Motivic Voice-Leading in Selected Piano Cycles of Johannes Brahms

Jacob Joel Gran
jgran1@lsu.edu

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MOTIVIC VOICE-LEADING IN SELECTED PIANO CYCLES
OF JOHANNES BRAHMS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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by
Jacob Joel Gran
B.A. Saint John’s University, 2012
M.M. Louisiana State University, 2014
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation identifies a technique used by Brahms to organize the compositional designs of his piano cycles. The technique is *motivic voice-leading*. By that I mean that certain patterns of triadic voice-leading gain significance through their unconventional use or varied repetition that have implications throughout the cycle. And, in the same way that traditional melodic or rhythmic motives can be developed and reworked, the composer may break these voice-leading patterns into their component stepwise connections. These stepwise dyads may be developed independently of their original triadic context, in the manner of a pitch-class motive.¹ We can understand many of the most rhetorically disruptive chromatic moments in the cycles as the consequences of pitch-class motives that derive from the cycle’s motivic voice-leading.

Within Brahms’s piano cycles, we may derive the motivic voice-leading pattern from the tonic triads of adjacent pieces in a cycle. This technique allows Brahms to coordinate the local pitch content of his miniatures with the large-scale form of the cycle in which they are embedded. Local voice-leading events therefore gain significance as replications of (in a Schenkerian sense) and as references to (in an associative sense) the global changes that take place as the cycle progresses. These voice-leading events accrue expressive meaning as they foreshadow, invert, and recollect events from elsewhere in the cycle. Most importantly, this approach provides the framework for a compelling critical analysis of the cycles, in which their most salient chromatic features cohere into an intelligible compositional plan.

This dissertation examines three piano cycles by Johannes Brahms that range from across his compositional career. In Chapter 2, “Beethoven, Brahms, and Universal History,” I argue that the voice-leading pattern in Brahms’s op. 10 ballades (1854) is modeled on patterns of chromatic key areas from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, and that other aspects of the ballades are likewise modeled on the Ninth. Chapter 3, “Voice-Leading Compatibility in the op. 117 Intermezzos,” explores a more complicated case than the one encountered with the op. 10 cycle. Here, Brahms coordinates key areas that would otherwise have no obvious tonal connection through the use of a descending 5-6 motivic voice-leading pattern. In the final analytical chapter, “Motivic Voice-Leading in the op. 119 Klavierstücke,” we examine a case in which Brahms’s motivic voice-leading is accomplished using explicit melodic motives (rather than pitch-class motives), which had not been the case in the earlier cycles. These analytical chapters provide a window onto Brahms’s changing use of motivic voice-leading as a compositional technique as well as its limitations and advantages as an analytical tool.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Johannes Brahms’s piano cycles represent a meeting place for many of the most important narrative threads in the critical reception of his music. Partially at stake, for instance, is Brahms’s reputation as the ultimate organicist, who created works of profound unity and coherence.\(^1\) Nineteenth century genre conventions placed far less of a demand on the piano cycle for large-scale closure or tight integration of elements than it placed, for instance, on the symphony or sonata. The piano cycles are therefore a valuable laboratory for testing claims about the composer’s organicist *bona fides*. Brahms was also a prolific composer of *lieder*; and a better understanding of his instrumental cycles would perhaps shed light on the design of his song collections, and the often-cited statement in which he compared his collections to bouquets of flowers.\(^2\)

Brahms’s piano cycles also inflect our understanding of larger stylistic trends of the nineteenth century. Brahms is frequently cited as the paragon of “absolute” music in the nineteenth century, as opposed (dialectically and perforce) to Liszt and the New Germans.\(^3\) But a major recent trend in Brahms scholarship has been to cast doubt on his role in this simplistic narrative.\(^4\) Two miniatures from Brahms’s piano cycles bear poetic allusions as subheadings,

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4 For a summary of this trend, see Heather K. Platt and Peter H. Smith, “The Wondrous Transformation of Thought into Sound: Some Preliminary Reflections on Musical Meaning in
which raises the question of programmaticism and extra-musical association in the cycles generally. Finally, the piano cycles provide us a window onto the Romantic fragment, both in its aesthetic and in its technical implementation. Coming to a clearer understanding of this repertoire will have consequences for our understanding of a wide range of nineteenth-century Western musical topics.

This dissertation identifies a technique Brahms uses to organize the compositional designs of his cycles. The technique is *motivic voice-leading*: the derivation of pitch-class motives from the stepwise voice-leading connections between the tonic triads of adjacent pieces in a cycle. This technique allows Brahms to coordinate the local pitch content of his miniatures with the large-scale form of the cycle in which they are embedded. Local voice-leading events therefore gain significance as replications of (in a Schenkerian sense) and as references to (in an associative sense) the global changes that take place as the cycle progresses. These pitch-class motives accrue expressive meaning as they foreshadow, invert, and recollect voice-leading events from elsewhere in the cycle. Most importantly, this approach provides the framework for a compelling critical analysis of the cycles, in which their most salient or surprising features cohere into an intelligible compositional plan. In addition, this approach allows the analyst to solve two problems in the existing literature by pitting the problems against one another; to fill in one another’s gaps, so to speak.

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5 See along these lines Dillon Parmer, “Brahms and the Poetic Motto: A Hermeneutic Aid?” *The Journal of Musicology* 15 no. 3 (Summer, 1997), 353-389.

Cyclic Integration

The first problem is stylistic, and it has to do with the means by which Brahms integrates his cycles. Previous approaches to nineteenth-century cycles have tended to focus on static similarities, such as shared key areas, thematic material, formal patterns, etc. Patrick McCreless has dubbed this kind of interpenetration of elements “cross-referencing.”\(^7\) The earliest such studies focused specifically on 19th-century song cycles, the most notable of which is Arthur Komar’s analysis of Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*.\(^8\) With respect to instrumental cycles, Jonathan Dunsby and Nicholas Marston have examined the possibility of what Dunsby terms a “multi-piece,” in Brahms’s op. 116 *Fantasien* and a selection of Beethoven’s Bagatelles, respectively.\(^9\) Peter Kaminsky’s analysis of Schumann’s early piano cycles draws special attention to motivic and tonal cross-referencing as the basis of cyclic coherence, and does so in a repertoire that is an influential predecessor to Brahms’s cycles.\(^10\) Notice that, as McCreless points out, the cross-

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\(^10\) I prefer Kaminsky’s definition of a cycle, as distinct form a collection, to Dunsby’s multi-piece, and will adopt it for the remainder of the dissertation. “We generally think of a collection as a set of independent, closed tonal movements whose integrity would not be destroyed if they were arranged in a different order or even transposed. For a cycle, on the other hand, we assume that some sense of unity flows from a coherent tonal and formal organization.” – 207. Peter
referencing of static features is basically an unordered association of elements, which does not help to explain the composer’s choice of ordering for the pieces in a cycle. All of the aforementioned studies also therefore invoke the possibility of a pseudo-Schenkerian fundamental structure that spans across multiple pieces, songs, or movements. This explains the choice of ordering for the pieces, as they together contribute to an ordered tonal process.

These studies considered a diverse repertoire from different composers and time periods, and several of the authors make clear that one would expect a similar diversity of compositional strategies to the problem of the integrated cycle. As Dunsby puts it, “the nature of the unity of these collections need not be the same in each case.” In his article, “Compatibility in Chopin’s Multipartite Publications,” Jeffrey Kallberg gives a useful list of criteria by which these cyclic strategies can be mapped out. David Brodbeck later condensed these criteria as the “Three C’s” of a cycle: compatibility, coherence, and closure. The relative cyclicity of a given collection can be measured by considering each of these three terms. Closure and coherence (understood as a less totalizing synonym for “unity”), don’t require much explanation. Compatibility, on the other hand, is Kallberg’s term for the arrangement of the pieces of a cycle so that, “when a set is played in sequence, a sense emerges that the works belong together.” Kallberg’s discussion of the possibilities of tonal coherence is worth an extended quotation:


Thinking abstractly, one can imagine three ways in which tonality might act as a cohesive force in opuses with two or more numbers. Each way makes use of some sort of “logical” progression or interaction of keys. In the first, the keys of the individual numbers would be related by relatively common harmonic progressions to those that precede and/or follow, such that a chain of associated keys results, with the tonality of the final viewed as a point of arrival, or “tonic” (e.g., four works in the keys of A minor, F major, G major and C major, or vi-IV-V-I). Such an arrangement emphasizes tonally conventional relationships over aurally perceptible ones; in the example given, the listener clearly would not hear the A minor of the first work as “vi.” In the second, the keys of the numbers would be laid out following a progression less common in ordinary terms, but “logical” because of an imposed symmetrical design (e.g., keys that ascend or descend by semitones, say C major, C-sharp minor, D minor). In the third, a system of tonal reference or recall would be employed so that keys heard in one work would also be featured in another (e.g., if an opus contained two works, in D major and E major, the latter would highlight passages in D major).  

Kallberg’s first possibility is quite similar to the uses of a cycle-spanning fundamental structure encountered in the other literature, except without a specific appeal to Schenkerian methodology. In this respect, it may be useful to distinguish between what Felix Salzer calls “harmonic progressions,” which are in some way common to all theories of chord function, and “contrapuntal progressions,” which are more uniquely Schenkerian. Notice how Kallberg implicitly equates the tonic triads of each piece with their governing tonality, as a synecdoche. This is a necessary step in assigning a functional meaning to an entire piece. The second possibility – involving a symmetrical design – is unique among the approaches mentioned so far, in that it does not make any appeal to conventional tonal theory. Relevant examples would include Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier, or Beethoven’s op. 126 Bagatelles, whose tonics descend through a major thirds cycle (G – g – E♭ – b – G – E♭). The third possibility is the same as the tonal cross-reference employed by McCreless and Kaminsky, in which features – in this case tonal features – are transplanted from one piece to another.

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In contrast to these static comparison approaches, the approach based on motivic voice-leading introduced in this dissertation emphasizes dynamic similarities. In other words, a cycle might be said to cohere, not because its pieces share similar musical elements, but because they partake in similar musical actions (or contribute to a single action). These actions are those voice-leading events that contribute to a larger contrapuntal process, such as, for instance, a functional harmonic progression, but also including a linear intervallic pattern (LIP), or a contrapuntal progression. This shift in attitude means that a greater diversity of musical elements can be drawn into a coherent analytical picture, and, as we will see, some of Brahms’s most heterogenous cycles lend themselves handily to a motivic voice-leading analysis.\(^\text{17}\)

**Pitch-Class Motives**

The second problem addressed by motivic voice-leading is methodological, and it has to do with the limits of pitch-class motive analysis. Steven Laitz defines the term in his 1992 dissertation:

\[\ldots\text{early on in the piece, certain contiguous pitch classes are highlighted, one of which is chromatic – indeed, it is this which marks it for memory. The chromatic pitch, malleable enough to recur in various contexts, occurs throughout the piece in concert with one or both of its flanking diatonic pitches. That this melodic entity comprises a three-note chromatic segment rather than one pitch acting in isolation allows us to specify criteria by which its repetitions may be verified and considered motivic… Such a pitch-class motive may be developed in dramatic ways including the “promotion” of one or all of its members to deeper levels of structure, usually by a step-by-step process. In summary, then, a chromatic pitch-class motive generally: 1) recurs throughout the texture of a}\]

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\(^{17}\) Incidentally, this shift is analogous to Morse Peckham’s distinction between static and dynamic organicism in his definition of Romanticism: “What then is Romanticism? Whether philosophic, theologic, or aesthetic, it is the revolution in the European mind against thinking in terms of static mechanism and the redirection of the mind to thinking in terms of dynamic organicism. Its values are change, imperfection, growth, diversity, the creative imagination, the unconscious.” – 14. Morse Peckham, “Toward a Theory of Romanticism,” *PMLA* 66 no. 2 (March, 1951), 5-23.
composition; 2) is highlighted in some fashion (for example, registrrally, dynamically, or as a foreground dissonance); and 3) recurs at more than one structural level.\textsuperscript{18}

This kind of analysis – tracking the adventures of a chromatic “problem note” across the span of a composition – has a long but disjointed history.\textsuperscript{19} Some writers took this kind of analysis to be more a matter of expressive interpretation and storytelling, while others felt the need to ground their prose narratives in some form of hardcore theoretical technology. The progenitor of the first group was Donald Francis Tovey, who gave a colorful prose description of the C$\#$ in m. 7 of the first movement of Beethoven’s \textit{Eroica} symphony, and its accompanying expressive “cloud.”\textsuperscript{20} Subsequent prominent Tovey-style analyses have been given by Joseph Kerman, in his discussion of the G$b$ in Beethoven’s \textit{Serioso} String Quartet, op. 95, and Charles Rosen, in his discussion, also of G$b$, in the \textit{Hammerklavier} Sonata, op. 106.\textsuperscript{21} In the second group, of those more intent on theory building, belong Heinrich Schenker, Patrick McCreless, and Laitz himself. Schenker provides several examples of enharmonic motivic parallelism and hidden repetitions in \textit{Free Composition} that Laitz claims as ancestors of pitch-class motive (pc-motive) analyses.\textsuperscript{22} Much of Patrick McCreless’s work fleshes out the analytical possibilities of


\textsuperscript{20} In reality, Tovey didn’t have much else to say about this kind of analysis, but his comments on the C$\#$ of the \textit{Eroica} were hugely provocative to later generations. Donald Francis Tovey, \textit{Essays in Musical Analysis} vol. 1, \textit{Symphonies} (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 45.


\textsuperscript{22} Although he was not quite the storyteller that Tovey was, Schenker does discuss the enharmonic reinterpretation of the pitch-class motive in the first movement of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata, op. 81a, using similar descriptive language and metaphors: “Here, g$b^2$ and g$\#^2$ are engaged in a struggle with one another – only two single tones, certainly not a motive in the usual sense. And yet the synthesis of the entire first movement circles around this conflict.”
cross-referential chromaticism, including stepwise “unordered pitch-class dyads” that are quite similar to pc-motives. Of these writers, Laitz provides the most useful (because reproducible) methodology in his formulation of the pc-motive.

A synthesis of the narrative and technical approaches to problem note analysis is found in Edward T. Cone’s article “Schubert’s Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics,” of 1982. Cone uses Schubert’s manipulations of a pc-motive in the Moment Musical, op. 94 no. 6, to map out the work’s “expressive potential.” In his words, every musical composition has a “wide, but not unrestricted range of possible expression.” Valid hermeneutic interpretations of a work must lie within the range of a piece’s expressive potential, and structural analysis can be used to delimit the boundaries of that range. This suggests that the intuitive problem note narratives of the likes of Tovey, Kerman, and Rosen, are valid as long as they are married to an adequate technical description that places them within the work’s expressive potential. What’s more, these narratives are analytically useful because they illustrate the interior shape of that potential by way of a narrative analogy.

Joseph N. Straus, in an article on disability narratives in music, generalizes the specific narrative arc that Cone uses in his analysis of Schubert’s Moment Musical, into a form he claims is common to most problem note narratives. He breaks this narrative into three stages:

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Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, translated and edited by Ernst Oster (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press 1977), P254, Figure 119 no. 7; see also P256, Figure 121.


25 Ibid., 239.
1. The music begins with a relatively straightforward assertion of key. Early on, usually within the first sixteen measures, a chromatic note is stated in a rhetorically charged manner that marks it for attention. In the music that follows immediately, the chromatic note is abandoned, and the music proceeds as if it had never occurred.
2. Later, however, that chromatic note becomes the focal point for harmonic and formal disruptions that increase in intensity over the course of the piece.
3. Finally, near the end of the piece, the chromatic note is normalized in some way, subsumed into the diatonic frame.26

Patrick McCreless points out how remarkably similar this description is to Laitz’s definition of a pc-motive (excerpted above), the only difference being that Straus emphasizes the problem note’s normalization at the end of the piece, and Laitz emphasizes the possibility of Schenkerian hidden repetitions.27 Straus also links the history of this style of analysis through Schoenberg and his American students, in addition to the other traditions mentioned earlier. Schoenberg never provided a clear example of his notion of a “tonal problem,” although Straus points out an example from the Gedanke manuscript in which Schoenberg traces the implications of an early F♯ in Brahms’s String Quartet in C minor, op. 51 no. 1.28 His student, Patricia Carpenter, analyzes Brahms’s op. 60 piano quartet in a similar style, following the implications of the cross-relation B♭/B♯.29 She writes, “Consider the cross-relation, and by that I mean simply more than one form of the same scale degree. If such a cross-relation occurred in an initial theme (and one often does), Schoenberg looked to it for the source of imbalance.”30 A chromatic pc-

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motive will always contain a cross-relation of this kind, and it is remarkable to observe that the
basic contours of problem note analysis have been more or less independently arrived at so many
times over the course of the last century.

In addition to the analyses by Schoenberg and Carpenter, there have been more recent
ttempts to investigate the degree to which “problem notes” play a part in Brahms’s
compositional style. Loretta Terrigno has analyzed Schoenbergian tonal problems in a Brahms
lied, in a manner similar to Laitz’s pc-motive analysis of Schubert lieder.31 Peter Smith has also
recently revisited the Brahms/Schubert sonata form connection with respect to cross-referential
chromaticism.32 The fact that the problem note phenomenon can be found in widely different
genres of Brahms’s output, and most significantly that there is a prominent precedent in works
by Schubert in both cases, should give us confidence in assigning this technique a place in
Brahms’s compositional toolkit. As we will see later in this chapter, Schubert also provided
Brahms with a compositional blueprint for motivic voice-leading as an organizing principle in
his instrumental cycles.

Straus and McCreless raise two important concerns regarding the limitations of problem
note analysis going forward, both of which appear serious to those of us enthusiastic about such
approaches. Straus’s concern has to do with historical and stylistic limitations in the repertoire.
He finds the high-point of problem note narratives in middle-period Beethoven and late
Schubert, and certainly the preponderance of problem note analyses are drawn from this small

31 Loretta Terrigno, “Tonal Problems as Agents of Narrative in Brahms’s Unbewegte laue Luft, op. 57 no. 8,” Music Analysis 36 no. 3 (October, 2017), 350-371.
body of works. McCreless is more optimistic about limitations in the repertoire, identifying pc-motives in the music of Haydn and Mozart, as well as Chopin, Brahms, and especially Wagner. Straus’s point, however, is that as the level of “ambient chromaticism” grows over the course of the nineteenth-century, it becomes more difficult to assign any one particular chromatic note privileged rhetorical significance over others in a piece. Cone’s original analysis of the E♯s in Schubert’s *Moment Musical* would seem willful and unpersuasive if the surrounding music were as intensely chromatic as some of Brahms’s intermezzos, as opposed to the predominantly diatonic texture of Schubert’s actual piece.

