I, _______________Yu-Sui Esther Hung_______________, hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

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Beethoven’s Variations WoO 76, Opp. 34, 35, and 120:
A Comparative Analysis Between and Among

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Beethoven’s Variations WoO 76, Opp. 34, 35, and 120:
A Comparative Analysis Between and Among

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Abstract

In 1802 Beethoven made a striking declaration to his publisher that he had adopted a completely new manner in his two latest sets of piano variations, Opp. 34 and 35, and consequently numbered them among his greater musical works. Four sets of Beethoven’s theme and variations for solo piano from different stylistic periods are studied: WoO76 from 1799 has been regarded as a model of Opp. 34 and 35 in the mediant key relationships (Op. 34) and in the culminating movements—the adagio and fugal finale (Op. 35), which are, in his own words, completely new and different from his earlier variation works, in a manner anticipative of the *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120. Stylistic features and development demonstrated from these four works, as well as Beethoven’s use of fugue in his variation form are discussed.
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To my family, who always love me, support me, and believe in me more than anyone else ever has or ever will. To our Heavenly Father—my work is for him and could not have been done without his grace.
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Introduction

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) is the composer whose greatness has gone beyond the limits of musical sound. He represents the transition from Classicism to Romanticism at the turn of the nineteenth century more clearly than any other composer of his time. On one hand he had the benefit of the eighteenth-century way of stepping into the professional musical world—he was born into a musical family, with both his grandfather and father employed as musicians at the court of the Electorate of Cologne, and, as Haydn and Mozart, he also profited from patronage (many of his compositions were dedicated to his patrons.). On the other hand he shared the futuristic traits with his nineteenth-century successors, composing not only for a current purpose, instead having the audience and the future in mind. It is reasonable to believe that Beethoven was an innovator with imagination, experimenting with harmonies, tonalities, developmental processes, forms, instrumentation, and broadening the technical demands of the string and keyboard instruments.

Among his numerous works encompassing all genres including opera, more than one half are instrumental including the piano, either solo piano, piano and orchestra, instrumental chamber music with piano, or vocal works with piano. The piano represents a springboard for his achievements, and it is also the most important medium for the path-breaking innovations of his evolving musical style. Beethoven’s piano works comprise an immense musical legacy from all periods of his career. During his Bonn period (his first formative period ending around 1792), Beethoven had already
established his reputation as a prodigy, mainly from his performances of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*. His youthful years in Bonn also saw the publications of his earliest compositions, including his first published work, a set of theme and nine variations on a march by Dressler (WoO63) from 1782, as well as the three early piano sonatas (WoO47), his first substantial published compositions from the following year. The *Dressler Variations* is an early product encouraged by his teacher Christian Gottlob Neefe, hoping to gain fame and money for his young pupil, which, however, did not quite receive the desired result. Nevertheless, although Beethoven’s fame as a composer was not yet widely recognized, contemporary reports already described his extraordinary abilities in improvisation, and he was noted as a prodigy with a promising future.

Following his arrival in Vienna in 1792, Beethoven wrote primarily for solo piano or combinations of different instruments including piano. In Vienna he established himself as pianist and composer rapidly and with remarkable success. By the time he finished his First Symphony and the String Quartets Op. 18 in 1800, Beethoven had already completed fifteen piano sonatas (up to Op. 14 and including the two Op. 49 and the three WoO47 sonatas), two piano concertos, and thirteen independent sets of theme and variations, and several publishers were already competing for his newest compositions. Beethoven’s early years in Vienna played an extremely large part in the formation of his musical personality. With his rapidly growing reputation, nurture and expansion of genre, forms, and styles, what remains unchanging is the centrality of piano compositions in his oeuvre.

Including the three early WoO47 piano sonatas, Beethoven wrote thirty-five sonatas for solo piano, twenty independent sets of piano variations, five piano concertos
(or six if including his first concerto in E-flat, WoO4 and excluding the independent movements for piano and orchestra, the Triple Concerto, and transcription of the Violin Concerto), and numerous miscellaneous works, such as short dances, independent movements, and character pieces. For Beethoven the piano concerto was an important dramatic genre in which the composer himself assumed the role of soloist. According to the documented performances of his concertos, Beethoven played the solo piano part of all his piano concertos, and three of the premieres of his five major piano concertos were by the composer. As did many of his contemporaries and eighteenth-century predecessors including Mozart, Beethoven premiered his piano concertos both to introduce the work to the audience and to further establish himself as a virtuoso player. In addition to his string quartets, his piano sonatas are regarded as best exemplifying the evolution of his stylistic development as well as his experimentation with forms.

The division of Beethoven’s three stylistic periods was proposed as early as 1828 by Schlosser, taken up by Fétis in 1837, and later elaborated and popularized by Lenz in 1852.1 Although criticized for being too simplistic and not taking account of the music composed at Bonn, the division of Beethoven’s life and works into three periods nonetheless provides a basic framework to “accommodate the bluntest style distinctions to be observed in Beethoven’s output” and “corresponds with the major turning-points in Beethoven’s biography.”2 In his early sonatas the forms, styles, and pianistic techniques are clearly influenced by Mozart’s and Haydn’s models. The sonatas between 1802 and 1812, the so-called second period starting from Beethoven’s declaration of taking on a

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2 Ibid.
new manner, saw the expansion in every regard including forms, virtuosity, harmonies, 
tonalities, and length; in his late sonatas, the trajectory toward the last movement, the 
more daring harmonic language, as well as the heavy contrapuntal thinking signifying his 
looking back to the Baroque learned style are among the many features typically 
associated with his third stylistic period. Along with his piano concertos and sonatas, 
Beethoven also wrote numerous sets of theme and variations for different genres, mostly 
for solo piano or combinations of instruments with piano, whether standing 
independently or integrated in a large-scale work, such as a sonata movement.

From the 1782 set of variations for solo piano on a march by Dressler, the product 
of an 11-year-old apprentice, to the dazzling *Diabelli Variations* published in 1823, the 
culmination of a professional virtuoso’s life’s work, Beethoven’s piano variations span 
more than forty years. This is a creative period greater than that of his thirty-two piano 
sonatas, which date from 1795 to 1820. Although a clear development of style is not as 
easily observed from the outset in his variations as that found in the composition of his 
piano sonatas, demonstrating his expanding compositional technique as much as their 
sense of innovation as mentioned earlier, Beethoven’s variation works stand clearly 
among the finest examples of variation writing in the Classical-Romantic era.

Before discussing Beethoven’s variations in any detail, it is necessary to take a 
digression to examine the variation form Beethoven inherited. According to Elaine 
Sisman’s categorization, the following variation types were well established in the late 
Baroque period and were summed up under J.S. Bach’s hand:³

1. Constant-harmony variations.

This category includes numerous variation sets in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in which the harmonic structure of the theme is generally fixed in the variations to follow, and the harmonic progression “takes precedence in retentive power over the melody.” Bach’s Goldberg Variations is a representative example of the constant-harmony variations.

2. Melodic-outline variations.

In the melodic-outline variations, the melody of the theme, or at least its main notes, remains recognizable despite figuration, simplification, or elaboration, which subsequently is typical of the many late eighteenth-century to early nineteenth-century variations.

3. Ostinato variations.

In this type of variations, the entire piece is based on a recurring bass line. The Ostinato variations include the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century continuous variations, such as passacaglia and chaconne.

In discussing variations by Classical composers, Sisman remarks that “the variation principle and form were central to Haydn's creative mind,” and that Haydn’s variations span the entire range of possibilities of the classical variations. Haydn began with only constant bass and constant harmony sets but gradually wrote large numbers of melodic-outline variations, which eventually predominated the genre around 1770. Whereas Haydn tended to write a few variations on an elaborately detailed theme, Mozart

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6 Ibid.
wrote most of his variations on popular and relatively simple tunes. Mozart used a particular pattern extensively: the penultimate variation is in slow tempo, often acting as a kind of extra slow movement in a multi-movement work; and the final variation is fast and in bravura style. This stereotype of Adagio-Allegro pair to round off the variation set established by Mozart was later adopted by Beethoven, especially in his early sets.

Some of Beethoven’s early piano variations can be seen as rooted in those models by his eighteenth-century predecessors, most notably Haydn and Mozart. From Mozart’s keyboard variation sets, Beethoven adopted many common features, especially the minore, and the adagio finale variations. In these early variation works, the shape of the melody, the formal design, the tonal center of the theme, and the overall character are generally preserved intact in the variations that follow, and some of them, as Josef Müller-Blattau suggests, probably originated as improvisations. Among his numerous works composed during the Bonn period, it is through these early variations, more than through the other Bonn music, that the Beethoven to come can be glimpsed. It is logical for him to begin with variations because at that time variations were “a standard tool in teaching piano techniques and composition.”

Adolph Bernhard Marx in his composition treatise Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch theoretisch (the practical and theoretical study of musical composition) urges pupils to study and master the variation form as Beethoven did:

Beethoven in particular used variation form in the most deeply thoughtful way. One may even call it the chief lever of his creative activity. . . . Accordingly, the

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pupil who is seriously interested in comprehensive training and professional activity will find reason enough to make himself at home in the art of variation, even though the forms seem to him more profound and more promising.  

Although Marx indeed pointed out the supposed shortcomings of the variation form, the centrality of theme and variation in Beethoven’s output, as Steven Whiting reports, “imposes a binding model on aspiring composers of later generations” and “justifies the study of a form that has fallen into aesthetic disrepute.”

