

Nascent Neoclassicism in Beethoven's Op. 135

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Abstract

Beethoven's final works are of great importance to understanding his artistic trajectory. His late works depart from stylistic convention, but his final string quartet seems to harken back to his early op. 18 quartets. Beethoven's late style had taken a completely different direction than his other late works – no longer was Beethoven aiming externally, towards stretching the boundaries of form; instead, Beethoven looked internally and returned to Haydn's smaller sensibility in order to limit the scope of his composition. I argue that in his Op. 135 string quartet in F Major, Beethoven modifies his sense of texture, melodic material, and harmony in order to make the work more compact and reflective of the high classical era. Additionally, Beethoven uses musical quotation from Handel's oratorio *Jephtha*, to not only pay homage to Handel, but to accurately depict the paternalistic conflict in his life. By undertaking comparative analyses of Beethoven's earlier works, along with structural analysis of Op. 135 itself, Beethoven's final work portrays him as the progenitor of neoclassicism as a compositional mindset.

Beethoven's final string quartets are a foreboding set of works written during the final years of Beethoven's life. The final quartets are considered by scholars to be the culmination and apotheosis of his musical journey, and the remarkable complexity of each work left a lasting compositional precedent heretofore unmatched. His final major work, his op. 135 string quartet, is considered the odd work of the set, as it not motivically related to any of the prior late quartets. Superficially, the work stands on its own and seems to be a step backward in compositional complexity. In this paper, I argue that the work is in fact a step forward into neoclassicism, as shown by the work's harmonic structures, texture, and musical material. Using literature based on prior analyses of Beethoven's early quartets, patterns develop between Beethoven's early and late compositional tendencies. His handling of melodic material, harmonic organization, and textural conception is marked with restraint and proportionality typical of both composers such as Haydn, Mozart and later neoclassical works. The "Es muss sein" motive used in this work, and its origination from Handel, shows a strong forbearance of musical quotation and shifts the narrative in how Beethoven portrays his personal life within his music.

There is perhaps no better place to start understanding Beethoven's stylistic choices in Op. 135 than in his classical period. Beethoven holds a unique transitional role between the classical and Romantic eras and his early opus numbers show a clear precedence, mastery, and understanding of the high classical era. The mark of his renowned teacher, Haydn, is clearly felt in these early works – especially in regards to form. Beethoven's early string quartets, specifically the Op. 18, are encyclopedic in how they show Beethoven's grasp of contemporary style. Jeremy Yudkin writes:

You imitate the master in order to become original, but in so doing you sacrifice the quality for which you worship him: originality. It is precisely indicative of the radical aesthetic dichotomy between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that Beethoven was

not troubled by this paradox. Many of his early works from the years in Bonn... as well as some of the early works from Vienna... are imitations of Mozart.¹

Beethoven understood that for his own stylistic advancement, you must thoroughly work through the works of the past, and write in a style that is intentionally imitative of those masters. The massive rift in tradition between the Baroque and Classical eras allowed for this composition-by-imitation, and in Beethoven's case, while the trappings of the works written during his early classical phase seem to be purely classical, the modifications and nuances added within the compositions are anything but.

Scholar Jeremy Yudkin tries to categorize these similarities in his work – specifically between Mozart and Beethoven, by inviting a relationship between two of their works: the String Quartet K. 464 by Mozart as inspiration for Beethoven's Op. 18 No. 5. The differences between the “earlier” late quartets (op. 130, 131, 132) and his op. 18 quartets are numerous, and could be in another light seen as works by a different composer. Yudkin makes clear that Beethoven was not afraid to stray from Mozart's work, and due to the “very different stage of his career...his imitation involves both careful selection and careful rejection.”² Beethoven did not need to follow all aspects of the work, but picked and chose the most important elements. This act, and this understanding, serve as a precedent for his thorough understanding of borrowing musical material. Yudkin goes on to summarize Beethoven's work:

Of all the movements, Beethoven's first “swerves” the most from its model. The parallels between the two Minuets, the two variation movements, and the two finales are stronger than those for the two first movements. [...] Beethoven's rhythmic ambiguity, however, comes only in the first four and last six measures of the movement, and the harmonic detour in Beethoven's movement involves E minor, simply the minor version of the dominant. [...] Indeed it is in his opening movement that Beethoven has most radically

¹ Jeremy Yudkin, “Beethoven's ‘Mozart’ Quartet,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 31.

² *Ibid*, 68.

reinterpreted his model. By deliberately misprising the Allegro, Beethoven has adopted an affect quite different from that of his model...³

Even at such an early point in his compositional work, Beethoven understood his compositional priorities: from Mozart's work, he only took what he needed, mostly structurally, to create his own affect. The outline, destination, and musical goal of Beethoven's work are completely different from Mozart's – and Beethoven does not imitate Mozart's affect as much as he uses portions of his template. By delaying certain rhythmic and harmonic features of his own work, he reorganizes and reprioritizes what he needs to. In a sense, Beethoven understood Mozart's work so well that he distilled it to exactly what it structurally posed for the entire work. Yudkin traces this method of composition as Beethoven's "...homage to Mozart [in which] Beethoven models a quartet on a masterpiece. In quiet rivalry with him, he fashions a completely different composition from matching materials..."⁴