I will allow McCreless to summarize the second concern in his own words:

This sort of analytical work is, as a friend reminds me, “an easy game to play.” That is, all it takes to play the game is to recognize which pcs in a given key are chromatic, paying attention to whether any of these reappear with some frequency, and then constructing a narrative about them if they do. In the 1980’s it was too easy to latch onto a marked pitch … pursue it doggedly throughout a piece, ignoring melodic motives, surface rhythm, linear contrapuntal structure, hypermeter, and form, skipping altogether sections that do nothing with the thematized note, and ultimately showing how the chosen pitch-class is recuperated at the end. Not necessarily a sophisticated task, and not one to inspire confidence if it is not nuanced with an understanding of other musical variables.

These two objections would seem to take the air out of any project aimed at analyzing Brahms’s highly chromatic piano works using pc-motives at the core of its methodology. As stated earlier though, motivic voice-leading provides a putative solution to these objections.

Regarding Straus’s concern about the arbitrary selection of problem notes in late nineteenth-

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33 It is noteworthy that Straus singles out Brahms by name as a possible exception. Straus, “Normalizing the Abnormal,” (2006), 151.
34 “Richard Wagner, whose harmonic practice, from the *Ring* on, is founded upon the notion of pc-specific motives functioning, at different levels, across vast spans of musical and dramatic time.” McCreless, “The Pitch-Class Motive in Tonal Analysis,” (2011), 55. See also Jacob Gran, “Ornamental and Motivic Integration in Chopin’s op. 9 Nocturnes,” *Indiana Theory Review* 34 no. 1-2 (Fall, 2017), 23-49.
century music, the pc-motives discussed in the forthcoming analyses are picked from the froth of “ambient” chromaticism, not because they are placed in rhetorical isolation (although Brahms does a fair amount of “problematizing” of these chromatic notes), but because they have a constitutive role to play in the work’s triadic voice-leading. This means that a motivic voice-leading analysis can coordinate three distinct pc-motives (one for each tonic chord member), and their enharmonic derangements, at a time. The analyses can therefore accommodate highly chromatic music while avoiding a criticism of arbitrary selection (in theory, one could even predict the relevant pc-motives knowing only the keys of the pieces in a cycle). Regarding McCreless’s concern about the ultimate fruitfulness of such analysis, it should be clear that pc-motives are not invoked in this case for their own sake, but as evidence marshalled to support an argument about how Brahms has structured some of his piano cycles. For this reason, the pc-motives discussed are inextricably bound up with other musical parameters, especially linear contrapuntal structure and form.

**Methodology and Sample Analysis**

Schubert’s *Moment Musicaux*, op. 94 (D. 780), will provide a useful sample analysis for the purposes of explaining the methodology, for two reasons. First, as hinted at in the discussion above, Schubert’s instrumental cycles were a possible influence on Brahms’s own cyclical designs. Second, the reader is likely to already be familiar with Edward T. Cone’s analysis of the expressive and formal consequences of the pc-motive in the final piece. Cone’s observations can be supplemented by considering the larger role that the E/F pc-motive plays in the entire cycle. The cycle consists of 6 pieces, whose ordering of keys are: C major – A♭ major – F minor – C♯
minor – F minor – Ab major. If we arrange the tonic triads from each piece so as to maximize voice-leading parsimony (which means, in the case of the fourth piece, enharmonically respelling the tonic triad so as to preserve common tones with the adjacent triads), we would arrive at something like Figure 1.1.36

I say, “something like Figure 1,” because the particular voicing of the reduction could be done in different ways. For instance, the bass voice is only included in order to show each triad in root position; in each case it is a redundant doubling of a chord tone in another voice. The upper three voices are shown in closed position, but their ordering is arbitrary (I chose to place the most active voice in the soprano for illustrative purposes). As we will see in Chapter 3, there may be musical reasons to render the abstract voice-leading between triads with a specific voicing, but this is not such a case. These voice-leading events should be thought of as alterations to the “imaginary continuo” that some Schenkerians have written about, and so they

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36 Parsimonious voice-leading is most often associated with Neo-Riemannian approaches to triadic voice-leading, although the same principle can be found in other traditions. See especially Richard Cohn, “Neo-Riemannian Operations, Parsimonious Trichords, and their ‘Tonnetz’ Representations,” *Journal of Music Theory* 41 no. 1 (Spring, 1997), fn. 4, 62. An argument could be made that the entire dissertation may have adopted a transformational approach to voice-leading. However, we have adopted a Schenkerian linear methodology in order to align this project with preexisting Schenkerian-based work, most notably Laitz’s pc-motives, David Neumeyer’s background-middleground transfer (discussed on page 62), and John Robert Benoit’s “composite” fundamental structure (page 108).
are independent of any specific register or voicing. What is important are the stepwise connections and chromatic transformations between adjacent triads, indicated with slurs in Figure 1.1. These are the minimal voice-leading events that connect nearby triads. We can use these voice-leading connections to generate a network of pc-motives, which together summarize the voice-leading work that must be done to move the cycle forward (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 shows the pc-motives from the tonal perspective of A♭ major, the tonic of the final piece of the cycle. But one important factor for the development of these motives is that the tonal context will change from piece to piece as the cycle progresses, while the pc-motives will remain untransposed (though possibly enharmonically respelled). Because the tonal context shifts with each piece, it is useful to think of these pc-motives as dyads containing two generic note classes. Motive 1, for example, involves note-classes A and G, Motive 2 C/D, and Motive 3 E/F. The various chromatic changes to these notes that occurs as tonal context shifts do not alter their basic stepwise relationship. Pc-motives manifest primarily as neighbor note relationships (although Laitz allows for other kinds), and the primary tone and diminutional tone may trade functions depending on the tonal context. Consider Motive 3 in the context of C major, as

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happens at the beginning of the cycle in op. 94 no. 1. Here, E (enharmonic F♭) is the primary tone and D♯ (enharmonic E♭) is the lower neighbor; the inverse of the relationship shown in Figure 1.2. Such an inversion of the pc-motive occurs in m. 14, when the work’s first substantial cadence articulates V/iii (a rare cadential goal, supporting the melodic motion from E to D♯), followed by a dramatic pause (see Figure 1.3).

The first occurrence of Motive 1.3 emerges as early as m. 5 of the piece, when Schubert immediately restates the ending of the previous phrase, but with an unexpected shift of mode from C major to C minor (Figure 1.4). This rhetorically highlights an opposition between the notes E♮ and E♭ (enharmonic D♯). Here, we run into a methodological sticking point, since in this case we are not dealing with a stepwise connection per se, but the chromatic transformation of a chord tone. This should be properly thought of as a motivic association between the pitch classes involved in the pc-motive, rather than a repetition of the motive itself, which requires an
underlying stepwise motion between two different note-classes. Nevertheless, because
enharmonic reinterpretation of this kind occurs quite frequently as composers develop their pc-
motives, I beg the reader’s patience, in advance, if I do not always belabor this technical
distinction explicitly in the forthcoming chapters.

The pc-motives derived from the motivic voice-leading pattern can be used for more than
spotting moment-to-moment chromaticisms. The enharmonic reinterpretation shown between
Figures 1.3 and 1.4 is not especially compelling taken alone, although surface-level details such
as this can be used as evidence for the kind of intra-systematic interpretive work described by
Cone. More interesting are the ways in which hidden repetitions of the motives contribute to
deeper levels of linear structure. Figure 1.5 shows a deep middleground reduction of op. 94 no. 2
in A♭ major, where a repetition of Motive 2 generates the tonally distant key area of the work’s
B section.

The upper staff of Figure 1.5 is a linear reduction of mm. 1-38 of the *Moment musical*. The lower grand staff shows excerpts of the relevant sections that correspond vertically with the
linear reduction. Each excerpt is demarcated with a thick bar line – double bar lines are original
to the score and indicate the boundaries of the A, B, and A’ formal sections. Notice the D♭ upper

**Figure 1.5.** Linear reduction of op. 94 no. 2, showing how the tonality of the middle section
relates to the D♭ upper neighbor from Motive 2.
neighbor figure in the opening anacrusis. This is a low-level instance of Motive 2’s C/Db neighbor motion, which is then replicated at a subsequent melodic level by the motion to D♭ on the downbeat of m. 1. At the end of the first A section (m. 18), Schubert places a PAC in the key of the subdominant, D♭ major, which supports the D♭ upper neighbor within a middleground repetition of Motive 2. Schubert enharmonically respells this D♭ as C♯ in order to generate the work’s B section, in the surprising and unconventional key of F♯ minor (understood enharmonically as the minor subtonic).

The key areas expressed in a work’s alternate sections – for instance the B section of an ABA’ form – are the best opportunities for the composer to emphasize thematic keys and key relationships at a level more local than the tonic of an entire piece. Schubert’s choice of F♯ minor in this case does not simply duplicate the triadic voice-leading from the macrolevel of the cycle in a direct imitation of part-to-whole, but instead isolates a component of that voice-leading (in this case Motive 2) and allows it to develop in a new and unexpected direction. This technique allows Schubert (and Brahms, as we will see) a more organic, rather than mechanical, connection between part and whole. Another example occurs in the Moment musical no. 4, when the transformation of 3 between the C♭ minor tonality of the A sections and the D♭ major of the B sections produces a middleground repetition of Motive 3 (E – F♯ – E, or E – E♯ – E).

We will not rehash Edward T. Cone’s analysis of the final piece, no. 6 in A♭ major. Nevertheless, a motivic voice-leading analysis of the op. 94 cycle would have encountered many of the same observations made by Cone with respect to the E/F pc-motive; what I would call Motive 3 from Figure 2 and what he refers to as the “promissory note” E♯. In addition, such an
analysis would provide a wider context for assessing the congeneric meaning (the meaning established within the work itself) of the observations. For example, Schubert makes repeated feints towards the key of F minor, which Cone points out are accomplished either by 6-5 suspensions over the A♭ major tonic (rather than proper root position chords or tonicized key areas), or by its failed applied leading tone (the promissory E). These gestures gain meaning by association with the previous occurrences of F minor in the cycle – whether as a voice-leading configuration, a consonant triad, a key area, or as a tonality. Two of the previous Moments musicaux were in F minor (nos. 3 and 5), and Schubert’s recollections of F minor in the final piece resonate with the cycle’s musical past. Even the tonic, A♭, has gained meaning at this point in the cycle, as it has not been heard since the tonic of the second piece and during brief tonicizations in the third. The D♭ major of the B section also harkens back to the middle section of no. 4, and Schubert not coincidentally stages a comforting pastoral retreat in this key in both instances. “Associative tonalities” of these kinds can accrue meaning through topical, programmatic, or expressive interactions over the course of a cycle. Finally, the additional congeneric connections revealed by this kind of analysis reinforce Cone’s hermeneutic interpretation of op. 94 no. 6, and further clarify the boundaries of the piece’s expressive potential.

38 These feints occur in mm. 3, and 47-48. Cone, “Schubert’s Promissory Note” (1982), Example 3, 238.
CONCLUSION

The methodology outlined above is intended to be a simplified technical description of an aspect of Brahms’s compositional practice. Since Brahms’s practice changed over the course of his career and from piece to piece, we should of course not expect the methodology to apply equally well to all of his instrumental cycles. The last four pieces of the op. 76 cycle, for example, indeed form a satisfying motivic voice-leading pattern, but the entire cycle of eight pieces does not.\(^{41}\) The op. 79 *Rhapsodies* present the opposite difficulty, since they form a very short cycle of only two pieces. There are clear harmonic and motivic cross-references between the two rhapsodies, but the methodology developed in this dissertation would not reveal unique insights.\(^{42}\) The op. 116 cycle begins and ends in the key of D minor and has already been analyzed as a monotonality by Jonathan Dunsby.\(^{43}\) Finally, the op. 118 *Klavierstücke* orbit around an important tritone relationship (A and D\(^{\#}\)/E\(_{b}\)). However, while this design produces pc-motives in the first, second, and sixth pieces, the design is not especially evident in the interior pieces.\(^{44}\) For these reasons, it would be overzealous to claim that motivic voice-leading is the only, or most important, organizational principle in Brahms’s piano cycles.

\(^{41}\) The final four pieces have tonic triads of C\(^{\#}\) minor, A major, A minor, and C major, respectively. In other words, they form a chromatic 5-6-5 contrapuntal pattern. Notice in particular the A-G melodic suspension that begins the final piece and connects it to its predecessor.


\(^{44}\) In the first piece, in A minor, Cone points out the importance of the voice-leading of the “problematic” D\(^{\#}\) that proceeds as if it is an E\(_{b}\) in mm. 5-6. Edward T. Cone, “Three Ways of Reading a Detective Story – Or a Brahms Intermezzo,” *The Georgia Review* 31 no. 3 (Fall,
The remainder of the dissertation is broken into three analytical chapters and a conclusion. Each analytical chapter takes as its subject a cycle from Brahms’s piano oeuvre and demonstrates how a motivic voice-leading analysis can lead to an understanding of the cycle’s formal organization, linear contrapuntal structure, and expressive potential. These analyses are organized both chronologically – ranging from the beginning of Brahms’s compositional career, nearly to its end – and also in order of increasing complexity of design.

Chapter 2 deals with the op. 10 cycle of ballades, composed in the summer of 1854, while Brahms was in Dusseldorf and in the immediate aftermath of Robert Schumann’s suicide attempt and commitment. The four pieces are arranged with a highly symmetrical tonal design: the key areas are D minor, D major, B minor, and B major. The large number of common tones between the tonic triads of these key areas results in an orderly disposition of pc-motives; exactly one connecting each piece to the next in a rather study-like demonstration of motivic voice-leading. This cycle is heavily loaded with expressive and programmatic associations between key areas, melodic motives, and topics. In particular, I will use the motivic voice-leading analysis to defend an interpretation of the ballades as an allegory of universal history – a construal of history in terms of teleological spiritual progress that was pervasive in Brahms’s
Germany. Along these lines, I will compare the op. 10 ballades to a prominent predecessor that has a long interpretive history as a program for universal history: Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, op. 125. In fact, I would argue that the tonal areas and specific pc-motives of op. 10 are lifted directly from the Ninth, in order to be reassembled in a way more in keeping with Brahms’s personal understanding of universal history.

Chapter 3 deals with the op. 117 Intermezzos, published in 1892. The tonal arrangement of these three pieces is more analytically challenging than that found in op. 10. The ordering of tonic triads is E♭ major, B♭ minor, and C♯ minor. This arrangement does not suggest a sense of functional progression or a symmetrical pattern, nor does it include the cross-referencing of secondary key areas (recall Kallberg’s criteria for tonal coherence quoted on pg. 4). By contrast, these three criteria could have successfully provided alternative explanations for the tonal design of op. 10. However, when one arranges the tonic triads as a descending 5-6-5 contrapuntal pattern, this specific voicing reveals a coherence based on motivic voice-leading. Just as in the ballades, Brahms places an epigraph above the first piece relating the cycle to a poem from Herder’s collection of folk poetry, and I conclude the chapter by commenting on the cycle’s expressive potential in light of its programmatic and congeneric constraints.

The fourth and final analytical chapter deals with the op. 119 Klavierstücke (1893). The first three pieces in the cycle, which Brahms labels Intermezzos, move through a coherent motivic voice-leading pattern through the keys of B minor, E minor, and C major. The succession of pc-motives for this portion of the cycle could be viewed classically as transposed repetitions of the same 5-6-5 neighbor-note motive in different keys. The final piece, labeled Rhapsody, changes the course of the motivic voice-leading pattern by reproducing the neighbor-note motive from the previous piece as an untransposed repetition within a new tonal context (3-
4-3 in the key of Eb major). This same sort of “dog-legged” tonal design can be found in Brahms’s op. 121 *Vier ernste Gesänge* (1896), where again Brahms designs the first three pieces of the cycle around a single pattern and allows the fourth and final piece to suggest an alternative path within the same motivic voice-leading system.

Chapter 5 is a short conclusion. Here I will discuss the ways in which Brahms’s compositional practice in his piano cycles should be reevaluated in light of the dissertation’s findings, and the ramifications this may have for the “narrative threads” mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. I also examine some of the possible analytical applications for motivic voice-leading beyond the problem of the integrated instrumental cycle. This includes cross-referential and “associative” analyses of chromaticism in single-movement monotononal works, the analysis of various kinds of sonata cycles and other multi-movement designs, and also the problem of “progressive” or “directional” tonality in single-movement works.
Chapter 2: Beethoven, Brahms, and Universal History

Let [the modern poet] not lead us backwards into our childhood … but rather lead us forward into our maturity … Let him undertake the task of idyll … which, in a word, leads man who cannot now go back to Arcady forward to Elysium.¹

— Friedrich Schiller, *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795)

In this passage from perhaps his best-known aesthetic essay, Schiller gives his formulation of the role of art in modern society. The role of the artist is closely tied to Schiller’s understanding of progress. He associates the past with childhood, naiveté, and “Arcady,” while associating the future with maturity, sentimentality, and “Elysium.” This view of historical progress that unites human spiritual, cultural, and aesthetic development is referred to in various sources as *universal history*. More on this later. The notion that art can clarify and mediate historical progress became especially widespread in musical writings of the nineteenth century, notably in the writings of François-Joseph Fétis, Franz Brendel, and Richard Wagner.² Individual masterworks might contribute to the progress of musical history, as in Wagner’s argument about the future of music in the wake of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony.³ But masterworks might also reflect and illustrate historical progress as part of their internal design, as historical program or

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Examples of pieces that allegorize history might include Dittersdorf’s Symphony Kr.73 “Die vier Weltalter” (“The Four Ages of the World”), Haydn’s The Creation, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, and, according to a hermeneutical reading by Paul Merrick, Liszt’s B-minor Piano Sonata. The main focus of this chapter is on Johannes Brahms’s op. 10 ballades (1854) especially insofar as they function, when taken as a compositional whole, as an allegory of universal history. As their titles imply, these ballades recount an epic story – not any particular balladic story but rather the story of history itself.

A proper critical analysis of Brahms’s op. 10 ballades must include universal history as a part of its interpretive frame of reference, as a source of coherence for the ballades’ topical plot and expressive meaning. Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony might have served Brahms as a precedent in this regard. The Ninth has a longstanding interpretive tradition in terms of universal history, especially insofar as the symphony represents the content of Schiller’s “Ode to Joy” (where Joy is construed as the apostrophic “Daughter of Elysium”) as well as Schiller’s speculative philosophy of history more broadly. A critical analysis of op. 10 should therefore also confront its relationship to the Ninth Symphony. This will prove to be worth the effort, since many of the ballades’ most peculiar features are illuminated when we view op. 10 as the young

Brahms’s reinterpretation of his predecessor’s masterpiece and its relationship to the abstract features of universal history.

The organization of this chapter is therefore unavoidably front-heavy. The goal of the chapter, in the context of the dissertation as a whole, is to show the advantages that a focus on motivic voice-leading can afford an interpretive analysis, with Brahms’s op. 10 ballades as a case study. But before that, we must investigate that work’s relationship to Beethoven’s Ninth, and before that, we must explore exactly what I mean by universal history. For readers impatient with the historical background, we return to the music on page 32.