That Beethoven revised his style in his variation writing is validated in his 1802 letter to Breitkopf & Härtel in which he claimed that the Opp. 34 and 35 variations set were written in a “wirklich ganz neue Manier,” a completely new manner. Even though it has been disputed among scholars as to what Beethoven truly intended for when he made such declaration, from this point on, many of Beethoven’s large-scale works (especially symphonies) “have prominent conjunctions of variation and fugue,” hence “forecasting the central place these forms would have in his late style.”

The present study will focus on the research, analysis, and comparison of four sets of theme and variations for solo piano by Beethoven representing his different stylistic periods—WoO76, Eight Variations on a Theme by Süßmayr in F from 1799; Op. 34, Six Variations on an Original Theme in F from 1802; Op. 35, Fifteen Variations and a Fugue

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on an Original Theme in E-flat also from 1802; and Op. 120, Thirty-Three Variations on a Waltz by Diabell in C completed in 1823.

Each of the four variation works differs from one another in such a unique way. The order of discussion follows the pieces’ chronological order to better demonstrate how these variation works outline Beethoven’s stylistic evolution as well as how the earlier works forecast the later ones, and how the later ones are rooted in the earlier models.

WoO76 has been regarded as a model of Opp. 34 and 35, which, as Beethoven announced, were completely new and different from his earlier variation works, in a manner anticipative of the Diabelli Variations, Op. 120. Different approaches to the variations as well as inter-relations are already found in these four cycles from the outset. In the WoO 76 set the trajectory toward the mediant-related key relationship is observe—the keys of variations 4, 5, and 6 are in F major, D minor, and B-flat major respectively, following a descending diatonic-third sequence. As Glen Stanley reports, this can be seen as a testing-of-water of the descending chromatic-third key relations found in Op. 34, in which the third-related key relations are used extensively. 13 However, this is an experiment that Beethoven did not repeat in his later compositions in this genre. Furthermore, with the different tonalities, meters, and tempo indications (Minuet and March for variations 4 and 5), Beethoven successfully created a different character for each variation. This was rather innovative for the time, but obviously not something that Beethoven often returned to in his later variations.

Cast in the unusual form of an introduction consisting of only the bass of the theme followed by the full theme, fifteen variations, and a fugue, the Op. 35 cycle is

13 Stanley, “The ‘wirklich gantz neue Manier’ and the Path to It,” 60-61.
based on a sixteen-bar binary theme from the finale of the ballet Prometheus. As will be described later, the Op. 35 set demonstrates that Beethoven was as much concerned with its harmonic underlay, its bass line, as with its melodic foreground. His heavy contrapuntal thinking and preoccupation with the totality of its profile all point to the culminating work in his piano variation genre, the Diabelli Variations to come almost two decades later.

The analysis of each individual work will focus on the construction of the themes, whether original or borrowed, their properties, phrases, melodies, rhythms, and textures. The analysis will also focus on Beethoven’s variation techniques, as well as his approach to the variation as a large-scale form in connection with the form as he received it. The analytical methods adopted will include Schenker’s approach to the variation form in reference to his unpublished study of Beethoven’s Op. 35. Following the analysis of each variation set, a comparative analysis between these four works will be provided. The comparative analysis will also include Beethoven’s different approaches to fugal writing as observed in each work.

“Beethoven wrote different variation works for different purposes and in various genres and media,” wrote Whiting. While some variation sets show “analogies to sonata principles,” others seem to “comprise dramatic scenes,” and still others include “studies in string quartet writing.” The piano variations by Beethoven are probably most deeply rooted in the rhetorical art of his sonata style, in which motivic and melodic relations,


16 Ibid.
harmonic and tonal factors are emphasized. The present study will focus on the WoO 76, Opp. 34, 35, and 120 variation sets in the areas mentioned above from an analytical and pianistic perspective.

The specialized research in Beethoven’s piano variations is uneven. Scholarly consideration mostly falls on the Diabelli Variations, Op. 120. Among the many scholars who have studied the Diabelli Variations in detail, William Kinderman’s comprehensive analysis based on his thorough investigation into the available primary and secondary sources as well as analyses by earlier and contemporary scholars is of considerably high value. Besides the Diabelli variations, to a lesser extent the Eroica Variations, Op. 35 is also of interest to scholars, most notably with regard to the sketch study in relation to the genesis of the Eroica Symphony. The Op. 34 set written around the same time as Op. 35 has received little attention. Although there are a handful of studies of Beethoven’s stylistic evolution observed through his piano sonatas, that of his piano variations, whether easily identified or not, is generally overlooked. The literature devoted to his early variation works is in general sparse. A few articles concerning variation sets written before 1800 are mostly devoted to WoO 65, twenty-four variations on Righini’s Arietta “Venni amore” in D major, which is described by Glenn Stanley as the finest work among Beethoven’s early numerous variation sets on borrowed themes.17 Josef Müller-Blattau is one of the few scholars to discuss the early variations in detail,18 and Steven Whiting’s PhD dissertation published in 1991 is among the few available more recent

17 Stanley, “The ‘wirklich gantz neue Manier’ and the Path to It,” 57.

18 Joseph Müller-Blattau, Beethoven und die Variation, quoted in Stanley, “The ‘wirklich gantz neue Manier’ and the Path to It,” 53-54.
resources in the English language that provide thorough investigation and insights into Beethoven’s variations written before the turn of the nineteenth century.
By the turn of the nineteenth century, Beethoven had already composed nineteen variation sets and ten variation movements in larger works. Among these variation works, thirteen are independent sets of theme and variations for solo piano. Most of the discussions on Beethoven’s variations have almost always grouped these variations together as the “pre-opus” variations, or the variations enroute to the “new manner”, which Beethoven himself claimed in 1802 with the composition of his Opp. 34 and 35 variations. Of Beethoven’s thirteen pre-opus piano variations, only one is on an original theme. The others are based on existing works by such diverse composers as Dressler, Righini, Dittersdorf, Haibel, Paisiello, Wranitzky, Grétry, Salieri, Winter, and Süßmayr, or on folk tunes.

As discussed previously, Beethoven started his composition in variations. Of Beethoven’s keyboard variations written during his Bonn period, the WoO 65, Twenty-four variations on “Venni amore” by Righini (WoO 65) is regarded as the most significant and successful one and received more scholarly attention than the other pre-opus variations. Unlike Beethoven’s earlier works of apprenticeship, the WoO 65 set made an immediate impression, not only with its length, but also its diversity and originality. It is the longest, technically most challenging, and most diverse in style before the Op. 35 “Eroica” variations. The WoO 65 set also attests to the notion of
variation as developmental process in such a way anticipative of the WoO 76 and Op. 35 variations some years later, and finally the Diabelli variations decades later.

Upon his departure from Bonn in 1792, Beethoven had finished four independent sets of theme and variations for solo piano. His compositions in the variation genre continued as he moved to Vienna. The year 1799 was perhaps the most prolific year in terms of his variation writing. Within one calendar year, he wrote three variation movements and four independent instrumental variations. Three out of these seven works are independent variation sets for solo piano (WoO 73, 74, and 76), with the WoO 76 set being the last variation work in this fruitful year.

The eight variations on Süssmayr’s “Tändeln und Scherzen” in F major, is, in many ways, representative and cumulative of Beethoven’s variation works before 1800 while at the same time striking out “in a new direction, broaching specific features of the ‘completely new manner’ announced with opera 34 and 35.”19 In WoO 76, conventional approaches in clothing Süssmayr’s tune are found in the first four variations; in the midst of this predictable procedure, the next four variations surprisingly attest a tonal innovation that Beethoven and no other composer before him had done in their variation writing.

The Süssmayr’s tune Beethoven chose to set is twenty-four-measure long and simple in harmony and texture. Its motivic material and phrase structure, however, contain some engaging elements that allow for further development and intensifications, such as the alternation between triadic and turn figures, the recurring rising-fourth and falling-third intervals at mm. 9 and 13, the surprising fermata at m. 14 to break the

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theme’s “predictable regularity,”^20 as well as the repeat of material at the end of the theme (mm. 19-24 is the literal repetition of mm. 13-18), making possible further working-out in later variations.

The WoO 76 set can be divided into two parts— the first half that stays in the tonic F major, and the second half that departs from and later returns to F. The first four variations are faithful bar-by-bar to the theme in its phrase structure, harmonic scheme, and even the placement of the fermata sign. The Süssmayr’s tune here, decorated with increasingly busy figuration, is tossed back and forth between two hands – right hand in variations 1 and 2, left hand in 3, and finally both hands in 4. Beethoven effectively created a sense of continuous rhythmic progression by gradually shortening the basic rhythmic unit in each variation—while the general rhythmic unit in the theme is based on eighth notes, in variation 1, the 8th-note triadic figure is filled in with 16th notes over expanded register while outlining the same triads; in the second variation, the note-value is further shortened with arpeggiation based on 16th-note triplets; in variation 3, when both hands are heard together, the smallest note-value is now 32nd notes, one fourth of that of the theme; in variation 4, Beethoven shortens the note-value yet again by presenting a swaying gesture based on 32nd-note triplets. (Ex. 2.1) The ever shortening note-value from the theme through variation 4 is reminiscent of a similar technique found in the variation movement in Beethoven’s own Op. 14/2 sonata, as well as the slow movement from his later Op. 57 sonata, all of which testify to Beethoven’s awareness of and possible reference to the 17th-century English division variation, in which the notes in the ground bass is divided into shorter ones. (The same kind of variation technique is

^20 Ibid.
also observed in the variation movements in Beethoven’s piano sonatas, Op. 14 No. 1, and Op. 53.) The continuous rhythmic progression and tension from the increasingly faster surface rhythm generates the need for relaxation, which is, to some extent, provided as variation 5 begins with a return of the original tune in the bass voice in its original note-value. The rhythmic restlessness is finally relieved, however, with another kind of unsettledness. For the first time in his variation writing, Beethoven is found to set variations in keys other than the tonic and its parallel minor. He wrote two variations to follow a falling-third key sequence – variation 5 in D minor (vi), and variation 6 in B-flat major (IV) before the tonic F major returns at variation 7. This descending-third key progression would later become the guiding principle of Beethoven’s Op. 34 variations, in which the key of each variation is a third lower than the preceding one, to be discussed in the next chapter.

