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A response to Bojan Bujić

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I applaud Dr. Bujić's sensitive analysis of the stepwise upper-voice descent that promotes continuity between the contrasting halves and the two phrases of the opening thematic period in the finale of Beethoven's Op. 101, and I am intrigued by his suggestion of a rhetorical and poetic parallel to the discourse of Beethoven's theme. Since it is my attribution of topics that is being strongly challenged by Dr. Bujić, however, I will focus on clarifying why I applied particular topical labels. I will also explain how the interpretation of topics, especially when they creatively interact to produce tropes, provide a starting point for a more nuanced analysis of musical expressive meaning than might be apparent from Dr. Bujić's critique.

To begin, the two topics disputed by Dr. Bujić (the learned style and the musette) are each cued by more than the single feature Dr. Bujić questions. The rationale for the learned style (and the reason I would not consider it merely an "echo" topic) is grounded in the contrapuntal relationship the imitative voices manifest: a 2-3 suspension chain, comprised of the basic pitches of the two-voice descent. This was a point I made later in my book when I returned to a closer interpretation of the theme (1994: 170, "implied 2-3 chain suspensions"), but not in the survey article (2005), since in the latter I only briefly alluded to the example as a case of the tropological interaction of topics. Ratner might have further suggested the "bound style" as a source for this underlying counterpoint, and it is completely compatible with a Schenkerian reductive account. The smoothness implied by the strict, bound style, however, is broken on the surface here by the character of the imitated motive, which suggests a contrasting topic: fanfare. Together, these two topics suggest an "authoritative" (learned style) "heroic victory" (fanfare)—an interpretation that meshes with Beethoven's verbal instruction, "mit Entschlossenheit" (with determination).

That there is a palpable contrast in texture, dynamics, and character created by the second four bars of the theme cannot be aurally disputed. My labeling of musette for these four bars is predicated not merely on the pedal point (note its syncopation, derived, perhaps, from similar syncopations in the first movement), but also on the "flowing sixteenths in simple stepwise motion" (1994: 170). The characteristic performance on these bagpipe-type instruments is of one or more drones accompanying an improvisation in faster note values that often swirl in stepwise arabesques. Whether or not "musette" is an ideal topical label, the simplicity of this passage marks it as generically "pastoral."

Why might Beethoven have composed such an extreme topical contrast in a single theme? One option would be the dialectical theme found so often in Mozart (e.g., the opening theme of his Piano Sonata in C Minor, K. 457, which surely influenced Beethoven in composing the opening theme of his own Piano Sonata in C Minor, Op. 10, no. 1). A stronger interpretation would suggest that an interactive trope is being proposed, as supported by the juxtaposition of topics in a single functional location (this is further supported by Dr. Bujčić's analysis of voice-leading continuity that clearly links these two four-bar units into a larger rhetorical statement). Interpreting the trope depends on our having fairly clear expressive correlations for each of the constituent topics.

The learned style is "authoritative" since it alludes to the venerable and strict style of Baroque (and even earlier) counterpoint. We know that Beethoven was intrigued by the possibility of a stylistic trope in his letter proposing a "Kunstvereinigung," or unification of the styles of the "Deutsche Händel und Seb. Bach" with current stylistic practices (see his letter to Prince Rudolph, dated July 29, 1819). And we know that the learned topic is "developed" later in the movement (not only by the development's fugato, but by various imitative treatments of pastoral musette and rustic dance in the exposition). Dr. Bujčić notes that the consequent eight-bar phrase of the opening period inverts the texture and continues the voice-leading descent. Had I attempted a complete topical analysis of the finale (not my intent even in the book), I would have noted that the invertible counterpoint (creating a chain of 7-6 suspensions) further supports the learned style labeling, and that the musette is further developed by the introduction of parallel thirds in the swirling sixteenths—parallel thirds being a strong pastoral marker in appropriate contexts.

The fanfare is "heroic" and associated with "victory" when diatonic and forte. The musette, or more generally the pastoral style it references, had in late Beethoven earned a place in all three stylistic registers, from low style "rustic" or "graceless" pastoral, to middle style "graceful" galant simplicity, and ultimately, for late Beethoven, to a high style state of serenity or spiritual "grace" (1994: 80). Beethoven plays with stylistic register throughout this finale—for example, the rustic folk dance in m. 59 (Schenker edition), which combines a pedal bass with offbeat chord accompaniment and imitation of a fragment of the main theme (here, echo imitation would indeed be an appropriate label)—and throughout the sonata (consider the rustic pastoral trio of the march movement, with its own bizarre, canonic imitations; this is a movement that also features the troping of learned style and heroic march).

My argument for high-style pastoral as visionary and spiritual emerges from an interpretation of the entire sonata. Here I will mention only the visionary return of the opening of the first movement, a quintessentially pastoral theme (1994: 97-99), in the transition to the finale. The pastoral expressive genre of this sonata depends on the framing and guiding of pastoral topics that shape its discourse. Suffice it to say that when we hear the "musette" in the latter half of the eight-bar finale theme, we are quite prepared by previous events to interpret it as pastoral, and, I would further claim, as visionary. The trope, then, of the main theme combines "authoritative victory" with "spiritual grace." To verbalize this trope as an "internalized victory of the spirit" (1994:

171), while perhaps too pat, still helps to distinguish the nature of this late-style “victory” from the Promethean victory of the external will that Beethoven employs in some middle style works, such as the Fifth Symphony.

Topics and tropes can guide the hermeneutic interpretation of a work, and one need not succumb to a prescriptive analysis if one carefully analyzes the cues that call forth topical recognition, rather than bluntly applying labels. Furthermore, the hermeneutic readings I propose can readily incorporate the insights of Schenkerian analysis (see, for example, my “model” analysis of the Cavatina from Beethoven’s String Quartet in Bb, Op. 130, as Chapter 8 of *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*); my point in arguing against formalist analysis is that we need not stop with a voice-leading analysis, when there is so much else of interest in the “irreducible significance of the surface” (1994: 160, 278). Topical and tropological analysis can help us understand some (but not all) of the expressive motivations for unusual structures in Beethoven’s and many other composers’ works.

The alternatives Dr. Bujic proposes may be understood as complementary to my own approaches, rather than mutually exclusive. I invite him to consider the ways in which composers’ use of *topoi* reflects an extensive cultural practice that extends throughout the arts (see, e.g., Monelle 2006; for more on troping of topics, see Hatten 2004).

Bibliography

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