**Universal History**

Universal history refers to the kind of history-making guided by the belief that human events have unfolded, and will continue to unfold, as part of an intelligible process at the largest possible scale. The task of the historian/philosopher is to articulate the general laws of development that shape that process, and to speculate on whatever telos, pattern, or cyclicity history might possess. Increasing fascination with the notion of historical progress reached its peak during the nineteenth century with an increasing historical self-awareness and the Romantic preoccupation with “modernity” as an historical/cultural category. Universal history is naturally bound up with the historian’s problem of periodization, although with the added complexity of

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6 Universal history is a concept that is pertinent within a number of fields, and one’s definition of it partly depends on whether one’s stance is philosophical, political, or aesthetic. For a comprehensive literature review inclined towards the aesthetic (especially with respect to the German and English Romantics), see M.H. Abrams, “Part Four/ The Circuitous Journey: Through Alienation to Reintegration,” in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 197-252; and for one inclined towards political theory, see Francis Fukuyama, “5. An Idea for A Universal History,” in *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 55-70.

attempting to account for future periods of development that have not yet occurred. The Marquis de Condorcet, for example, believed humanity to occupy the ninth stage of a ten-stage historical development, while Schiller placed humanity in the second of three. 8

A factual account of history is necessarily limited to analysis of the past, as in the empirical historiography developed by Enlightenment thinkers such as Edward Gibbon and David Hume. 9 The account provided by universal history, however, deals both in facts and in values, and is concerned with humanity’s ultimate destiny in addition to its origins. These writers typically did not start from scratch in conceptualizing a universal history, but instead drew upon the Christian cosmogony as a preexisting model. Although the thinkers discussed below held a wide range of religious beliefs (or lack of belief), the creation myth in Genesis provided universal historians with a common point of origin for their view of human development, while Christian eschatology provided them with a teleological endpoint.

In one sense, the journey of Christian history ends by returning to the state of perfection where it began. But in another sense, the initial paradise (Eden) and the ultimate one (New Jerusalem) are fundamentally different, the latter being a higher level of perfection. This is why M. H. Abrams characterizes the shape of this journey, from origin to endpoint, as a spiral rather than as a circle. 10 The seeds for this view of the spiral shape of history can be found in the Christian doctrine of the Felix Culpa, or Fortunate Fall, first articulated by Saint Ambrose of

8 It should be noted that these historical periods are defined according to radically different criteria.
9 See for instance chapters 6-10 of Hugh Trevor-Roper, History and the Enlightenment (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
10 “In Schiller, furthermore, the concept of a fall, or historical decline, has been fused with the idea of progress so as to give history a spiral form; for the unity with himself to which man will return is not only as good as the unity he has forfeited; it is far better.” Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, 207.
Milan in the fourth century: “Felix ruina, quae reparatur in melius” [“It is a fortunate fall, that which is restored for the better”]. Milton expresses the same Christian view of history at the end of book 12 of *Paradise Lost*, when Adam admits his uncertainty as to whether he should repent or rejoice at his fall from grace and the path that he has set in motion for human history.

As Abrams argues, universal history underwent gradual secularization during the Enlightenment, and especially in the writings of the German Idealists and Romantics beginning in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Writers increasingly tried to understand the revelation of large-scale historical trends as analogous to the education of an individual. Blaise Pascal phrased this viewpoint succinctly when he proposed that we can “consider the entire sequence of human beings, during the entire course of the ages, as a single man who lives perpetually on and learns something all the time.” This was later echoed by G. E. Lessing: “What education is to the individual human being, revelation is to the whole human race.” The analogy of the development of history to the development of an individual is also alluded to in

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11 *Patrologia Latina* 14, 1065.
13 “Much of what distinguishes writers I call ‘Romantic’ derives from the fact that they undertook, whatever their religious creed or lack of creed, to save traditional concepts, schemes, and values which had been based on the relation of the Creator to his creature and creation, but to reformulate them within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego, the human mind or consciousness and its transactions with nature.” Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 13.
the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, when Schiller refers to the past as childhood and the future as maturity. This analogy affords the notion of historical progress clear directionality.

Immanuel Kant provided a secular formulation of the Fortunate Fall in his essay, “Conjectural Origin of the History of Man” [1786]. Kant construes the narrative of Genesis chapters 2-6 as an allegorical reflection on human nature from which he abstracts the outline of a four-stage universal history. Kant defines his stages of history based on the stages of the development of human rational faculties, ordered from simple to complex. In his earlier essay, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” [1784], Kant outlines this relationship explicitly: “The history of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring out an internally – and for this purpose also externally – perfect political constitution as the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed completely.” For Kant, then, the end of history means achieving a state of complete political freedom in which mankind is able to exercise its rational capacities unencumbered. The notion of freedom as the *telos* at the end of historical development was to be highly formative in later accounts of universal history.17

In describing humanity’s first stage Kant writes that, “Initially, the newcomer must have been guided solely by instinct, that voice of God which all animals obey… So long as

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17 The 20th-century Marxist philosopher Erich Fromm also reads the attainment of freedom as the culminating goal of history based on an interpretation of Genesis clearly indebted to Kant: “Acting against God’s orders means freeing himself from coercion, emerging from the unconscious existence of prehuman life to the level of man. Acting against the command of authority, committing a sin, is in its positive human aspect the first act of freedom.” Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1966), 27-28.
inexperienced man obeyed this call of nature, his lot was a happy one.”\textsuperscript{18} The transition to the second age is brought about by the archetypal fall event; the eating of the forbidden fruit at the center of the garden which enabled Adam and Eve to distinguish between good and evil. For Kant, the capacity to distinguish good from evil necessarily entails moral accountability, and this is the key difference between the first and second stages. Humanity is reluctant to leave the security and comfort of the “womb of nature,” but “restless reason, irresistibly driving him on to develop his innate capacities, stands between him and that imagined seat of bliss, and does not allow him to return to the state of rude simplicity from which it had originally extracted him ([Gen] III. 24).”\textsuperscript{19} The second stage represents a self-dividedness within the individual – the division between instinctual impulses for satiation and self-conscious reflection upon one’s actions and impulses.

Kant’s third stage elevates this conflict from the level of the individual to the level of society. Cain and Abel, in the fourth chapter of Genesis, represent agricultural and pastoral ways of life, respectively. The demands of these two separate lifestyles result in societal conflict that must be mediated by higher authorities than individuals and clans. This is the birth of the state and (partly) the justification of its authority. As society diversifies and becomes more complex, so too do the types of conflicts it engenders – inequality, injustice, corruption, etc. But of central importance for our purposes is Kant’s emphasis on the divide and separation between agricultural society (which develops into urban cities and “culture” generally) and pastoral society. Cain’s jealousy of his brother Abel as God’s favorite mirrors cultured humanity’s jealousy of the rural pastoral element, which maintains a closer relationship with nature.

\textsuperscript{18} Kant, \textit{Political Writings} (1991), 223.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 226.
Mankind’s alienation from nature plays out within the individual and within society, and by largely the same mechanism.

Since Kant limits his analysis to the book of Genesis, he does not describe a future fourth age of mankind in this essay. Nevertheless, the end state of Kant’s history may be inferred from his other writings and from the orientation he takes in his concluding remarks. He writes that, “The vacuity of this wish for a return to the past age of simplicity and innocence is adequately demonstrated by the foregoing account of man’s original state… he must continue to ascribe his present condition and all its hardships to himself and his own choice.” Kant is solving a problem that arises from an allegorical reading of the Old Testament with an answer derived from the New Testament. In order to bear the hardships of the modern condition, the individual must take ownership of them. The voluntary adoption of suffering is a central Christian message, exemplified by Christ’s prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Like Adam and Eve, Jesus finds himself in a garden and presented with the same problem of impending suffering. Unlike his predecessors, Jesus resigns himself to his fate, making his suffering at least potentially redemptive. Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811), an early Romantic playwright and poet, spells out the link between Christian redemptive suffering and the final stage of universal history in the closing dialogue from his aesthetic short story, “On the Marionette Theatre” [1810]: “Therefore, I said… we would have to eat again of the tree of knowledge to fall back again into a state of

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21 Matthew 26: 39: “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”
22 I Peter 2: 20-21: “But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps.”
innocence? Most certainly, he replied: That is the last chapter of the history of the world.”

According to this line of reasoning, the last stage of human development is not only to possess moral responsibility but also to desire it, to take it upon oneself deliberately.

Finally, this returns us to Schiller and “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry.” Unlike the polemics discussed above, this essay views universal history from the perspective of aesthetics and modern art. Schiller’s central aesthetic dichotomy is that between the naïve and the sentimental. In his own words, “The poet … either is nature or he will seek her. The former is the naïve, the latter the sentimental poet.” A sentimental poet, like Kant’s divided individual, is alienated from nature and reflects self-consciously on this separation. The naïve poet, on the other hand, acts directly, motivated instinctively and unreflectively. These two poetic types associate with historical eras. Classical poets such as Homer, Ovid, and Ossian are grouped as naïve, while modern poets such as Klopstock, Voltaire (in his satires), and Schiller himself are considered sentimental. Schiller notes that the chronology of poets does not line up perfectly, as he considers Shakespeare and Goethe, for instance, to be naïve artists despite their historical lateness. Classical genres such as tragedy and comedy are also coded as naïve, while satire, elegy, and idyll are considered typical of modern sentimentality.

24 Other essays by Schiller that deal with Universal History are “Something Concerning the First Human Society, According to the Guidance of the Mosaic Records” [1790] and “On the Aesthetic Education of Man” [1795]. See also “The Nature and Value of Universal History: An Inaugural Lecture” [1789], History and Theory 11 no. 3 (1972), 321-334.
25 “This path taken by the modern poets is, moreover, that along which man in general, the individual as well as the race, must pass. Nature sets him at one with himself, art divides and cleaves him in two, through the ideal he returns to unity.” 112.
26 Schiller, “Naive and Sentimental Poetry,” 110.
We can see several of the themes of universal history summarized in the quotation that served as an epigraph at the beginning of this chapter: “Let [the modern poet] not lead us backwards into our childhood … but rather lead us forward into our maturity ... Let him undertake the task of idyll … which, in a word, leads man who cannot now go back to Arcady forward to Elysium.” We see the fall from innocence as irreversible. When innocence is portrayed historically, therefore, it comes with a necessary layer of retrospection and nostalgia. We see that historical progress is likened to an education, transforming children into adults and societies into better ones. Schiller assigns art a moralizing responsibility; its purpose is to orient its audiences on the path to progress. Schiller’s “An die Freude” is an explicit orientation towards Elysium, and Beethoven’s setting of the poem in the finale of the Ninth Symphony can be seen as a response to Schiller’s moralizing imperative.27

**BEETHOVEN’S NINTH**

A piece of music might allegorize universal history through the chronological arrangement of its movements, like stories told in the panels of stained glass windows in a European cathedral. But music is equally capable of representing temporal states outside of the chronological flow of events, such as moments of anticipation or foreshadowing, or moments of nostalgia and reminiscence. A musical allegory of universal history would therefore involve a

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27 This section was long enough as it is, but quick mention should be made of G. W. F. Hegel and his relation to universal history. His works that most directly deal with the subject are the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837). Hegel’s notion of historical progress by way of dialecticism bears distinct similarities to the spiral shape of history described by earlier writers. Hegel’s central notion of *Aufheben* – a verb that paradoxically means at the same time to annul, to preserve, and to raise to a higher level – is a key example. Hegel’s dialectic is the same mechanism of progress articulated by earlier writers but replicated at more local levels of history and thought. Hegel’s philosophy of history would have a deeper impact than any other on music historians and theorists of the 19th-century, most famously A. B. Marx.
portrayal of its internal themes just as much as it would involve a chronological narrative of progress. Beethoven’s symphony has no overt programmatic association with notions of history or progress except for its relationship to the themes embodied in Schiller’s ode. But as I hope to make clear, the indirect associations lead to a compelling interpretation of the work. In this section I will point out features of the Ninth Symphony that either have been interpreted in terms of the themes of universal history in previous literature or deserve to be, as well as the purely musical features of the symphony that I believe to be relevant in comparison to Brahms’s ballades.

In 1835, a little more than a decade after the symphony’s premiere, Robert Schumann mentions the interpretation of this work as a musical representation of human history: “… the symphony expresses the story of mankind – first chaos – then the call of God ‘there shall be light’ – then the sunrise over the first human being, ravished by such splendor – in one word, the whole first chapter of the Pentateuch is in this symphony.”28 Although Schumann makes clear through his tone that he does not agree with this reading of the work, he appears to have been parodying an interpretation that was commonly-held. It is not entirely apparent which section of the symphony corresponds to which section of Schumann’s mock program. Presumably though, the initial chaos out of which God creates order corresponds to the opening of the first movement. The opening is famously ambiguous; the opening string tremolos fail to outline a clear metrical pulse and the spare open fifths (A–E) fail to define a tonality and mode (or rather, they imply an incorrect tonality, the key of A).

Many subsequent writers have picked up on the “Creation” interpretation of the Ninth symphony, including Wagner (to be discussed more with respect to the finale). Discussions of this literature review can be found in Maynard Solomon’s “The Ninth Symphony: A Search for Order,” and Ruth A. Solie’s “Beethoven as a Secular Humanist: Ideology and the Ninth Symphony in Nineteenth-Century Criticism.”

Although Schumann claims the symphony expresses “the story of mankind,” his reading apparently stops with the book of Genesis. Nevertheless, the Ninth might best be interpreted as universal history and not simply as a Creation myth. Otto Baensch reads the Ninth in these terms more explicitly than other writers, viewing the symphony’s finale as a representation of the perfected moral state at the end of history (i.e., Elysium) as construed by Schiller. For Michael C. Tusa, the finale also represents a “precis of music history up to Beethoven’s time,” and his article frequently derives its interpretations from Schiller’s historically-informed opposition of Arcady and Elysium. This chapter adopts a viewpoint consonant with those of Baensch, Tusa, and others – that the Ninth

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30 Baensch, Aufbau und Sinn, (1930), 5, 47, 53. As Maynard Solomon writes, “The story of the journey from Arcadia to Elysium may have already been implicitly merged with another narrative, one that traces the route from Lenz’s Creation … to Cataclysm, to the end of history.” Solomon, “The Ninth Symphony,” 12.

represents, if not a narrow programmatic depiction of universal history, at least an arena for the
interplay of its main themes.\textsuperscript{32}

For brevity’s sake, I will focus the discussion of the Ninth symphony on those large-scale
tonal and contrapuntal features that the symphony shares with Brahms’s ballades. This is
summarized as a motivic voice-leading pattern in Figure 2.1. The first part of Figure 2.1A shows
an ascending chromatic 5-6 sequence that connects a D minor triad to a C\textsubscript{♭} major triad. These
triads represent the key areas of the symphony’s tonic and tonal extreme, respectively. This
sequence is the most common way that Beethoven links the two key areas together (see Figures
2.2 and 2.9 later on in the chapter). I am calling this sequential relationship of triads (and their
associated key areas) the centrifugal phase of the motivic sequence, after Schoenberg’s notion of
centrifugal forces that tonicize distant tonal regions\textsuperscript{33}. The sequence also has a centripetal phase,

\textsuperscript{32} Tusa, “Noch Einmal” (1999), 113.
\textsuperscript{33} For further explorations of the \textit{Grundgestalt} concept and Schoenberg’s use of the terms
“centripetal” and “centrifugal,” see as examples Patricia Carpenter, “‘Grundgestalt’ as Tonal
Function,” \textit{Music Theory Spectrum} 5 (Spring, 1983): 15-38; and Severine Neff, “Aspects of
‘Grundgestalt’ in Schoenberg’s First String Quartet, Op. 7,” \textit{Theory and Practice} 9 nos. 1/2
where the pattern reverses to a descending 6-5 sequence (also shown in Figure 2.1A) which reconfirms the tonic tonal region. This connects B major (enharmonic C♭ major) to the tonic D major by way of B minor. Whereas the key areas and sequential patterning of the centrifugal phase dominates the symphony’s first three movements, the centripetal phase is found in the finale (see Figures 2.10 and 2.12 later on in the chapter).

In addition, the characteristic chromatic notes of both phases of the motivic sequence are refracted in diverse ways across the piece – not just as contrapuntal steps within the motivic sequence itself but also independently. Each move in the motivic sequence highlights a stepwise dyad. The other notes are preserved as common tones between adjacent triads in the sequence. The transition between D minor and B♭ major triads, for instance, highlights the stepwise dyad A/B♭. Note that all the notes that result from these transitions can be related by step to chord tones of the tonic triad, and that the sequence results in different (i.e., competing) chromatic and diatonic versions of each stepwise relationship. Figure 2.1B shows the motivic dyads as pitch-class motives within the principle key area. Together, the motivic sequence and the chromatic ramifications of each stepwise motive form a motivic voice-leading pattern.

Figure 2.2A shows the beginning of the secondary theme group in m. 80 of the first movement. The secondary key area for the movement is B♭ major, and the relationship between the tonic and secondary key area of the exposition can be viewed as a large-scale (if somewhat obvious) instance of the motivic 5-6 pattern. The theme itself outlines the interval of an

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ascending tenth, from D\textsubscript{4} to F\textsubscript{5}. The ascent is decorated with melodic appoggiaturas that bring into focus some of the stepwise motives – the G/F dyad and the B\textsubscript{b}/A dyad. The shape of this theme and its foregrounding of specific dyads ascending beyond an octave is characteristic of several subsequent themes throughout the symphony. This material is transposed to the key of D major within the recapitulation beginning in m. 345, as shown in Figure 2.2B. This interval of transposition by major third results in the foregrounding of different versions of the motivic dyads. The appoggiaturas that previously articulated G/F now articulate B/A, an altered version of the B\textsubscript{b}/A dyad encountered elsewhere in the work. As we will see, the structural interval of transposition between the exposition and recapitulation naturally calls attention to other tonal relationships from temporally disparate locations in the work.

Figure 2.3 shows the transition into the elaborative middle section of the secondary theme group beginning in m. 102. This involves a modulation that makes explicit use of the centrifugal
phase of the motivic 5-6 sequence. The triads of the sequence (and their inversions) are annotated above the score. This modulatory passage leads into a thematic statement in the key of B major (enharmonic C♭) which is the movement’s tonal extreme.

Figure 2.4A shows the calm B major theme, while Figure 2.4B shows the theme transposed to the key of E♭ major during the recapitulation. Insofar as the recapitulation should bring the structurally-dissonant key areas of the exposition into closer relationship to the tonic, the key of E♭ major is closer to the tonic both in terms of its nearness on the circle of fifths or key signature, as well as in its thematic contextual relationship to d minor on the centrifugal phase of the motivic sequence (see Figure 2.1A from earlier).