This aforementioned rivalry is an instance of Beethoven understanding his historical position as composer: a self-historicism. In his understanding of the compositional world he inhabited, he portrayed himself as the seminal baton holder of Haydn and Mozart. This echoes into his compositional mindset for his later works. Beethoven's livelihood was deteriorating near the end of his life, and he knew that his final works must act as an impetus for those following him. Perhaps, the actions taken in Op. 135 harken back to his work in Op. 18 No. 5 – but this time, intending to demonstrate his mastery rather than rival. Yudkin discusses this in the conclusion of analysis, not as a demonstration of mastery but as finally claiming a crown from Mozart:

Is it possible to find in Beethoven the final stage of imitation – the complete sublimation of the precursor, a capturing of his essence...? I believe it is. Beethoven turned to K. 464 again a quarter of a century later, when he was working on his Quartet op. 132. The

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 69.

Allegro ma non tanto of Op. 132, Beethoven's next quartet movement in A Major, takes a further unwavering look at the extraordinary Minute from Mozart's op. 10 no.

5...Beethoven has won through from anxiety to acceptance, beyond originality, from rivalry to rapprochement.

Yudkin believes that a connection exists between Mozart and Beethoven in Op. 132 –

chronologically the first composed of the trio of the interconnected “late” quartets

(130/131/132). It is not hard to notice patterns of what Yudkin describes here in Beethoven's last

work: perhaps the direct nature of the form of Op. 135, its brevity, are the highest magnitude of

this “rapprochement” – it was not enough to act in a referential manner in Op. 132. To signify

the importance of Mozart's influence, Beethoven wanted to show a complete sublimation of the

style in his own writing – he wanted to demonstrate the potency of music that did not need to

have the elaborations of his late works.

There is a direct connection to op. 135 from Beethoven to one of his most regarded influences, namely Handel. The top of the fourth movement famously has the epigraph:⁵

Allegro

Muss es sein? Es muss sein! Es muss sein!

Beethoven inscribes the top of the final movement with the primary motives elaborated on throughout the fourth movement. The movement utters the motives in different registers and instruments, but starts in a manner akin to call-and-response between the lower and upper strings of the quartet. Academic debate over what the questions mean (roughly translating in English to “Must it be? It must be! It must be!”), why Beethoven has placed them here, are unending - but the origins of the musical motive themselves have gained more clarity through the work of Gerald Silverman, who tracks the motive to Handel:

⁵ Ludvig van Beethoven, *Streichquartett Opus 135* (Munich: Henle Verlag, 2004): 21.

The opening words of Handel's last great work, in his oratorio *Jephtha*, are 'It must be so,' these sung in recitative by the character Zebul: which words, in the eventual German bilingual Chrysander edition of 1886, were to be rendered, 'So muss es sein.' Thus with these words Beethoven's own great musical hero, Handel, had introduced his own magnificent swansong.⁶

This relationship perhaps sounds coincidental but Beethoven's reverence of Handel is well documented. Although Beethoven clearly displays early influence from Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven has made frequent reference to Handel's work before, especially in his *Missa solemnis*, when he quotes the *Messiah*.⁷

There is another set of words on top of the epigraph attached to the final movement of op. 135, namely "Der schwer gefasste Entschluss"⁸. This translates literally to "the heavy, calm, decision." No academic consensus exists on the meaning of these words, but some scholars, including Silverman, believe that they reflect "a much more serious concern...Beethoven's preoccupation with the fate of his nephew Karl [who] ... torn by conflicting pressures...wrote a suicide note and tried to shoot himself."⁹ This personal preoccupation, Silverman believes, echoes the plot and tone of the narrative of Handel's *Jephtha*, which itself deals with conflicted paternalism, and sacrifice. The thematic connection continues further into Beethoven's personal life, Silverman continues:

On the one hand he could laud marriage and fidelity, as in *Fidelio*, yet on the other prove himself incapable of living harmoniously with anyone, and with recourse to brothels instead. And though he idealistically felt himself to be a democrat, he forever sucked up to the nobility, even trying, unsuccessfully to pass himself off as a noble. His life, therefore, was threaded throughout with elements of "Muss es sein?" and "Es muss

⁶ Gerald Silverman, "New Light, but also more Confusion, on 'Es Muss Sein'," *The Musical Times* 144, no. 1884 (Autumn 2003): 51.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ludvig van Beethoven, *Streichquartett Opus 135* (Munich: Henle Verlag, 2004): 21.

⁹ Gerald Silverman, "New Light, but also more Confusion, on 'Es Muss Sein'," *The Musical Times* 144, no. 1884 (Autumn 2003): 51.

sein,” making it little wonder if Handel’s motif had offered him a desired – but elusive – musical, even moral, leitmotif in his last weeks and months.¹⁰

This personal connection makes this harkening back to Handel even clearer – Beethoven listened to and admired the works of Handel, studying and referencing them in his most nuanced and complex works – but the complexities of his personal life, combined with his personal stressors, gave him both a musical and personal claim to Handel’s work. By distinctly siphoning out the motive and quotation, Beethoven again marks his precedent and historicism – elements of his neoclassicist thought. Understanding his place in life, and his increasing fragility, he shows influence and direction from masters by completely emulating them in his music. Never in the last movement are the words “Es muss sein?” felt - instead, Beethoven subsumes the narrative influence of the quotation, and the complexity of his personal life into the tug and pull of the last movement. He harkens back to past compositions in a manner that is not anachronistic but reverential, which manifests itself in the pacing of the final movement.

