Topics and Formal Functions: The Case of the Lament

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[–] Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the relationship of the lament topic to various form-functional contexts. After explaining that this topic is inextricably linked with a schema defined essentially by its bass voice, the study considers how the intrinsically sequential harmonic content of the schema lends itself well to expressing the formal sense of "being in the middle." It further demonstrates that the schema can also participate in creating a formal ending, a cadence, and can even be used in an initiating formal context, which may engender the perception of a "formal dissonance," a conflict between intrinsic and contextual functionality. The pervasive descending bass line of the lament schema, while appropriate for baroque compositional practice, jars somewhat with classical practice, such that the lament topic becomes a touchstone for highlighting stylistic differences among earlier and later works within the eighteenth century.

Keywords: lament, topic, schema, formal function, cadence, formal dissonance, intrinsic functionality, contextual functionality, baroque, classical

In an earlier essay (Caplin 2005) I examined the conditions under which a relationship between musical topics and formal functionality might be established and evaluated. I discussed the extent to which a given topic has the potential of expressing the general temporal qualities of *beginning, middle*, or *ending* of a formal process, including the framing temporalities of *before-the-beginning* and *after-the-end*. I argued that an association of topic and form must engage a topic's specific musical features—its melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and textural content—and that a distinct connection between topic and formal function can only arise when such features themselves can be shown to articulate a specific temporal quality. I thus took the "Universe of Topics" (as proposed by Agawu 1991 and supplemented by Monelle 2000) and distinguished individual topics as generating "no formal relation," a "possible formal relation," or a "likely formal relation" (Table 15.1). For each topic that has a likely relation to formal functionality, I discussed which specific musical characteristics—such as its harmonic content, its melodic directionality, or its textural complexities—help establish its ability to express one or more generalized formal functions (Table 15.2).

The present chapter will develop further the relationship of topic to form, but now in connection with a single topic, the *lament*. I have chosen this topic because, unlike the other form-relating topics (see again, Table 15.2), the lament has the potential of expressing the full complement of beginning, middle, and ending functions. The topic is thus suitable for use in a wide variety of compositional contexts. The lament is also interesting because it represents a special case of the relation between topics and contrapuntal-harmonic schemata (Gjerdingen 2007). In principle, topics and schemata are distinct from each other, even if in some cases a given topic can be associated with a specific schema (as discussed in the previous chapter of this book), but the lament topic is inextricably linked with a single schema. This schema, too, is special: whereas most schemata embrace both an upper-voice melody and bass melody, the lament schema is defined essentially by its stepwise descending bass; no one melodic pattern emerges as (p. 416)

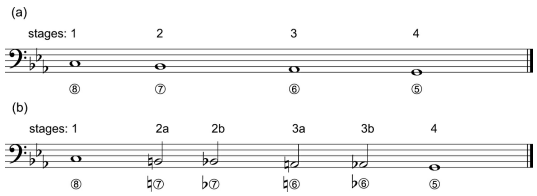
Table 15.1 "Universe of Topics" from Caplin, "On the Relation of Musical *Topoi* to Formal Function" (2005), 115, table 1

1. No Formal Relation	**2. Possible Formal Relation**	**3. Likely Formal Relation**
alla breve	brilliant style	*coup d'archet*
alla zoppa	cadenza	fanfare
amoroso	fantasia	French overture
aria	hunt style	horn call (horn fifths)
bourrée	pastoral	lament
gavotte	sensibility (*Empfindsamkeit*)	learned style
march		Mannheim rocket
military		musette
minuet		*Sturm und Drang*
ombra		
opera buffa		
recitative		
sarabande		
sigh motive (*Seufzer*)		
singing style		
Turkish music		

Table 15.2 Topics and General Temporal Qualities

Topic	Pre-Beg	Beg	Mid	End	Post-end
coup d'archet	✓	✓			
fanfare		✓		✓	
French overture		✓			
horn call (horn fifths)		✓		✓	✓
lament		✓	✓	✓	
learned style		✓	✓		
Mannheim rocket	✓	✓			
musette		✓			✓
Sturm und Drang			✓		

a conventional counterpoint to this bass line. In short, we can say that the lament topic is defined by the lament schema and the lament schema is defined by its bass. Last but not least, the lament's pervasively descending bass is somewhat of a constraining factor, especially in works by classical composers, whose bass melodies typically feature prominent ascending motion. The topic is thus a touchstone for highlighting some important stylistic differences among earlier and later works within the eighteenth century.



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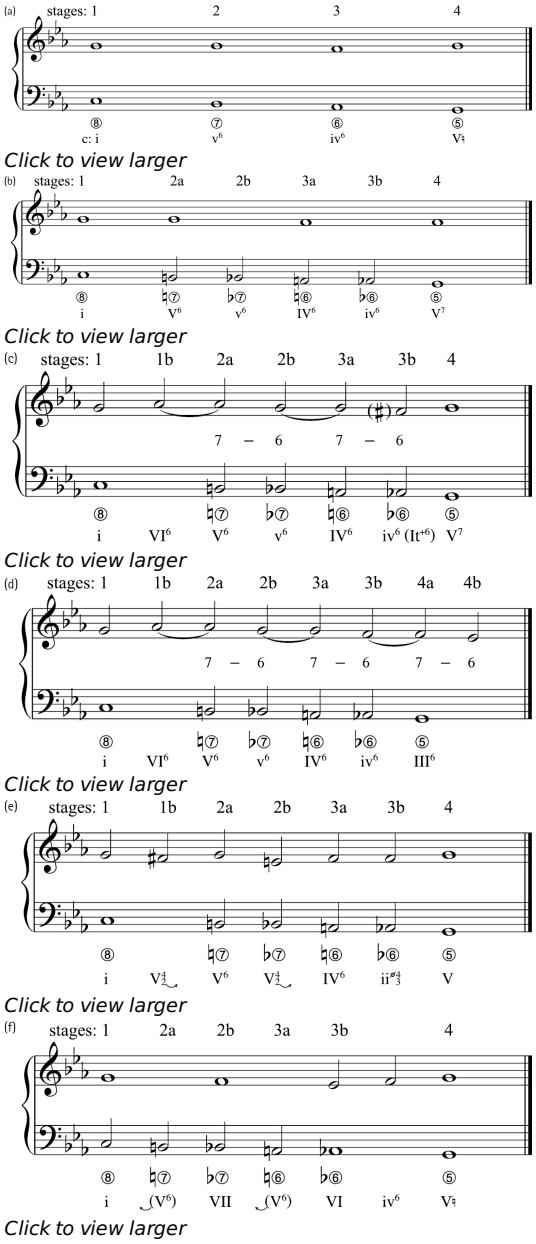
Example 15.1 The lament schema: (a) diatonic, minor-mode pattern and (b) chromatic pattern.