35 This is Edward T. Cone’s famous “sonata principle,” given in Musical Form and Musical Performance (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 76-77.
The next subsection of the secondary theme group, beginning in m. 120, also sets certain of the pc-motives in relief. Beethoven stages a kind of competition between G♭ and G♮ as accented upper neighbors to F (Figure 2.5A). These are the chromatic and diatonic versions of 6 in the key of B♭, respectively. Within the exposition, G wins out and the passage continues building momentum until a series of climactic outbursts confirm the key of B♭ major. Within the recapitulation, however, the minor version of 6 wins out (in this case B♭ versus B♮, another motivic dyad from Figure 2.1B) and the rest of the secondary and closing material remains in the tonic key of D minor (Figure 2.5B).

**Figure 2.4.** Beethoven: Symphony no. 9, I. A). mm. 108-111; B) mm. 375-378.
There are fewer specific musical features of relevance within the second movement, but its relationship to the “story of mankind” is worthy of speculation. The piece alternates between a d minor scherzo and D major trio which can be interpreted respectively as the cultured and pastoral aspects of human society (or, in Kant’s terms, the competing manifestations of Cain and Abel in human society). The main theme of the scherzo is fugal – a reference to the learned style. Beethoven depicts a “societal discord” between the members of the orchestra when, in m. 177, the bassoons initiate a false recapitulation of the main fugal theme in the incorrect key of e minor. Slowly other families of instruments enter the texture, but the timpani, tuned to the chord members of the d minor triad, are incapable of participating. The timpani object by blasting on octave F’s beginning in mm. 195 until the rest of the orchestra adjusts, moving through the key of a minor and F major to accommodate the timpani. That is the “joke” of this scherzo, and the butt of the joke is the self-dividedness and self-referentiality that Kant and Schiller would count
as a symptom of the modern condition. The trio section, by contrast, is a clear example of the pastoral topic and Schiller’s “naïve” impulse. The main motive of the trio, which ascends through a third stepwise, anticipates the contour and key area of the “An die Freude” theme in the finale.

The third movement, in the key of B♭, opens with a two-measure introduction that revisits some of the motivic stepwise dyads from the first movement (especially the ascending, appoggiatura-laden secondary theme, shown earlier in Figure 2.2). Beethoven reveals the movement’s primary registral space and timbral palette, as well as some of the most important motivic chromaticism for the work – the G♭ neighbor note in the cellos in m. 2 (Figure 2.6).

The form of the movement is an alternating pair of themes and variations. When the first theme nears its end, Beethoven achieves a modulation to D major, the key of the second theme, by resolving the dominant of B♭ chromatically in contrary motion. In m. 23, the clarinet’s E♭ resolves down to D, but the cello’s F “resolves” upward to F♯, supporting a D major triad in first inversion (Figure 2.7). The bass changes halfway through m. 24 to put the D triad in root

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position as tonic support for the upcoming statement of the second theme. The bass’s F – F♯ motion is a chromatic reinterpretation of the F/G♭ dyad from the movement’s introduction.

Figure 2.8 shows the second theme, which is partially designed around a scheme of appoggiaturas reminiscent of the movement’s introduction and the second theme of the first movement. The primary dyad embedded in this theme is G – F♯. Notice the way in which Beethoven has prepared the key of D major using the reinterpretation of G♭ as F♯ within this particular stepwise dyad. In the symphony as a whole, the only place where the key of D major is approached simply as the parallel major of d minor is in the trio of the second movement. More typical is to treat D major as consonant support and elaboration of a bass F♯ (as in the explosion of D major in first inversion at the recapitulation of the first movement, m. 301), which is itself approached as a reinterpretation of lowered ▼6 in the key of VI (B♭). There are easier ways of getting to the parallel major, but Beethoven’s chosen path in the slow movement sets the motivic relationships of the stepwise dyads into comparatively sharp relief.
The way back to B♭ major also highlights the G – F dyad. As Figure 2.9 shows, the flutes first resolve the tendency tone G to F♯ in m. 40, but in m. 41 G resolves surprisingly to F♮ (Figure 2.9). The voice-leading of the retransition resolves the dominant of D major with chromatic contrary motion between outer voices (G – F and A – B♭) in a manner parallel to the chromatic transition that began the second theme. The emergence and retreat of D major in this movement is an instance of Steven Laitz’s “submediant complex,” a composing out of G♭ as lowered 6 in the key of B♭ major. This is closely related to the compositional play with G♭ from passages in the key of B♭ within the first movement (see Figures 2.3 and 2.5A). The retransition ends in m. 42 with the same F dominant chord that left off at m. 23 of the main theme.
After the first variation of the primary theme (mm. 43-64), the first variation of the second theme begins in m. 65 but now adjusted to the key of G major. This results in the retransition leading not back to the tonic but to E♭ major. This “false recap” and its modulatory connection to the beginning of the second variation of the primary theme is shown in Figure 2.10. As with the case of D major and minor seen previously, there are far more pedestrian ways of connecting the keys of E♭ and B♭ than the tonal path that Beethoven has chosen, but this path highlights some of the key sequential motions in the motivic voice-leading pattern (Figure 2.1A). As the reduction in Figure 2.10 shows, Beethoven reaches the movement’s tonal extreme of C♭ major by way of E♭ minor, and, again, a composing out of the note G♭. At the end of the passage, a G♭ dominant chord is prolonged in mm. 97-98 which resolves as if it were an augmented sixth sonority in the tonic key in m. 99 at the onset of the second variation of the primary theme.

Figure 2.10. Beethoven: Symphony no. 9, III, mm. 83-94 and sequential reduction.
The finale of the Ninth Symphony famously combines the resources of the orchestra with a full choir and vocal soloists in a setting of Schiller’s “An die Freude.” For Richard Wagner, the dramatized conflict between instrumental and vocal music found in the finale of the Ninth Symphony evokes one particular aspect of the Christian myth of Creation. He writes: “The instruments represent the rudimentary organs of Creation and Nature; what they express can never be clearly defined or put into words, for they reproduce the primitive feelings themselves, those feelings which issued from the chaos of the first Creation, when maybe there was not as yet one human being to take them up into his heart.”\(^{37}\) It becomes clear that for Wagner, the programmatic moment of creation is not the beginning of the first movement but the first entrance of the vocal parts in the finale, with the baritone recitative on the words, “O Freunde, nicht diese Töne” (m. 216). A few years later, Wagner continues this line of thought: “Then a human voice, with the clear, sure utterance of articulate words, confronts the din of instruments … With these words Light breaks on Chaos; a sure and definite mode of utterance is won…”\(^{38}\) Wagner seems to be building his interpretation on the Creation myth from the first chapter of the Gospel of John, and the concept of the word as *Logos*, the force that produces order out of chaos.

The baritone recitative resonates with the themes of universal history for another reason. The recitative is preceded by a cycling through of themes from the previous movements. These themes are then “dismissed,” insofar as they are interrupted by the cello and bass recitative and do not return. These quotations are a symptom of self-consciousness, and they have a precedent in the transition into the finale of the Piano Sonata op. 101, where the pastoral character of the


quotation lends credence to its interpretation as a backward glance to Arcady that is rejected in
favor of a forward path. Stephen Hinton has pointed out several aspects of self-consciousness in
the finale of the Ninth, including Beethoven’s setting of the word “diese” in the baritone’s phrase
of rejection. The two syllables of this word fall on an appoggiatura B♭ – A, one of the motivic
dyads from Figure 2.1B. Hinton convincingly compares this appoggiatura to the later instances
of the B♮ – A version of the dyad within the D major portions of the finale. One interpretation
is that these tones specifically (“diese Töne”) represent what is being rejected.

The popular (if contentious) view of the form of the finale as a four-movement
“symphony in miniature” also corroborates an interpretation of the movement as depicting
heightened self-consciousness. As Tusa points out, the peculiar ordering of the interior
movements of the Ninth – with the scherzo second and the slow movement third – brings this
self-referential patterning into starker relief. The finale does not mirror a typical four-
movement plan in miniature, but instead the particular plan of this symphony. Within Schiller’s
aesthetic paradigm, self-consciousness is symptomatic of modern sentimentality, but it is also a
prerequisite for obtaining an ideally integrated self-harmony. Seen in this way, the baritone
soloist’s rejection of the previous music and deliberate adoption of the path toward integration is

22 no. 1 (Summer, 1998), 63.
40 Hinton cites the passage that I have included in Figure 13 later on in the text.
41 Baensch, Aufbau und Sinn (1930), 20 n.1; Charles Rosen, The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart,
Beethoven (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 439-440; Ernest F. Livingstone, “Das
Formproblem des 4. Satzes in Beethovens 9. Symphonie,” in Gesellschaft für Musikforschung:
Bericht über den internationalen musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress Bonn 1970, ed. Carl
Dahlhaus, Hans Joachim Marx, Magda Marx-Weber, and Günther Massenkeil (Kassel:
Bärenreiter, 1971), 494-497.
42 Tusa, “Noch einmal,” (1999), Table 2B, 123; 125-126.
a text-painting of Schiller’s Elysium and a response to the “call to purpose” of the horns at the
day of the penultimate movement (mvmt. III, mm. 121 and 131).

As has been mentioned previously, the finale makes use of the centripetal phase of the
motivic 6-5 sequence – relating the tonal extreme B major to the tonic D major by way of B
As Figure 2.11 shows the connecting passage that leads into segment 7 of Tusa’s 11-segment
breakdown of the finale. In terms of the “symphony in miniature” scheme, this lies near the end
of what would be the scherzo section. The horns’ repeated F♯s support statements of the head
motive of the Joy theme first in B major, then B minor, and finally in D major when the voices
reenter fortissimo for the concluding portion of the scherzo section. The expressive effect is of
losing one’s way and then a surprising homecoming. It goes without saying that the transition
from B major to B minor highlights the motivic dyad D♯ (E♭) – D♭, and the transition from B
minor to D major highlights B – A.
Beethoven uses the same sequential connection to smooth over the boundary between formal sections beginning in m. 841 (Figure 2.12). This is the transition out of the soloists’ cadenza in the key of B major during the mini finale (Tusa’s segment 10). The local B major tonic unexpectedly gives way to its parallel minor on beat 3 of m. 841. The threat of closure on the parallel minor is avoided as the Bass soloist moves from B to A on the downbeat of measure 842, showing a D major 6/4 chord to be the actual goal of the phrase. As the *Poco Allegro* section begins (Tusa’s segment 11), the B – A dyad reiterates itself in the strings and accelerates as a subversion of the convention of the written-out cadential trill.

As the work’s final big breakthrough, this moment is noteworthy for the fact that Beethoven chooses not to employ a conventional tonal relationship for connecting his formal sections. It is difficult to even imagine a dominant/tonic connection here that would not sound completely trite. Instead, he places the full formal and expressive emphasis of this critical passage on the centripetal motivic sequence from Figure 2.1A. In this way Beethoven illustrates one final time the progression from the key of B major to D major by way of B minor – keys that have by now accrued heavy programmatic significance over the course of the symphony.
Brahms’s Ballades

Brahms had Beethoven and Schiller on his mind during the summer of 1854. He had recently heard the Ninth for the first time on a trip to Cologne with Julius Otto Grimm (the dedicatee of op. 10) in late March earlier that year. Brahms is known to have read the correspondence between Goethe and Schiller “almost to pieces,” and the diary of aphorisms Brahms kept at this time contains a number of quotations from Schiller. During this summer, Brahms composed the ballades and he began work on the Piano Concerto op. 15, another work that has been analyzed through the prism of the influence of the Ninth Symphony. William Kinderman notices several points of similarity between Brahms’s ballade op. 10 no. 1 and the first movement of the Ninth. Both works are in the key of d minor and have an initial emphasis on the sound of the open fifth, A – E. The secondary key area of B♭ major – and its structural and expressive antagonism toward the minor tonic – is “especially characteristic” of both works. Figure 2.13 shows the motivic sequence of op. 10: a chromatic ascending 5-6 sequence. Each of the four triads serves as the tonic triad of one of the ballades, and they are arranged in chronological order.

The motivic sequence of the op. 10 ballades can be seen as a condensation of the one outlined for Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony (compare Figure 2.13 and Figure 2.1A). Both sequences connect D minor triads to B major triads using 5-6 contrapuntal motion. But whereas Beethoven arrives at C♭ (enharmonic B) by passing through several intermediate steps, Brahms’s sequence takes a shortcut through the parallel major. In fact, except for the initial D minor triad, the sequence in Figure 2.13 is a retrograde of the shorter centripetal phase of Beethoven’s sequence in 2.1A path from B major to D major found in the symphony’s finale). This sequence produces the same motivic stepwise dyads as those in Beethoven’s Symphony (Figure 2.1B), but Brahms elects to emphasize some more than others (with particular attention given to the D/D♯ dyad). Finally, given the expectations of the symphonic genre, Beethoven’s pattern is tonally closed, but no such genre expectations constrain Brahms’s piano cycle. Whereas Beethoven’s symphony returns to the major tonic D major, Brahms’s sequence leads outwards from the initial tonic D minor without returning to it, leading to a tonally progressive scheme.

Brahms placed an epigraph above the beginning of op. 10 no. 1: Nach der schottischen Ballade “Edward” (in Herder’s "Stimmen der Völker"). The ballad is a dialogue between a Scottish knight, Edward, and his mother. As the dialogue reveals, Edward has killed his father at his mother’s request. The dialogue ends when Edward curses his mother, rescinds his inheritance, and consigns himself to self-imposed exile. This story has the archetypal outline of a

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47 “‘After the Scottish ballad ‘Edward,’ (from Herder’s The Voices of the People).”
fall event and shares a number of thematic features with the biblical story of Cain and Abel. As a starting point for a programmatic reading of op. 10 no. 1, the “Edward” program pinpoints a tragic fall from grace in the distant historical past, and it reverberates with all of the distinguishing features of the transition from innocence to self-alienation that is thematic to presentations of universal history.

Figure 2.14 shows the second phrase of op. 10 no. 1, commonly interpreted as Edward’s portion of the dialogue in response to the initial questions of his mother. Interestingly, Brahms demarcates the dialogic boundary with double bar-lines. Although this appears to be a five-measure phrase in common time, a better understanding is indicated by Brahms’s phrasing slurs – it is instead a four-measure phrase in an implied quintuple time. The analytical reduction at the bottom of Figure 2.14 shows the sequential harmonic pattern underlying this passage that resembles several sequential successions of key areas in the first movement of the Ninth, particularly in the development section, which reaches its tonal extreme in C minor by way of G minor. Early on in his first ballade, Brahms revisits the most important key areas of Beethoven’s first movement and highlights the same thematic emphasis on E♭ (notice that the sequence in Figure 2.14 incorporates E♭ as a chord member of the E♭ and C minor triads).
Figure 2.15 is a linear reduction of the first half of the ballade’s B section (mm. 27-41).

This passage is characterized by a continuous crescendo and wedge-like contrary motion outwards into the piano’s highest and lowest registers (the registers have been adjusted in Figure 2.15 to fit legibly on the staff). The section begins with a stable sense of D major, and in m. 31 the harmony of B minor initiates harmonic motion away from the tonic. The first perceived point of arrival is at the B major harmony in mm. 37-38 that is expanded by a voice-exchange. The contrary motion continues, however, driving the music back to D major with fortissimo (and “grandioso”) hammering. This exploratory succession of chromatic key areas is the first instance of the opus’s motivic sequence (recall Figure 2.13). At m. 42, D major gives way to D minor, and the midpoint of the B section finds itself suddenly back in the global tonic key area. The second half of the B section is also governed by sequential logic, as Brahms brings back material from the A section (Figure 2.16). The melody beginning in m. 44 is the same material shown earlier in Figure 2.14, Edward’s part of the dialogue, but made into an apotheosis (and, once again, demarcated with an analytical double-bar line).

The second half of the B section leads away from the tonic D minor by the same sequence as shown in Figure 2.14, tonicizing in turn the triads of D minor, B♭ major, G minor, E♭ major, and C minor. The fortissimo dynamic continues until m. 55 when Brahms indicates a
diminuendo and the key of Eb begins to stabilize as a potential resting point. This passage bears a marked resemblance to the first movement of the Ninth Symphony, where a crescendo (beginning in m. 295) builds up tension within the development section and the energy is released on an extremely condensed reprise of the main theme, fortissimo, eventually dying away in a gesture of exhaustion (ending in m. 339). Edward’s material in the ballade, which seemed to have been brought back too early during the B section, does not return at all upon the reprise of the A section.

None of the subsequent ballades have programmatic subheadings, as op. 10 no. 1 does. Instead, in building a hermeneutic interpretation I would advocate for a reading of the ballades that continues the archetypal story of the Romantic wanderer – Cain in exile – where the Edward ballad leaves off.⁴⁸ Op. 10 no. 2 begins with a gemütlich lullaby topic. Relative to the Edward

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⁴⁸ Along these lines, see William Kinderman, “Wandering Archetypes in Schubert’s Instrumental Music,” 19th-Century Music 21 no. 2, Franz Schubert: Bicentenary Essays (Autumn, 1997): 208-
program, this may be interpreted as an attempted reestablishment of the positive maternal force, after the falling out between Edward and his mother at the end of the ballad proper. More generally, though, it is enough to point out that even without a specific program, nostalgia for lost innocence is paradigmatic of the lullaby topic. 49 The expressive world of op. 10 no. 2 is therefore exactly appropriate for portraying the themes of the middle, alienated stage of universal history in the wake of the fall event.

This ballade is composed in a symmetrical arch form: ABCBA. Figure 2.17 shows incipits from the A, B, and C sections that illustrate the motivic sequence composed out within the work’s large-scale tonal design. Remembering that the tonic triads of the four ballades form the pattern D minor – D major – B minor – B major, we can see that Brahms has composed out his motivic sequence at multiple levels in the second ballade – at the background relationship between ballades, at the middleground relationship between A, B, and C sections, and, as shown in Figure 2.18, at the foreground level of the A section. Figure 2.18 shows the beginning of the

second phrase of the work, where the sequence highlights the change from B minor to B major and the melodic difference between D♮ and D♯ within the motivic dyad.

An early *Abschrift* of the third ballade in B minor, partly in Brahms’s handwriting, indicates that the piece was originally to be subtitled “scherzino,” and the work is ternary in the manner of a scherzo and trio. Ryan McClelland mentions this piece as an example of the kind of minor-mode scherzo writing, typical of Brahms’s early career, that features the kind of Romantic irony associated with the writings of Jean Paul, Novalis, and others. Just as the scherzo of the Ninth Symphony was the locus of representations of self-alienation in that work, op. 10 no. 3 also serves as the nadir of self-alienation for op. 10. Figure 2.19 shows the opening of the third ballade.

The three left-hand fifths that serve as an introduction establish a metrical accent on the last eighth-note of the measure – one eighth-note off from the notated meter. Taken alone, these fifths sound as if they are downbeats. This apparently stable metrical interpretation is

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50 The coda of the second ballade returns to this dyadic conflict, when the Eb of a passing C minor 6/3 chord grates jarringly against the pedal D.
Figure 2.19. Brahms: Ballade, op. 10 no. 3, 1-4.

contradicted upon the entry of the right-hand material in m. 3. This is the scherzino’s “little joke;” the pianist’s left and right hands are consistently out of phase for the majority of the A section. With the opening of the third ballade, Brahms thus treats the concept of self-dividedness thematically – embodying it for the performer and making it both audible and visible for the audience.

