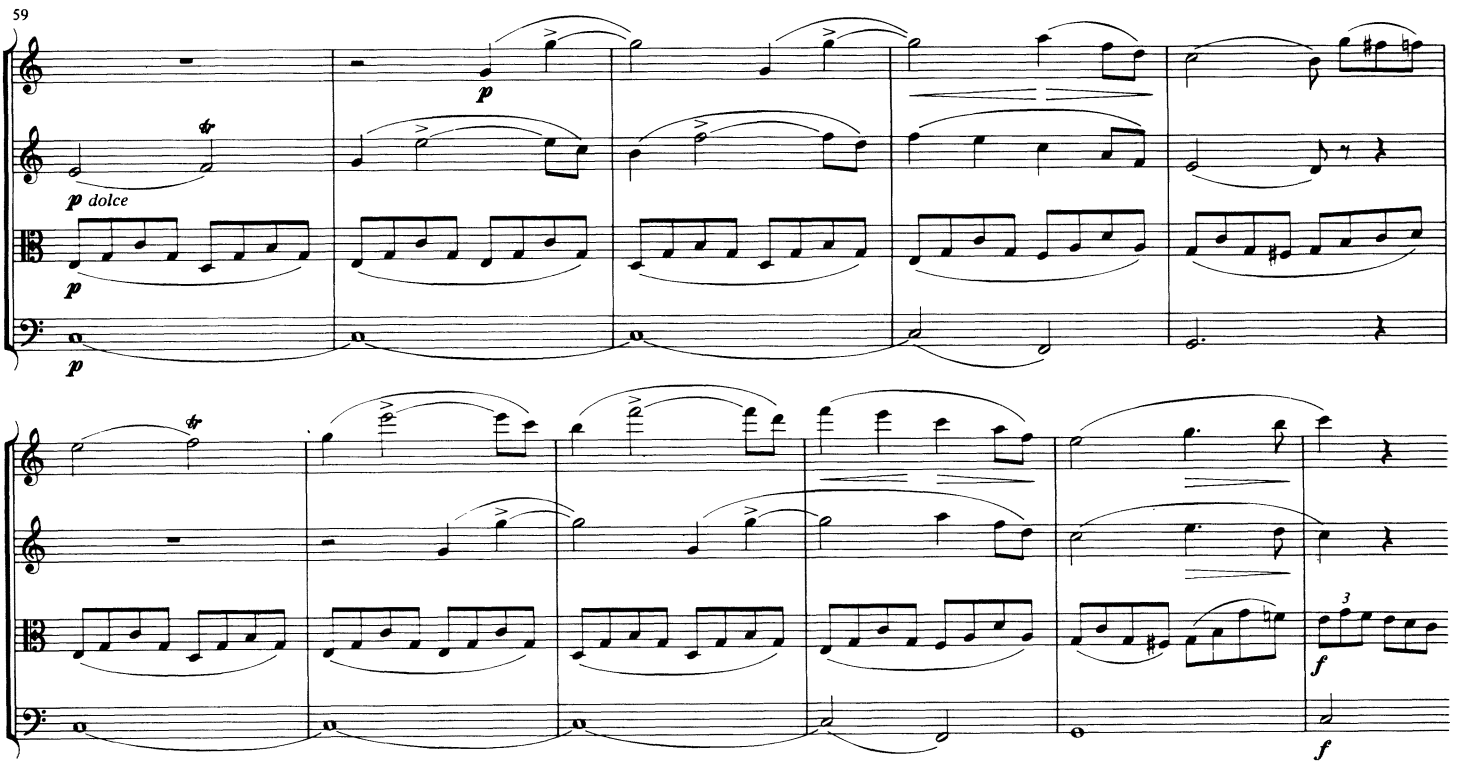
What is the point of such an esoteric allusion or imitation? What, if anything, does Schoenberg mean by composing his sonata form in imitative relationship with Schubert's? One answer, it seems clear, is that Schoenberg sought continuity. His twelve-tone sonata is not a "cliché typical of a romanticism at once ostentatious and outmoded," as Boulez, for

the row that structures the first of *Three Satires,* op. 28, a piece in whose foreword Schoenberg claims he is mocking, among others, the "quasi-tonalists."