The lament schema is characterized by a bass line that descends stepwise from the tonic scale-degree to the dominant, thus spanning an interval of a perfect fourth. This *descending tetrachord* became associated in the early to mid-seventeenth century with (p. 417) a genre of expressive vocal music containing a mournful text, most especially in works that were titled *lamento* (Rosand 1979). The descending tetrachord was often treated as a ground bass and thus relates as well to the instrumental genres of passacaglia or chaconne. A strictly diatonic, minor-mode version of the lament *schema* is shown in Example 15.1a. Note that, following recent practice (Gjerdingen, 2007; Sanguinetti 2012), I label the scale degrees in the bass by Arabic numerals enclosed in a circle. I further identify four *stages* of the schema (numbered 1 through 4) associated with each bass note. Typically, the expressive quality of lament is made more manifest when the tetrachord is chromaticized, as shown in Example 15.1b. Here, stages 2 and 3 are each subdivided as a or b depending on whether the bass notes ⑦ and ⑤ are natural or flat.[1] This chromatic version, also called *passus duriusculus* (somewhat hard passage) by the seventeenth-century theorist Christoph Bernhard (1648–49; see Williams [1997: 61–62] and Monelle [2000: 73]), could also feature an ascending chromatic line and could appear in upper voices of the musical texture as well as the bass (Williams 1997). For the present purposes, I will deal with the lament topic as confined to the bass voice, for it is there that its form-functional effect is most evident. Moreover, the majority of examples discussed here will feature a chromatic descending motion, with only a small number of purely diatonic examples providing some simpler contexts for comparison. It must be admitted that not all uses of the chromatic tetrachord strongly engage

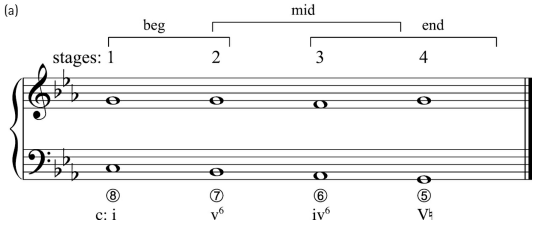
the expressive qualities of mourning and loss; indeed, it is difficult to draw the line between those cases whose nature clearly expresses a lament from those that are more affectively neutral. I will, however, generally restrict my examples to those in which the chromatic tetrachord occurs within minor-mode contexts rather than major-mode ones, where the sense of invoking the lament topic might seem far-fetched.



Example 15.2 Standard harmonizations.

Let us begin by considering some standard harmonizations associated with the lament bass, for harmonic content normally proves to be the strongest indicator of formal functionality (see Example 15.2). The first passage, Example 15.2a, shows a fully diatonic version of the descending tetrachord so as to reveal the sequential nature of the progression from stages 2 to 3, namely the harmonies v^6 to iv^6. A chromatic version, **(p. 418) (p. 419)** shown in Example 15.2b, shows that harmonization remaining the same. Frequently, the descending stepwise motion is elaborated by 7–6 suspensions in the upper voice, as shown in Example 15.2c; in this case, stage 1 can be subdivided and the harmony of stage 1b can initiate the sequential progression with VI^6. Moreover, the descending sequence can continue into stage 4 when it is supported by a III^6 harmony (Example 15.2d); the suspension and its resolution can even subdivide this fourth stage into a and b. The sense of sequence can be accentuated if the dominant and subdominant harmonies are preceded by their own dominants, as shown in Example 15.2e. Finally, another sequential pattern can be used if the constituent harmonies of stages 2 and 3 are placed in root position

(Example 15.2f).[2] Some variations to these basic harmonic plans can be found, but most can be related to the versions just presented.



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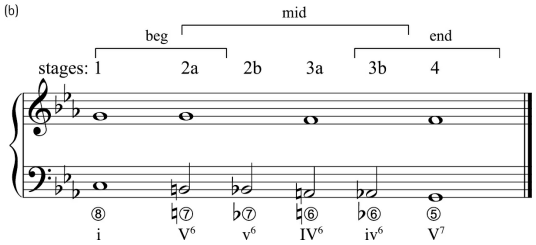

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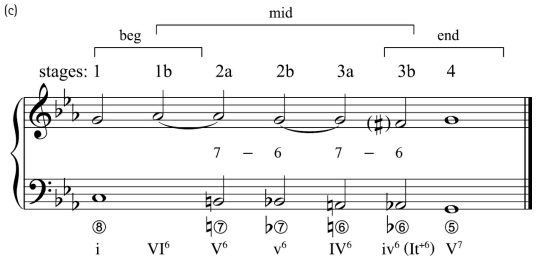

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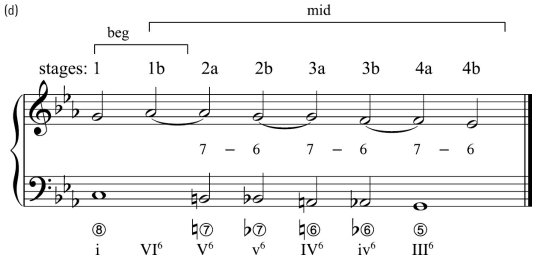

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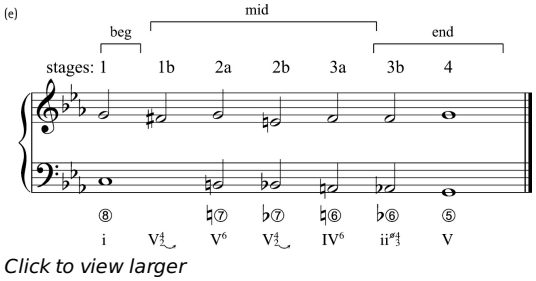

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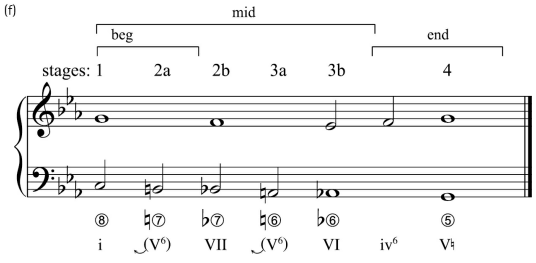

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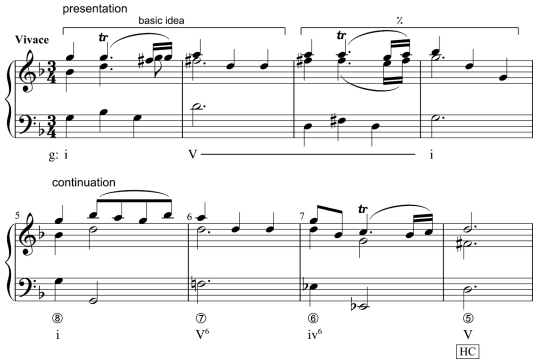
Example 15.3 Standard harmonizations and formal functionality.

Given these various harmonizations, what are their implications for formal functionality? These depend on the

particular stages involved, as shown in Example 15.3, which now adds a form-functional analysis to the progressions of Example 15.2. To the extent that the harmonization projects a sequential pattern, a generalized *medial* formal function is expressed: the instability of sequential harmonies naturally associates this progression type with the sense of "being-in-the-middle" of a formal process. The projection of sequence occurs in all of the versions from stage 2 to stage 3; the motions from stage 1 to stage 2 in Examples 15.3e and 15.3f, and from stage 3 to stage 4 in Example 15.3d are sequential as well. When stage 4 consists of a dominant triad, then the motion from stage 3 to stage 4 has the potential of creating a half-cadential progression—pre-dominant to dominant—which clearly articulates an *ending* formal function. If stage 4 is harmonized by a dominant seventh, then this dissonant harmony can be a constituent of an authentic cadential progression, assuming that a root-position tonic follows to complete the progression. Finally, the root-position tonic of stage 1, including its motion to V^6 in stage 2a, can project a tonic prolongation, whose harmonic stability is suitable for supporting an *initiating* function. We see, therefore, that when the complete schema is used, and when stage 4 brings a cadential dominant of some sort, then the potential for the lament bass to express the complete set of generalized temporal functions can be realized. In many situations, however, the full complement of functions is not present. For example, tonic prolongations also frequently occur in medial formal (p. 420) (p. 421) contexts, where other factors besides harmonic content alone can express that function, such as grouping fragmentation, harmonic acceleration, faster surface rhythms. As a result, the tonic prolongation at the beginning of the schema may be entirely associated with medial functionality and not with a formal beginning. The schema may also fail to express a closing function if stage 4 does not create a genuine cadence of some kind.