It will be fruitful, thus, to understand the structures and features of Op. 135 that show direct elements of this neoclassicism. The primary elements Beethoven shows in the work fall under the umbrella of restraint and proportionality; both of which can be immediately felt in Op. 135’s compactness of form. Each movement is, superficially, less progressive and less mobile than the movements of his last quartets. When looking at the scope of his earlier works, especially with Op. 131 and Op. 130 (with the two endings and the ‘Grosse Fuge’ finale), this work is remarkably lighter. In Op. 131, the thematic apex of the work revolves around the slow variation movement near the middle, which directs listeners through a deconstruction of the motives that Beethoven has elaborated at this point. The slow movement of op. 135 is

¹⁰ Gerald Silverman, “New Light, but also more Confusion, on ‘Es Muss Sein’,” *The Musical Times* 144, no. 1884 (Autumn 2003): 53.

comparatively barely a third in length, and while it may be the emotional crux of the work, it does not have the temporal heft. Barbara Barry characterizes Beethoven's "redesign" as shifting a paradigm:

The F major quartet returns to a four-movement plan after the larger numbers of movement in opp.130, 131, and 132. Its first movement has a more normative sonata design after the 'double textured', juxtaposed material in the first movements of opp.130 and 132, and the slow fugal first movement of op.131. In op.135, the first movement and finale have a matching relationship of key, character and proportion, typical of many classical string quartets, symphonies and sonatas... [this in contrast to] the experimental relationships of first movement and finale in two of the preceding quartets... In addition the normative four movements and matching first movement/finale, precisely contoured style and balanced phrase patterns in op.135 recall Haydn, referencing the F major quartet as redesigned classicism.¹¹

This analysis by Barry is apt, and she agrees with the main characterization made prior: the fundamental characteristics of Op. 135 are its most important discerning characteristics. As she discusses, Beethoven's late style, in general, was more exploratory and vast than the scope presented in this work. Works composed just a few years earlier while musically proportional do not share the same "proportionality" present in works of a more classical styling. Haydn set very clear precedents for a form that could now be considered monikers: fast-slow-fast-'semi-slow/fast', with sonata form first movement, a slow movement (generally a sonata form in a closely related key), minuet/trio (Beethoven often replaced this with a scherzo), and a "semi-slow" ending which was normally in a Rondo form.

Haydn's efforts, thus, made the form of a quartet more rigorously compact. This perceived "effectiveness" is what Beethoven toyed with in the late works. Compared to the massive scope of Op. 130, with its turmoil-filled inner movements and bombastic conclusion, Beethoven aimed to make the form transcendent, and less internal. If Haydn's contributions were

¹¹ Barbara Barry, "Op. 135: Beethoven's 'Haydn' quartet," *The Musical Times* 1945 (Winter 2018): 65.

more conciliatory – meant to reconcile popular musical culture into a more refined, and elegant form, Beethoven wanted to demonstrate the boundaries of the form. This disjunction in compositional understanding is evident and clear for most of their works: but in Op. 135, it is not. Beethoven returns to a more classical styling, and returns to something closer to what Haydn passed on.

Barry's concluding remark references a re-designation – this being the commonality between this work and Beethoven's late works. The compact, interconnected movements are not imitative of Haydn's work as much as they reutilize what Haydn meant to do. The scope of the first movement may be shorter than the scope of other late Beethoven first movements, but the reduced scope is not so much an imitation of Haydn's style, but a sign "...of looking backwards in order to look forwards."¹² This awareness, and this mental space, is at heart a pillar of neoclassicism: Beethoven now, was not afraid of following in the footsteps of Haydn, but was going to use them and mold them directly – using, at first, the structural brevity and clarity as a new set of guidelines for composition.

The first movement of the work is elegant, well structured, and ultimately interrogatory. The opening phrase, in the viola, is the motive that ties the entire first movement together. The response of the rest of the quartet to this initial motive is the motor for action, but as Kristen Knittel shows, this movement is problematic in many ways:

Indeed, with the exception of the extremely solid and final-sounding cadence in bar 10, to which many commentators draw attention, there is very little about Op. 135/1 that isn't problematic. The recapitulation of the main material takes place before the main key is firmly re-established, and the beginning of the coda is also uncertain because the

¹² Ibid.

recapitulation manifests the same problems that are found in the exposition with the ambiguity of the second theme, the lack of caesura, and unstable arrival points.¹³

The remarks made here about the first movement are not so much problematic as they are characteristic of the modifications Beethoven has made to Haydn's style. The strong but unstable resolution is below in measure 10.¹⁴

The musical score is for the first movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in F Major, Op. 135, measures 1 through 10. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' and the time signature is 2/4. The key signature has one flat (F major). The score is arranged for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The first system (measures 1-5) shows the initial entries of the instruments. Violin I and II have rests in measures 1-2, then enter in measure 3. Viola and Violoncello enter in measure 1. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *sf* (sforzando). The second system (measures 6-10) shows the development of the texture. The Viola and Violoncello parts feature a 'pizz.' (pizzicato) marking in measure 6. The Violin parts have a 'poco cresc.' (poco crescendo) marking in measure 8. The Violoncello part has an 'arco' (arco) marking in measure 10. The score concludes with a *p* (piano) dynamic in measure 10.