**Ex. 2.1** WoO 76, Theme through Var. IV, gradually shortening note-value

- Theme, eighth-note
Ex. 2.1 (continued)

- Var. I, sixteenth-note

- Var. II, sixteenth-note triplet

- Var. III, thirty-second-note

- Var. IV, thirty-second-note triplet
Between variations 5, 6, and 7 in WoO 76, Beethoven used the same pivot-chord modulation procedure. At the end of variation 5 in D minor, the tonic resolution here also functions as iii of B-flat major, the key of the next variation, and leads to open octaves on E-flat and C, members of the V7 chord in B-flat. Similarly, the open octave on the tonic B-flat at the end of variation 6 can be understood as IV in F, which at the same time serves as the 7th of V7 in F. (Ex. 2.2) The tonal plan in the second half of the WoO76 variations demonstrates a large-scale harmonic motion going through pre-dominant, dominant, and back to tonic. While the theme and the first four variations are to establish and prolong the original tonal center, the change of keys in variations 5 and 6 functions as vi and IV in F, upper and lower neighbor to prepare and embellish the structurally significant dominant harmony at the end of variation 6, though only briefly on the surface timing. The tonal tension caused by departure from the tonic is finally relaxed with the return of the tonic F major at the culminating variations, an Adagio molto ed espressivo and a fugato Allegro vivace. (Ex. 2.3) As mentioned earlier, the decorative approach in the foreground melodic development found in the first four variations is abandoned when the tonal centers begin to shift down by third. In variations 5 and 6, the theme is preserved rather closely in its original shape and pace, first in the bass (no. 5) and then in the top voice (no. 6), but at the same time transposed down by thirds. Variation 5, though not in the parallel F minor, is the minore variation in the WoO 76 set, and it is texturally related to variation 3, which also sets the melody in the bass. As observed by Whiting, the correspondence between variations 3 and 5 “reveals itself only gradually but unmistakable by the minore’s last phrase, with its treble accompaniment in offbeat sixteenth”\textsuperscript{21} (mm. 21-23 in both variations).

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 339-40.
Ex. 2.2 Pivot chord modulation

- Var. V, mm. 21-25

- Var. VI, mm. 21-25

Ex. 2.3 Large-scale harmonic scheme of WoO 76
After the two non-tonic variations laying bare Süssmayr’s tune, the tonic returns as variation 7 begins. Variation 7, marked *Adagio molto ed espressivo* in 6/8, decorates the theme lavishly with florid figuration. Unlike the 24-bar theme, variation 7 has twenty-eight measures, with added measures between the two fermatas at mm. 14 and 24 (originally mm. 14 and 20). Here, Beethoven is found to have lengthened and composed-out falling thirds of the second dominant 7th chord with a cadenza-like passage, highlighting its higher structural significance than the previous one before giving way to the tonic resolution at the final phrase. WoO 76’s variation 6 is “no longer along Mozartean lines but rather one that seems prophetic of John Field’s nocturnes some fifteen years later.”\(^\text{22}\) Meanwhile, the *Adagio molto ed espressivo* here also foreshadows Op. 34, in which the theme is an Adagio and later decorated with highly florid figurations. Together with the last variation, a fugato *Allegro vivace* in 2/4, the final variations form a contrasting pair that perhaps anticipates the concluding pair found in Beethoven’s Op. 35 variations, a 6/8 *Largo* and a 2/4 *Finale Alla Fuga: Allegro con brio*.

In variation 8, Beethoven turned Süssmayr’s 3/8 *Andante* theme into an *Allegro vivace* in duple meter. Disguising it as a fugal subject with a new character, Beethoven still preserved the predominant features of the theme, such as the alternation between triadic and turn figures from the opening bars, and the recurring rising-fourth interval with its descending response at m. 9 ff. The fugal subject is four measures long, based closely on the opening two bars of the theme. (Ex. 2.4) The answers to the fugal subject proceed rather conventionally and lead to a stretto effect involving the two upper voices tossing back and forth the head motive from the fugal subject over a dominant pedal in the bass. At m. 41, an ascending sequence is found to utilize the material from the second

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 340.
half of the theme, the rising-fourth motive (c – f) and its answer in contrary motion. (Ex. 2.5) The melodic and tonal sequence here rises by minor thirds at a six-bar time interval. The rising-fourth figure first appears in the tonic F major, and moves through A-flat major, B major (C-flat enharmonically), to D major, where the sequence is broken by a return of the fugal subject in D, which is realized to be the last entry of the subject as the texture becomes homophonic. After m. 65, the falling-third motive from the theme (mm. 13-14) is heard to follow a descending-third tonal sequence, reversing the pattern in the previous measures and looking back to the key relationships between variations 4, 5, and 6. (Ex. 2.6) Whereas in variation 7, the falling thirds from mm. 19-20 of the theme are expanded into a “six-measure cadenza while compressing the falling third into a half-step,” 23 the corresponding passage in the final variation spans no less than 27 measures and gradually stretches the third to an octave. (Ex. 2.6) The dominant prolongation of higher structural significance and the final tonic resolution are thus highlighted by the further intensification of a few simple cadential measures from the theme.

The finale of the WoO 76 variations brings together techniques of fugue, variation, and development, and is even viewed by analogy with a sonata recapitulation. 24 It is a culminating movement that initially disguises itself in the form of a fugue, while continuing to vary the events from the theme in the order as they originally appear. The basic thematic ideas from the theme are all dealt with, treated contrapuntally, and further developed in the culminating fugato variation.

23 Ibid., 343.
24 Ibid.
Ex. 2.4

Theme, mm. 1-4

Var. VIII, mm. 1-4 (fugal subject)

Ex. 2.5

Theme, mm. 9-10

Var. VIII, mm. 41-42
Ex. 2.6

Theme, mm. 13-14

Var VIII, mm. 65 ff
The *Allegro vivace* also provides references and connections to its preceding variations, especially with regard to the descending-third sequence of keys between variations 4, 5, and 6. Although the falling-third progression is reversed in variation 8 to rise from F, A-flat, B, to D, such sequence can be heard as a large-scale motion from F down to D (a falling third), which is followed by yet another third down to B-flat, and finally back to F, the same pre-dominant function as that found in variations 5 and 6.

To conclude, it is not entirely new to write a lengthier and more developmental final movement in a variation set, but in most of Beethoven’s earlier variation sets, the final variation gets developmental or departs more freely from the theme only in the coda section that comes after a complete presentation of a varied theme along the conventional lines. The final variation in the WoO 76 set, though labeled as a variation, poses a coda-like or even a “sonata recapitulation” image to its listeners from the very beginning. It sums up the salient features from what comes before, and the entire WoO 76 set also forecasts the startling statement of a “new manner” that Beethoven would claim in his variation writing three years later.

\[ ^{25} \text{Ibid., 344.} \]
Of Beethoven’s twenty variation sets for solo piano, Op. 34, six variations in F major, and Op. 35, fifteen variations in E-flat major, both published in 1802, are the first sets to receive opus numbers by the composer, and they are considered by many scholars as the first substantial variation works by Beethoven.26 The thirteen variation composed before 1801 were published in a numerical order—nos. 1 through 13—and assigned with the WoO numbers later by Georg Kinsky.

Beethoven’s declaration of revising the style and adopting an entirely new manner in his variation writing is plausibly evidenced by his Opp. 34 and 35 variation sets, offered to his Leipzig publisher Breitkopf & Härtel in 1802, accompanied by the following remarks:

I have composed two sets of variations, one consisting of eight variations and the other of thirty. Both sets are worked out in quite a new manner, and each in a separate and different way. . . . I assure you that you will have no regrets in respect of these two works—each theme is treated in its own way and in a different way from the other one. Usually I have to wait for other people to tell me when I have new ideas, because I never know this myself. But this time—I myself can assure you that in both these works the method is quite new so far as I am concerned.27

Much attention has been paid to these claims, especially with regard to the possible novelty and innovation that Beethoven may have had in mind when composing these two variation sets. What distinguishes Opp. 34 and 35 variations from most of his earlier

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variation works lies in the originality of the themes, which were written by Beethoven himself instead of borrowed from preexisting tunes by other composers. This is probably why Beethoven chose to assign them opus numbers. After the Opp. 34 and 35 sets, only two sets of theme and variations received opus numbers by the composer: Op. 76, Six Variations in D major from 1809, and the Diabelli Variations, Op. 120 published in 1823.

Two months after Beethoven’s declaration of the “new manner”, in December 1802, Beethoven once again wrote a follow-up letter to Breitkopf & Härtel, asking that the printed edition of the Opp. 34 and 35 variation sets should include an introductory note, written by the composer, calling attention to their innovative character:

“As these variations are distinctly different from my earlier ones, instead of indicating them like my previous ones by means of a number (such as, for instance, Nos. 1, 2, 3 and so on) I have included them in the proper numerical series of my greater musical works, the more so as the themes have been composed by me.”