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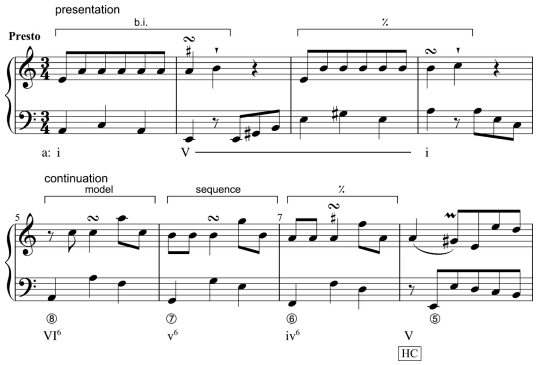
Example 15.4 Corelli, Concerto Grosso in G minor, Op. 6 No. 8, "Christmas," iv, mm. 1–8.

Up to now, we have been discussing the lament bass schema in the abstract and in isolation of any actual occurrence in the musical repertory. Let us now turn to some specific excerpts in order to investigate the variety of form-functional relationships that the lament bass can enter into. I begin with some relatively simple cases in which the bass remains fully diatonic, turning then to more chromatic bass lines. Example 15.4, from Corelli's "Christmas" Concerto, presents a fairly straightforward situation. The overall formal context represents an early example of what Arnold Schoenberg (1967) first described as the *sentence* theme-type.[3] It begins with a two-measure *basic idea* that is immediately repeated as a dominant response, the two ideas together creating what I term a four-measure *presentation* phrase. Inasmuch as the basic idea is a clear initiating function, its repetition continues to express an even heightened sense of beginning, such that the presentation as a whole sets up strong expectations for a *continuation* that (p. 422) would destabilize the formal context and promote greater mobility, eventually resulting in cadential closure of some kind. Here, the four-bar continuation phrase is supported by the lament bass, which descends diatonically from ⑧ to ⑤, the arrival of the dominant creating a clear half cadence. Following the stability of the presentation phrase, with its firm root-position tonic prolongation, the continuation expresses medial functionality by bringing a minimal sense of harmonic acceleration and by the harmonic sequence expressed in stages 2 and 3 (mm. 6 and 7) of the descending tetrachord. Stage 3 also provides the pre-dominant harmony (iv^6) needed to articulate the half cadence, which closes the theme. To be sure, the opening tonic harmony of stage 1 (m. 5) continues the prevailing tonic prolongation, thus maintaining a sense of initiating function in that respect; however, we see that Corelli also takes the opportunity of providing greater melodic activity in that measure (compared with the previous ones), which immediately helps to project medial functionality. As soon as stage 2 brings the minor dominant in first inversion (v^6), the tonic prolongation yields to a sequential progression that fully supports the sense of "being-in-the-middle" of the theme. In short, the lament bass essentially expresses medial and concluding functions, the initiating function being created by the prior

presentation phrase.



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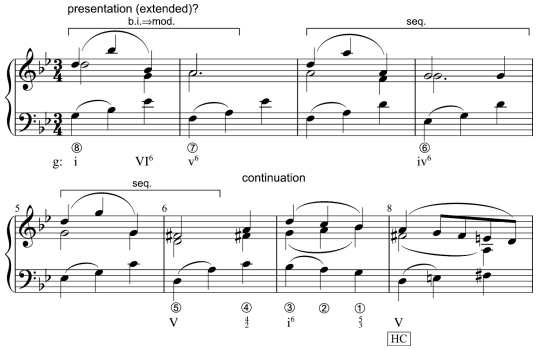
Example 15.5 C. P. E. Bach, Sonatina in A minor, Wq. 50 No. 3, H. 138/i, mm. 1–8.

A similar situation is found in the opening movement of C. P. E. Bach's Sonatina in A minor, Wq. 50 No. 3, H. 138 (Example 15.5). Following an opening presentation, the continuation begins with a diatonic version of the lament bass. Here the sense of medial function is more strongly expressed than in the Corelli example, since the VI^6 harmony (p. 423) of stage 1 (in m. 5) already signals the onset of the sequential progression. As well, Bach uses this harmonic progression to support a clear model–sequence repetition, which also articulates phrase-structural *fragmentation*, the reduction in the size of the groups, from two-measures in the basic idea and its repetition to a single bar for the model and its sequences.



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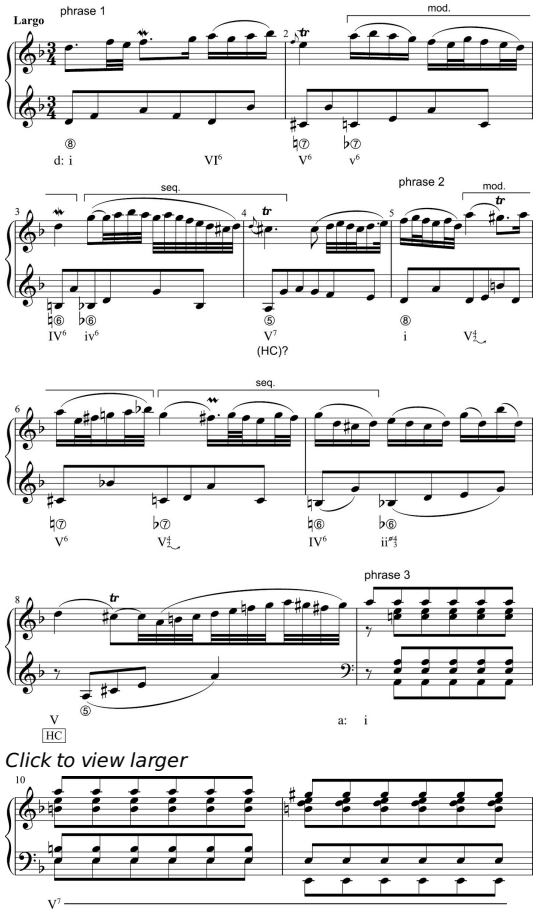
Example 15.6 Handel, *Water Music*, Suite No. 3 in G minor, Minuet II, mm. 1–8.

Example 15.6, from the second minuet of Handel's *Water Music*, Suite No. 3 in G minor, brings greater formal complexities in a context that may, like the previous examples, seem sentential. Here, the lament topic appears at the very opening of the theme to support the basic idea, which is repeated two times over the course of the entire bass-line descent. As a result, the arrival at m. 6 of stage 4 on dominant harmony is not perceived as cadential, since it is still supporting an "opening idea"; as a result, Handel has the bass continue down stepwise all the way back to tonic (①), which moves directly to another dominant, one that is entirely cadential in function, thus creating the half cadence at m. 8. The lament schema itself, therefore, does not participate in any ending function. Returning to the opening of the theme, we might also question the extent to which initiating function is expressed. Note that like the prior Bach example, stage 1 of the lament schema begins with tonic for only two beats, the final beat of the measure bringing a VI^6; indeed, given the prevailing harmonic rhythm, we are encouraged to hear all of the first measure as VI^6, thus signaling a sequential progression from the very start of the theme. Moreover, although we might be tempted to speak of an "extended" presentation, one that includes the third statement of the basic idea, we are hard-pressed to recognize a (p. 424) broader tonic prolongation supporting that initiating function. Indeed, the basic idea itself seems to function as a "model" for two sequential repetitions. In other words, a case can be made for recognizing that the theme starts immediately by expressing a medial function, a large-scale continuation. This seemingly paradoxical formal situation can be better understood when we distinguish between *intrinsic* and *contextual* formal functionality (Valières et al. 2009: 18; Caplin 2013: 132–33). The former arises from our perception of the musical content of a given passage irrespective of its actual placement within the broader form; in this case, the intrinsic functionality of the lament bass is effectively *medial*. But coming as it does

at the very start of a formal process—the onset of a new "movement" of the work—we contextually interpret the schema as *initiating*, at least for its first couple of stages. The resulting conflict between intrinsic and contextual functions, which we might consider to be a type of *form-functional dissonance* (akin to Krebs' [1999] notion of "metrical dissonance"), creates a palpable sense of instability at the opening, which might seem odd if this movement were fully self-contained. Yet in a performance tradition in which this second minuet is played immediately following the first in the same tempo and without any break in the pulse and then further followed by a complete reprise of minuet I, the lack of a fully functional initiation at this medial location in the larger formal context seems appropriate enough.