The start of the first movement is also remarkable in its rhythmic treatment. The contrapuntal motion of each of the voices in mm. 4-5 after the viola introduces the responsorial rhythm is texturally very delicate, compared to other late works. The transparency and the use of pizzicato so early on in the cello voice, leading to a tonic chord in mm. 6, is also a sign of Beethoven's light sense of sound. As Knittel points out, mm. 10 is the only true strong resolution early on in

¹³ Kristin Knittel, "Late, Last, and Least: On Being Beethoven's Quartet in F Major, op. 135," *Music & Letters* 87, no.1 (Winter 2006): 36.

¹⁴ Ludvig Van Beethoven, *Streichquartett Opus 135* (Munich: Henle Verlag, 2004): 1.

the work, and its brief finality is never felt again. This is not to say the work does not resolve, but more to show another modification of Haydn's style: delaying resolution, and writing in a more fleeting manner. This characteristic is typical Beethoven, but progression in the early parts of the work from transparency to unity (in mm. 9-10) is example of Beethoven's modifications, or as Knittel says, "problems", that the work brings. William Kinderman agrees, and discusses Johnathan Kramer's observations:

The linear or deterministic aspect of Beethoven's works is a familiar aspect of his style, but the nonlinear features deserve more recognition. Jonathan Kramer has drawn attention to nonlinear qualities in the first movement of...op. 135. He focus on the strong tonic cadence heard already in bar 10 of the opening Allegretto, as well as the disconnection of this gesture from the immediate continuation, and he probes the paradoxical implications of an "actual ending" of the piece in "gestural time" heard just as it begins.¹⁵

Kinderman and Kramer hint on something that will be later discussed, namely the aspect of "discontinuity" present in the work. However, the modifications and change of expectation is something well associated with Beethoven's late style. The idiosyncrasies of Beethoven's late voice are heard and contained within the trappings of an Haydn's high classical sensibility.

The second movement contains perhaps some of the most fleet-footed and boisterous writing in Beethoven's entire oeuvre. The movement starts off like almost all Beethoven scherzos: syncopations galore, obfuscation of the beat, and irregular metric stresses to throw off listeners:¹⁶

¹⁵ William Kinderman, "Beethoven's Last Quartets: Threshold to a Fourth Creative Period?" in *The String Quartets of Beethoven*, ed. William Kinderman (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006): 281.

¹⁶Ludvig Van Beethoven, *Streichquartett Opus 135* (Munich: Henle Verlag, 2004): 10.

Vivace

Within the first few bars, every beat in the bar is stressed. The pickup that starts the movement stresses the third beat, and as such throws the rest of the meter off kilter until later in the scherzo. While Beethoven's love of obfuscatory rhythm is nothing new, what is interesting with this movement is the scope, direction, and organization. Almost all of the late quartets have quick-witted scherzi, similar to the one in op. 135. What sets this one apart, however, is the changing of relations. Haydn's set precedent was to make the scherzo (or minuet) section of the middle movements the loud of the two, and in nearly every instance of a minuet and trio in Haydn's quartets, the trio movement is quiet, serene and more peaceful. This, again, is a testament to Haydn's reverence of proportionality: almost Newtonian in a sense, every fast and loud action in a work needs a soft and quiet section to counterbalance it in ones ear. Beethoven does not do this here: the introductory scherzo is much more quiet and the notorious fortissimo passage, as seen below, occurs well into the middle of the trio.¹⁷ In addition, the pacing of the movement is continuously breakneck: never does the listener take a moment of respite.

¹⁷ Ibid, 13-14.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a quartet. The first system, starting at measure 139, shows four staves. The top staff (violin) has a melodic line with slurs and accents. The second staff (viola) has a similar melodic line. The third staff (cello) and fourth staff (bass) feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in octaves, marked with a *cresc.* and *ff* dynamic. The second system, starting at measure 145, shows the same four staves. The top staff continues with a melodic line, while the lower three staves continue with the octave pattern, marked with a *f* dynamic.

The boisterous octave writing in the lower instruments repeats for nearly 50 measures, and in more ways than one can be interpreted as leaving the work not feeling like lopsided classical pastiche, but a movement with textbook Beethovenian frenzy. Joseph Kerman continues:

An absolutely wild, shattering climax comes in the very last place that might have been anticipated, namely in the trio of the scherzo. The three low instruments grind the turn-motif into A [major] over and over again, nearly fifty times without any interruption, while the violin screams a wild triumphant leaping dance above. *Fortissimo* is required for the first time in the entire quartet... The scherzo has a special responsibility for dynamism... This responsibility the present *Vivace* fulfils in a perfectly fantastic way... This piece is as swift and quirky as a bagatelle, a fact that should not obscure its very ominous undertones.¹⁸

Kerman's feelings hint on a different kind of reference to Haydn: one that is more in line with a complete structural proportionality. If Beethoven wanted to have full control, and malleability of the insides of each movement, a way he could use Haydn's smaller-scale quartet form was to create hierarchy of emphasis. The first movement of the quartet, marked *Allegretto* rather than

¹⁸ Joseph Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets* (New York, 1967): 358-360.

the ordinary *Allegro* that would befit one of Haydn's works, use oddities of phrasing, transparency, and tight motivic writing to start the work. While it has a powerful trajectory, it never shows the textbook aggression signature to a work of Beethoven's: the second movement fills this gap. The relative lightness of the first movement runs into the start of the second, but the second spins out into a mood of bright triumph. All of these characteristics show Beethoven's use of Haydn's forms, but recasting of the internal parts of the work – a neoclassical mindset.