[65]The ordering of the principal row's final hexachord develops further the likeness to Schubert's first theme. In Schubert's first theme, the fifth and sixth new pitches to enter are D (m. 5) and G♯ (m. 7). Schoenberg duplicates this succession exactly in the principal row (ONs 11 and 12), as shown in I_3 in Figure 1. In addition, the hexachord represented by ONs 6–11, which comprises all but the last pitch of the harmonic-minor scale segment, replicates the first six notes of Schubert's second theme (E–F–G–C–B–F), not in the ordering of its pitches, but in its internal pc-set structure: 4–14 (0,2,3,7), 5–20 (0,1,3,7,8), and 6–z25 (0,1,3,5,6,8):



Example 8. Schubert, String Quartet in A minor, first movement, mm. 59–69: second theme

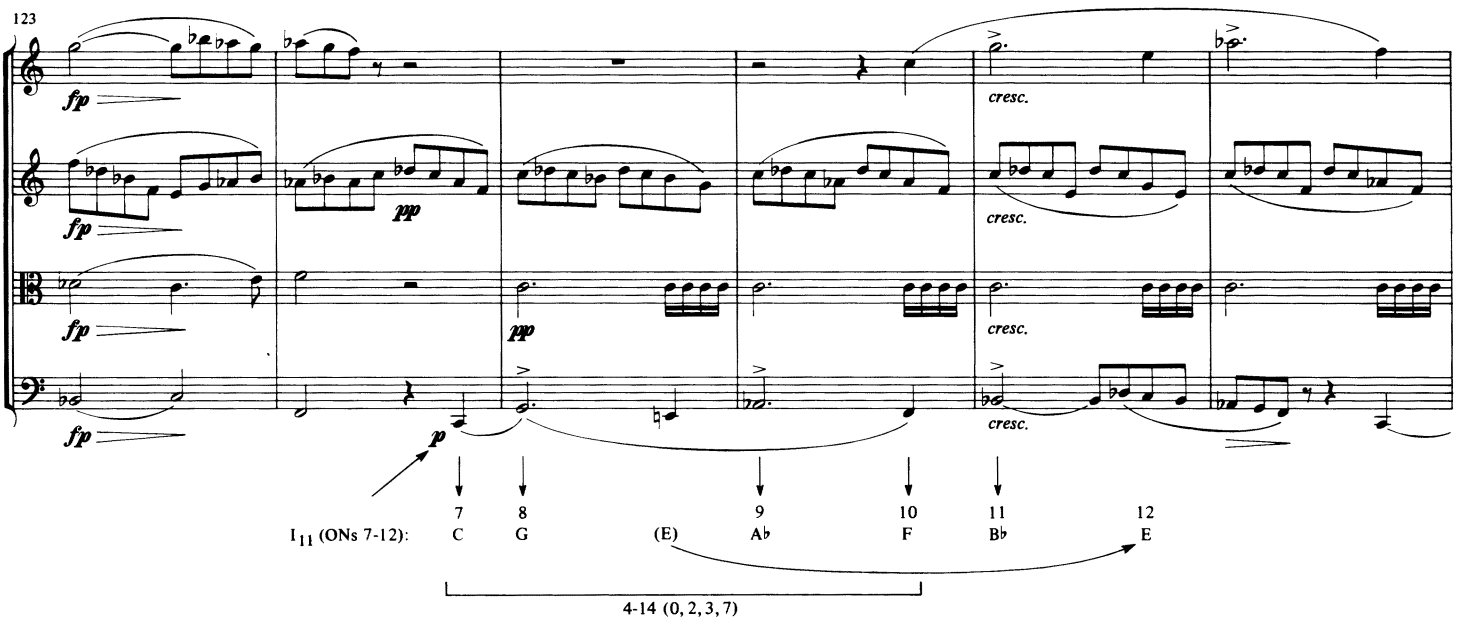


one, has since maintained.[66] Instead, in Schoenberg's recreation, Schubert's abandonment of conventional thematic contrast seems to evolve into a deeper structural principle. Schoenberg aspires to compose a sonata form that will not appear as an upstart in period costume, but as the legitimate heir of the tradition.