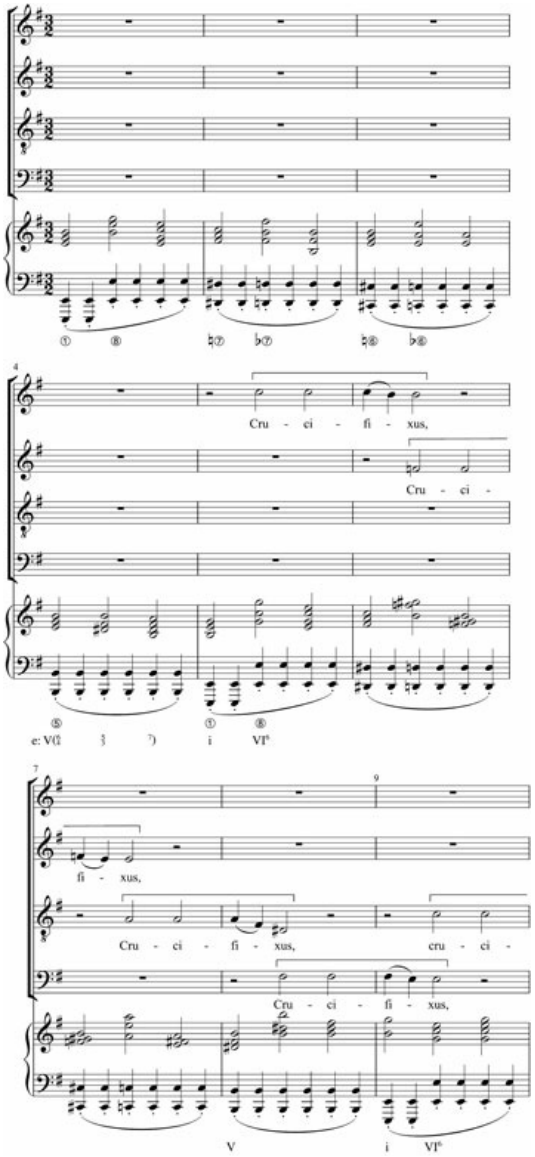


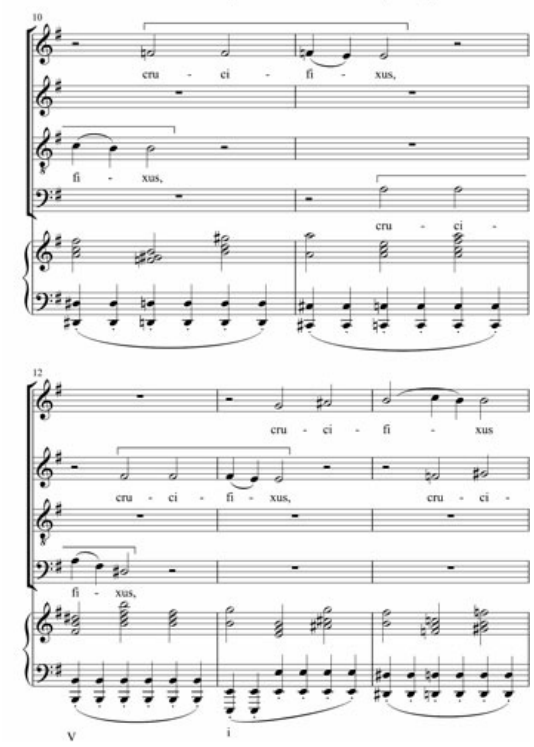
Example 15.7 J. S. Bach, Concerto in G minor, BWV 975/ii, mm. 1–11.

Let us turn now to cases where the bass line is chromaticized, a situation that offers greater opportunity for harmonic variety. The opening of the slow movement of J. S. Bach's Concerto in G minor, BWV 975, based on an earlier concerto by Vivaldi, illustrates a fairly typical baroque usage (Example 15.7). Here, the lament bass appears at (p. 425) (p. 426) the very beginning of the work and is used twice to support the first two four-measure phrases. Again, we could recognize the three fundamental formal functions of beginning, middle, and end underlying each phrase. Medial functionality is clearly articulated by the sequential progressions, and ending functions are evident enough with the arrival on dominant harmony at mm. 4 and 8, following cadential pre-dominants (iv^6 at m. 3; ii$^4_3$ at m. 7). But like the prior example of Handel, the sense of functional initiation is rather weakly expressed. The opening idea is supported by tonic harmony for only two beats of the first measure; afterward the shift to VI^6 moving to V^6 already suggests sequential activity, which is further reinforced by a model in mm. 2–3 that is repeated as a sequence in mm. 3–4.[4] The use of the lament bass at the very opening of the theme thus creates a degree of form-functional dissonance arising from the intrinsically medial characteristics of the schema and its contextual location as a formal beginning. Note that in the second phrase, Bach varies the harmonies to make the sequence even more prominent through the use of secondary dominants tonicizing v and iv. As a result, the model already arises on the second beat of m. 5, such that only the downbeat tonic brings any hint of initiating function. This harmonic change is appropriate enough, of course, seeing as the phrase is the

second one of the movement and thus does not have to articulate an initiating quality as strongly as the first phrase.

Following the opening two phrases, Bach relinquishes the lament bass for a harmonic situation that is more stabilizing in the new key of A minor. If he had continued using the same bass pattern for the entire movement, we could have spoken of the lament schema being used as a ground bass. Indeed, Bach writes a number of such ground-bass movements, perhaps the most famous being the "Crucifixus" from the B-minor Mass, whose opening phrases are shown in Example 15.8. As we have done up to now, we can identify the form-functional elements *within* the complete schema, though here, a sense of formal initiation is largely absent: except for the first bar, whose tonic downbeat initiates the entire movement, the grouping structure throughout the rest of the piece sees all of the phrases starting on the upper E (⑧) and concluding on the lower E (identified here as scale-degree ①). And throughout the piece, this opening moment of the schema is, with only one exception (m. 13), never harmonized with tonic.[5] As a result, an intrinsic sense of formal initiation is, from the harmonic perspective, extremely weak, if not lost altogether. What about the sense of formal end? Inasmuch as the schema concludes with a fifth leap, the potential for authentic cadential closure is strongly projected by the bass line. Indeed, the harmonies of the opening three phrases end with the progression V–I. But with this situation we confront a potentially awkward formal dilemma. If Bach were to realize every final pitch of the schema with a genuine authentic cadence, then it would be difficult to shape a larger-scale formal design for the movement as a whole. To avoid that situation, Bach uses a variety of strategies to foil a sense of closure for most of the schemata and thus to allow for a broader formal plan to emerge.