Op. 34, Six Variations in F major

The Adagio theme of the Op. 34 F-major variation set is cast in ABA simple binary form. (Ex. 3.1) The first A section (mm. 1-8) is constructed with a 4 + 4 eight-measure parallel period, whose antecedent phrase comes to a half close at m. 4, creating the need for continuation and closure that the consequent phrase provides. Harmonically, this eight-measure parallel period firmly establishes the tonal center of the entire theme without any ambiguity. The B section of the theme (mm. 9-14) features a tonicization of

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28 Ibid, 83.
V, which is further confirmed by the three-time reiterated V6/4—5/3 of V to V before returning to the initial material at m. 15.

The return of the A section (m. 15ff) follows the opening A section verbatim and, at this point in time, provides the formal and tonal resolution as it comes to a full close and completes the large-scale I-V-I bass arpeggiation of the entire theme. Underneath the score found in Ex. 3.1, a bass reduction of the whole theme using a Schenkerian approach demonstrates the unfolding of the overall I-V-I harmonic motion. The tonic prolongation at the beginning is interrupted by the tonicized V harmony at m. 12 (denoted by the double vertical line), and the tonal return at m. 15 retraces the opening gesture over a complete I-V-I bass arpeggiation. This horizontal unfolding of the two members of the F-major tonic triad seamlessly corresponds with the three ternary sections—the first A section is supported by the prolonged tonic harmony, which then moves to the dominant in the contrasting middle B section, temporarily interrupting the structural I-V-I motion; the tonal and thematic return at the second A section is understood to resume the prolongation of I and at its end complete the I-V-I bass arpeggiation of the entire theme.
Ex. 3.1 Op. 34, formal and harmonic analysis
The simple ternary design as well as the harmonic scheme of the theme is found to be preserved intact in the variation movements following the theme. Beethoven, however, surprises his listeners by assigning a new tonality to each variation. The keys of the theme and the first five variations follow a descending chromatic-third sequence: the theme is in F major, variation 1 in D major, variation 2 in B-flat major, variation 3 in G major, variation 4 in E-flat major, and variation 5 in C minor, whose local tonic C efficiently turns into a C dominant harmony, functioning as retransition that prepares the return of the tonic F-major in variation 6. (Ex. 3.2)

Whereas Beethoven in his WoO 76 always provided a pivotal measure outlining the dominant 7th chord of the new key before the next variation begins, here in his Op. 34, Beethoven provided no transitional process into the next variation between the theme and the first five variations. The new key is presented suddenly with no previous preparation as the new variation begins, and the direct modulation between each variation is achieved by means of a common tone, which serves as a pivot from the original to the new key. With Beethoven’s choice of tonal sequence, the common tone connection is effortlessly facilitated, as the two adjoining keys are a third apart. The tonal plan shown in Ex. 3.2 also demonstrates the common tone connection of the keys from the theme through variation 5, as well as the V-I resolution from variations 5 to 6. According to Glen Stanley’s reports, this kind of descending third key relation is not a definite novelty, as Beethoven himself had used a similar sequence of keys in his WoO 76, eight variations on a theme by Süssmayr in F. As discussed in the previous chapter, the keys of variations 4, 5, and 6 of WoO 76 are in F major, D minor, and B-flat major respectively, thus forming a descending diatonic third key relationship. This is usually viewed as a

29 Stanley, “The ‘wirklich gantz neue Manier’ and the Path to It,” 73.
testing-of-water of the descending chromatic third key relations found in Op. 34.

However, Beethoven and no other composer before him used such sequence of keys as extensively as in his Op. 34. Although the trajectory toward the mediant-related key relationship had been increasingly adopted in the works by Beethoven and his successors, Beethoven did not repeat this experiment to such a wide-ranging extent in his later compositions in the variation genre.

In addition to the key changes, Beethoven assigned different meters and tempo indications to each variation. (Table 3.1)

**Ex. 3.2** Op. 34, tonal scheme

* Slurs denote common-tone connections.*
The first variation in D, despite sharing the same tempo marking and meter with the theme, expresses the theme lavishly with controlled decoration, a quality that is almost completely relaxed in the next five variations. Variation 1 is essentially a double variation, as Beethoven wrote new decorative figuration and passagework in the return of the A section and also complicated the consequent phrase of the opening parallel period with ornamental non-harmonic tones to fill in the chords, at the same time expanding the range. The next variations are respectively a sturdy 6/8 in B-flat, in which the energetic solid chords presented in the low register alternate with the fast running arpeggio swaying into the higher octaves; a gentle Allegretto in G with a thinner texture reminiscent of Mozart’s keyboard style; a Minuet in E-flat; a funeral March in C minor, relative minor to the key of the preceding variation; and, after a five-measure extension on the C-dominant harmony, variation 6 begins, finally back in the home key, in the style of a lively Ländler in 6/8, which harmonically and formally relaxes the tension built up in
the previous variation movements. The inclusion of a *minore* variation (Var. V in C minor) testifies that Beethoven is highly familiar with the stereotype established by Haydn and Mozart.

The modulation process at the end of variation 5 is worth mentioning, as it reflects some interesting facts that are present throughout the entire cycle. At m. 24 in variation 5, the single C is first heard as tonic in C minor. However, as the passage proceeds, the C minor harmony is turned into its parallel major, and eventually becomes the bass of the C dominant 7th harmony, necessitating the tonic resolution while highlighting its structural significance. (Ex. 3.3) The dual function of the single c\(^1\) at m. 24 is forecasted in the very beginning of the entire piece as the Adagio theme begins on an anacrusis c\(^2\) that is only understood to function as the 5th of the F major tonic harmony until the beginning of the first measure. (see Ex. 3.1 on p. 26)

**Ex. 3.3** Op. 34, transition between Var. V and VI
Besides the transitional passage between variations 5 and 6, the cadential extension at the end of variation 6 (marked *Coda* by the composer) is another interpolated passage not included within the theme’s original ternary design and its varied restatements. The harmonic scheme here is also noteworthy. Modal mixture is again featured, and the minor mode facilitates the augmented 6th chord to embellish the now lengthened dominant harmony, emphasizing the arrival of the final unnumbered variation that almost resembles the recapitulated theme. (Ex. 3.4) The *Adagio molto* is, in fact, another variation in the form of a highly decorated theme and follows the formal and tonal plan of the theme measure by measure. The decorative figuration and the heavy use of trills and turn figures here foreshadow the type found in the 6/8 Largo, the fifteenth variation of the Op. 35 set, to be discussed later in this chapter. Together with the theme and the unnumbered variation after variation 6, the Op. 34 set contains eight movements, which perhaps justifies why Beethoven referred to this variation set as consisting of eight variations instead of six when he wrote to his publisher. (see p. 23)
With different tonalities, time signatures, and tempo indications, Beethoven in his Op. 34 variations successfully created a different character for each variation movement and hence introduced a new way to vary in the conventional genre. The rather traditional techniques of melodic decoration are thus “given new life in changes of character and in what sounds like a radical defamiliarization of the theme as early as the D major of the
first variation, virtually a conjurer's trick."\(^{30}\) Even though the notion of characteristic variations is not at all foreign in the early nineteenth century, assigning a distinct character in a variation set by means of key, meter, and tempo changes to each single variation is a genuine novelty, as it has not been done as extensively in Beethoven’s own earlier variation works or compositions by his predecessors.

**Op. 35 “Eroica” Fifteen Variations with Fugue in E-flat Major**

Cast in the unusual form of an introduction consisting of only the bass of the theme ("col Basso del Tema") and its three varied restatements, followed by the full theme, fifteen variations, and a fugue, the Op. 35 cycle is based on a sixteen-bar theme from the finale of the ballet *Prometheus*, composed around 1800 to 1801. It is an original tune Beethoven used previously for a Contredanse of the same period (WoO14, No. 7), and, most celebratedly, for the finale of the later *Eroica Symphony* (1803).

The theme of the Op. 35 set is in repeated simple binary form. Before the theme appears in its entirety, Beethoven introduced only the bass line of the theme four times—*Introduzione col basso del Tema, a due, a tre, a quattro*—as Beethoven described it. The *basso del Tema* is first heard in unison over three octaves, with the three initial vertical pitches on E-flat, e-flat, and e-flat\(^1\). After its initial presentation, this bass line shifts up into higher octaves – one octave higher in the *a due* (beginning on e-flat), two in the *a tre* (e-flat\(^1\)), and eventually three octaves higher and is placed in the top voice in the *a quattro* (e-flat\(^3\)). Besides serving as a constant melody, the bass line also participates in

the two-, three-, and four-voice counterpoint preceding the theme. This constant bass and its embellished restatements have led some scholars to call the Op. 35 variations as a kind of cantus-firmus variation, a more restricted type of the constant melody variation previously discussed in the first chapter.