The slow third movement is significantly more passive than other slow movements Beethoven wrote earlier. However, there are remarkable sections of homophony in the work, which are not present in Beethoven's earlier writings. This movement, while contemplative does not reach the vast distances achieved in the earlier slow movements of Beethoven's, such as the famous variation movement of Op. 131. Nevertheless - within the introspection and internality of this movement, Beethoven's sense of texture and opposition recall the homophonic textures of Mozart's Haydn quartets, such as K. 421. Note the independent first violin melody, and the rhythmic homogeneity of the accompanying parts¹⁹:

The image displays a musical score for the slow third movement of Beethoven's Op. 131. It consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 80. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The first violin part features a melodic line with a trill (tr) and a fermata. The other parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

¹⁹ W. A. Mozart, *Abteilung I: Streichquartette, Band [NMA VII/20]* (Kassel: Barenreiter-Verlag, 1962): 1.

Comparing these elements with the transitional melody in the first violin of Op. 135²⁰:

Note the similar rhythmic homogeneity of the lower voices, but notice how Beethoven controls which instruments share rhythmic release. In mm. 20 of Op. 135, the viola shares the upbeat to the next measure with the change in the second violin – in mm. 19, all three lower voices sustain the Db major chord through the bar, allowing for clarity when the first violin ascends to the high Db. The middle section of the slow movement shows Beethoven’s signature modification of these classical forms, as he delineates the inner section of the slow movement both harmonically and texturally. Again, note how by doing so he maintains the proportionality and balance of the inner movement, as Mozart and Haydn do, but he both literally and figuratively distances himself²¹:

²⁰ Ludvig Van Beethoven, *Streichquartett Opus 135* (Munich: Henle Verlag, 2004): 17.

²¹Ibid, 18.

23 *più lento*

By countering the more heavy pace of the first half of this movement, and beginning the middle section in a more lyrical, slower pace (as marked), Beethoven maintains a dialectic motion. The tonality, E major, is not only the tonality of the leading tone of the key of the entire work, but the mediant of the prior key of Db. Beethoven's more aggressive modulations, while not musically acting in that manner, are not as closely related with what would have been found in Haydn's writing. All of these characteristics and modifications show the action of Haydn's precedent: the overall form of the slow movement is compact, but the internal changes to the work forced Beethoven to be more agile with his musical material. Modulating to distant keys in shorter time spans; emphasizing melodies through monophonic and homophonic textural features. The more expanded harmonic palette, along with the modifications of proportionality are reflective of a neoclassical mindset: modifications to the form, but using the broadest hierarchical elements of the form as guidance.

From the first three movements, Beethoven's subsuming of Haydn's precedent is clear. Beethoven does not want to write a work in exact copy of Haydn, but wants to keep the structural and hierarchical elements in place to make the work a tighter knit score. The brevity of each movement is a guardrail and challenge: Beethoven still uses his distinct artistic voice to

modify the innermost elements of the work. An element of this artistic voice is also present in these first two movements, something Barbary Barry calls “discontinuity”:

...characteristics of compression and discontinuity...are revisited in the late quartets: in the angularity and juxtaposition of sections in the *Grosse Fuge*, in the disjunctions in the first movement of op. 132, and, in very different ways, in the first movement of the F-Major Quartet, op.135. Discontinuity [can be seen] as action and rhythmic compression, coherence as connection and structural planning: the style references for the op. 18 quartets are not only in op. 95.²²

Barry here is discussing an element of Beethoven’s composition that can be most clearly felt in his op. 18 quartets, and again is primarily a focus on rhythmic modification. In Beethoven’s earliest works, which can be considered firmly ‘classical,’ Beethoven shows extraordinary sensitivity and interest in characteristics that present themselves in the *Vivace* of Op. 135. Beethoven’s intent while writing the Op. 18 quartets has been of high academic contention: were this quartets intended as forays into the high classical style espoused by Mozart and Haydn, or were the early quartets a means of being seen as a masterful composer? Barry continues:

An insight into Beethoven’s purpose for op. 18, beyond the specific compositional agenda of being acknowledged a master alongside Haydn and Mozart, can be found in a letter from around 1798 to his friend Nicholas Zmeskall: ‘The devil take you, I refuse to hear anything about your whole moral outlook. *Power* is the moral principle of those who excel others, and it is also mine.’... Power is the moral dimension of art as creative action...From this perspective of devising creative action, Beethoven’s reinterpretation of Haydn and Mozart’s techniques in string quartets gains new seriousness of purpose.²³

From this, Barry helps explain Beethoven’s internal practice: Beethoven’s experimentation with the form and composition of the early op. 18 quartets is not only his demonstration of mastery, but also a demonstration of his artistic willpower. For Beethoven, at that early point in his career, he viewed his compositions as polemics – examples of how what he learned from Haydn and Mozart could become something of his own. The Op. 18 quartets, thus, do not share the same

²² Barbara Barry, “In Beethoven’s ‘Clock Shop’: Discontinuity in the Opus 18 Quartets,” *The Musical Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 321.