Figure 2.20 shows the transition into the ballade’s B section. The transition begins after the close of the A section in F♯ major, the key of the dominant. The rhythm abruptly slows to one articulated pulse per measure and the harmony oscillates between A♯ minor and F♯ major triads. The only difference between these two chords is the motivic dyad E♯ (enharmonic F♮) – F♯. The A♯ minor triad is tonally disorienting, since it implies a diatonic iii – I progression in the key of F♯ major while F♯ was approached as the dominant of B minor only seconds earlier. This new orientation opens up space for the theme of the B section in the key of D♯ minor, the beginning of which is shown in Figure 2.20. James Parakilas describes this highly evocative middle section as, “…choral singing in some archaic style – not a style in which ballades are likely to have been sung, but perhaps one evoking the same lost world that the name ‘ballad’ evokes.”

Archaism detected by Parakilas is partly attributable to the vaguely modal harmony; the articulation of D♯ minor as the tonic occurs only at the half-cadences on A♯ and authentic cadences in D♯ minor at the ends of phrases. This unusual selection of #iii as the key of the B section can be explained as a middle-ground recurrence of the D – D♯ motivic dyad (D being the natural form of 3 in the key of B minor). Figure 2.21 shows the D – D♯ dyad at play in the final cascade that leads into the close of the reprise of the A section. D is spelled enharmonically as C♯ and clashes vertically as a series of accented appoggiaturas with the D♯ chord tones – first in the right hand on the downbeat of m. 113 and three more times between the two hands as the

Figure 2.20. Brahms: Ballade op. 10 no. 3, 38’-42.

Figure 2.21. Brahms: Ballade op. 10 no. 3, mm. 113-124.
cascade descends. The slower, chordal material that had formed the transition into the B section now serves as a coda forming a highly unusual iii – I cadence in the key of B major.

The main theme of the last ballade, in B major, puts the D – D♯ antagonism into its most succinct form of op. 10 (Figure 2.22). The melodic D♮ of m. 1 functions as a C♯♯ incomplete neighbor to the D♯ of m. 2. Brahms treats this as a kind of thesis statement, or Grundgestalt, for the rest of the piece. This recontextualization of the D♮ – D♯ motivic dyad inverts the relationship found in the earlier pieces, where D♮ was the diatonic component and D♯/E♭ was chromatic (see for instance Figures 2.14-2.18). The typical configuration of a Grundgestalt is that it presents and then develops a musical idea by prefiguring thematic developments later on in the piece.54 The summarizing chromatic gesture of op. 10 no. 4 implicates a slightly different narrative trajectory – in addition to the narrative of a seed growing into future developments, this chromaticism is also a Rückblick, or backward glance, that reviews and reinterprets the chromatic tendencies of the previous music.

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54 “Consider the cross-relation – and by that I mean simply more than one form of the same scale-degree. If such a cross-relation occurred in an initial theme (and one often does), Schoenberg looked to it for the source of imbalance.” Patricia Carpenter, “Schoenberg’s Tonal Body,” Theory and Practice 30 (2005): 43.
Figure 2.23A shows the beginning of the second strain of the binary A section. Measure 17 is identical to measure 1, but the second strain departs from the course laid out by the first strain when the melodic D♮ functions as the lowered 3 initiating a phrase in the parallel minor, rather than resolving upward to D♯ as in m. 2. The fourth ballade overall forms an unusual kind of rondo form: A (1-46) B (47-72) A’ (73-134) B’ (135-148). The A’ section is 15 measures longer than the initial A section due to an irregular phrase insertion: a sarabande in the key of B minor that is sandwiched between the varied reprises of the first and second strains of the A material in mm. 99-114. In addition, Brahms does not reprise the return of the first strain that had earlier rounded off the binary form in mm. 27-46, but instead restates some of the sarabande material. The reprise of the second strain, shown in Figure 2.23B, incorporates the quarter-note/half-note rhythm of the sarabande that surrounds it.

William Horne and William Kinderman both point out the programmatic significance of the sarabande material. Horne argues that this piece, along with its companion op. 10 no. 3, originated as part of a set of character pieces relating to E.T.A Hoffmann’s Kater Murr and the
character of Kappelmeister Johannes Kreisler. The sarabande plays an important role in one passage of that book, when Kreisler’s uncle reportedly danced a minuet to the music of a sarabande. In their correspondences, Brahms referred to this portion of the piece as a “Menuett or ?” while Joachim described it as a sarabande. Just as with the dialogic phrases from the “Edward” ballade, Brahms visually segregates the sarabande passages from the material upon which it intrudes with double bar lines. The piece thereby suggests the beginnings of its own analysis.

Figure 2.24 shows the very end of op. 10 no. 4. The varied reprise of the B section now occurs with a key signature of B minor. Although visually the piece ends in the key of B minor, the persistent applied D♯s suggest to the ear that the piece is indeed coming to a close in the tonic major, albeit with modally-mixed plagal colorations. This problematizes the relationship between D and D♯. Which version of ∆ is hierarchically superior to the other? Are the D♯s an instance of a tierce de Picardy within the key of B minor (in which case D♮ subordinates D♯), or is the emphasis applied to the major tonic triad enough to persuade the ear that the piece has conceptually returned to the opening key of B major (in which case D♯ subordinates D♮)? The end of the opus is therefore ambivalent with respect to the competition between the components of the primary motivic dyad.

This ambivalent ending represents an attempted integration of the work’s contradictory elements – in this case the competing major and minor versions of the tonic triad, along with all the expressive significance that depends on that basic distinction. This is a fitting place to end an

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allegory of universal history; the final ballade does not return exactly to the major mode where it began but instead it incorporates its opposite in a dialectical spiral. Continuing the story of Edward into the last ballade (as the development of a generic musical protagonist or persona), this can be seen as a musical representation of the integration of the contradictory elements of the self – the final stage of moral development in the universal history of Schiller and Kant. In addition, insofar as the note D is a token for the tonic key areas of the first two ballades, this integration includes the literal musical past of op. 10 no. 4.

Figure 2.25 shows the large-scale tonal design of op. 10. Unlike Beethoven’s symphony, which moves from tonic minor to tonic major, the ballades have a truly tonally progressive design. This design constrains our possible interpretations of the allegory of universal history in op. 10 insofar as we accept the large-scale tonality as tone painting of certain expressive states. The tonal trajectory of Beethoven’s Ninth, from D minor to D major, corresponds with what
Robert Hatten has called a “tragic-to-triumphant” expressive trajectory. It is clear to see how the parallel major can be interpreted as a goal or telos in an expressive narrative, but it is not so clear what kind of analogous expressive relationship B major would have with respect to the initial D minor.

Figure 2.25 construes the tonal relationships of the op. 10 cycle diachronically, as seen retrospectively from the perspective of the last ballade. The fundamental structure therefore transpires entirely within the final piece. When seen from this retrospective viewpoint, the background structures of the previous ballades are relegated to middleground events. As was mentioned previously, the ordering of the tonic key areas for each piece replicates the ascending chromatic 5-6 sequence from Figure 2.13 – D minor and D major as part of the 5-phase, and B minor and B major as the 6-phase. The contrapuntal relationship of the previous ballades to the final one is as consonant support for the modally-mixed Kopfton D♮.

Contrasting this tonal/expressive scheme with its putative model in Beethoven’s symphony, we can discern at least two creative misprisions on the part of Brahms. First,

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whereas Beethoven emphasizes societal integration as the goal of development, Brahms’s goal is personal integration. This follows naturally from the works’ respective genres. The subdued lyricism of op. 10 no. 4, which never rises above a *mezzo forte* dynamic for its entire 148 measures, appears infinitely more private compared with the finale of the Ninth, with its calls for universal brotherhood and “*diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt*” Second, whereas Beethoven’s Ninth modulates outward to the tonal extreme of C♭/B major before winding back towards the major tonic in the finale, Brahms’s tonally deviating scheme carries the listener to the same tonal extreme (and by largely the same motivic sequential patterning) without returning to the initial tonic. Both tonal trajectories may be interpreted as exhibiting Abrams’s spiral shape, since Beethoven returns to his initial tonic, which is, however, radically transformed by mode, while Brahms instantiates the spiral integration by subsuming the chromatic note D♮ into the closing tonal region. But the D major conclusion of Beethoven’s Ninth represents a definitive acquisition of the teleological goal, while in Brahms’s miniatures B major could hardly be seen as the end of the process of tonal development. Very generally, then, we might conclude that Beethoven’s response to Schiller’s moralizing imperative is public and complete while Brahms’s is introspective and ambivalent.

**CONCLUSION**

The analysis of Brahms’s op. 10 ballades in terms of motivic voice-leading reveals salient design aspects of Brahms’s cycle that may go unnoticed with other methodologies. It shows that the tonal relationships between pieces in the cycle, when construed as abstract voice-leadings between their tonic triads, play out also within individual works. The most atomistic level of these voice-leadings is the level of individual motivic dyads, which manifest as pitch-class
motives that Brahms singles out for thematic and expressive treatment. Perhaps most importantly, the motivic 5-6 sequence provides a scaffolding for an expressive/hermeneutic interpretation of the entire cycle and specifies the contribution of each piece to a coordinated expressive trajectory. In the case of op. 10, this involved an interpretation in terms of universal history and its concomitant themes of lost innocence, self-consciousness, and individual and societal integration. In subsequent chapters of the dissertation, the hermeneutical importance of the motivic voice-leading patterns are not nearly as pronounced as in op. 10.

The foregoing interpretation will hopefully also contribute to the place of the ballades in music criticism. The “Edward” ballade has received ample scholarly attention, partly owing to its position as one of Brahms’s early instrumental works with an explicit program. The other ballades have resisted easy classification. James Parakilas, in his book *Ballades Without Words*, writes that, “Brahms may have been using the title that properly belonged to the first piece as a solution to the problem of what to call the whole set, even at the price of mislabeling the others to a greater or lesser extent.”60 This conclusion is understandable, since op. 10 nos. 2-4 hardly evoke the ancient, bardic narrative tone or topical world of op. 10 no. 1, nor do they evoke the solo piano ballades by Chopin and Liszt that would have been the immediate historical precedents for the genre expectations of op. 10.61 Nevertheless, all four of the ballades have earned their titles – not by each illustrating a different epic narrative of the ancient past, but by together mediating the diegetic distance between the ancient, tragic world of the “Edward” poem and the modern world of the salon or parlor in which the pieces would have been performed.

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60 Parakilas, *Ballades Without Words* (1992), 139.
They don’t recount any individual historical program, but the program of historical progress itself. In this sense, Brahms’s epigraph indicating the “Edward” ballad as interpretive source informs the entire set of pieces, and not only op. 10 no. 1.\footnote{George S. Bozarth came to the same conclusion, although, frustratingly, he did not elaborate on his reasoning. “In the Ballades, Op. 10 ... the Scottish ballad ‘Edward’ exercised a powerful influence over musical events even beyond the first Andante.” “Brahms’s Lieder ohne Worte: The ‘Poetic’ Andantes of the Piano Sonatas,” in Brahms Studies: Analytical and Historical Perspectives, edited by George S. Bozarth (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 376.}

Finally, this analysis is a modest supplement to recent Brahms reception by writers like Reinhold Brinkmann and Margaret Notley, who have written on the connection between notions of music-historical lateness, personal late style, and the “autumnal topos” in the music of Brahms.\footnote{Reinhold Brinkmann, Late Idyll: The Second Symphony of Johannes Brahms, translated by Peter Palmer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); “While late style and music-historic lateness are based on different assumptions, both concepts offer valid frameworks for considering Brahms’s later music and can be brought into illuminating alignment, each conditioning the other.” Margaret Notley, Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.} Nicole Grimes has recently broached these topics in her article, “Brahms’s Ascending Circle: Hölderlin, Schicksalslied, and the Process of Recollection,” where she also brings to bear M.H. Abrams’s spiral metaphor as a tool for understanding Brahms’s large scale tonal planning.\footnote{Nicole Grimes, “Brahms’s Ascending Circle: Hölderlin, Schicksalslied, and the Process of Recollection,” Nineteenth-Century Music Review 11 no. 1 (June 2014), 57-92.}

Although his career may be divided into style periods, the last of which must necessarily be chronologically “late,” expressions of retrospection, nostalgia, and autumn are characteristic of Brahms’s output across his entire career, including the early op. 10 set. Universal history provides a framework for understanding historical lateness (not just musical lateness) as it was constructed and aestheticized in the writings of some of Brahms’s favorite thinkers and as embodied in some of his music.
CHAPTER 3. VOICE-LEADING COMPATIBILITY IN THE OP. 117 INTERMEZZOS

In the previous chapter, we investigated one of Brahms’s early piano cycles and the ways in which an analysis focused on motivic voice-leading could support an expressive interpretation of the cycle. The subject of the current chapter is Brahms’s op. 117, a cycle of three intermezzos composed near the end of the composer’s career in 1892. Although some of the chapter will deal with the expressive design of the cycle as a whole, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate Brahms’s compositional play with motivic voice-leading at both large and small scales within the work. As such, discussions of expressive interpretation will be largely a side effect of these motivic considerations rather than ends in themselves, and I will conclude with those thoughts at the end of the chapter.

As a cycle, the three pieces of op. 117 do not demonstrate obvious tonal coherence. The first piece, in E♭ major, may be related to the second, in B♭ minor, as tonic and minor dominant, respectively. The third piece, in C# minor, may be seen to relate to the second as an enharmonic respelling of the parallel minor of the relative major (D♭ minor). Neither of these are very strong tonal relationships, and any attempt to rationalize the tonal relationship between the first and third intermezzi would be even more strained. If we instead focus our attention on the abstract voice-leading between the tonic triads of the adjacent pieces, as in Figure 3.1, then a more coherent picture emerges.

The descending 6-5 sequence shown in Figure 3.1 does not occur literally within any of the three intermezzi – as I stated in previous chapters, the motivic voice-leading can be abstract and removed from the musical surface. Nevertheless, this contrapuntal pattern is present in partial form for many of the most salient passages in op. 117. This pattern lends coherence to local chromatic details in the form of individual stepwise dyads. As we will see, the passage in the cycle that most closely resembles the voice-leading in Figure 3.1 is the coda of the final piece, which acts as a kind of summary of the work’s tonal/contrapuntal journey. The voice-leading pattern in Figure 3.1 can be broken into three primary dyads that draw attention to themselves over the course of the opus. Listed as they occur left to right in Figure 3.1 (and roughly as they occur chronologically in the cycle), the stepwise relationship E♭/D♭ will be referred to as Dyad A, Dyad B is B♭/A♭, and Dyad C is F/E.²

Op. 117 No. 1

The first piece begins by outlining an important melodic motive – a descent through the upper tetrachord 8-5 (Figure 3.2). This motive is transformed chromatically over the course of

² A case could be made for the motivic significance of the dyad G/F, but this would require too much space for too little reward to be worth the effort for the reader. Put briefly, G is the Kopfton of the first intermezzo which passes through F on its way to a completion of the Urlinie. The B section of the piece occurs in the parallel minor so that G♭ is emphasized. This G♭ is reinterpreted as F♯ in m. 49 in a tonicization of G minor – a reversal of the voice-leading relationship of the dyad where G typically resolves down to F. After the first intermezzo this dyad plays little role in the cycle, and so it will not be addressed again.
the piece and eventually serves as a linkage between the first and second intermezzi (more on this later). The second phrase of the A section begins with the motive exchanged into the bass voice and transposed into the key of the dominant (Figure 3.3).

This thematic statement evokes the logic of a fugal subject answer pairing by occurring in a different melodic voice and in the dominant key. While the left hand begins its thematic statement, the right hand follows in canonic imitation at the octave, offset by roughly one quarter note. Both statements quickly dissolve, however, as A♭ returns in m. 8 to reorient the listener towards the tonic. There will be no cadence in the dominant, or half cadence on the dominant,

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3 For more on this, see Peter H. Smith, “Brahms and Subject/Answer Rhetoric,” Music Analysis 20 no. 2 (July 2001): 193-236.
but instead the music will flow directly into a reprise of the opening tonic material to close the A section. This means that the A♭s introduced in mm. 7-8 never resolve upwards to B♭, but instead form part of an abstract passing motion that chromatically fills in the span between the fifth and third of the tonic triad: B♭ – A – A♭ – G. Notice that the “frustrated” A is positioned as a chromatic passing tone between the two components of Dyad B – the notes B♭ and A♭. As such, the potential confusion of this note as either A♮ (with a tendency to resolve upwards) or B♭♭ (with a tendency to resolve downwards) has motivic significance, since this voice-leading distinction amounts to a difference between the note-classes A and B.

This harmonic gesture – in which Brahms evades a cadence on the dominant by frustrating the applied leading tone at the last moment – is repeated within the B section (mm. 21-37). This occurs at the end of the first 8-measure phrase, shown in Figure 3.4. Again, we see the same play with Dyad B as A♭ moves down to A♭. This time the gesture is even more expressive as Brahms underlines the shift in tonal direction with a sudden ritardando and decrescendo. This chromatic passing motion B♭ – A – A♭ is also revisited in the closing measures of the piece (see mm. 53-54), and, as we will see, the conspicuous voice-leading involving Dyad B continues throughout the opus.
Figure 3.5 shows how Brahms uses a chromaticized version of the tetrachord motive to blur the boundary between the end of the B section with the reprise of the A section. The B section ends with a minor version of the tetrachord, where the notes D and C from the original have been lowered to D♭ and C♭ respectively. This harmonized as a passing motion over V7/iv: the dominant of A♭ minor. Rather than resolving, however, the E♭ dominant seventh proceeds directly to an E♭ triad on the downbeat of m. 38. This coincides with the reprise of the A section and the return of the main theme. Brahms therefore follows the convention of the double return of theme and key area, but he subverts the tradition by making the dissonant preparatory chord and the consonant chord of resolution, ironically, the same sonority. In addition, the motivic tetrachord is heard twice in quick succession – first in minor form, with the initial notes E♭/D♭, in m. 37 and then in major form, with the initial notes E♭/D♮, in m. 38. Recall that these are the two note-classes involved in Dyad A from the motivic voice-leading pattern outlined earlier in Figure 3.1. This transition between formal sections is the earliest moment at which Brahms sets a pc-motive in relief to the unmarked flow of the rest of the piece.

Brahms uses the tetrachord motive not only as a linkage between formal sections of the intermezzo, but also as a linkage between the first and second pieces in the cycle. At the end of the first intermezzo the primary melodic line and bass voice both reach stable closure on the
The second intermezzo begins with a melodic filling-in of the third Db – C – B♭: a completion of the tetrachordal span E♭ – B♭ (Figure 3.6).