A more complete answer, I suggest, will recognize competition as well as continuity, dialogue as well as imitation. I do not pretend to be able to follow more than a few of the detailed interchanges that make up this dialogue, and even

[66]Boulez, "Schoenberg is Dead," 21.

Example 9. Schubert, String Quartet in A minor, first movement, mm. 125–28: new theme from development section



those few may seem insufficiently demonstrable, at least by the norms of traditional music scholarship. Consider, however, Example 7, Schoenberg's opening theme, which comprises two repetitions of the row. The first is the principal row form P_7 <7 4 3 9 0 5 6 11 10 1 8 2>. The second repetition uses one of the two alternate orderings of the row, $P_{7(1)}$ <7 4 3 9 0 8 1 5 11 6 2 10>, that appear in Schoenberg's quartet. The basic set itself differs from its two alternate orderings only in the ordering of their last seven pitches, and thus all maintain the seven-note tonal allusion. The cello's four-note bass line shown in Example 7 allows us to overhear the dialectical exchange that Schoenberg is beginning with Schubert. It spans the entire theme and consists of two pitches (ONs 6–7) from both forms of P_7. Even though these four pitches are not adjacent in either P_7 or its alternate form $P_{7(1)}$, together they create a form of pc-set 4–14, the same tetrachord that appears at the beginning of both of Schubert's principal themes.[67] The cello presents these pitches in the

[67]Elsewhere I have discussed Schoenberg's compositional sketches for the opening phrase in which he marks with brackets and bar lines the harmony that structures the cello. The sketch leaves little doubt that he regards these four pitches as a single, unordered harmony that relates to its occurrence as a linear segment of the basic set, and its prominent position in the opening

exact order of Schubert's second theme, E♯–F♯–G♯–C♯, and even mimics its pitch notation (E–F–G–C) and much of its ascending contour and durational proportions (Example 8). The cello's phrase thus strongly invokes Schubert's second theme, even while the many overt allusions that I have noted earlier unmistakably invoke his first theme. It is as if Schoenberg makes Schubert's two themes accompany each other.

This double presence of both of Schubert's themes in Schoenberg's opening theme has a startling effect. The listener hears just enough to grasp the allusion to Schubert's first theme when the cello's quotation of the second theme sharply intrudes. The effect is especially aggressive and jarring because we cannot yet hear how the cello line derives from the row and its variant. The discomfort or instability of Schoenberg's opening contrasts strongly with Schubert's opening and, once the imitation of Schubert is recognized, seems to derive from the simultaneous presence of the two composers. (For example, Schoenberg's theme, in marked contrast to Schubert's, creates rhythmic instability by avoiding downbeats.) Without this source or dimension to its discomfort, the various tonal gestures and allusions of Schoenberg's opening would be both superficial and unsubstantiated. Nothing like this uneasy or aggressive relationship characterizes the kinds of imitation I have called reverential, eclectic, or heuristic.

It remains to explain more fully why Schoenberg's imitation of Schubert can be called dialectical. The reason emerges in the way that Schoenberg's quartet challenges the harmonic structure of classical sonata form, an even more basic premise of tonal form than contrasting themes. Schoenberg's twelve-tone method both challenges and is challenged by Schubert's tonality. Schoenberg's imitation of harmony and motive together suggest an interpretation of the enigmatic structure of his quartet's recapitulation and coda. To make this argument, I offer an abbreviated summary of Joseph Straus's detailed analysis that elegantly connects Schoenberg's partial analysis of the Schubert quartet to the harmonic structure of his own Third Quartet.[68]

Schoenberg judged that Schubert's originality in harmony was to make "the actual transition to Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian composers' procedures."[69] In his analysis, Schoenberg concentrates on the extraordinary modulations in the development section of the A-minor Quartet, emphasizing the tonally distant keys of F minor (the submediant) and D♭ major (the submediant of the submediant) before the recapitulation in A minor.[70] In the Third Quartet, Schoenberg uses exactly this large-scale progression by major thirds to build and connect each of the three sections of his sonata form, but in place of tonal keys he substitutes twelve-tone areas delineated by inversional axes. Harmonic progression within these areas now depends not on tonal norms, but on inversional symmetry and balance.