²³ *Ibid*, 328.

compositional impetus as Op. 135. In fact, the vast differences in Beethoven's health and personal life bring doubts into this continued aggression. But it is hard to not assemble patterns from Beethoven's early life – the means by which he exerted his artistic vision at an early time is much the same. Beethoven no longer needed to demonstrate his mastery of Haydn and Mozart this late in his career: he was paying homage, and understood his historical position. He rather used these elements as a neoclassical revival of the succinct, effective, brevity of the form.

Haydn spent his entire career as Kapellmeister of the Esterhazy court. This unique artistic position enabled him to produce a large volume of works in short periods of time with little regard for issues in compensation. Every work that Haydn composed would receive a payment from the court – during Haydn's prime years of composition he was a very successful composer. Beethoven was not lucky in this regard. His later years were plagued by misuse of funds, and relative austerity in regards to his living condition. John Gingerich discusses Beethoven's actions around the composition of Op. 135:

The conversation books do not record any plans for performing Beethoven's last quartet, but a year after Beethoven's death, on Sunday, 23 March 1828, Linke gave another benefit concert featuring the premiere of Op. 135. Beethoven had written his final, comparatively small quartet after having heard repeatedly from Holz and his relatives that he could make just as much money by writing shorter quartets, that the quartet in B-flat, op. 130, could have been carved in two and sold for twice as much. The publisher Maurice Schlesinger later remembered having received a letter from Beethoven claiming to have written the op. 135 quartet "only because I had promised it and need money," and the "es muss sein" showed how onerous the task had been.²⁴

This discussion between Beethoven and his publisher adds more credence to Beethoven's sudden stylistic change near the end of his life. Beethoven's money problems were common knowledge, and with the state of his nephew, more income would have been beyond helpful. If we trace his

²⁴ John Gingerich, "Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Beethoven's Late Quartets," *The Musical Quarterly* 93, no. 3

mindset, and look back to the compositions of his teacher, someone who was a notably rich composer, the sudden change of style does not seem so sudden.

Contemporary reception of the quartet and its debut by the Schuppanzigh quartet adds more to origins of this quartet, and Beethoven's intent. While Beethoven's pragmatism behind the composition can be argued, and it is very likely that the shortened format for compositions used by Haydn (and to an extent Mozart) would have allowed for Beethoven to publish with more frequency, the instantly apparent differences between this work and his last works would have elicited a markedly different reaction from audiences. Christina Bashford compiles reactions to the premiere of some of the quartets, note especially the reactions to Op. 135:

...even Alsager admitted that the finale op. 135 was a 'very peculiar structure...intended to work out and apparently uncouth subject, which the composer entitles '*Muss es seyn*' [sic.]?'...The second movement of op. 130, which Ella described as 'grotesque and delightful' and Hogarth as the 'diamond of the desert,' was regularly encored. The scherzo of op. 135, according to the *Musical World*, set the audience 'upon the titter,'... The slow movements of opp. 130 and 135 were also singled out...the slow movements of opp. 127, 132, and 135...the opening of op. 135 [as well].²⁵

Audiences reacted incredibly positively to many of the movements in op. 135, and while it seems reactions combined within the many different works, the first three movements of the work were notable for their impact. Their brevity clearly allowed for a strong feeling in the audience – and the scherzo movement excited the audience enough for the feeling to be noticeable. The subtleties of the form, and the nuance of the work, are more present analytically. While the cadential figurations in the first movement, and the delay of anticipation (aforementioned: discontinuity) are present, Beethoven's control of the form is at the highest of his prowess. Op. 135, chronologically, was the last written quartet. Even if the complexity of the form,

²⁵ Christina Bashford, "The Late Beethoven Quartets and the London Press, 1836-ca.1850," *The Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 105-111.

structurally, came earlier, the experience of writing those prior quartets contributed to his manifest control of the material.

There is a clear and remarkable progression in Beethoven's compositions from his earliest works, such as the op. 18 quartets, and his latest works. Each of his works demonstrates a mastery of the previous style – and as Jeremy Yudkin discusses, Beethoven channeled his reverence of prior composers into his own works. The origin of the “Es muss sein” motive, and its similarities to Handel's *Jepthra* combined with the personal crises in his life are reflective of a closer relationship between Beethoven's life and work. Nearing the end of his life, Beethoven's artistic impulse grew past his initial motivations earlier in his career: rather than demonstrate his knowledge, he wanted to pay homage. He looked back, recognizing his place in historical context, and used the restraint and proportionality of form presented by Haydn, and reimagined his contributions to the string quartet medium in a neoclassical manner. This manner of composition, regardless of the impetus for its occurrence, is a form of neoclassicism prior to the composers of the 20th century. In many ways, this understanding of Beethoven may lead to a reinterpretation of neoclassicism: as a stylistic choice, it should become something more inclusive. Neoclassicism may become the act of self-reflection that allows a composer to not only recognize their place in historical currents, but also evaluate compositions of the past and combine elements from those works with their own.

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Annotated Bibliography

Balter, Tamara. "A Theory of Irony in Music: Types of Irony in the String Quartets of Haydn and Beethoven." PhD diss., Indiana University, 2009.