This version of the tetrachord includes the note Db in place of D♮, just as it did in mm. 33-36 (see Figure 3.5). Notice as well the bass motion E♭ – Db from the anacrusis to the downbeat of m. 1 of op. 117 no. 2. This bass articulation of Dyad A is prominently placed at the head of the main theme, and it is repeated several times throughout the piece. The B♭ minor tonic triad is first heard in first inversion over this bass note Db. Remarkably, a convincing root position tonic triad does not occur until the final cadence of the intermezzo. This serves to reinforce the voice-leading relationship between the two pieces, which resembles the abstract voice-leading found in Figure 3.1 (in other words, a root position E♭ triad progressing to a first-inversion B♭ minor triad). This relationship is most audible in performance if the two pieces are played attacca, but it persists at a certain level of analysis regardless of the performance situation.

**Op. 117 No. 2**

The first A section of op. 117 no. 2 (mm. 1-22) has a unique design that can be partially explained in terms of the middleground motivic voice-leading established within and between
the two intermezzi. The first phrase is an elongated sentence of 9 measures. The basic idea takes up roughly one measure of time, but because it begins on an eighth-note anacrusis it does not line up perfectly with measure 1 (Figure 3.7). The varied repetition, from m. 1.3-2, simply changes the direction of the melody. The continuation subphrase, beginning with the last beat of m. 2, features a sequential root motion descending through the circle of fifths. Such sequential motion would conventionally end with an arrival at some sort of cadence, typically near m. 4 (according to the sentence’s expected proportion of 1+1+2). Instead, the sequence continues, not breaking off until it arrives at V\textsuperscript{7}, which is prolonged through mm. 6-7. Even this functional dominant is not a point of cadential arrival, however, as it is followed immediately by a resolution to a
remarkable harmony in mm. 8-9, to be discussed shortly. The first phrase, then, evokes the rhetoric of the sentence form while failing to fulfill its expectations. Instead of an affirmative drive towards a cadence, we have an anaemic drifting that stalls out on the mysterious chord in mm. 8-9.

What makes this chord so remarkable is not its content, but its extravagant presentation. Figure 3.8A shows the basic progression, where a simple $\text{VII}^4_3$ connects the functional dominant at the end of the first phrase to the $I^6$ chord that initiates the restatement. Figure 3.8B shows how Brahms stretches this leading-tone chord across measures 8-9. Brahms displaces the bass $E_b$ until the downbeat of m. 9 and delays the resolution of the $D_b$ accented passing tone until nearly the end of m. 9. Figure 3.8C shows the actual passage. Rhythmically and texturally, mm. 8-9 can be thought of as a written-out fermata. While the arpeggiation sweeps downward in m. 8, the listener is presented with only the passing tone $D_b$ and the chord tones $A$ and $G_b$. Momentarily,
these three notes may be mistaken enharmonically for a G♭ minor triad that would be highly out-of-place at this moment in the music. When the note E-flat appears in the deep bass register on the downbeat of m. 9, and the arpeggiation rebounds back into the treble register, the simultaneity becomes enharmonically equivalent to an E♭ half-diminished seventh chord. Only when the note D♭ resolves to C with the return of the head motive on the last beat of m. 9 does the function of the passage become apparent. Both of the brief enharmonic readings mentioned above hinge on the function of A♮/B♭♭.

The motivation for this purple patch comes into clearer focus when we consider the motivic voice-leading of the intermezzo’s deep middleground.5 Like the other pieces of this cycle, op. 117 no. 2 is cast in a ternary ABA form. The B section is in the key of D♭ major, so that the piece, in very rough outline, moves from tonic to relative major and back to tonic. Recall, however, that the tonic triad almost exclusively occurs in first inversion, only arriving at root position with the final cadence of the piece. An abstraction of the voice-leading for the deep middleground of the intermezzo is represented in Figure 3.9. Here it is apparent that the motion from tonic to relative major between the A and B sections represents the same motivic 6-5 contrapuntal motion that was introduced all the way back in Figure 3.1. This 6-5 motion is accomplished entirely by B♭ moving to A♭ – the notes of Dyad B. Returning to Brahms’s purple patch, mm. 8-9, we can begin to understand what is at stake in hearing the note as either A♮ or

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5 “Purple patch” refers to a passage that draws rhetorical attention to itself through its extravagance. It is most famously applied to music by Sir Donald Francis Tovey, “Haydn’s Chamber Music,” in Cobbett’s Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music vol. 1, A-H, edited by William Mason Cobbett, 515-548 (London: Oxford University Press, 1929). For a discussion of Tovey’s usage, see Alexander Raymond Ludwig, “Expecting the Unexpected: Haydn’s Three-Part Expositions,” Lumen 32 (2013), 32-40.
and as either a chord tone or non-chord tone. Is this note a leading tone, which will resolve upward to B♭, or is it a chromaticized version of B♭ that will resolve down to A♭? Is it a 6 or a 5 in the 6-5 contrapuntal scheme that structures the voice-leading of the entire intermezzo? (I think the best answer to these rhetorical questions is given in Figure 3.8, which views the chord in its full context.) The real importance of this passage is Brahms’s compositional play with Dyad B, problematizing its importance at the foreground and middleground level of the intermezzo.

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Brahms uses Dyad B to override the phrase boundaries of the B section. The first phrase of the B section ends with a half cadence on F at m. 30. This cadence on V/vi is not unusual in and of itself, but the direct continuation back to the local tonic of D♭ major in m. 31 means that the A♮ tendency tone is frustrated – it leads downward to A♭ from B♭ exactly as it did in mm. 7-8 and 53-54 of the first intermezzo and just as it threatened to do in mm. 8-9 earlier in this piece. Figure 3.10 shows a reduction of this passage that highlights Dyad B within the inner voice.
Notice also that the downward resolution of B♭ to A in m. 30 works in contrary motion to the upward resolution of E to F – the notes of Dyad C – in the soprano voice.

Finally, Dyad C features prominently in the accompanimental figuration of op. 117 no. 2. The dyad first occurs as an incomplete neighbor E resolving to F in the left hand of m. 1. This left-hand textural pattern of an incomplete neighbor followed by a rising chordal arpeggiation permeates nearly every measure of the two A sections (an inversion of the right hand’s anacrusis head motive). At the very end of the work, the intermezzo’s coda features an extended pedal point on F (the dominant) in the bass voice, embellished at the beginning of each measure with the same E♮ incomplete neighbor note (Figure 3.11). While the other voices slide around chromatically, the bass voice articulation of Dyad C remains distinct and unchanging. The transition between the end of the second intermezzo and the beginning of the third is more musically disjunct than that between the first and second. Nevertheless, it is still useful to imagine an *attacca* performance in which the end of one leads seamlessly into the beginning of the next in order to examine the voice-leading compatibility of the pieces in the cycle. Two
things about this transition suggest compatibility. First, the final B♭ minor tonic triad that closes op. 117 no. 2 is awkwardly voiced (see m. 85 in Figure 3.11). Brahms doubles the final melodic fourth in the right hand between F and B♭ so that a new high range of the instrument opens up in the final moments of the piece. In addition, because the piece spent so much time expressing the tonic over a D♭ bass, the newly discovered root position tonic sounds ironically unfamiliar. The voicing and harmony of the concluding arpeggio therefore renders it, to a degree, unrelated to the previous music. This conclusion by non-sequitur in fact prepares the ear for continuation.

Secondly, as was stated previously, the coda of the second piece prominently articulates Dyad C in the bass voice where E♮ repeatedly resolves upward to F. These insistent E♮s prime the listeners’ ears for the melodic E on the downbeat of m. 1 of op. 117 no. 3. The anacrusis to the final piece could in fact be mistaken for a continuation of the B♭ minor harmony that concluded the previous piece (Figure 3.12). The sixteenth-notes C♯ and D♯ may be briefly interpreted as enharmonic Db and Eb – scale degrees 3 and 4 of B♭ minor (presumably headed to 5, F) rather than scale degrees 1 and 2 of C♯ minor (on their way to 3, E). Although the melodic E♮ on the downbeat of m. 1 comes as a surprise, the difference between our expectations and reality is exactly the difference between F and E – the elements of Dyad C.

Figure 3.12. Transition between op. 117 nos. 2 and 3.
The third and final piece in the cycle, op. 117 no. 3 in C# minor, in one way or another reckons with all three motivic dyads. But rather than anticipating future chromatic events, the encounters with the motivic dyads in op. 117 no. 3 are retrospective – they summarize the chromatic relationships established within and between the previous pieces and rationalize the key of C# minor as a suitable endpoint for the cycle as a whole. The main theme of the A section is designed around periodic phrases of five measures each (Figure 3.13). The first five measures form an antecedent phrase that rises from C#4 to B4 before descending to B#3 – the leading tone. The phrase is almost entirely stepwise and outlines the peculiar interval of a diminished octave. The consequent phrase, mm. 6-10, also rises from C# to B, but this time it passes through A# as opposed to A♯ before cadencing in the key of the minor dominant. The primary difference

Figure 3.13. Brahms: Intermezzo op. 117 no. 3, mm. 1-10.

Op. 117 No. 3

The third and final piece in the cycle, op. 117 no. 3 in C# minor, in one way or another reckons with all three motivic dyads. But rather than anticipating future chromatic events, the encounters with the motivic dyads in op. 117 no. 3 are retrospective – they summarize the chromatic relationships established within and between the previous pieces and rationalize the key of C# minor as a suitable endpoint for the cycle as a whole. The main theme of the A section is designed around periodic phrases of five measures each (Figure 3.13). The first five measures form an antecedent phrase that rises from C#4 to B4 before descending to B#3 – the leading tone. The phrase is almost entirely stepwise and outlines the peculiar interval of a diminished octave. The consequent phrase, mm. 6-10, also rises from C# to B, but this time it passes through A# as opposed to A♯ before cadencing in the key of the minor dominant. The primary difference
between the antecedent and consequent phrases is the latter’s insertion of A♯, raised 6, as opposed to A♮. This is an enharmonically-spelled version of the same Dyad B from earlier in the cycle (recall Figures 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.8, 3.9, and 3.10) but now ascending through the melodic space G♯ – A – A♯ instead of descending.

Brahms further dramatizes the contrast between A and A♯ in the five-measure phrase that immediately follows – mm. 11-15 (Figure 3.14). After the cadence in G♯ minor in m. 10, the octave A♯s that initiate the contrasting phrase in m. 11 appear aurally as either ♭2 in the key of G♯ minor, or 6 in the original key of C♯ minor. The phrase continues in octaves until the melodic note A♭ returns in m. 13 and the phrase ends with another cadence confirming the minor dominant. The next five-measure phrase, mm. 16-20, is a variation on the preceding one. This phrase fills in the previously sparse texture – supporting the melody with a descending 6-5 linear
intervallic pattern between the bass and tenor voices of the left-hand accompaniment. Dyad B again crops up within the bass voice of the 6-5 sequence in m. 18 – an A♯ moving to A♮ and from there to G♯ on the downbeat of m. 19 (compare Figure 3.14 with Figures 3.3 and 3.10). Unlike the previous phrase, the variation cadences in the tonic, which prepares a return of the main theme in m. 21.

Tim Howell has pointed out that each time the main theme returns over the course of the intermezzo, it does so with radical transformations of texture, harmony, dynamics, and even tempo. In the first statement of the theme, in mm. 1-10, the antecedent phrase featured the melody in bare octaves to which the consequent phrase added a simple alternation of tonic and dominant in the bass. The restatement in mm. 21-25 supports the theme with a florid 16th-note accompaniment, and surprisingly alters the harmonization of the first two measures to ii°₅ (Figure 3.15A). Notice that this chord is enharmonically identical to the arpeggiated “purple patch” sonority from mm. 8-9 of op. 117 no. 2, discussed earlier with respect to Figure 3.8. That sonority might now be seen as a foreshadowing of the supertonic seventh chord in the key of C♯ minor. Figure 3.15B shows the return of the purple patch sonority upon the reprise of the A section of op. 117 no. 2 (mm. 59-60). This time, as the arpeggio turns upward again in m. 60, Brahms adds a descending scalar passage in the right hand. The notes of this scalar run are borrowed from the key of D♭ minor – an enharmonic respelling of C♯ minor. In fact, the interpretation of the note A♮ as B♭♭, which was only a murky possibility in mm. 8-9, is now explicit in the notation (even more biting as the left hand persists with the earlier A♯ spelling,

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forming a dissonant cross-relation). The reharmonized treatment of the main theme at m. 21 of op. 117 no. 3 can therefore be seen as a recollection of these earlier highly salient chromatic moments from the previous piece, particularly the purple patches at mm. 8-9 and 59-60.

The B section of the final piece also relates to the cycle’s motivic voice-leading in a number of ways. Recall that the ABA form of the second intermezzo prolonged a contrapuntal 6-5 motion between the tonic triads of each section (B♭ minor – Db major – B♭ minor). Figure 3.16 shows how the ternary form of op. 117 no. 3 generates a continuation of the exact same contrapuntal pattern (enharmonic Db minor – B♭♭ major – Db minor). The local tonic triads of

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7 The second intermezzo features several instances in which A♮ functions as a B♭♭ – continuing downwards to Ab rather than resolving up to B♭. In addition to the instances already mentioned, see the stepwise melodic descents at mm. 49-50 and 69-70.
the six formal sections of the two pieces together can be viewed as a very large-scale composing-out of Dyad B and Dyad C, as shown under the brackets in Figure 3.16.

The B section of op. 117 no. 3 also provides new tonal context for the motivic dyads at more local levels. The B section is rounded binary in design, and it maintains the same periodic 5-measure phrasing of the rest of the piece: ||: 46-55 :||: 56-75 :||. The main melodic idea is a chromatic E – F₉ – E neighbor note figure (m. 46) which places Dyad C front and center within the melody (Figure 3.17).

Figure 3.18 is a voice-leading reduction that shows how Dyad C is used in the bass voice to delay a return to the tonic during the developmental passage from mm. 56-65. When the main theme of the B section then returns in m. 66, it does so over a dominant pedal E that resolves to the tonic at m. 68. This developmental passage prolongs the dominant from mm. 56-68 by way
of a middleground hidden repetition of Dyad C in the bass voice (shown with motivic brackets in Figure 3.18).

Brahms inserts a brief retransition before the reprise of the A material, mm. 76-81. The retransition is interesting for a few reasons. First, the retransition is divided into two three-measure phrases, each ending with a fermata. The three-measure phrase lengths are some of the only reprieve from the principal five-measure phrasing within the intermezzo. Secondly, this passage resists the formal expectations of a retransition by neglecting to prepare the harmonic return of the tonic key area (at least by conventional means). As can be seen in Figure 3.19, the retransition begins on a G♯ dominant seventh chord in m. 76. This is the only necessary harmony in connecting the key areas of A major and C♯ minor, and Brahms could simply have resolved this chord at the reprise of the A material to achieve the conventional “double return” of key and theme.

However, the retransition quickly swerves away from the typical dominant preparation. The G♯ dominant seventh changes quality to a half-diminished seventh as it approaches the fermata in m. 78. This gesture is repeated up one whole-step, in sequence, between mm. 79-81, where an A♯ dominant seventh chord similarly dissolves to an A♯ half-diminished seventh. The chord roots of this progression are G♯ and A♯: the notes of Dyad B. Also, as the A♯ dominant
changes to an A♯ half-diminished, the melody in the alto voice changes from an articulation of E♯ to E♮: the notes of Dyad C. Both motivic dyads are bracketed in Figure 3.19.

Brahms achieves an ironic effect of arrival upon the A♯ half-diminished chord in m. 81. This chord contains the notes of the global tonic triad – C♯, E, and G♯ – as its chordal third, fifth, and seventh, respectively. The A♯ diminished chord in m. 81 is voiced in 6/5 position, emphasizing aurally the 6-5 contrapuntal relationship between this chord and the global tonic triad. This is also the moment at which the repeated sixteenth-note melodic figure becomes recognizable as the opening anacrusis from the main theme, as it is now performed at the original pitch level. This allows Brahms to blur the boundary between the retransition and the reprise of the A material. Neither the tonic key nor the primary theme of the conventional double return have actually arrived yet, but the only difference is the addition of the note A♯. So close, yet so far!

As was the case with the previous returns of the main theme, the reprise that begins in m. 82 is heavily reharmonized (Figure 3.20). The A♯ half-diminished seventh that ends the retransition leads into a D♯ dominant seventh which moves by circle of fifths motion back into the tonic key gradually over the course of the antecedent phrase. Notice the inclusion of the descent A♯ – A♮ – G♯: an articulation of Dyad B despite the fact that the A♮ forms a dissonant
passing tone a ninth above the bass. In addition, Brahms inserts a new measure into the consequent phrase so that the proportion of the main theme is now 5+6. Brahms made several revisions to this phrase in his sketches before settling on the published six-measure version, which are discussed in detail in Carlton Gamer’s essay, “Busnois, Brahms, and the Syntax of Temporal Proportions.”

Measure 91 is the extra measure. Gamer speculates on Brahms’s reasons for this phrase extension in terms of the abstract temporal proportions of the piece, but I would submit that this measure’s highly expressive resolution of the A♯ half-diminished seventh to a B major triad (recall the ascents from C♯ to B within the main theme) plays some role in Brahms’s motivation.

Finally, the coda presents one last reworking of the main theme (Figure 3.21) that is rife with allusions and backward glances to important chromatic chords and verticalities from earlier in the cycle. The coda begins on the same A♯ half-diminished seventh that ended the retransition, but because the coda begins immediately after the tonic triad that ends the reprise of the A section, the only difference between the two chords is the unprepared chromaticism A♯ in the

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Figure 3.20. Brahms: Intermezzo op. 117 no. 3, 82-86.

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bass of m. 103. This chord leads into a D♯ dominant seventh, just as it had done at the boundary between the retransition and reprise of the A section (m. 81). This D♯ chord is enharmonically equivalent to the Eb dominant seventh that Brahms used to blur the boundary between the end of the B section and return of the main theme in the first intermezzo (recall Figure 3.5). This then gives way in m. 105 to a D♯ half-diminished seventh, by the same “dissolving” voice-leading pattern that was at work in the retransition.⁹ This harmony is also an allusion; this time, to the “purple patch” sonority from the main theme of the second intermezzo (recall Figure 3.8). Measure 106 then begins on a tonic 6/4 and proceeds through the dominant before finally resolving to the tonic as part of a conventional PAC that ends the piece. The coda also reveals motivic relationships linearly, as the motivic dyads are once again bracketed in the reduction above Figure 3.21. This coda serves as a summation of the chromaticism and motivic voice-

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leading, not only of this intermezzo, but of the entire piano cycle, as can be seen by comparing Figure 3.21 with Figure 3.1.¹⁰

CONCLUSION:

Figure 3.22 shows a sketch of the background voice-leading of the three intermezzos taken together, including a background-middleground transfer in the style of David Neumeyer.¹¹ The tonic of the final piece is interpreted as D♭ minor instead of C♯ minor in order to clarify the implied voice-leading between pieces. The descent of the fundamental structure of op. 117 no. 3 occurs entirely in the formal coda (See Figure 3.21), and that accompanying voice-leading is reproduced in the inner voices of Figure 3.22.