In the Third Quartet, Schoenberg typically presents pairs of inversionally-related row forms. The succession of I-related row forms creates, in turn, a sense of balance around some axis of inversion. For the movement's principal pair of inversionally related row forms, P_7 and I_0, the inversional axis is A/B♭–E/D♯; the remaining pitches in both row forms balance symmetrically around this axis (as shown in Figure 2). Theorists have long recognized that Schoenberg viewed the balance of a twelve-tone aggregate created by such an inversional axis "as something quite analogous to the balance induced by a tonal center."[71] Similarly, in the Third Quartet

theme reflects its special importance. Martha M. Hyde, "The Roots of Form in Schoenberg's Sketches," *Journal of Music Theory* 24 (1980): 16–19.

[68]Straus, *Remaking the Past,* 121–32, 165–68.

[69]Schoenberg, *Structural Functions,* 156.

[70]Ibid.

[71]David Lewin, "Inversional Balance as an Organizing Force in Schoenberg's Music and Thought," *Perspectives of New Music* 6/2 (1968): 2.

Figure 2. Schoenberg, String Quartet No. 3: primary inversional axis

P_7:	G	E	D♯	A	C	F	F♯	B	B♭	C♯	A♭	D
I_0:	C	D♯	E	B♭	G	D	C♯	A♭	A	F♯	B	F

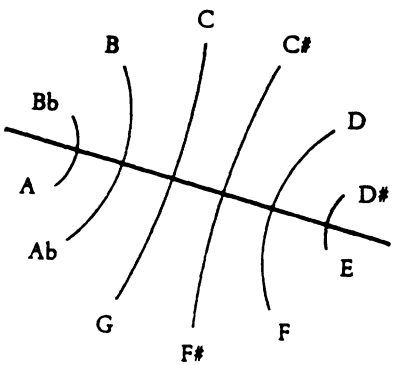
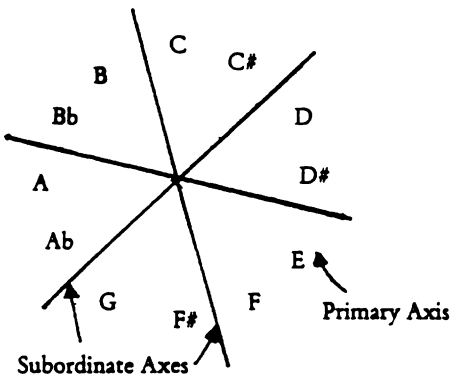


Figure 3. Schoenberg, String Quartet No. 3: primary and secondary inversional axes

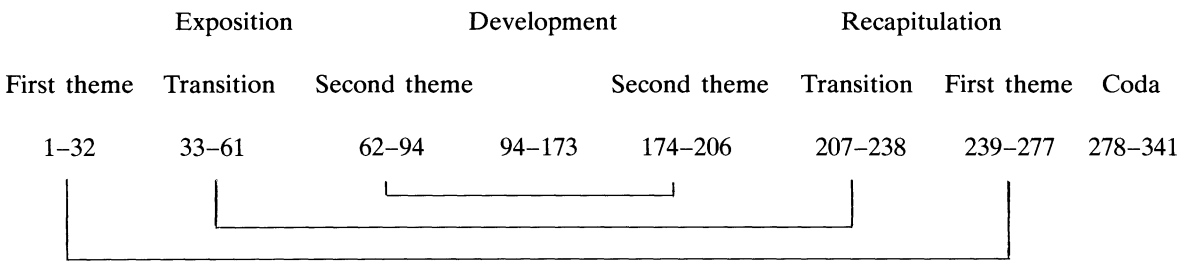


Schoenberg uses inversional axes to define areas around which other areas or regions balance. To chart the progression of inversional axes in Schoenberg's form is to discover that each of its three principal sections comprise inversional axes tracing a large-scale progression in major thirds, the same progression that Schoenberg discovered as the harmonic structure of Schubert's development section. But instead of a linear progression by major third, Schoenberg uses the primary inversional axis (A/B♭–E/D♯) as a fulcrum, against which is balanced on either side (that is, inversionally) the two subordinate axes (C♯/D–A♭/G and F/F♯–C/B), each separated by a major third (as shown in Figure 3).

