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MUTH 5360: Analytical Techniques II

### Analysis-Reinterpretation of Motive in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony

Written between 1804 and 1808, Beethoven's (1770-1827) Fifth Symphony was premiered in December of 1808 at Vienna's Theater an der Wien on a program consisting entirely of Beethoven premieres. The first movement of the Fifth, cast in sonata form, is based around a short-short-short-long motive that appears in many guises. As Charles Rosen notes when talking about sonata form:

Not only the themes but many of the accompanying details, and even, indeed, the large structure are often derived from a central idea. The coherence of a work of art is, after all, not a modern ideal anachronistic in the late eighteenth century, but the oldest commonplace of aesthetics, handed down from Aristotle through Aquinas. (Rosen: 39)

Thus, the opening motive and its variations are central to the work. I hear the expanded motive (Ex. 1), first sounded in the horns in measure 59 and later expanded upon in the development, as a vital moment that assists in shifts between stability and moods throughout the movement.

#### Example 2-Expanded Motive Measures 59-63



This expanded motive, stated heroically in the horn, distinguishes itself from the previous use of the main motive with its larger intervallic leap and added notes. If the opening strings and clarinet are indeed representative of fate knocking on the door (if one were to believe Anton Schindler's apocryphal assertion) than the expanded motive in measure 59, is the answer to the call. This answer is part of the bridge between the first and second areas in the expositions. It

heralds in the new theme in Eb major, the relative major of the opening key of C minor, and effectively alters the mood. The tense nature of the first area is pushed aside in favor of the more romantic quality of the second area. This use of the expanded motive as a symbol of transition sets a precedent and imbues it with hypothetical meaning.

The hypothetical significance of the motive opens an expectation for future appearances. The appearance of the motive again in measure 195 (Ex. 2) denies the expectation established by the first appearance. The motive has now been harmonized and rather than leading to a more stable area, as the first appearance does, it builds tension. The rhythmic idea from the end of the motive is repeated in a call and response figure between the strings and the winds. This highly chromatic section of the development features a number of unexpected chord progressions that lead the development from F minor towards the D major sonority that begins the retransition.

Example 2-Measures 195-201

The musical score for measures 195-201 is an orchestral reduction. It is written in 2/4 time and features three parts: Winds, Strings, and Winds. The Winds part begins with a forte (ff) dynamic and a chromatic ascending motive. The Strings part provides harmonic support with sustained chords. The second Winds part continues the chromatic motion. The key signature has three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab) and the tempo is marked 'ff'.

The retransition, beginning at measure 228, again features the expanded motive, also harmonized here similar to its previous incarnation, albeit with different harmonies. The hypothetical meaning of the second appearance suggests that this one will lead to similar results. Although the intervallic contour is not maintained and harmonies are altered our expectations are not completely thwarted. The motive is still recognizable and also leads towards an oscillation between the winds and strings. This time the oscillation occurs on a B<sup>o7</sup> chord, another unstable chord with an ambiguous quality, especially when heard after the D major chord in measure 231.

The next appearance of the motive at measure 303 in the bassoons (although sometimes reassigned to the horns) is more akin to the first appearance from the exposition. Indeed, this appearance takes place in the recapitulation and serves as a transition from the severe first area of the recapitulation to the lighter second area. The only difference, besides instrumentation, is that the figure is now in C major as opposed to the Eb major of the exposition. The recapitulation does not always have to repeat the exposition verbatim; in fact, there is usually some form of reinterpretation of its materials, especially in later Beethoven works (Rosen: 75).

If Leonard Meyer is correct that emotion is derived from the inhibition of an expectation, than the use of the expanded motive in a variety of ways and settings is certainly a pertinent aspect of the piece. Each time it is heard, it begs the question as to how it will be handled. While the first and fourth occurrences are treated as elegant transitions from stormy sections to more graceful ones, the second and third appearances precede more chromatic moments that lead towards more tension. The second and third are closer to the center and this accounts for their contribution to more tension because as Rosen notes, “[t]he climax of a classical work is closer to its center (Rosen: 75).” The separate occurrences, whether leading to tension or stability, all play off each other. The first suggests transitions to more stability, an expectation thwarted in the second occurrence. This evident meaning, in turn suggests another hypothetical meaning. Will a pattern be set? The third occurrence suggests that the figure more frequently leads to less stability in the form of oscillating chords between the winds and strings but this pattern is later upset in the recapitulation by the occurrence in the bassoons. These hypothetical and evident meanings play off each other frequently throughout the movement, resulting in a high degree of expectation inhibition which consequently affects emotion.

List of Works Cited:

Rosen, Charles. (1972) *The Classical Style*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.