Tamara Balter, in her dissertation work, undertakes several case studies on quartets composed by Haydn and Beethoven in order to understand how irony is present in their works. The types of irony that she explores are Socratic irony, parody and Romantic irony. She compares Haydn's work in Op. 33 with dialectics in dialogues written by Socrates/Plato while comparing Beethoven's work with Haydn's. The latter comparison sheds light on the influence Haydn held on Beethoven. Utilizing examples and quotations from both composers, Balter codifies a direct musical link between the two composers. This direct analysis between the composers is rare – and as such proves extremely valuable for scholars on both Haydn and Beethoven to understand their mutual relationship. Unfortunately, Balter spends a significant portion of her work on understanding Haydn and does not spend much time on Beethoven's works. However, the analysis provided on Beethoven's works proves sufficient as an analytical entry.

Bashford, Christina. "The Late Beethoven Quartets and the London Press, 1836-ca. 1850." *The Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 84-122.

Christina Bashford draws on firsthand accounts of early performances of Beethoven's late quartets in Victorian London in order to explore the contemporary reception and influence the works held in the English critical tradition. She believes that while the interpretation of the quartets through the first generation of Viennese and Parisian critics has been well documented, the same understanding has not been allowed of the London press. While she does concede that the Beethoven Quartett Society of London has a thorough history of documentation, she feels the broader picture of the relationship of the late quartets to the musical society of London in the 19th century is new ground. Her work tracks the changing expectations, reactions, and interpretations of English critics as the works were performed with more frequency. A significant limitation of this work is that it is not analytical, but rather a work of historical and historiographical importance. As such, there is not significant emphasis on a musical understanding of the works; however, the thorough findings through contemporary critics help show the shifting views of the natures of these complex works.

Barbara, Barry. "In Beethoven's "Clock Shop": Discontinuity in the Opus 18 Quartets." *The Musical Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 320-37.

Barbara Barry thoroughly analyzes the formal nature of Beethoven's early Op. 18 quartets. Her findings are through the lens of Adorno's understanding of Beethoven's use of time as she frequently uses his terminology to facilitate analysis (intensive and extensive time). By citing examples from Beethoven's Op. 18 works, she describes moments in the works where Beethoven breaks from tradition by Haydn and the late Mozart, and writes in discontinuity rather than continuity. She finds that the discontinuity is not limited to the rhythmic sensibility of Beethoven's writing, but finds its way in Beethoven's tonal outline, as he utilized tonal interruptions in order to create harmonic disjunction. The limitations of this work regard the subject: Barry's work is exclusively an analysis of Beethoven's early writing for strings, and

does not delve into his late period. This limitation can be put aside, however, as the patterns and precedents that Beethoven sets in these early compositions echo into all of his later music.

Gingerich, John. "Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Beethoven's Late Quartets." *The Musical Quarterly* 93, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 450-513.

John Gingerich explores the rarely discussed relationship between Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Beethoven in this work which is focused on the performance practices of Schuppanzigh's eponymous string quartet. The work undertakes several analyses of Schuppanzigh's views and practices on programming choice of the time, and looks at the relationship Schuppanzigh had on each of the late quartets, starting with op. 127. Gingerich concludes that all of the quartets that Beethoven wrote, from op. 18 to op. 135 hold some bearing of influence from Schuppanzigh, partially due to the fact that he was one of the first major artist to hold extensive concert series. These premieres hold tremendous weight on the entrance of a work into the general repertoire, and Schuppanzigh's relationship with Beethoven allowed the works to gain an exposure that they may have never held before. Gingerich also documents Schuppanzigh's thoughts on each late quartet, from numerous contemporary sources. The major limitation of this work is that it spends a significant amount of time explaining Schuppanzigh's biographical background, and artistic modus operandi. The connection to Beethoven is not the primary focus. Nevertheless, Gingerich creates a connection between the Beethoven and how Beethoven's work was interpreted through Schuppanzigh's interpretations and subsequent performances.

Kinderman, William. "Beethoven's Last Quartets: Threshold to a Fourth Creative Period?" In *The String Quartets of Beethoven*, edited by William Kinderman, 279-322.

William Kinderman attempts to put together patterns and motives from Beethoven's late quartets and Beethoven's compositional methods in order to hint at a new direction of composition that Beethoven may have taken. Kinderman focuses primarily on the three correlated middle works, namely op. 130, op. 131, and op. 132. These quartets share thematic commonalities, and represent Beethoven's most extreme formal experimentation - as such, Kinderman undertakes a historical and analytical understanding of the works, along with a comparison of their "nonlinear" aspects in order to extrapolate the underpinnings of Beethoven's would-be fourth creative period. The work is limited by its scope - an analysis of Op. 127 and op. 135 would have been extremely useful, due to the relative formal "conservatism" of both works. Regardless, Kinderman strikes new ground in analysis of the commonalities of these major works, and lends a firm entry into the nuance of these works.

Knittel, Kristin. "'Late', Last, and Least: On Being Beethoven's Quartet in F Major, op. 135." *Music & Letters* 87, no.1 (Winter 2006): 16-51.