Schoenberg revises the usual thematic design of the tonal sonata to create an analogue for the symmetrical harmonic progression of inversional axes. By reversing the order of the two themes in the recapitulation, he creates a symmetrical thematic design that balances the exposition against the recapitulation and uses the development section as its center (as shown in Figure 4). Schoenberg, then, makes his symmetrical harmonic progression replicate on a deeper level the form's new thematic symmetry. Moreover, on a larger scale, with only a few exceptions, the forms of the row that comprise the recapitulation are simply the inversions of the corresponding forms in the exposition around the movement's principal axes. In other words, inversional symmetry provides harmonic structure within and among all three sections.

Both these features of the Third Quartet—thematic structure and inversional symmetry—point toward a dialectical engagement with the earlier model, but we are free to read that engagement in several ways. Perhaps Schoenberg means to explore the structural implications of a sonata form that lacks thematic contrast. What is the point, Schoenberg may seem to ask, of traditional harmonic progression in a form that has abandoned thematic contrast? Does that question suggest Schoenberg's reworking of Schubert's tonal progression by major third as three twelve-tone areas with inversional axes balanced by major third? I do not pretend that

Figure 4. Schoenberg, String Quartet No. 3, first movement: formal sections



the answer to this question is clear, which is to say that, given the interpretive tools now available, we would most likely disagree on how and by what evidence any answer should be tested. But I am convinced that our interpretive tools will remain undeveloped and our understanding of music history impoverished if we remain unwilling to entertain such questions.