After the pre-thematic material, the theme of the Op. 35 variations finally appears in its entirely. The simple binary sixteen-bar theme consists of two reprises—the first reprise is tonally open and lands on an active V, generating the need for tonal resolution that the second reprise provides. As Glen Stanley remarks, in the theme of Op. 35, Beethoven achieved “the balance between melodic simplicity and well-wrought harmonies,” which is therefore “capable of further development.”\(^{31}\) In his unpublished analysis of Beethoven’s Op. 35 variations, Schenker, who must have known this piece dearly as a pianist and theorist, analyzed the *Urlinie* of the theme as a 5-line. (Ex. 3.5) In Schenker’s preliminary analysis, the melody in the entire first part of the theme prolongs scale degree 3 (g\(^2\)) over a harmonic motion from I to V. Instead of reading the first g\(^2\) as the *Kopfton* of a 3-line, Schenker interpreted the g\(^2\) here as the beginning of an initial ascent from scale degree 3 up to the *Kopfton* scale degree 5 (b-flat\(^{lat}\)), reached only at the fifth bar of the second reprise. The descending 5-line occurs only in the last four measures of the whole theme, with scale degree 4 being implied while the soprano leaps to c\(^{lat}\) over a ii\(^6\) harmony. Therefore, according to Schenker’s analysis, the theme of Beethoven’s Op. 35 variations is essentially the composing-out of a 5-line supported by I, ii\(^6\), V6/4-5/3, and I. (Ex. 3.6)

\(^{31}\) Stanley, “The ‘wirklich gantz neue Manier’ and the Path to It,” 71.
The time and space between these structural events provides a solid basis for foreground melodic development, which is a highly desirable quality for a variation theme. The repeated simple binary form also allows for further intensifications, in effect, creating double variations as found in variations 6, 14, and 15, as well as the last two
unnumbered variations (marked *Andante con molto*) after the fugue. The fifteen variations following the theme all consist of two repeated eight-bar phrases, and they are mostly constant harmony variations; in other words, the variations are faithful almost bar-by-bar to the formal and harmonic scheme set out in the theme. Unlike the descending third key relations as observed in the Op. 34 set, the entire Op. 35 cycle remains in the tonic E-flat major, with the exception of variation 6, which is written in the relative C minor. Unlike the relative-minor variation (Var. 5) in WoO76, where Beethoven transposed the tune down a third to fit the harmonies in the new key, here in variation 6 of the Op. 35 variations, Beethoven successfully wrote a variation in the relative C minor without having to change a pitch for tonal justification, testifying to Beethoven’s strong concern and careful planning with the tonal property of the theme. (Ex. 3.7)

**Ex. 3.7** Op. 35, the melody of the theme and Var. VI

- Theme, mm. 1-4

- Var. VI, mm. 1-4
In addition to variation 6, a change of mode (minore) is featured at the penultimate variation 14, again, a model established in Mozart’s variations. As in the a quattro of the Introduction, the thematic bass appears in the top voice and is later placed back in its proper bass voice in the written-out repeat of the first eight bars. The minore variation is contrapuntal in texture, as are variations 5 and 7 (canon at the octave), as well as the Introduzione and Finale: Alla Fuga. The Op. 35 variation set is, for the most part, a unique masterpiece, not so much in Beethoven’s variation techniques, but rather in his contrapuntal thinking demonstrated throughout the whole piece, a quality largely embraced in his later compositions, especially in his late piano sonatas.

As mentioned earlier, Beethoven in his Op. 34 variations used the third-related key relationship extensively; such key relationship is, however, not found from the outset in the Op. 35 set. Nonetheless, the harmonic connection between the fugue and its preceding material interestingly reveals the trajectory toward the mediant-related key relations. (Ex. 3.8) Although variation 15 closes in the tonic E-flat major, a Coda in the relative C minor—the same key as variation 6—is added to this final variation before the fugal finale. As Schenker indicates in commentary accompanying his analysis of Beethoven’s Op. 35 variations, the Coda “brings a parallel to variation 6” in that “the fundamentally inappropriate key of C minor was used for a singular harmonization [of the theme].”32 Also, just as C minor in variation 6 eventually goes back to the tonic E-flat

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Ex. 3.8 Op. 35, tonal connection between the Coda after Var. XV and Fugue

Finale, Alla Fuga

Allegro con brio

E♭ major
major without extensive modulation, in the Coda, a full close in the C minor tonic harmony is avoided; “the harmony leads to the dominant of C minor, which, however, is better understood here as III in E-flat.”\(^{33}\) The unsettled G-major harmony in the last few bars of the Coda creates a need of a tonal and formal resolution the fugue provides.

The fugue subject, once again, utilizes the opening four notes from the *Basso del Tema*. Beethoven effectively employs materials from both the thematic bass and soprano melodies into the three-voice fugue. (Ex 3.9) After modulations to various keys, the subject returns in the tonic E-flat major, now in its inversion, again utilizing the initial four notes from the thematic bass, which testifies to Beethoven’s strong concern for the bass line throughout the entire cycle.

The idea of concluding a variation set with a fugue is not entirely new, as Beethoven in his WoO76 had included a fugal treatment of the theme’s opening motive in the final variation. The fugue in Op. 35, however, exhibits a more mature conception than WoO76 in its more thorough and thoughtful fugal writing and in linking the discreet sections within a larger whole harmonically. It is obvious, in his Op. 35 variation set, that Beethoven was as much concerned with its harmonic underlay, its bass line, as with its melodic foreground. In other words, one is able to observe Beethoven’s preoccupation with the totality of its profile, as well as how the melody and bass coexist as one and alternate as individuals in a manner anticipative of the *Diabelli Variations* finished two decades later.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.
Ex. 3.9 Op. 35, thematic connections between the theme and the fugue

- Theme, mm. 1-4

- Fugue, mm. 1-4, fugal subject based on the thematic bass

- Fugue, mm. 52-55, contrapuntal material based on the thematic soprano melody
Nevertheless, it is still puzzling as to why Beethoven described his Op. 35 variation set as consisting of thirty variations in his 1802 letter to Breitkopf & Härtel (see p. 23). It is probably Beethoven himself who created this confusion regarding how many variations are there in the Op. 35 set. Even though it is titled in the original edition as *Fünfzen Variationen mit einer Fuge*, in the autograph Beethoven did not provide numbers for the variation movements. If one counts the four pre-thematic movements in the *Introduzione*, the three double variation movements with written-out repeats, as well as the two unnumbered variations in the concluding *Andante con moto* (both of which are essentially double variations), eleven extra variations can be identified, thus materializing a variation set consisting of a theme, twenty-six variations, and a fugue. Scholars including Stefan Kunze and Paul Mies have attempted analyze the fugue of the Op. 35 variations as a kind of constant-bass variation, a passacaglia based on the *Basso del Tema*, trying to reconstruct the thirty variations that Beethoven may have had in mind.34 However, as Michael Heinemann indicated, even with such a relentless effort, Kunze and Mies still failed to locate the thirty variations Beethoven might have meant in his letter to Breitkopf & Härtel.35 The perplexity may have very well resulted from the fact that Beethoven had not even finished the composition of the Op. 35 set when he corresponded with Breitkopf & Härtel in October 1802.

Scholars including Hans Verner Küthen and Steven Whiting have argued that what Beethoven declared in 1802 as a “completely new manner” was, in fact, self-
promoting, a sardonic statement that Beethoven had hoped would impress his publisher and audience. According to Whiting’s interpretation, what Beethoven wrote in the same follow-up letter in December 1802, in which he requested the Opp. 34 and 35 variations to be published with accompanying remarks calling attention to their innovative character (see p. 24), suggests that external factors played a role in the claims of the “new manner:”

Instead of making a great clamour about a new method of writing v[ariations], like our worthy neighbours the Gallo-Franks would make, such as, for instance, when a certain French composer presented me with fugues après une nouvelle méthode, the method amounting to this, that the fugue is no longer a fugue, and so on—I have wished to draw the attention of those who are not connoisseurs to the fact that at any rate these v[ariations] are different from all others. And this I thought I could do most naturally and unobtrusively by means of a short introductory statement which I request you to print for the shorter and for the longer variations.36

Both Küthen and Whiting suggest that what Beethoven claimed as “new” was more of a competition and reaction to Anton Reicha’s “new method of fugue.” On artistic grounds, “Beethoven had little to fear from Reicha’s work;” however, as Whiting wrote, he was obviously “sensitive to competition and to well-advertised ‘new methods,’” and, this may have been the reason why he insisted that the Opp. 34 and 35 are distinctly different from his earlier variation work.37

While Beethoven’s approach to his Op. 34 and 35 sets can be seen as largely rooted in his previous variations and those of his predecessors, he certainly had developed new vocabulary into his own language, and his statement of adopting a new manner surely has found its triumphant expression in the Eroica Symphony two years later.

In 1803, one year after the Heiligenstadt Testament, Beethoven seemed to have recovered quickly from the despair and anguish he had expressed in the previous year by devoting himself to hard work. At this time, although Beethoven had “already gained a reputation throughout Europe as a composer of instrumental music,” wrote Kerman and Tyson, “opera was still the royal road to fame,” and Beethoven was no exception. He had immediately responded when opportunities arose and consequently expanded his concert venue to the Theater an der Vien with the premier performance of his oratorio Christus am Oelberge in April, 1803. Nevertheless, even with his successful appearance in Vienna as a dramatic vocal composer, Beethoven’s inner demand for instrumental works evidently was still pressing. 1803 saw the composition of many of his great instrumental works—the Eroica Symphony, the Op. 31 piano sonatas, the Waldstein Sonata, the Kreutzer Sonata, and the WoO 78 and 79 piano variations, to name just a few, were produced and premiered within the one-year span.