The expressive trajectory of the op. 117 cycle coordinates with the motivic voice-leading at important moments throughout the opus. A critical analysis of the intermezzos should therefore include an account of its expressive world and its relationship to the motivic voice-leading pattern. Like op. 10, the first piece of op. 117 bears an epigraph taken from Herder’s translation of folk poetry; in this case, the opening lines of the English ballad “Lady Anne

Bothwell’s Lament,” which Herder titled in German, “Wiegenlied einer unglücklichen Mutter” (Lullaby of an Unhappy Mother). The poem is both lament and lullaby, a topical blend whose musical possibilities Brahms richly exploits over the course of the cycle. Brahms excerpted the opening two lines for his epigraph, which serve as a refrain later in the poem: “Schlaf sanft, mein Kind, schlaf sanft und schön! Mich dauert’s sehr, dich weinen seh’n.” Given in Percy’s original Scots dialect, this would be: “Balow, my babe, lye still and sleipe! It grieves me sair to see thee weipe.”

Just as I argued in the previous chapter that the initial epigraph serves as a hermeneutic clue for the entirety of op. 10 – and not only for the “Edward” ballade itself – so I believe “Lady Anne Bothwell’s Lament” has interpretive significance for all three intermezzi of op. 117. George S. Bozarth reads op. 117 no. 1 as a “setting” of stanzas 1–4 of the lament, op. 117 no. 2 as a setting of stanzas 4–7, and (following the cue of Max Kallbeck) op. 117 no. 3 as a setting of a separate Scottish ballad from the Volkslieder, “O Weh, O Weh” (alternatively titled, “Wehgeschrei der Liebe” or, “Herzweh”). This parsing does not satisfy me for two reasons. First, despite the fact that the two poems share the theme of traumatic abandonment, it seems inconsistent to invoke a second ballad as a poetic source for the third intermezzo, especially one that is not validated by the composer’s direct reference. Second, the division of the stanzas of “Lady Anne Bothwell’s Lament” between the first and second intermezzi appears arbitrary. The poem gradually darkens in tone and shifts focus from the baby in the present (the poem’s lullaby

aspect) to the absent father in the past (the lament aspect), but there is no crisp boundary between stanzas three and four that would justify Geiringer’s division. Instead, I understand Brahms’s epigraph as an allusion to the lullaby/lament’s topical world and the abstract poetic themes (specifically nostalgia and lost innocence) that permeate all three pieces of the cycle and structure its psychological progression.

As a concluding thought on this chapter I would like to discuss how the cycle’s motivic voice-leading might also complement and clarify the opus’s expressive trajectory. Those salient moments at which Brahms sets the motivic dyads in relief, because they are so attention-grabbing, are also moments of heightened rhetorical and expressive significance. For instance, Brahms uses the motivic voice-leading as a “linkage” technique that obscures important moments of formal articulation, such as at cadences (as in Figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.8), at the boundary between phrases (Figures 3.10, 3.14, and 3.18), between formal sections (Figures 3.5, 3.9, and 3.15), and even between adjacent pieces within the cycle (Figures 3.6 and 3.12). Leonard Meyer’s model of musical emotion as arising out of violations of a listener’s expectations is particularly relevant here.\(^{14}\) That there are schematic expectations in moments such as those listed above is clear, and the way in which Brahms expressively violates our expectations is in part determined by the motivic voice-leading patterns of the opus. An important example is Brahms’s gesture of deflection, encountered several times but not named until now.\(^{15}\) Recall Figures 3.3 and 3.4, in which Brahms uses the notes of Dyad B to divert the flow of the music at


\(^{15}\) I am using the term deflection in a similar manner to Michael Cherlin’s discussion of “distraction” as a rhetorical trope in the music of Schoenberg. *Schoenberg’s Musical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 306.

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the last moment away from a cadence on the dominant. The same gesture of deflection – involving a surprising resolution of the note A♮ – occurs at the end of the main theme of op. 117 no. 2. At precisely the moment at which an enculturated listener would expect a cadential clarification of the work’s tonal focus, Brahms dampens the drive to a cadence with the chromatic “purple patch” chord. Finally, the largest gesture of deflection occurs in the retransition to the reprise of the A section of op. 117 no. 3. One could imagine this retransition recomposed so that it prolongs the initial G♯ dominant seventh chord until it resolves to the tonic at the same moment the main theme of the A section returns. Instead, Brahms uses the voice-leading of Dyads B and C to deflect the harmonic orientation of the passage far afield, where the main theme must do the work of returning to the tonic key itself over the course of its first phrase.

Several of these deflections involve a dominant seventh chord – the sonority with the clearest conventional cadential expectations – followed surprisingly by a half-diminished seventh chord (see especially Figures 3.8, 3.18, and 3.20). In each case, the result is a disorientation of tonal focus. Notice also that the deflections involve the flattening of tendency tones, and that we are consistently deflected in a particular voice-leading direction: downwards. This parallels the overall flat-ward tonal direction of the cycle from E-flat major to D-flat minor. Expressively, the effects of these moments may be described with adjectives such as deferral, deterioration, or decay (pardon the alliteration). Particularly since the tonal deflections become more severe over the course of the cycle, notions of deterioration or decay seem especially appropriate for building an expressive interpretation of the opus. Moreover, expressive gestures of deterioration and decay coordinate well with the expressive world of the program Brahms designated to op. 117 – the themes of nostalgia and lost innocence from “Lady Anne Bothwell’s Lament.”
Chapter 4. Motivic Voice-Leading in the Op. 119 Klavierstücke

The cycles examined so far have followed predictable key patterns. In the first analytical chapter, we saw that Brahms designed the op. 10 ballades around a symmetrical tonal pattern (D minor, D major, B minor, B major). The symmetry alone would justify ending the cycle with the fourth ballade, although if Brahms had decided to compose an additional fifth ballade then one could imagine the tonal pattern continuing into the key of G♯ minor, and beyond. With the op. 117 set, Brahms arranges the pieces around a descending 5-6 pattern (E♭ major, B♭ minor, enharmonic D♭ minor) that is distinctly asymmetrical. This pattern is less predictable, since the tonic triads do not come from a shared diatonic scale. The tonality of the last intermezzo, in C♯ minor, makes sense as an endpoint for the tonal process only in retrospect and after much demonstration by Brahms. For the last analytical chapter, we turn to the op. 119 Klavierstücke, where Brahms employs another sequential tonal pattern that governs the first three pieces in the cycle, labeled Intermezzi, while the final piece, labeled Rhapsody, appears to stand apart. This tonal design, where the sequential process terminates by apparent non-sequitur, can also be found in Brahms’s contemporaneous Vier ernste Gesänge, op. 121. In both cases, the final piece relates to the previous pieces by pointing out a path that was not taken by the tonal pattern. These are not so much non-sequiturs as they are negations.

Also, unlike in the previous cycles, within op. 119 Brahms attaches specific tonal motives to the components of the motivic voice-leading structure. In this case, the Ur-motive is a 5-6-5 neighbor note. This neighbor note conveniently overlaps with the motivic 5-6 motion that governs a major portion of the cycle’s key relationships. For this reason, this chapter will be less dependent on references to motivic “dyads,” which in previous chapters served to frame the
analytical discussion outside of the music’s linear context. Instead, the neighbor notes will appear as Schenkerian motives and their repetitions. The three motives are shown in Figure 4.1.

All three motives are upper neighbor motions around the structural notes F# (Motive A), B (Motive B), and G (Motive C). Notice that for the first three intermezzos, the motivic upper neighbor note from the previous intermezzos (filled-in note heads in Figure 4.1) becomes a tone of the tonic triad for the subsequent intermezzo. In this way, the motives serve to create a pattern of interlocking voice-leadings that will be discussed more at the end of the chapter. The final intermezzo breaks the pattern by retaining Motive C but recontextualizing it chromatically (A♭ versus A) and contrapuntally (3-4-3 vs 5-6-5). This is in part the negation of the pattern referenced earlier.

**Op. 119 no. 1**

Figure 4.2 shows the opening measures of op. 119 no. 1 in B minor. This beginning is one of the most famous and analytically contentious passages in Brahms’s output. The fact that the literature does not even agree on whether the passage is ambiguous seems proof enough that it is.¹ Some of the obscurity of this opening can be attributed to its chain of descending thirds, which are especially characteristic of late Brahms and relate this intermezzo with the first

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¹ “… the progression is in fact quite straightforward, obscured only by the manner of presentation.” Allen Cadwallader, “Motivic Unity and Integration of Structural Levels in Brahms’s B Minor Intermezzo, op. 119, no. 1,” *Theory and Practice* 8 no. 2 (December, 1983),
movement of the fourth symphony and “O Tod” from the *Vier ernste Gesänge*, op. 121.\(^2\) The descending thirds make it difficult to parse the boundaries between adjacent chords. Do the first three notes represent a B minor triad? Or, when G enters, are they revealed to have been the third, fifth, and seventh of a seventh chord? By the time E enters at the bottom of the pseudo-arpeggio, there must have been a change of harmony, as the note F\(^\#\) is now a dissonant ninth above the bass. This simple surface may be conceptually organized in a number of ways.\(^3\)

A linear perspective on this passage will help to clarify some of the ambiguities and obviate others. In mm. 1-2, the topmost voice outlines a neighbor note figure, F\(^\#\) – G – F\(^\#\), which is embellished with an appoggiatura A. This neighbor note will be referred to as Motive A for the rest of the chapter. Allen Cadwallader analyzes the harmonic progression of the first four measures of the theme as based on seventh chords descending through the circle of fifths – I\(^7\) IV\(^7\)

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The succession of chords does not line up in a regular way with the meter or rhythm of running sixteenth notes. Instead, the chords are derived as vertical support for the motion of the outer voices, as shown in Figure 4.3.

We know from Brahms’s student, Gustav Jenner, that Brahms paid special attention to the contrapuntal relationship between the outer voices. The outer voice counterpoint of this opening is particularly attention-grabbing for a few reasons. First, the E on the third beat of m. 1 is the first clear bass note. Until then, the texture has unfolded in a downward arpeggiation; each note is introduced as a candidate bass voice, but the registral status of each depends on what follows. Although Felix Salzer and Cadwallader both hear B as an implied bass note for the opening, this interpretation requires a certain amount of imaginative effort. One could equally put forward a reading of the piece that views the first 16 measures as a large auxiliary cadence in

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B minor – I₆ II⁷ V – where there is no strong initial tonic (the D bass of the I₆ arriving in m. 2).

Even accepting the presence of an implied structural B bass note, the outer voice counterpoint is noteworthy for its very pungent dissonance (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 shows a reduction of the outer voices for the first two measures, first showing the actual presentation and metrical alignment and then showing a more basic rhythmic normalization. Notice the consecutive dissonant intervals of a ninth and compound fourth in the first reduction. By the time the dissonant F♯ above E of m. 1 resolves, the bass voice has already moved on to a new tone, D, which is dissonant against the resolution. It seems to me that this intermezzo is in some sense about the possibility of consecutive dissonances between the outer voices. If I had to identify a basic idea, or Grundgestalt, for op. 119 no. 1, this would be it. The intermezzo is a study in “incorrect” fourth species counterpoint, where dissonances roll into subsequent dissonances rather than alternate between dissonances and resolutions.

Figure 4.5 shows a transitional moment from the middle section of the piece. Brahms prolongs the dominant of D major by alto and bass voices moving in chromatic contrary motion, with voice-leading similar to Yellin’s “omnibus” progression. The dominant resolves when the main theme of the middle section returns in m. 31, but with the same chromatic alto and bass lines from the transitional passage now incorporated into the theme. This theme, as Cadwallader has pointed out, is also constructed around a middleground repetition of the same F♯ – G – F♯

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neighbor note prolongation of the primary tone (Motive A) as the main theme at the opening of the intermezzo (recall Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.6 shows another occurrence of consecutive outer-voice dissonance. Notice in m. 34 the dissonant fourth between B and E. At the same moment that the melodic dissonance resolves downward by step, the bass voice continues to the next note in its chromatic ascent, forming a dissonant ninth, C – D. This C resolves downward to B on the downbeat of m. 35, revealing the basic tenth that the ninth had earlier displaced. This consecutive dissonance is the reverse of that from the opening theme of the intermezzo. Whereas first Brahms presents a situation where a ninth “resolves” to a fourth, here he presents a fourth “resolving” to a ninth. This idea is repeated in m. 38 with a fuller texture and louder dynamic.

The retransition that leads into the reprise of the A section casts a new light on the opening of the movement and in fact significantly recomposes that material. Figure 4.7 shows a linear reduction of mm. 43-48. Brahms places chains of descending thirds in a kind of *stretto*, so
that a new melodic voice enters every three eighth notes, creating a hemiola effect. The first two chains are shown in m. 43 of the reduction; the rest are indicated by slurs. The overlapping entries form consonant tenths that then begin to become “stretched out” (i.e., rhythmically displaced) starting in m. 45 with the acquisition of the tonic scale degree in the bass voice. Brahms demonstrates, aurally, how the consonant tenths are displaced into the dissonant ninth (F♯ – E) that begins the reprise of the main theme in m. 47. Compared to the opening of the piece, where the initial tonic affirmation was tenuous at best, in the reprise Brahms gives clear articulation of the tonic in the bass voice in m. 45.

Figure 4.8 shows a reduction of the first intermezzo’s formal coda, where Salzer and Cadwallader identify the structural descent of the Urlinie. As can be seen from the reduction, this descent is buried within the inner voices of a thick chordal texture. Speaking in terms of contrapuntal structure, this is the best and only candidate for the Urlinie descent. But it is equally fair to point out that this descent lacks the kind of strong rhetorical emphasis that one would expect of a closing cadence (and in fact, the only tonic cadence in the work). Brahms adds a soprano voice that covers the 2 - 1 structural descent with the span 8 - 7 - 6 - 5. This shifts the

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8 Cadwallader, “Motivic Unity and Integration of Structural Levels,” Example 7, 22-23.
listener’s attention towards 5 (F#) as the goal of melodic closure. Rather than support the 2 - 1 descent with a clear V – I motion in the bass voice, Brahms instead obscures the harmonic motion through registral and textural alterations. The last clear bass note in m. 64 is an E, while Salzer and Cadwallader both hear this voice moving up into the inner-voice F# of m. 65, before returning to the deep bass register with the note B of m. 66. But if one was not hunting for a fundamental structure in this passage, it might easily be heard as a plagal cadence (E – B in the bass register). In short, one must do a considerable amount of interpretive work in order to hear the final cadence as a tonic PAC, rather than the equally plausible IAC or even plagal cadence. Brahms seems to be aiming for a sense of incompleteness and irresolution; the ironic open-endedness that characterizes a Romantic fragment.

**Op. 119 no. 2**

The second intermezzo, op. 119 no. 2 in E minor, is also designed around a motivic upper neighbor note figure—in this case, B – C – B, which will be referred to as Motive B. Unlike the first intermezzo, however, this neighbor note decorates an ancillary soprano voice through 5-6-5
motion above the tonic triad, rather than the primary tone. Structurally, the piece is a simple uninterrupted 3-line, albeit one that places a strong melodic and rhetorical emphasis on 5 through repetitions of Motive B.

The opening of op. 119 no. 2 is shown in Figure 4.9. The intermezzo is cast in a ternary ABA form, the B section of which takes place in the parallel major key, E major (Figure 4.10). The main melody of this B section is a variation on that of the A section, but because of the change of key, the upper neighbor is now C# rather than C (compare Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10). The lyrical interchange between the diatonic and chromatic versions of 6 during the

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9 For more on the relationship between the A and B sections of this intermezzo, see Cai, *Brahms’s Short, Late Piano Pieces* (1984), 52-54; and Ira Lincoln Braus, “An Unwritten
middle section of the intermezzo is a textbook example of Steven Laitz’s “Submediant Complex,” and it is one way in which Brahms dramatizes the cycle’s motivic voice-leading in this piece. B♯ (enharmonic C♮) appears in mm. 40, 48, 59, and 64 as an applied leading tone that resolves upwards to C♯. C♮ appears in mm. 52 and 65 through modal mixture. The chromaticism of these passages takes on added referential meaning, since it points back not only to the minor mode from the framing A sections, but also to chromatic elements elsewhere in the cycle. Notice that the difference between the key signatures of the first two pieces (B minor = 2 sharps; E minor = 1 sharp) is exactly the difference between C♯ and C♮.

Figure 4.11 shows a recurring chromatic episode from the A section that may be seen as a ramification of Brahms’s compositional play with Motive B. Brahms reinterprets a local C major triad (VI in E minor) as the dominant of F minor and places a variation of the opening theme over this new dominant pedal. The neighbor note figure now passes through the notes C and Db, which, when enharmonically respelled as C♮ and C♯, are the two versions of Š that were problematized elsewhere in the intermezzo. The chromatic excursion ends abruptly when C is again interpreted as VI in E minor halfway through m. 19. Notice also the accented E♭ in the

Metrical Modulation in Brahms’s Intermezzo in E minor, op. 119 no. 2,” *Brahms Studies* 1 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1994), 161-169.
soprano voice of m. 19. The parallel moment in the original theme would be the accented D♯ from m. 2. What was originally a disconnected leading tone that went nowhere becomes, in the variation, a pivot that smooths over and rationalizes the abrupt return to the tonic key.

Just as in the first intermezzo, the second ends with a short formal coda that includes the descent of the Uirlinie. Figure 4.12 shows the structural descent G♯ – F♯ – E in mm. 87-90.

Notice that Brahms again covers over the structural close of the melody with the introduction of a soprano voice that obscures the listener’s sense of closure (compare Figures 4.8 and 4.12). In this case, the soprano voice recollects the major version of Motive B (first heard at the opening of the B section) beginning in m. 90.

Op. 119 no. 3

The third intermezzo, op. 119 no. 3 in C major, is quite similar to the second intermezzo in its broad outlines. It is also ternary, and it also features an uninterrupted three-line with conspicuous rhetorical emphasis given to 5. In fact, the main melody for the third intermezzo outlines Motive C in almost exactly the same way that the second intermezzo outlined Motive B (Figure 4.13). Since the design of the second intermezzo was a continuous reworking of a 4-measure theme (an example of Schoenberg’s “developing variation”), the beginning of the third intermezzo can be seen as yet another variation on the theme of the second piece. Significantly,
the first harmonic motion in the intermezzo is from a C major triad to an E minor triad on the
downbeat of m. 3. This highlights the triadic voice-leading of Motive B and recalls the tonic of
the previous intermezzo.

Adam Ricci has written on the development of Motive C throughout the piece (although
of course he did not refer to it as such). In addition to being embedded within the main melody,
the 6-5 motion of the motive is also composed out through the frequent tonicizations of A
minor/major at important formal cadences (as at mm. 12 and 24). As an aside, the oscillation at
these cadences between A minor and A major highlights the same C♮ – C# opposition from the
previous intermezzo. The piece’s B section (mm. 24-50) is designed around a sequential
spinning-out of the motivic 6-5 motion through diverse key areas. Figure 4.14 shows a moment
near the end of this spinning out, when Brahms reveals the derivation of the underlying 6-5
motions to the cycle of thirds that characterized the main theme of the first intermezzo.