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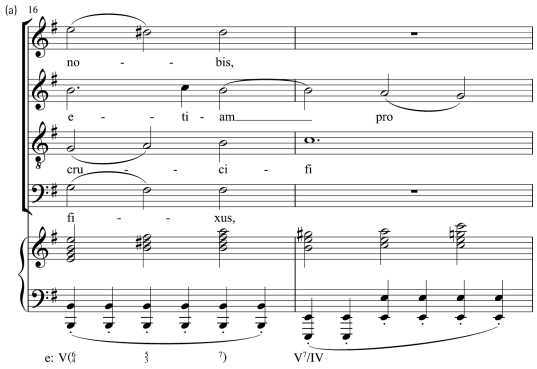
Example 15.8 J. S. Bach, Mass in B minor, BWV 232, "Crucifixus," mm. 1–14.

Let us examine how he accomplishes this result. To be sure, the instrumental opening phrase could be seen to close with an authentic cadence ("imperfect," because the highest instrumental part ends on ˆ3). We will come back to the true status of this cadence after we have worked through the rest of the schemata. When the voices enter, they do so **(p. 427) (p. 428) (p. 429)** one at a time, sounding the sole word "Crucifixus" for two full phrases, the end of each one of which, at mm. 9 and 13 respectively, could be thought of as articulating an authentic cadence, since the requisite cadential harmonies are present. But we might question whether it makes sense to speak of genuinely functional cadences at these points in the piece, where the text has moved no further than its first word, and where the same opening idea, a descending sigh figure, predominates. In other words, since both the text and the musical ideas are entirely initiatory, the potential cadences at m. 9 and 13 do not seem to bring a genuine sense of formal end to anything larger in scope than the lament bass itself. Moving further into the piece, Bach uses a variety of devices (harmonic, melodic, textural) to avoid projecting a formal ending at those points where the lament bass leaps from ⑤ to ① (Example 15.9a–c). Only first, at m. 29, does Bach write a clearly articulated perfect authentic cadence (Example 15.10), which corresponds to the completion of a full grammatical unit of the text.



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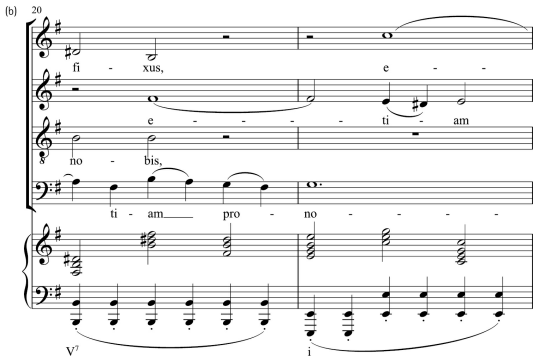

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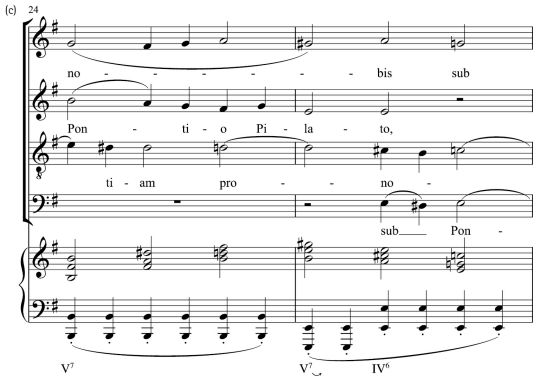

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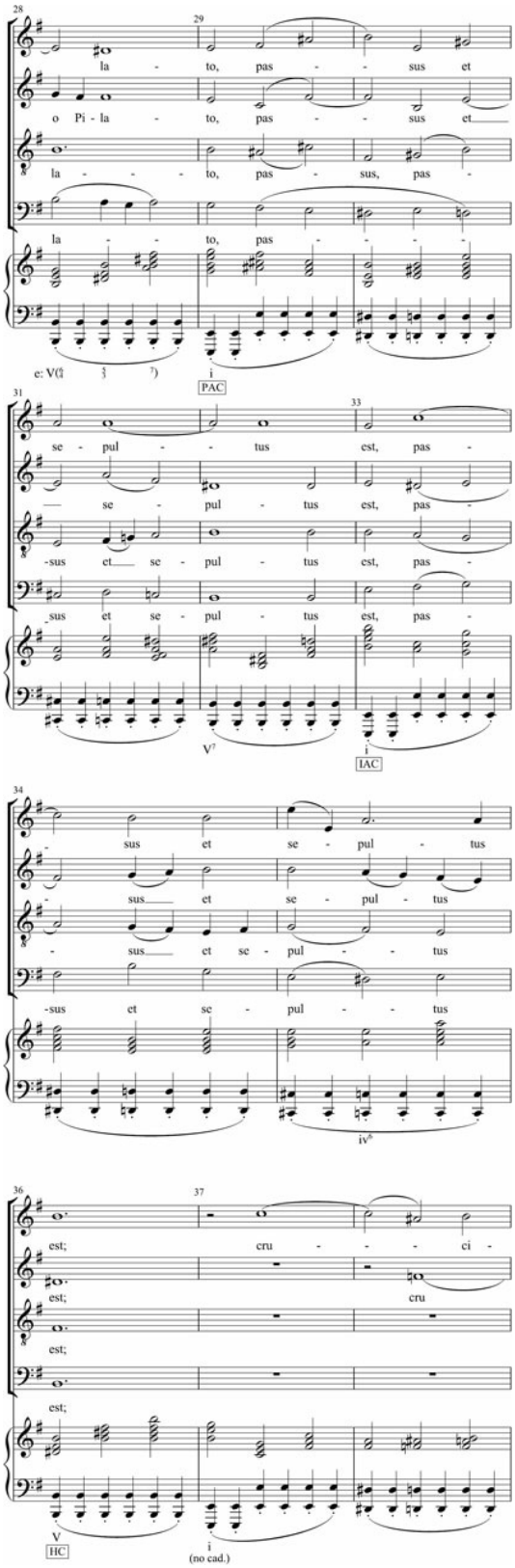
Example 15.9 J. S. Bach, Mass in B minor, BWV 232, "Crucifixus": (a) mm. 16–17; (b) mm. 20–21; (c) mm. 24–25.

Following this cadence, the second full line of the "Crucifixus" text begins ("passus et sepultus est") with a complete change in texture from polyphonic to homophonic. The first full cycle of the lament ground bass ends on the downbeat at m. 33 with an imperfect authentic cadence (IAC). The text is then repeated, but this time Bach concludes the text and the music of the chorus on the downbeat of m. 36, right at the onset of dominant harmony. He thus changes the way in which the lament bass expresses its (p. 430) (p. 431) sense of ending function, now having it articulate a half cadence over ⑤ rather than an authentic cadence over ①. The resolution to tonic at the following bar does not create a cadence of any kind, but rather sets up the return of the opening "Crucifixus" text, the pervasively polyphonic texture, and a chromatically embellished version of the sigh motives. The section between the PAC at m. 29 and this recapitulatory onset at m. 37 thus functions as a contrasting middle, one which appropriately enough ends with a weak cadence on dominant harmony in order to set the stage for a return of the opening materials. This third section of the piece, like the first, also finds ways of avoiding the sense of authentic cadence when the lament bass reaches ① at mm. 41 and 45 (Example 15.11a–b). That moment is saved for the end of the complete text at m. 49 (Example 15.12) and the achievement of another perfect authentic cadence. Following this cadence, Bach writes one more cycle of the lament bass, this time altering it so that it modulates to the relative major of the home key, G major, closing there with an IAC. This passage clearly has an "after-the-end" function, one which also prepares for the D-major outburst at the beginning of the following "Et resurrexit."