After Beethoven’s 1802 declaration of the “wirklich ganz neue Manier,” the next two decades saw an uneven distribution of composition in the piano variation genre. Following the Opp. 34 and 35 variations discussed in the previous chapter, Beethoven wrote only five independent variation sets for solo piano. The pace of his piano variation composition is thus much slower than that of the 1790s, when he wrote over a dozen of

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independent piano variation sets. Among the five sets written after 1803, two were published in 1804 (WoO 78, Seven Variations on “God Save the King” in C, and WoO 79, Five Variations on “Rule Britannia” in D), one in 1807 (WoO 80, Thirty-Two Variations on an Original Theme in C minor), another opus-numbered variation set in 1810 (Op. 76, Six Variations on an Original Theme in D), and finally the Diabelli Variations Op. 120 in 1823. Among these first four variation sets, WoO 80, a passacaglia-like work on an eight-bar original theme, is the most frequently performed set, and is also likely the most frequently performed among all of Beethoven’s piano variations. As Sisman states, the WoO 80 variations may have been inspired by Handel’s Chaconne published in 1802 and C.P.E. Bach’s Folia Variations, which Beethoven was obviously highly aware of.39

Although Beethoven continued to write in variation form in different genres and for different instruments after the publication of Op. 76 in 1810, it was not until almost ten years later that he returned to the independent variations for solo piano with the composition of his culminating set, Thirty-three Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli, Op. 120.

Report has it that Anton Diabelli, a well-known music publisher at that time and himself a composer, wrote a 32-measure waltz and sent invitations to a large number of composers (Tonsetzer und Virtuosen) he considered important in the Austrian empire, asking each of them to write a single variation on his waltz tune, to be included in a collective publication as a patriotic project and to generate publicity for his firm, Cappi and Diabelli. Most of the composers responded to the call and submitted their

contribution in a timely manner, and the album was published under the title of *Vaterländischer Künstlerverein* (Society of Artists of the Fatherland) in 1824 with fifty variations by composers including Schubert, Moscheles, Kalkbrenner, and the 11-year-old Liszt, as well as a coda by Czerny. Kinsky’s research shows that Diabelli must have made the call in the early months of 1819, as Carl Czerny, the first contributor to the project, responded with a variation with the inscription “7. May, 1819.”40 Robert Winter’s reconstructed chronology of Beethoven’s sketchbooks also illustrates that the sketches of his *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120 appeared as early as the spring 1819.41

Beethoven, who was undoubtedly among the list of the top fifty composers at the time of Diabelli’s call, was reported to have initially dismissed Diabelli’s waltz tune as a “cobbler’s patch” because of its repetitive and mechanic nature, and thought the theme was too banal and mediocre to devote his time to it.42 However, the final result of Beethoven’s response to Diabelli’s call was not only a single variation, but rather an imposing set of thirty-three, a work that has taken its place along side J. S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* as one of the monuments of the variation literature. The *Diabelli Variations* are, in the words of Tyson and Kerman, “encyclopedic,”43 and Kinderman also remarks that they represent Beethoven’s “most extraordinary single achievement in the art of variation-writing,” and that no other works by Beethoven is so “rich in allusion,


humor, and parody.’ Their originality and power of invention are considered to stand with Beethoven’s other masterpieces from his late period, such as the Ninth Symphony, the Missa Solemnis, the last piano sonatas, and his late string quartets.

For a long time, the exact compositional time of Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations had been mistakenly assigned to 1823 due to Anton Schindler’s misleading account. Schindler, whose accounts on Beethoven have long been regarded as notoriously unreliable, stated that Beethoven had initially declined the call completely but later came to see the great potential within Diabelli’s tune and began to write a large set of variations only after the publisher promised an appealing price in 1823. Schindler’s report on the compositional genesis of the Diabelli Variations has been challenged by the more recent research and reconstructed chronology of Beethoven’s compositions, and has been regarded as erroneous. Studies on Beethoven’s own drafts, sketches, and manuscripts have shed new light on the chronological sequence for the composition of Op. 120, as well as the various stages in the genesis of the work and, consequently, Beethoven’s compositional process.

Among the more recent scholars who have devoted extended time to the compositional genesis of the Diabelli Variations and investigation in the primary sources in order to redate the work, William Kinderman and Maynard Solomon’s work have been extremely noteworthy. In contrast to earlier views, such as those of Nottebohm and Thayer, Kinderman’s research reveals that Beethoven’s 1819 draft already included

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44 Kinderman, Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations, xii.

45 Schindler, Beethoven As I Knew Him, 252.

twenty-three variations, more than two-thirds of the finished work. He later put it aside, primarily to work on Missa solemnis, Op. 123, whose composition was interrupted by the late piano sonatas Opp. 109, 110, and 111, and the Bagatelles, Op. 119. (It is generally believed that the theme for the variation movement of Op. 111 is derived from Beethoven’s work on the Diabelli Variations, whose composition dates overlap with each other.) It was not until mid-to-late 1822 that the sketches of the Diabelli Variations reappeared in Beethoven’s sketchbooks. Between 1822 and 1823 he added variations 1–2, 15, 23–26, 28–29, and 31, and revised the conclusion.47 Therefore, Schindler’s report that Beethoven did not begin working on the variations until being offered a good payment in 1823 is evidently inaccurate.

Also, because of the newly reconstructed compositional chronology of the Diabelli Variations, earlier analyses regarding the work as sonata-like or symmetrical have been challenged. Scholars including Michel Butor and Karl Geiringer have proposed a shared similarity in structure between Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations and Bach’s Goldberg Variations, while others have sought to locate sonata-form features in the Diabelli Variations, trying to group the variations into movement-like sections to “impose concepts of organic connectedness on the work that are more likely to be characteristic of classical sonatas, symphonies, and chamber music genres than of discursive forms like sets of variations.” 48 The present study will attempt to provide an analysis of the Diabelli Variations with regard to Beethoven’s variation techniques in relation to those discussed in the earlier chapters, as well as the relationship and


interaction between each variation and how they represent a forward motion culminating in the last five variations, at the same time focusing on Beethoven’s unique ways to vary and transform the seemingly ordinary into the sublime.

Like Bach’s Goldberg Variations, the Diabelli Variations represent a grandiose final statement. They were composed in Beethoven's twilight years, by which time he was stone deaf, therefore being representative of the reflective, deep, cerebral style of his late period. Because of the enormous scope and variety of composition, lengthy performance time (over an hour) and the ambitious nature of the work, as well as the advanced technical and psychological challenge, for the performer, these variations are often compared to, or seen as an answer to, Bach's Goldberg Variations.

Furthermore, Kinderman considers Op. 120 as the only great masterpiece by Beethoven with its origin from the commonplace. In contrast to his earlier variations, in the original title of Op. 120—33 Veränderungen über einer Walzer von A. Diabelli—Beethoven chose to use the German term Veränderungen, meaning "transformations," as opposed to the conventional Italian-derived Variationen. An earlier use of the same German term in the keyboard variation genre is seen in the Goldberg Variations, whose original title reads Aria mit 30 Veränderungen. The Diabelli Variations are thus often compared to the Goldberg Variations in terms of the composer’s transformation of the original theme.

The waltz theme by Diabelli is simple in its melodic shape, harmonic progression, texture, and form. It is thirty-two measures long, in continuous simple binary form, with

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49 Kinderman, Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations, 3.

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two reprises, both repeated, each consisting of sixteen measures and closing on a tonicized V (m. 16) and I (m. 32) respectively.

**Ex. 4.1** Formal diagram of Op. 120, theme

![Formal diagram of Op. 120, theme](image)

Although simple in design, the motivic material of the theme indeed contains some engaging elements that provide possibility for further development, intensifications, and, in the case for Beethoven, parody and transformation. Regardless of whether Beethoven thought highly of the Diabelli waltz tune or not, there is no doubt that he had an exceptionally insightful view of the features and properties of the waltz and successfully gave a new life to it in the variations following the theme.

Some trivial or repetitious elements in Diabelli’s waltz theme are observed: a) the turn figures to open the first two phrases of the theme, b) the repeating Gs over rather slow-moving harmonies, c) prominent use of falling fourth intervals found both in the melody and the bass support, d) the ascending sequential material toward the end of both reprises, and e) the contrasting two-part design in both reprises of the theme—first eight bars with static repetitive chords and the next eight with sequential material moving upward (Ex.4.2). In the present study, these features will be addressed as *motives a, b, c, and d* respectively, and discussions on how these motives are further developed and transformed in the variations following the theme will be provided.
The opening turn figure of the theme (motive a) is found to be widely exploited by Beethoven in many of the later variations on various levels—sometimes appearing as a short or extended decorative figure (variations 6, 9, 16, 21), others incorporated in the melody functioning as upper and lower neighbors to embellish the tonic C (variations 3, 4, 11, 12, 18). (Ex. 4.3) In several variations (i.e. variations 9, 11, and 12), the turn figure is even utilized as the general shape of the entire piece.
Ex. 4.3 Op. 120, variations 3, 4, 11, 12, 18, elaborations of the opening turn figure
The repeating Gs (*motive b*) is found to be the predominant feature permeating the entire set, or in other words, mercilessly exaggerated by Beethoven. Variation 1, marked *Alta Marcia maestoso*, commences the gigantic series of thirty-three variations in a way that is distinctly different from the theme, especially in character due to the altered meter—now 4/4 instead of the original 3/4. Although variation 1 departs from the theme drastically, the repetitive appearances of *motives b* and *c* provide a strong, clear reference to the theme. The repeating C-major chords in Variation 1, now heard over a moving bass line instead of the original falling fourths, are voiced in such a way that the G in the top voice clearly references back to *motive b* from the theme. (Ex. 4.4) Although the repetitious falling fourths from C to G (*motive c*) is no longer heard clearly from the outset, the step-wise motion in the bass is found to outline the interval of a fourth, descending from tonic to dominant and ascending back to tonic, also over a four-measure span (Ex. 4.4, bass). In Variation 15, in 2/4 and scherzando in character, the repeating Gs are found again, now over different harmonies including G augmented (Ex. 4.5). It is interesting that both these variations are not from the original 1819 bulk, but among those added in 1822-23. Perhaps Beethoven decided to take a longer detour from the original
theme by changing the character entirely while keeping the surface melodic feature intact
to maintain the theme and variation relationship. It is also noteworthy that Beethoven,
unlike Bach, in his Goldberg Variations, who seemed to have purposefully abandoned
the theme almost entirely and retained only the bass progression and its overall harmonic
scheme, preserved many of the elements presented in Diabelli’s theme and reworked
them in the later variations.