This leads into a false return to the main theme in m. 47 before the true return to the A
section at m. 51 (Figure 4.15). Although the thematic statement again unfolds over a C triad, it is
a C triad that has been reinterpreted as the dominant of F minor – just as it had been in the

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10 Adam Ricci, “The Progress of a Motive in Brahms’s Intermezzo op. 119, no. 3,” *Music Theory
Online* 13 no. 3 (2007).
chromatic digressions from the E minor intermezzo (compare Figure 4.11 and Figure 4.15). Here Brahms revisits the opposition of C and D♭ (enharmonic C♯) and introduces an opposition between A and A♭. These oppositions represent the submediant complexes of the second and third intermezzos, respectively. The A/A♭ opposition plays out in the G♯s that tonicize the A minor/major cadences (mm. 10-12, 21-24) and the modal mixture during the predominant preparation for the final structural cadence (mm. 60-62). The moment that A♭ reverts to A♮ during the false return is the exact moment of the actual double return of tonic key and main theme, although ironically both the theme and the tonic triad persist before and after the formal boundary. The return is accomplished through plagal rather than the more common authentic motion. This typically Brahmsian maneuver has been encountered several times in this dissertation: Brahms uses a contextual motivic relationship, as opposed to conventional tonal

**Figure 4.14.** Brahms: Intermezzo op. 119 no. 3, mm. 43-46.

**Figure 4.15.** Brahms: Intermezzo op. 119 no. 3, mm. 49-52.
ones, to do crucial formal work. Brahms dramatizes the A-G neighbor note one last time, as Figure 4.16 shows, in the short coda at the end of the work by using A as a prominent non-chord tone in the figuration.

**Op. 119 no. 4**

The final intermezzo, op. 119 no. 4 in E♭ major (subtitled, “rhapsody”), breaks with some of the voice-leading trends of the first three pieces. If Brahms had followed the path forecasted in op. 119 no. 3, then the next piece may have been in the key of A (the next triad in the 6-5 sequence), A♭ (a chromatic version of the same), F-minor (a variation on the A♭ version), or something similar. Brahms instead continues along a tonal path that allows the retention of Motive C, albeit in a new scalar context (recall Figure 4.1). Figure 4.17 shows the main theme of the rhapsody and its untransposed repetition of Motive C.

The G – A♭ – G neighbor note is composed out at the deep middleground level of the work, as shown in Figure 4.18. The rhapsody is an arch form: A (1-64) B (65-92) C (93-132) B’ (133-152) A’ (153-216) A’’ (217-262). The A’ section is another false recap, to be discussed.
shortly. My breakdown of the form diverges from that of Geiringer and Ng, who view the work as basically ternary, but whose middle B section is itself an enlarged ternary form. This strikes me as a difference in emphasis rather than understanding. In my view, Brahms sufficiently differentiates the Ab grazioso section to justify its being grouped at the highest organizational level of the work. Notice also the double bar lines that Brahms uses to demarcate the boundaries of the C section.

The A and B sections prolong the Kopfton, G, while the C section prolongs its upper neighbor, Ab – a large-scale repetition of Motive C. The surprise ending of the work in the parallel minor may be justified as a distant reference to Motive A from the first intermezzo (G becoming Gb mirrors the G – F♯ relationship from the first piece). The formal design of op. 119 no. 4 is remarkably similar to that of the ballade op. 10 no. 2 (discussed earlier in chapter 2). In both pieces, Brahms’s choice of key areas for the sections of the arch form, and the key of the

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13 Although he parses the form and linear structure differently, Samuel Ng discusses the middleground repetitions of the neighbor note in the last chapter of his dissertation, “A Grundgestalt Interpretation,” 316-322.
false return, were made very carefully to reflect the motivic voice-leading of the cycles in which they are embedded. In both, the A section is in a major mode, the B section is a march in the relative minor, and the C section is a major-mode scherzo. Additionally, both false returns take place in the conspicuous key of major VI. In the ballade, the reference to the key of B major at the false return is a foreshadowing of the tonality where the cycle will end, while in the rhapsody the key of C major references the tonic of the previous intermezzo.

Brahms includes several other cross-references to the motivic and harmonic materials of the previous pieces. The ending in Eb minor may be seen to have been subtly foreshadowed by

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14 To be sure, the rhetorical effects of the two false returns are quite different. The one in the rhapsody (at m. 153) would hardly be mistaken for a genuine return of the main theme. The rhythm, dynamic, register, and key area are all entirely different from the opening measures of the work.
the arpeggiated D♯ triad in the reprise of the A section in op. 119 no. 1 (m. 54). At several points in the rhapsody, Brahms develops the *marcato* melodic motive from m. 5 so as to outline a cycle of thirds (Figure 4.19). This is a reference to the opening of the first piece as well as the thirds cycle encountered in the developmental passage in the third intermezzo. Compare in this regard Figures 4.2, 4.14, and 4.19.

**Conclusion**

As in the previous chapters, we will conclude by examining the possibility of hearing the entire cycle integrated into a single contrapuntal structure. Figure 4.20 shows the hypothetical voice-leading connections between adjacent pieces in the op. 119 cycle. The key difference between this figure and those for the earlier cycles is that here, most of the interest resides in the two-part upper-voice structure rather than between the outer voices. The soprano and alto lines form what John Robert Benoit calls a “composite fundamental structure,” a fundamental structure of three voices, which adds an alto voice to the conventional *Urlinie* and *Bassbrechung*.¹⁵ The twist, of course, is that this composite fundamental structure supersedes the boundaries between adjacent pieces. For Figure 4.20, dashed lines across double bar lines indicate retained tones in the upper-voice structure while slurs across double bar lines indicate melodic motion. Slurs within double bar lines indicate an *Urlinie* descent.

Viewing the entire cycle in terms of a fundamental upper-voice structure helps us to clarify some of the local voice-leading difficulties within each piece, especially the first three intermezzos. Recalling Figure 4.8, the fundamental descent at the end of op. 119 no. 1 is buried in the middle of a thick chordal texture while the melody retains an insistent ♯5. Rather than

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viewing \( \hat{1} \) and \( \hat{5} \) as competing for dominance at the end of the first piece, we may view them as cooperating in the opening stages of a duet that lasts the entire cycle. In one piece, a certain voice possesses the Kopfton and executes the motions of the Urlinie, while the other voice anticipates important motivic voice-leading content (notice the motivic brackets showing Motives A, B, and C in Figure 4.20). In the next piece, the voices might exchange roles. Notice also how the F\# to G motion of the upper voice between the first two intermezzos was anticipated by the multiple repetitions of Motive A within the first piece.

The second and third intermezzos both feature strong melodic, motivic, and rhetorical emphasis on \( \hat{5} \), which makes it an appealing candidate to be the Kopfton. In both cases, however, any putative five-line would lack a persuasive \( \hat{4} \) as part of its descent. A better reading of these pieces would have \( \hat{3} \) as the Kopfton in one of the voices of the upper-voice structure while the other voice places motivic and rhetorical emphasis on \( \hat{5} \). The second intermezzo, like the first, features a final cadence with a conspicuously retained \( \hat{5} \) in the melody (Recall Figure 4.12). These inconclusive endings seem to demand that the intermezzos be heard as Romantic fragments, and the composite fundamental structure partly shows how they may be loosely

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Figure 4.20. A composite fundamental structure for the op. 119 Klavierstücke.
integrated into a larger whole. The final piece – the Rhapsody – completes the structure by uniting the two upper voices on the note Eb.

As was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, we may compare the large-scale cyclic design of op. 119 and op. 121. Figure 4.21 shows a composite fundamental structure for the Vier ernste Gesänge similar to the one shown in Figure 4.20. Some of Brahms’s compositional play with the notes B♭ and B♮ may be gleaned from this figure (as in the G-major middle section of no. 2 and the connection between no. 2 and no. 3) and this play is discussed in detail in Daniel Beller-McKenna’s article, “Brahms on Schopenhauer: The Vier ernste Gesänge, op. 121, and Late Nineteenth-Century Pessimism.” Equally important for the cycle, but less obvious from the figure, is the G♯ – G♮ dyad. G♯ plays a critical role in no. 1, as it allows the tonicization of C♯ minor (the work’s tonal extreme). It plays a middleground role in no. 3, “O Tod,” supporting the i – I – i ABA tonal/formal plan. The final piece begins off-tonic, as an A♭ triad (enharmonic G♯) resolves to a melodic G with tonic support in mm. 1-3. In addition, the motivic thirds cycle from “O Tod” plays an important motivic role in other songs from the cycle, as Beller-McKenna

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demonstrates. Recall the thirds cycle that initiates op. 119 no. 1. In both cycles, written roughly contemporaneously, Brahms experiments with the ways in which thirds cycles may generate motivic voice-leading relationships, as well as the ways in which these relationships may interact with the cycle’s form, linear structure, and expressive design.
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

In the preceding analytical chapters, we have used motivic voice-leading as a tool for relating the attention-grabbing details within Brahms’s piano pieces to the progress of the cycles in which they are situated. We have also seen how Brahms employed this tool across his compositional career – from the earliest piano cycle to the very last. The three cycles analyzed in this dissertation – opp. 10, 117, and 119 – were chosen not only because they demonstrate motivic voice-leading particularly clearly, but also because they illustrate Brahms’s evolving use of the technique. The early op. 10 ballades used a simple symmetrical tonal plan – a chain of parallel and relative major/minor pairs – that would remain coherent even without motivic voice-leading as an explanatory tool. The later opuses, however, employ chromatic and irregular tonal plans whose intelligibility depends increasingly on the motivic voice-leading pattern.

Motivic Voice-Leading Beyond Brahms’s Piano Cycles

The methodology of motivic voice-leading is very simple and can be applied to a wider repertoire than was examined in this dissertation. There is no reason, for instance, that the triads used to derive the motivic voice-leading pattern must come from the tonic triads of adjacent pieces in a cycle. They could just as easily come from the tonic triads of the movements of a sonata cycle. Or they could derive from the competing tonic triads of a piece with progressive tonality. They may also come from the tonic and the tonal extreme within a tonally-closed piece, in those cases where the polarization of the two key areas is especially prominent (as in the first movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, discussed in Chapter 2). Or, finally, they may be derived in non-instrumental music, such as from the key areas of sections of an operatic aria, duet, or entire scene.
There are many possible examples of motivic voice-leading in the context of a multimovement sonata cycle, especially in the 19th century.¹ A particularly clear example is Beethoven’s “Emperor” Concerto, op. 73, shown in Figure 5.1. I would direct the reader to Charles Rosen’s extensive discussion of the formal and expressive ramifications of the neighbor note C\(^\flat\) and the chromatic transformation G\(^\natural\)/G\(^\flat\) in the first movement, and I would point out the rather obvious instances of these pc-motives in the \textit{attacca} transition between the \textit{Adagio} and \textit{Rondo} movements.² A similar analysis could be conducted of the many 19th century pieces that share a multimovement harmonic design that Matthew Bribitzer-Stull has called the “A\(^\flat\) – C – E Complex.”³ Because of their shared harmonic design, works such as Beethoven’s Piano Concerto no. 3, op. 37, and Brahms’s Piano Quartet, op. 60, and Symphony no. 1, op. 68, share quite similar motivic voice-leading patterns. A comparison study may reveal interesting differences between these composers’ strategies when dealing with the same pc-motives and key areas.

The nineteenth century also saw the rise of “progressive,” or “directional” tonality – tonal designs that are best viewed not as a monotonality but as a combination of (usually two)

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¹ Some suggestive early examples are given by Ethan Haimo in “Remote Keys and Multi-Movement Unity: Haydn in the 1790’s,” \textit{The Musical Quarterly} 74 no. 2 (1990), 242-268.
tonalities. An example is Chopin’s second Ballade, op. 38, which begins in the key of F major and ends in the key of A minor. The upper staff of Figure 5.2 shows how the F/E pc-motive is derived from the two competing triads, while the bottom grand staff shows excerpts from the two main themes. Notice how the F major *Andantino* theme contains an accented E that resolves upward to F in m. 4 (bracketed), while in the A minor *Presto con fuoco* theme, the pc-motive is inverted so that F is a dissonant accented neighbor above E. The songs of Hugo Wolf, Mahler’s symphonies, and other repertoires that demonstrate progressive tonality may benefit from a streamlined methodology based on motivic voice-leading.

Motivic voice-leading may even be useful in analyzing the most common type of tonal design in the common practice repertoire – the tonally closed (i.e., not progressive) single movement work. For the majority of such works, the insights provided would likely be either

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trivial or not unique. However, motivic voice-leading would render the best results when applied to pieces with a very remote and rhetorically emphasized tonal extreme. A good example is the first movement of Haydn’s Piano Sonata Hob. XVI/52 in E♭ major. The development section features a false return of the secondary theme in m. 70, in the distant and unprepared key of E major. Few things in Haydn are completely unprepared, however, and the emergence of the key of E major can be seen as a chromatic detour spurred by a pc-motive that was embedded in the opening theme. The theme begins with G resolving upwards as an applied leading tone to A♭ in m. 1, and then immediately reversing direction in m. 2 (Figure 5.3). This downward resolution of A♭ to G is repeated and exaggerated in mm. 3-5. The E major area of the development section pops out of nowhere after a strong cadence on a G major triad (V/VI in E♭) in m. 69. The music’s prevailing register, dynamic, formal expectations, and tonal orientation are all seemingly abandoned between mm. 69-70. But the surprise shift gains some degree of comprehensibility when understood as an enharmonic respelling of the initial G/A♭ dyad as G/G♯.

Finally, motivic voice-leading may also be applied to non-instrumental repertoires. The duet, “Tutte le feste al tempio,” no. 14 from Act II of Verdi’s Rigoletto, is designed as two
dissimilar parallel statements followed by a combination of the two voices. The duet portrays the reunion of Rigoletto and his daughter, Gilda, after Gilda’s traumatic and illicit encounter with the Duke. The two characters process the event in very different ways. The first statement, sung by Gilda, modulates from the key of E minor to C major and positively confirms the major mode ending with a strong PAC (“Tutte le feste al tempio…”). Rigoletto immediately interrupts, taking the note C and reinterpreting it as the dominant of F minor (“Ah! Solo per me l’infamia…”).

Father and daughter then comfort one another in the key of D♭ major (“Piangi, piangi fanciulla…”). Figure 5.4 shows the harmonic path of the duet and its underlying 5-6 contrapuntal pattern. Gilda is the first to introduce the main pc-motive: the dyad E/F, which she uses to accomplish her modulation from E minor to C major as F♮ gradually replaces F♯. Rigoletto’s abrupt shift to F minor is a replication of the E/F relationship at a larger tonal level – also representing his separate train of thought. Finally, Gilda’s chromatic E♮/F neighbor figures during the final D-flat major section of the duet recall the earlier tonal relationships and signal her disquietude about the stability of the conclusion.

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Conclusion

As one writes about Brahms’s music, one gains the disquieting sense that the composer is staring back at the analyst, and he may or may not like what he sees. Even at the conclusion of this dissertation, it is difficult for me to tell which parts of my analyses are genuinely revealing, and which parts of them “any jackass” might notice.\(^7\) If Brahms were alive, he would likely not hesitate to share his opinion. He once reprimanded the critic Adolf Schubring for overzealously attributing motivic relevance to unrelated themes in the Requiem, and Jan Swafford’s biography contains numerous similarly harsh rebukes by Brahms of his apologists.\(^8\) Brahms was also a notoriously circumspect composer – self-aware in the extreme, like Schiller’s sentimental poet. His works at times appear to be both compositions and analyses of the traditions that they reconfigure. Like Bloom’s reading of Shakespeare, Brahms is “always ahead of you… whoever and whenever you are.”\(^9\)

So, at the risk of irritating the composer, what conclusions can we draw about Brahms’s compositional practice with respect to motivic voice-leading? To put it another way, what might Brahms the Analyst have noticed within the traditions of 19\(^{th}\)-century chromaticism, and how did he reconfigure those traditions in his own music? Very generally, we might say that for the first of the high classical composers, Haydn and Mozart, something as important as a work’s chromaticism could not remain arbitrary or incidental, uncoordinated with other musical elements. And so, chromaticism became increasingly systematized in their music.\(^10\)

\(^7\) Brahms’s famous quip is first reported in Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms* 2\(^{nd}\) ed., vol. 3 (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft, 1912), 109.
\(^10\) Take as examples Laitz’s analysis of the Menuetto from Haydn’s String Quartet, op. 64 no. 1, “The Submediant Complex,” (1996), 124-126; and Milton Babbitt’s brief but provocative
systematic treatment of chromaticism then became something of a norm in middle period Beethoven and late Schubert, in part through pc-motives and related compositional strategies. But, as the level of “ambient” chromaticism increased over the course of the nineteenth century, it became increasingly challenging for composers to sustain an internal compositional process that could coordinate a work’s chromatic elements.

This is a very general stylistic problem in the nineteenth century, and we would expect many putative solutions. Wagner’s use of the leitmotiv, for instance, meant that his chromatic key areas could take on referential (even bordering on semantic) significance.\footnote{Out of the huge literature on this topic, see particularly Bailey, “The Structure of the ‘Ring’ and its Evolution,” (1977).} Schoenberg’s analytical Grundgestalt concept, and his own use of the tone row, are other examples.\footnote{For an overview, see Carpenter, “Grundgestalt as Tonal Function,” (1983).} Brahms’s use of motivic voice-leading in his piano cycles, as outlined in this dissertation, represent a solution that is particularly well-suited to the genre of the romantic instrumental cycle. This approach is able to incorporate a large amount of chromaticism into a single compositional plan (one that is intrinsically related to the progression of the cycle as a whole), but at the same time is not overly restrictive or formulaic. Brahms may be as straightforward in his application as he chooses, as in the D-naturals in the main theme of op. 10 no. 4, or, he may be highly obtuse, as in the “purple patch,” mm. 8-9 of op. 117 no. 2. In each case, Brahms’s means of coordinating the moment-to-moment chromaticisms and expressive turning points in

the music is characteristically Romantic. It is a system and not a system, like Schlegel’s paradoxical aphorism about the internal workings of the mind.\footnote{Athenaeum Fragment 53: “It is equally fatal for the mind [\textit{Geist}] to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two.” Friedrich Schlegel, \textit{Friedrich Schlegel, Philosophical Fragments}, translated by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 24.}
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Vita

Jacob Gran is a native of Blaine, Minnesota. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in music composition and biology from Saint John’s University in Collegeville, MN, in Spring 2012, and he received his Master of Music degree in music theory from Louisiana State University in Spring 2014. His research interests include the music of Johannes Brahms, nineteenth-century chromaticism, and the style analysis of popular music. He has published on Chopin’s ornamental practice in Indiana Theory Review and has presented his research at several regional and international conferences.