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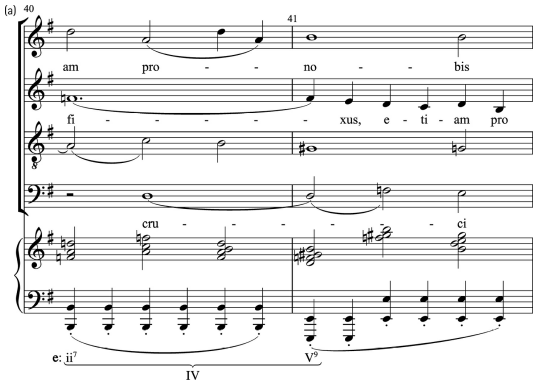
Example 15.10 J. S. Bach, Mass in B minor, BWV 232, "Crucifixus," mm. 28–38.



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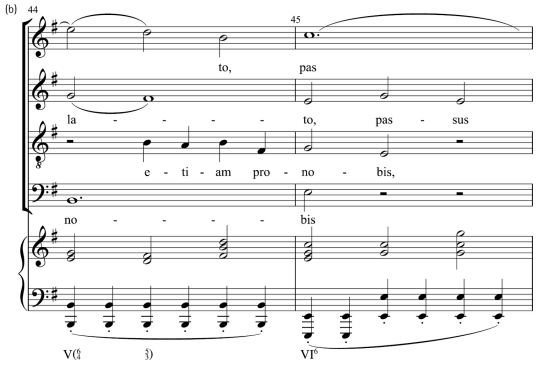

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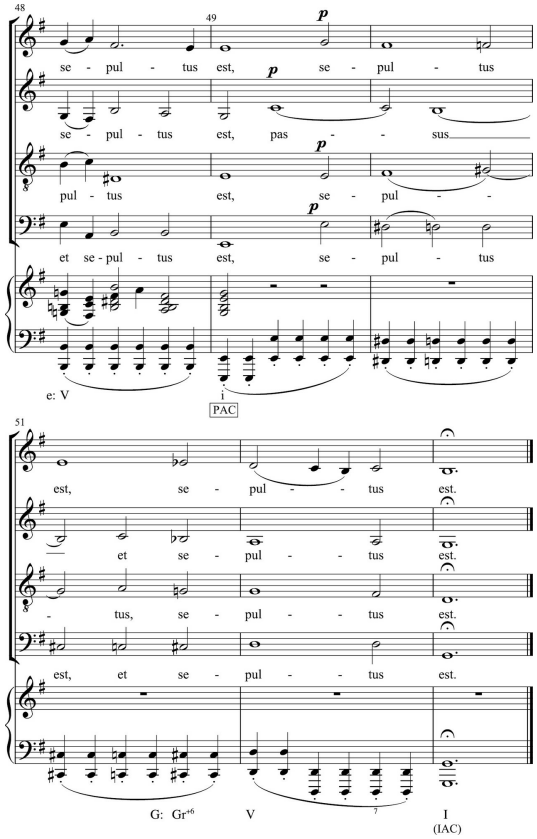
Example 15.11 J. S. Bach, Mass in B minor, BWV 232, "Crucifixus": (a) mm. 40–41; (b) mm. 44–45.



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Example 15.12 J. S. Bach, Mass in B minor, BWV 232, "Crucifixus," mm. 48–53.

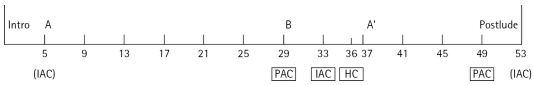

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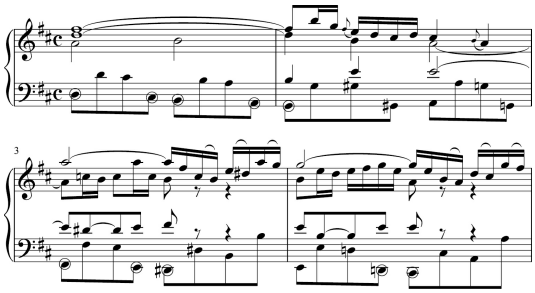
Figure 15.1 Form and cadence in the "Crucifixus."

Having worked our way through the entire "Crucifixus," let us reassess the form-functional implications of closure as expressed by the constant cycling of the lament bass. Although the potential for cadence is offered at the end of each schema, Bach exploits a variety of means for avoiding that sense except in a small number of (p. 432) (p. 433) (p. 434) (p. 435) (p. 436) cases. Within this overall ternary form (Figure 15.1), we find unambiguous perfect authentic cadences ending the A and A´ sections at mm. 29 and 49 respectively.[6] As well, we find a weak IAC within the B section at m. 33 and an even weaker half cadence closing that section at m. 36, thus taking advantage of the possibility that the dominant harmony supported by ⑤ can change from being the *penultimate* harmony of an authentic cadential progression to being an *ultimate* harmony of a half-cadential one.[7] Within this scheme, we can now better understand that the IACs closing the first lament bass at m. 5 and the final cycle at m. 53 lie outside the boundaries of the fundamental ternary form; rather they function to end the two framing units of the overall form, the "before-the-beginning" introduction and the "after-the-end" modulating postlude. These cadences thus have what I term a "limited scope," such that they end the schema alone, not any other larger section of the form proper (Caplin 2004: 86).

I turn now to some examples of the lament bass as used by composers of the classical period. But, before looking at specific cases, I want to note one major change in compositional style from earlier eighteenth-century practice to that in the later decades of the century. I am referring here to the organization of the bass line as a melodic part distinct from the structural upper voice. Typical of baroque works is the prominence of descending scalar bass lines, even at the very start of a thematic unit.[8] The bass line of Bach's "Air on the G string," from the third orchestral suite, is exemplary of this practice (Example 15.13). A standard midcentury manifestation of this opening descent has been well described by Gjerdingen (2007: 46–50), who identifies the combination of Romanesca and Prinner schemata that so typically begins a galant movement and that results in a complete octave descent in the bass voice (Example 15.14).[9] By the later decades of the eighteenth century, this preponderance of bass descents, particularly at the very opening of a theme, had largely run its course, and the high classical style sees a marked change in bass line structure, one whose model of a fundamentally ascending bass motion is given in Example 15.15a and specifically illustrated in Example 15.15b (Caplin 2008: 163–65). As a result of this change in practice, the lament topic, with its striking descending bass motion is not so suitable for use at the opening of a thematic unit, unlike the case for earlier styles, where such a bass descent is appropriate to general stylistic norms. Thus in classical themes, the lament tends to appear in a medial formal context, typically as a continuation following a solidly expressed initiating idea or phrase supported by a root-position tonic prolongation.



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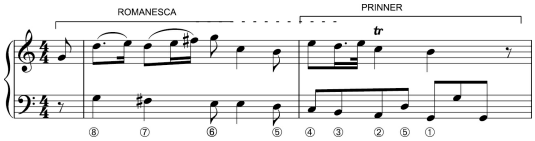
Example 15.13 J. S. Bach, Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068, Air, mm. 1–4.