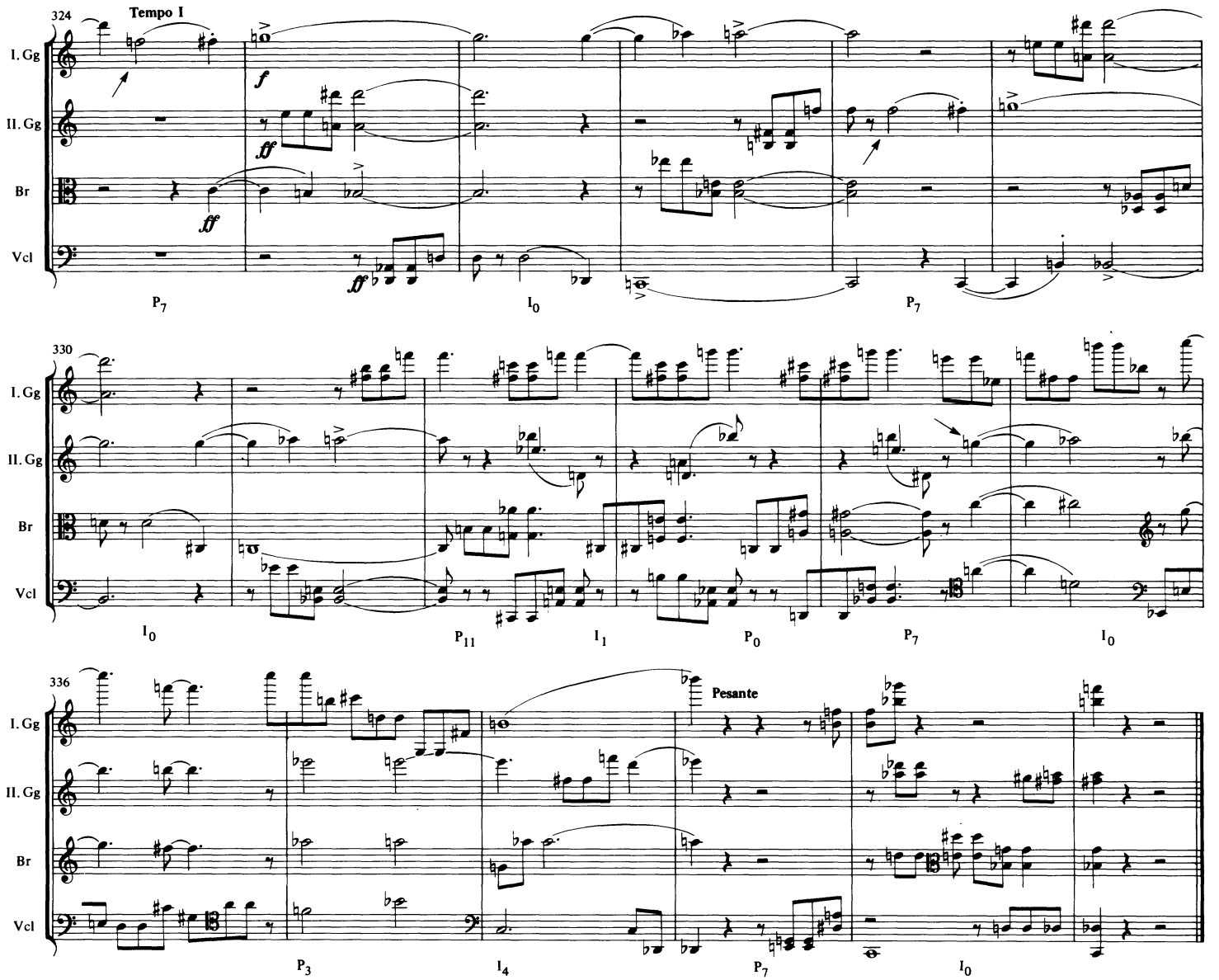
Straus, who deserves credit for bringing such questions to the attention of theorists, takes a different view of the relationship between Schoenberg's Quartet and Schubert's. He recognizes the imitative relationship between the principal themes, but argues that "beneath the surface Schoenberg's Quartet misreads Schubert's, reinterpreting both the phrase structure of its exposition and the large-scale harmonic organization of its development section."[72] Schoenberg's imitation of Schubert's surface features simply alerts the listener to the earlier model, but there the imitation ends, in Straus's view. The large-scale structures of both development sections derive from different and incompatible compositional systems. By substituting inversional symmetry for harmonic progression, Schoenberg misreads and marginalizes the feature that generated Schubert's form. The results, Straus continues, are "rich, coherent musical structures that, with parodistic effect, refer to the music of an earlier era." Straus concludes that Schoenberg was not imitating Schubert, nor being influenced by him in the usual sense. Following Harold Bloom's Oedipal view of the engagements between new artists and their precursors, Straus finds Schoenberg's use of Schubert to be marked by the "anxiety of influence" and by the standard post-romantic misreading of too authoritative classics that "clears creative space" for the new.

In my own view, Schoenberg's anxiety was to connect his own ample creative space to the German classical tradition, which he did not necessarily view as a suffocating presence. But that is not the argument I am advancing here. Instead I propose that recognition of Schoenberg's dialectical engagement with Schubert can help explain and enrich Schoenberg's otherwise unaccountable coda.

At its outset, the coda is not unaccountable. There is a gesture toward Schubert's developmental theme in mm. 278–82, and Schoenberg's principal themes make a fleeting appearance soon after. These opening gestures promise a coda conventionally related to the preceding movement and continuing the imitative engagement with Schubert, but that promise proves a tease. Schoenberg's coda is three times longer than Schubert's (63 versus 21 measures) and ap-

[72]Straus, *Remaking the Past*, 161.

Example 10. Schoenberg, String Quartet No. 3, op. 30, first movement, mm. 324–41: coda. Copyright by . . . Used by permission.



proaches the length of his development section. After their initial appearance, neither of Schoenberg's themes returns in a recognizable form. Rather than the conventional epilogue that reaffirms thematic contest and resolution, Schoenberg's coda presents and even develops at least two new motives, the more prominent of which is an ascending chromatic line comprised of five or six half-steps that often is accompanied by shorter descending chromatic segments (as shown in Example 10). Repeated listening may locate the seeds of these new motives in earlier sections, but Schoenberg's coda nonetheless seems to lack a dramatic function, apparently disconnected both from Schubert's coda and the rest of Schoenberg's movement. What seemed a display of imitative experimentation and inventiveness ends confusingly and inconclusively. No clear synthesis emerges, no obvious resolution, but only an extravagantly prolonged ending, ambiguous in thematic origin and dramatic function. Why would Schoenberg, having spent so much effort inducing a listener to understand his piece in relation to Schubert's, choose at the end to depart so markedly from his model? And why do so in the coda, a section that conventionally is least essential to the overall form? A listener attentive to the quartet's imitation of Schubert will ponder and interpret the coda's dramatic departure from the expected, not dismiss it as merely an imitative fumble.