Ex. 4.4 Op. 120, Var. 1

Ex. 4.5 Op. 120, Var. 15

As briefly discussed above, another feature from the Diabelli theme found to be
preserved and transformed in the later variations is the falling fourth that outlines the
tonic and dominant (motive c). This motive is preserved in nearly every variation in Op.
120, sometimes clearly heard from the outset with or without embellishment (variations
1—7, 9, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 24, 31—33), other times transferred to the bass voice (17, 27), and yet others disguised with inversion, filled in by passing tones, or broken up between voices. (Exx. 4.6-8) The falling fourth, along with the repeating Gs, is heard as a unifying element that ties all the variations together and makes the original tune more recognizable even though each variation has its own distinct character.

Ex. 4.6   The falling-fourth motive in variations 1-6, 9, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 24, 31 – 33
Ex. 4.6  (cont.inued)

Var. IV  
Un poco più vivace

Var. V  
Allegro vivace

Var. VI  
Allegro ma non troppo e serioso

Var. IX  
Allegro presante e risoluto
Ex. 4.6 (continued)

Var. XV
Presto scherzando

Var. XVI
Allegro

Var. XIX
Presto

Var. XX
Andante
Ex. 4.7  The falling-fourth motive transferred to the bass voice in variations 17 and 27

The sequential material at the end of both reprises as well as the upward steps formed between the first two 4-bar phrases create an interesting upward trajectory on various levels. (See Ex. 4.2 on p. 50) This motion juxtaposed with the downward motion of the falling fourth is found to be highly utilized in many of the variations following the theme. Also, the space created by the juxtaposition of the upward and downward motion in Diabelli’s theme allowed Beethoven to create many variations that progressively move into a high or low register alternatively with a general gesture spanning over a wide range. (See Var. 9 in Ex. 4.6 and Var. 27 in Ex. 4.7)
Besides the upward trajectory, most of the variations in Op. 120 are given such fast tempo markings as Allegro, Vivace, or Presto and are written in a way reminiscent of keyboard etudes by Czerny and Cramer, creating a sense of continuously forward motion owing mostly to tempi and figurations. The highly differentiated character of many of the individual variations can be viewed as “radically different modes of motion toward an unspecified objective—marching, striding, running, racing, dancing.”\(^{50}\) The ongoing forward motion is only interrupted by a few calmer and slower variations at variations 8, 14, and 20 which function as, in Solomon’s words, “plateaus” to provide “spacious havens for spiritual and physical renewal in the wake of the exertions that have preceded each of them.”\(^{51}\)

As Solomon reports, Beethoven in his Tagebuch copied passages by writers including Kalidasa and Hesiod that refer to ascending pathways as “metaphors of laborious quests for virtue and other affirmative goals.”\(^{52}\) Just as Kalidasa’s and Hesiod’s, the upward trajectory Beethoven has created in his *Diabelli Variations* perhaps reveals his endless longings and his inner search for the infinite, the beauty, and the sublime, all of which are essence of nineteenth-century Romanticism.

While the upward trajectory in the *Diabelli Variations* and its possible implications suggest Beethoven’s forward-looking aspects, many of the variations techniques he used in this work unquestionably show strong influences of his Baroque predecessors, most importantly J. S. Bach. Many of the variations are written in learned style. Canonic imitation as well as contrapuntal treatment of the theme is used heavily.

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\(^{50}\) Solomon, *Late Beethoven*, 180

\(^{51}\) Ibid, 192.

\(^{52}\) Ibid. 190.
throughout; sometimes only a portion of a variation receives contrapuntal treatment (e.g. only the first half, or only two out of three voices), whereas in other variations, the imitation is so strict that it involves all voices through the entire variation (4, 6, 11, 12, 19, 20, 24, 30, 32). The inclusion of a four-voice fughetta and a four-voice double fugue in variations 24 and 32 further confirms his contrapuntal thinking and referencing the earlier generations. In addition to contrapuntal texture in the style of J. S. Bach, some of the later variations are reminiscent of the Baroque keyboard idiom of J. S. Bach and Handel. Variations 29, marked *Adagio, piano*, and *mezza voce*, is perhaps the one that departs from the theme the most by far. Instead of following the original repeated binary form, the Diabelli theme is transformed into 12 measures in a two-part design without any repetition. It can almost be heard as a kind of “Baroque lament, which could easily be imagined in a setting for a solo melody instrument and figured bass.”\(^5^3\) However, it is not without a hint of the theme—the opening tonic-dominant relationship from the theme is now expanded into a two-measure harmonic progression, and the ascending sequential material, though completely different in character, is still found at the end of the variation. (Ex. 4.8)

**Ex. 4.8** Op. 120, Var. 29, mm. 1-2

Now consider the parody aspects in the *Diabelli Variations*. As mentioned above, Variations 24 and 32, both written as rather strict four-voice fugues (or *fughetta* and *fuga* in the composer’s terms), show Beethoven’s debt to Bach in his variation writing. The most obvious of these parody variations is Variation 22, where Beethoven introduced the tune in unison open octaves, referencing to “Notte e giorno faticar” from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. Although the two pieces do not share the same tonality, the musical reference is clear—the same descending fourth and fifth from tonic to dominant and from supertonic to dominant, respectively, in the same rhythmic pattern (Exx. 4.9-10). It is as if Beethoven was demonstrating that Diabelli’s theme shares common elements with Mozart’s aria, and he was fully aware of where Diabelli got his theme from. As Kinderman suggests, the allusion is not only clear through the resemblance of the themes, but also through the extra-musical relationship between Leporello and his master as analogous to the relationship between Beethoven and Diabelli’s theme—a relationship that is critical but faithful. Immediately following Variation 22 is an Allegro assai, a piece sharing the kind of pianistic virtuosity of the keyboard etudes by Cramer and Czerny, which is, again, another kind of parody.


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Ex. 4.9  Mozart *Don Giovanni*, “Notte e giorno faticar,” mm. 10-19

**Molto Allegro**

Lupone

Ex. 4.10  Beethoven Op. 120, Var. 22, Beethoven’s parody of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*
Kinderman argues that one of the main ideas that runs through the entire Op. 120 set is Beethoven’s use of parody, which is demonstrated not only in the examples listed above but also in the way Beethoven took Diabelli’s theme, the so-called cobbler’s patch, and “harps on the actual substance of the waltz itself—specifically those features of it which are particularly trite—and reproduces them in exaggerated form so that they become insufferably so in the parody.”55 It is this form of parody that is most important for the overall progression of the Variations, because “Beethoven’s criterion for criticism is precisely the melodic outline of Diabelli’s theme.”56 The remarkable parallels between Beethoven’s last piano sonata, Op. 111, and his own final variation set, Op. 120, are noteworthy. The melodic falling fourths almost always followed by a falling fifth (C-G and D-G in the theme), as well as the ethereal texture of the last variation are among the main features that Beethoven also adopted for his Op. 111. The end of the series allusions thus became “a self-reference, a final point of orientation within a work of art whose vast scope ranges from ironic caricature to sublime transformation of the commonplace waltz.”57

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
Comparison Between and Among

In Beethoven’s time, his music enjoyed an almost immediate appeal among the music lovers, and until today its popularity has never diminished. Moreover, the so-called “Beethoven myth,” surrounded by such issues as his poverty-driven childhood, socially isolating deafness, and his seemingly serious and paranoid personality, is still embraced by the popular imagination to this day despite arguments suggesting many of these issues to be doubtful. As a direct or indirect result of this Beethoven myth, the three-period theory of Beethoven’s stylistic development refuses to die regardless of its flaws and rigidity, as the dates indeed correspond with the major turning-point events in Beethoven’s biography.

Yet most of the examples drawn to define his stylistic evolution are generally from the sonata-form movements of the symphonic or other instrumental genres. His variations have generally been treated as individual topics due to their lack of a cohesive demonstration of his stylistic development parallel to that of his piano sonatas, string quartets, concerti, and symphonies. Having discussed the WoO 76, Opp. 34, 35, and 120 variation sets in details in the previous chapters, it is appropriate to revisit and reexamine some of the salient features in each of the four works and see how they correspond with the characteristics generally associated with the period. The inter-relationship between and among these four pieces will also be examined, especially with regard to Beethoven’s fugal writing, with the exception of the Op. 34 set, which does not include a fugal variation.
Beethoven’s WoO 76 variations in F major, composed in 1799, can be seen as a work summing up Beethoven’s early Vienna period, during which he gained control over the Viennese style, and also affirmed his individuality within it. Beethoven’s WoO 76 variation set serves as a good example that clearly demonstrates all these traits. Both constant-harmony and melodic-outlined variation techniques, as well as conventional pivot-chord modulation procedure are found in the WoO 76 set. Along with these traditional aspects that Beethoven inherited from his predecessors, he continued to surprise his audience with innovations that set aside his own individual style when composing within the Viennese style. As discussed earlier, the tonalities of variations 5 and 6 of the WoO 76 set follow a descending-third sequence, which demonstrates Beethoven’s preoccupation with the third-related keys, and can be seen as a preliminary prototype of the same kind of key relationship in his later Op. 34 in F, which, however, does not stay in F very long. Moreover, WoO 76’s seventh and concluding variation, marked Allegro vivace, begins with a three-voice fugue exposition.