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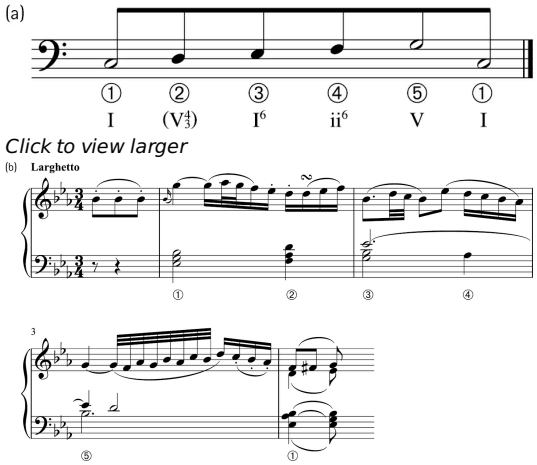
Example 15.14 Gallo, Trio in G major, i, mm. 1–2, from Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style* (2007), 50, ex. 3.9.

The opening of Mozart's Overture to *Don Giovanni* illustrates this technique well (Example 15.16). Following a

presentation phrase that prolongs tonic, the continuation begins with the lament bass, whose arrival on ⑤ brings a half cadence and standing (p. 437) on the dominant. A similar situation occurs at the beginning of the transition in the first movement of Haydn's Piano Sonata in E flat major, Hob. XVI:52 (Example 15.17). Following a two-measure basic idea, the music moves directly into a continuation phrase, one that brings two successive lament bass schemata, the first in the home key, the second in the subordinate key. Note that ⑤ (third beat of m. 13) is not cadential, but rather passes through to ♯④ as pre-dominant of the half-cadential progression that closes this modulating transition. The lament topic thus has an exclusively medial function. Note, by the way, that the chromatic descending bass is used here in a major-mode context, a situation that is rarely, if ever, employed in baroque works but that more readily appears in the classical style, with its greater use of modal mixture in general.[10]



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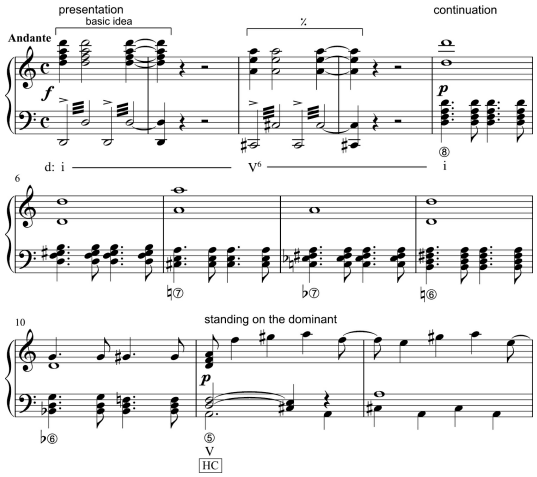
Example 15.15 Model of classical bass line (a) and its realization in Mozart's Piano Trio in B flat major, K. 502/ii, mm. 1–4 (b).



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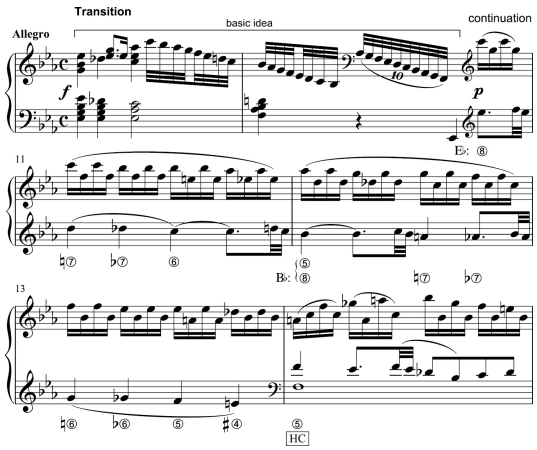
Example 15.16 Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, Overture, mm. 1–12.

The opening of the minuet of Mozart's String Quartet in D minor, K. 421 (Example 15.18a), illustrates again how the classical composers normally want to set up a secure sense of structural initiation via a firm root-position tonic before embarking on the lament topic. Here, the opening basic idea is supported by tonic, which continues into (p. 438) the first bar of a contrasting idea (c.i.). The second bar of that idea sees the appearance of $V^6{}_5$, which in itself maintains the tonic prolongation as support for the full four-measure initiating phrase (a *compound basic idea*).[11] But then Mozart lets the contrasting idea "become" (⇒) a model for sequential repetition as the bass continues its stepwise descent. A second repetition of the sequence begins with the upbeat to m. 7, which is slightly altered to accelerate the harmonic change leading eventually to a perfect authentic cadence to close the theme at m. 10. Like the previous example, the appearance of ⑤ at the downbeat of m. 8 does not yet signal a cadence, as the bass passes further down to ③, which initiates the authentic cadential progression. If the lament

topic is not associated here with formal ending, we might wonder if it participates in formal beginning. After all, the complete schema technically begins with ⑧ appearing at the very opening of the theme. Moreover, the next step in the descent, ♮⑦ occurs within the boundaries of the compound basic idea. In other words, the schema embraces both initiating and medial functions within the theme. But now an interesting issue of "in-time" listening is raised by this situation. Inasmuch as the motion from i to V^6 is so ubiquitous in tonal syntax, we probably would not even think that a lament bass is being projected until we hear ♭⑦, which does not occur until the beginning of the continuation phrase (m. 5). Indeed, it is (p. 439) possible to write a more normative eight-measure theme using this same opening and avoiding any reference to the lament topic (see the reconstruction in Example 15.18b). It is questionable, then, whether it makes much sense to speak of the lament topic participating in the formal initiation projected in the opening measures of this theme. Instead, we are more likely to think that the topic is associated here exclusively with medial functionality, along the lines of the previous classical examples we have examined.



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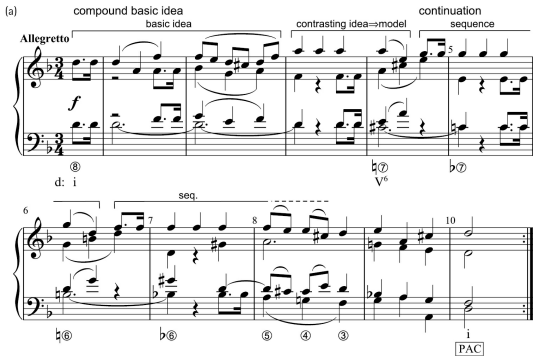
Example 15.17 Haydn, Piano Sonata in E flat major, Hob. XVI:52/i, mm. 9–14.

This is not to say that there are no cases where we would want to identify the lament bass from the very beginning of a thematic unit. For it seemed appropriate enough in connection with the baroque pieces shown in Example 15.6 and Example 15.7 to do just that, even when ⑧ supports a root-position tonic. In fact, there are some classical examples where we perceive the sense of the lament bass immediately at the opening of a theme. The first movement of the same Mozart quartet starts with a diatonic version of the descending tetrachord that quite readily evokes the lament topic (see Example 15.19). It is instructive, however, to observe how Mozart harmonizes the pattern, namely in a manner that is entirely tonic prolongational, with little hint of its more natural (p. 440) sequential expression. Note especially how the arrival on ⑤ brings a six-four sonority that is entirely tonic in its function. Following this two-measure basic idea, a contrasting idea brings what seems to be a weak IAC to close an antecedent phrase.[12] The following consequent phrase begins again with the lament bass, but now with greater chromaticism. The harmonization here pulls more quickly away from a secure sense of tonic prolongation via a tonicization of the subdominant; the harmonic destabilization here, though not typical of most periodic forms, is nonetheless logical enough, seeing as the beginning of the consequent stands "in the middle" of the complete theme.[13] Unlike the antecedent, the arrival on ⑤ brings a genuine dominant harmony, but one that is not cadential, in that it returns to tonic prior to the onset of the true authentic cadential progression that arises within m. 8. In short, both phrases of this theme begin with the lament bass, but the topic is harmonically adjusted to project a clear sense of functional initiation at its very opening and a medial function in its middle. In this way, Mozart avoids creating an undue dissonance between intrinsic and contextual formal functionalities that can easily arise when the lament bass is used at the very opening of a thematic unit, such as that already discussed in connection with Examples 15.6 and 15.7 and also to be seen in the passages to be discussed next.