Kristin Knittel examines Beethoven's rarely discussed Op. 135 in order to explain its importance in contrast its apparent simplicity. Op. 135 is relatively standard in its formalities - and as such, she believes its seemingly "obvious" nature has made it seem as an unsuitable swansong to musical critics. Knittel believes this is due to a misunderstanding of Beethoven's means of composition and hopes to inspire a re-evaluation of Beethoven's life and works. She utilizes historical and contemporary reviews of op. 135, as well as thorough analysis of the work

itself, in order to probe at some of the works surface level complexities and nuances often hidden behind its purported aural simplicity. She also points out misunderstandings regarding the background of the works composition and how the late period of Beethoven's life, and his sufferings, are romanticized in an attempt to impart greater significance on the late works. Knittel's work is limited by its multifaceted nature – the work simultaneously undertakes analysis, historical re-evaluation, and historiographical commentary. As such, the work fails to have a true direct emphasis. Thankfully, the breadth of the work is very useful in finding scholarship on this rarely documented work.

Reynolds, Christopher. "The Representational Impulse in Late Beethoven, II: String Quartet in F Major, Op. 135." *Acta Musicologica* 60, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 180-94.

Christopher Reynolds undertakes a thorough motivic analysis of op. 135 in this work – based primarily on the understanding of its cyclic nature. Reynolds thoroughly tracks the “Es Muss Sein” motive in the final movement of the work, and finds its possible origins in the first movement. By treating this subject like the subject of a fugue, Reynolds also finds how Beethoven transformed and dissected the theme in the last movement. He concludes his work by comparing the work to Beethoven Op. 98 song cycle, *An die ferne Geliebte*, and finds Beethoven's cyclic treatment of the subject in op. 135 to take precedent from this work, finding similar means of motivic transformation. A limitation of Reynolds' work is that it is purely analytical, and provides very little historical information of Beethoven's means of composition. While time is spent analyzing the epigraph, “Es muss sein,” little time is spent on the origins of the epigraph. Nevertheless, Reynolds representational analysis is the only one of its kind, and as such provides valuable analytical information for op. 135.

Silverman, Gerald. "New Light, but Also More Confusion, on 'Es Muss Sein'." *The Musical Times* 144, no. 1884 (Autumn 2003): 51-53.

Gerland Silverman finds a clear connection between Handel's last great work, the oratoria *Jephtha*, and the main motive from Beethoven's op. 135. The first words of Handel's work are “It must be so,” and Beethoven's theme is a slight deviation, “Es muss sein.” This uncanny similarity is the means of analytical entry for Silverman, and he compares Beethoven's relationship with his nephew Karl with the plot of *Jephtha*. He also finds that the connection does not end at op. 135, and points at a canon on a subject of Handel's, WoO 196, which Beethoven composed a few years prior. The limitations of this work are its scope and brevity – the analysis is very limited, and Silverman does not have many additional bibliographic sources besides his own findings. While this may indicate that this interpretation of op. 135's last movement is completely new analytical territory, citations that corroborate a relationship between Handel and Beethoven would help reinforce Silverman's findings.

Smyth, David. "Of Riddles and Rhetoric: The Finale of Beethoven's Last Quartet." *Indiana Theory Review* 26 (2005): 123-34.

David Smyth undertakes a formal analysis of the last movement of op. 135, in hopes to understand its lyrical nature, through the “Es muss sein” heading that heads its introductory page. The work is almost purely analytical, and very rarely strays from its analytical goal. Smyth tracks each modulation, and plots the movements tonal goals. Through his analysis, he finds that aspects of the work suggest that Beethoven viewed the work as an exploration of making the string quartet “sing,” similar to Schubert’s later “Der Tod und das Madschen”. Smyth also believes that the way that Beethoven creates intertextual complexities in this finale movement help in showing that Beethoven’s music does not take on a primarily positive outlook. In fact, Smyth argues that this movement lends more to a miserly mood, through its choices in modulation, rather than the accepted triumphant ending. Smyth’s work is limited by its scope – the analysis is limited to the last movement. It would be interesting to view other works by Beethoven, in his late period, under this lens. Regardless, the work is an excellent formal analysis exploring the tonality of this last movement, and its peculiarities in regards to the “Es muss sein!” motive.

Yudkin, Jeremy. "Beethoven's "Mozart" Quartet." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 30-74.

Jeremy Yudkin undertakes a thorough comparative analysis of Beethoven’s Op. 18 No. 5 and Mozart’s K. 464. This relationship helps unveil the major influences that Beethoven took from prior composers. Oftentimes, previous analyses of Beethoven have revealed the influence of Haydn, but Yudkin makes clear that the passing of the epochal Mozart at a young age left a considerable influence on Beethoven. The influence of Mozart’s music was felt especially through the teachings of Haydn. Yudkin uses writings from Beethoven, especially his manuscripts, to find concrete connections between Beethoven and Mozart. He additionally looks at musical connections between Op. 18 No. 5 and the slow movement of K. 464. From these characteristics, Yudkin extrapolates patterns that would follow Beethoven for the rest of his career. Yudkin’s work is limited by its very nature – the analysis and patterns found may only apply to these two specific works, and claiming that such patterns reflect in works significantly later in Beethoven’s output may seem like overstepping. However, Yudkin’s analysis of this work helps show where and when Beethoven referenced his influences for his own writing, and finding the commonalties between this early work and Beethoven’s later works may help in understanding his influences for his later works.