One should keep in mind that the fugue is without a doubt a traditional compositional process that Beethoven received from the previous generation of composers, but by the late eighteenth century the idea of including a fugue in instrumental forms had fallen out of favor, and usually the fugue only played a role in sacred forms. Thus, Beethoven’s attempt to include a fugue in his variations serves as a doppelganger here, an innovative experiment to be further developed in his later variation writing while referencing back to the compositional process well established by his predecessors.
Variation 7 of the WoO 76 set begins with a three-voice fugue exposition in J. S. Bach’s style. Although Beethoven introduced homophonic treatment along with another fugal subject entry after the exposition, the exposition clearly demonstrates the subject-answer-subject progression in the top-middle-bottom order of entries with tonal adjustments in the style of J. S. Bach. Although Beethoven had used contrapuntal texture and even fugue-like treatment in his earlier variation writing (WoO 65), the fugal variation in WoO 76, along with the use of foreign keys in variations 5 and 6 (submediant and subdominant), has a deeper meaning than that of the earlier example. It also takes “a step forward in the enrichment of the variation form,” and in a retrospective review of Beethoven’s later works, it “represents the first indication of a new ‘form idea.’”

If the descending-third key relations and the fugato in the finale of the WoO 76 variations are seen as Beethoven’s experimental studies, these experiments are certainly much further realized in his Opp. 34 and 35 variations. In the Op. 34 set the falling-third sequence goes through the entire cycle before reaching the dominant (F—D—B-flat—G—E-flat—c), a process much more extensive than that of the WoO 76. (Table. 5.1) Here, instead of introducing only a few variations in different keys, Beethoven created a set of variations in F major, which, however, does not stay in F for the most part. As Sisman remarked, the rather conventional techniques of melodic decoration are thus given new life in changes of character and in “what sounds like a radical

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defamiliarization of the theme as early as when the first variation in D major is introduced.

**Table 5.1** Descending-third key relationships in WoO 76 and Op. 34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th>d</th>
<th>Bb (chromatic pivot chord modulation)</th>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WoO 76</strong></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>vi</td>
<td>IV (V)</td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Op. 34</strong></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Eb c (change of mode) F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>VIIb v (V)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike the melodic orientation of Op. 34, Beethoven used constant-harmony technique almost exclusively in his Op. 35 *Eroica Variations*. He contrasted these two variations sets, written around the same time, by calling them “small” and “grand” in the same letter he wrote to Breitkopf & Härtel in 1802, possibly due to the length, the technical difficulty, and the overall large scale in every dimension of the Op. 35 set.

The grand finale of Op. 35 begins, as does the finale of WoO 76, with a three-voice fugue. Whereas the final variation in WoO 76 displays only the exposition of a fugue, the finale in Op. 35 exhibits much more comprehensive contrapuntal writing. The fugal subject is derived from the opening four notes in the *Basso del Tema*, not the theme itself, which shows that Beethoven regarded it as not just a preview of the theme prior to its actual presentation, but rather as a thematic idea to permeate the entire variation set. The subject material is treated later in sequences and, juxtaposed with material from the

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melodic theme, dominates the long episode between the two main sections. In the second half of the fugue, the thematic bass is even inverted to function as a new subject. As Misch indicated, the Basso del Tema’s role in the entire set is subordinate and secondary, and the fugue also reflects that fact, leading into a more richly embellished repetition of the theme in its entirety, which “undergoes its apotheosis in a final variation with the melody in the bass, and ends in a thematic coda.”

As mentioned before, Beethoven’s Opp. 34 and 35 variations were composed in 1802, the year by which scholars generally divide his first two stylistic periods. Even though these two sets of variations were written at a transitional time, many of the features associated with his mature middle period (or even late period) can be found in these two works, such as the move toward the third-related key relationships, expansion of and experimentation with harmonies, forms, techniques, and preoccupation with contrapuntal thinking.

One should keep in mind that Beethoven started composition in piano variations, and, as did many of his predecessors and contemporaries, perhaps treated the form initially as a way to practice compositional skills. Therefore, his variations may very well reveal some more advanced stylistic features in an experimental stage than works of the same date but written in rather unfamiliar, less used genres. For the same reason, it is no surprise that the Opp. 34 and 35 variations see many of the characteristics generally associated with Beethoven’s later compositions.

The Op. 120 Diabelli Variations, Beethoven’s last set in the piano variation genre, is the culmination of all the variation works he had previously composed, at the same time standing beside his other late masterpieces such as the Ninth Symphony, Missa

60 Misch. “Fugue and Fugato in Beethoven's Variation Form,” 17.
Solemnis, and the last piano sonatas and string quartets. The features usually associated with Beethoven’s late period include continuing experimentation with forms, characteristic intellectual depth, intense and highly personal expression, as well as heavy contrapuntal thinking. All of these can be seen in the Diabelli Variations. Moreover, almost all the variation techniques discussed previously—melody-outline, constant-harmony, fugal treatment, or changes in mode, tempo, meter, and character—can be found in the Op. 120 set, although the formal-outline variation technique is perhaps the main theme throughout.

As in Op. 34, where Beethoven seemed to purposefully disrupt and defamiliarize the theme as early as the beginning of variation 1, in Diabelli Variations the same disruption is achieved when Beethoven introduced an entirely different character with the Alla Marcia maestoso in variation 1, which “instantly reveals contrast to be the primary aesthetic of the set.”61 Throughout the entire set, the simple and light-hearted character of the original Diabelli waltz is almost always absent due to changes in dynamics, meters, harmonies, and textures, despite the formal design and basic motives usually being kept intact.

Also, the fugue in Diabelli Variations becomes a variation in the midst of other variations rather than in the finale. The “fughetta” designation of variation 24 clearly shows the ground plan of this variation, which begins with a four-voice fugal exposition and continues as episodes. What differentiates this fugue from Beethoven’s earlier examples discussed above is that instead of letting the contrapuntal texture flow into a homophonic treatment of the fugal subject, Beethoven continued the fugue with

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sequences and free counterpoint while following the general shape of the Diabelli theme’s two-part design. However, rather than writing a through-composed fugue in the style of J. S. Bach, Beethoven began the second part of variation 24 by inverting the original fugal subject, an approach observed in the fugal finale of the Op. 35 *Eroica Variations*. The use of an inverted subject with free counterpoint to open the second half is reminiscent of some concluding movements of J. S. Bach’s keyboard suites, where movements titled as “gigue” or “capriccio” are divided into two parts with the first section closing into V and the second section opening with an inverted subject and cadencing in I, while both versions of the subject subjects are present.

Variation 32 is another designated “fuga” by the composer. It is a tremendous double fugue (or, arguably, triple fugue) with two subjects presented and juxtaposed with each other from the beginning (Ex. 5.1). The head of the first subject is, as that of the finale in Op. 35, evolved from the head motive of Diabelli’s waltz, while the end of the subject closes with a gesture similar to a fragment of the theme. (Ex. 5.2) Here, the falling-fourth and the repeating scale degree 5 from the theme are held intact in the fugal subject.

**Ex. 5.1** Op. 120, Variation 32, Fuga, mm. 1—8
Ex. 5.2 Op. 120, theme, mm. 9-16

Just as in the Op. 35 finale, the fugue leads into a rather long dominant prolongation and, after a short cadenza-like *Eingang* (marked adagio), closes into an embellished repetition of the theme. Variation 32 in Op. 120, though harmonically much more complex, follows a similar procedure. It leads into a final variation in the same key and meter as the theme, which is in Kinderman’s words a “final spiritualized reminiscence”\(^6\) of Diabelli’s waltz, now presented as a Minuet in the style of Mozart. Moreover, like the fugue in Op. 35, the fugue in Variation 32 of Op. 120 is perhaps the “ultimate consequence and climax of the contrapuntal treatment”\(^6\) that permeates the entire cycle.

As discussed earlier, Beethoven started composition in piano variations. Throughout his career he never stopped writing variations for different instrumental genres, whether as an independent piece or as a movement in a larger work. He was familiar with the works by his Classical predecessors, especially those by Haydn and Mozart, and used techniques he inherited such as the conventional phrase structure, motivic elaboration, modulation procedure, and variation technique to create thematic statements of striking individuality. As Sisman reports, certain “proprieties” are observed

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\(^6\) Kinderman, *Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations*, 125.

\(^6\) Misch, “Fugue and Fugato in Beethoven’s Variation Form,” 23
in variations by Haydn and Mozart: a “propriety of ordering,” in which simpler textures would normally appear before more complex imitative polyphonic textures; a “propriety of performance style,” in which extremes of instrumentation, registers, and dynamics would generally be used later in the piece or only as local contrasts when used earlier in the piece; and a “propriety of contrast and return,” in which materials that depart distantly from the theme would be followed by returns of the theme or thematic melody.64

Beethoven was without a doubt highly familiar with every one of the proprieties mentioned above but at the same time expanding and breaking the Classical decorum by calling each one into question. This is not to say, of course, that Beethoven disrupted the relationship between the theme and variation and, thus, the fundamental concept of the variation form. However, by introducing a new level of difficulty in a previously more comprehensible form, he certainly created a “completely new manner” within his Classical heritage while leaving a profound legacy for many generations thereafter.

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Bibliography