To understand the coda is, I believe, to understand the point, or at least the outcome, of Schoenberg's dialogue with Schubert, as well as to confirm the reason that Schoenberg chose the Schubert quartet as his model. Instead of using the coda to reaffirm the movement's principal themes, as Schubert did, Schoenberg reasserts the movement's primary axis, with its symmetrical and inversional secondary axes. Throughout, the coda presents pairs of I-related row forms whose respective partitions share identical rhythms, but invert contour (as occurs, for example, in mm. 278–324). The coda's persistent use of partitioned thematic segments containing only three or four notes (typically echoed by inverted contour) effectively prevents any recognition of the movement's principal themes. Instead, new chromatic motives serve to accentuate and connect the three primary axes that previously have structured the movement's form.

In the coda's final eight measures, chromatic motions become vertical as well. Harmonic and melodic chromatic clashes saturate the texture. The row appears in radical reorderings, as though the coda, as it relinquishes motivic integrity, were also relaxing the integrity of the row itself in order to project chromatic lines as themes. In this section of this piece, at least, even the fundamental premise of the twelve-tone method becomes flexible—that all the music of the piece derive from the fixed ordering of the row. The coda seems to employ this flexibility in order to project more forcefully the movement's inversional axes and their respective twelve-tone areas. The extraordinary length of the coda may be necessary to give integrity to an entirely twelve-tone form, now that he relinquishes the features that previously delineated form—Schubert's unconventional themes and his own twelve-tone analogue of themes.

Schoenberg's coda is difficult to analyze, but perhaps that difficulty, made more unexpected by the movement's earlier relationship to the Schubert quartet, itself suggests a line of interpretation. Until the coda, Schoenberg prompts his audience to understand the sonata in an unfolding relationship with Schubert's. In Schoenberg's re-creation of the Romantic sonata, Schubert provides almost a commentary. Imitation is the device by which Schoenberg places his work in relation to the earlier tradition, and that placement is one clear way that a piece of music can generate meaning—suggesting the history of its own existence. But then in the coda Schoenberg abandons meaningful thematic form and all relationship with Schubert. The effect is frustrating as one turns and turns again to Schubert, trying to hear the commentary that should be there. Perhaps next year a colleague will take me to task for

missing a deeper and more conclusive role that Schubert is made to play in Schoenberg's coda, but as I presently understand the coda, it does not resume or resolve what has gone before so much as transcend it. Schubert disappears in Schoenberg's coda, as I now view it, in the way that Virgil, who has been Dante's steady commentator for 64 cantos, simply disappears in *Purgatorio* XXX. The new piece invokes the old and conjures it to speak of the coming into being and the affiliations of the new. Out of this dialectical imitation, this not wholly fictive dialogue, Schoenberg's twelve-tone sonata locates itself in the German tradition, which is made to anticipate and authorize his development of that tradition. The coda makes clear how enabling the dialogue has been. Schoenberg's imitation of Schubert does not lead backward into deepening engagement with a past classic. It leads forward into a new territory and asks its audience to follow.

ABSTRACT

Among the modernisms of the early twentieth century, music is almost alone in striving to be modern as well as ancient—to be neoclassical. This article works toward a theory of neoclassicism indirectly—by concentrating on four pieces, each of which exemplifies a different variety of engagement between the modern composer and the past model. Because its aims are broadly synthetic, the chosen pieces have been much analyzed by others to demonstrate how representative analyses can be organized into a broader and less technical understanding of neoclassicism. The paper suggests how we might divest neoclassicism of some equivocation by considering how and for what purposes composers invoke the past by imitating an older piece or style and the kinds of relation to that past that such imitations suggest.