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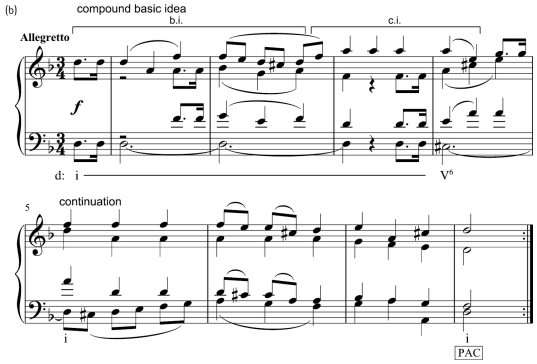

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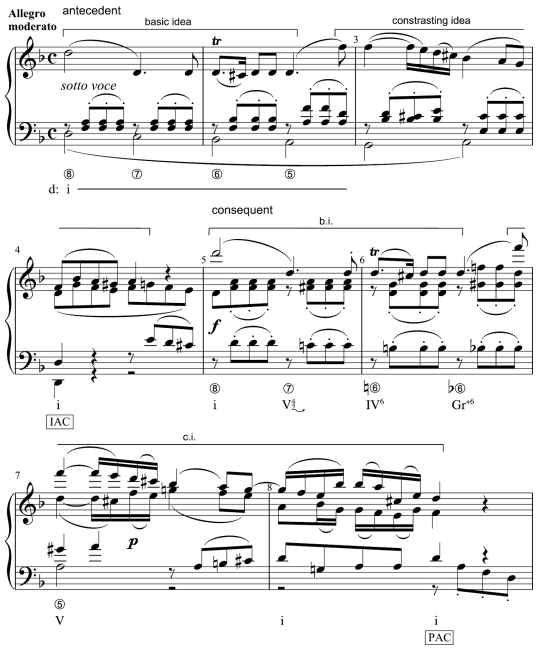
Example 15.18 Mozart, String Quartet in D minor, K. 421/iii, mm. 1–10: (a) original version and (b) recomposition.



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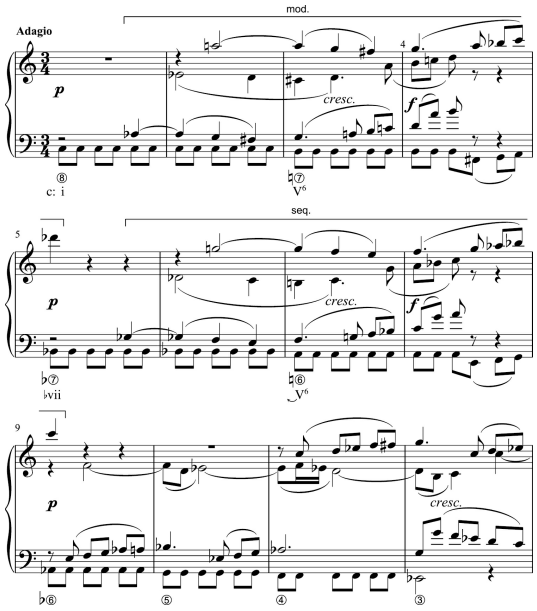
Example 15.19 Mozart, String Quartet in D minor, K. 421/i, mm. 1–8.



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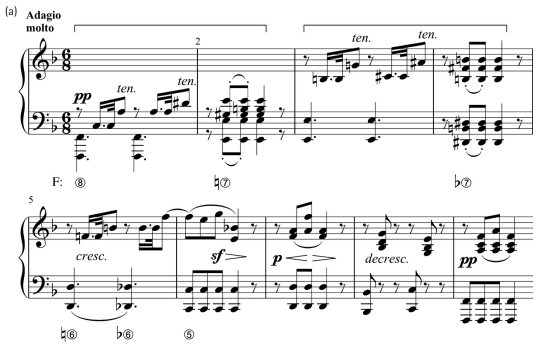
Example 15.20 Mozart, String Quartet in C major, K. 465, "Dissonance," i, mm. 1–12.

(p. 441) (p. 442) Slow introductions, which are generally destabilizing in preparation for the true beginning of the movement, seem especially suited to the immediate onset of a lament bass, as a number of prominent examples from the classical style attest. Indeed, the chromatic motion of the bass is sometimes complemented by highly chromatic inflections in the upper voices as well, as seen perhaps most strikingly at the opening of Mozart's "Dissonance" Quartet (Example 15.20). Here, the projection of a functional initiation is minimal due to the extreme dissonance created by the various chromatic (p. 443) lines, this despite the broader harmonic motion from i to V^6 within mm. 1–4. Moreover, these opening bars are then repeated sequentially, further projecting an overall, intrinsically medial functionality.[14] Even more harmonically extreme is the opening of the Introduzione to the finale of Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata (Example 15.21a). Here, the arrival on ♮⑦ in m. 2 brings a major triad in root position (VII, or perhaps V/III); the opening two-measure unit is then repeated in a manner that suggests a sequence, though a truly sequential transposition is not effected. For this time, the final harmony of the two-measure unit is a first-inversion B-major triad, which suggests that it may be functioning as a secondary dominant of the leading tone (and thus calling into question (p. 444) whether we can even hear the D♯ in the bass as ♭⑦ in F major). The extreme harmonic instability projected from the very beginning of this thematic unit creates a marked conflict between the intrinsic and contextual functions of the lament topic, and this formal dissonance supports well the aesthetic of destabilization that is typical of slow introductions in general. The opening of the Introduzione itself references the beginning of the first movement of the "Waldstein" (Example 15.21b), though the harmonization of the lament bass there, which conforms to the model shown in Example 15.2f, is somewhat less radical than that of the following movement.[15] Yet here, we are not dealing with a slow introduction, but rather already with the main theme, which should normally be quite *tight-knit* in formal expression.[16] So the form-functional dissonance arising here is especially strong, which surely helps in expressing the overall emotional agitation and excitement associated with this most remarkable sonata-form opening.



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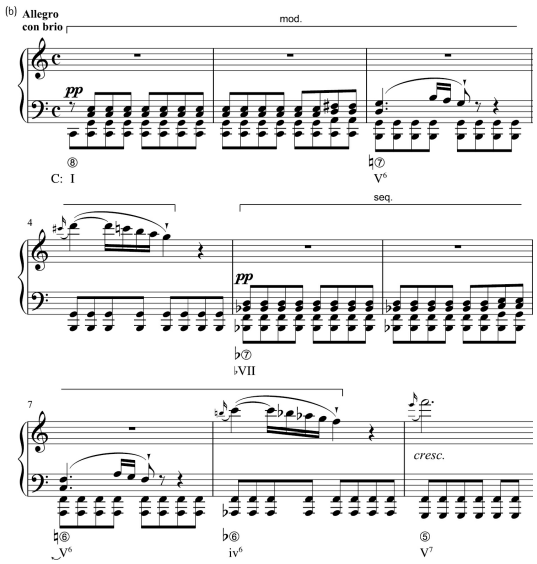

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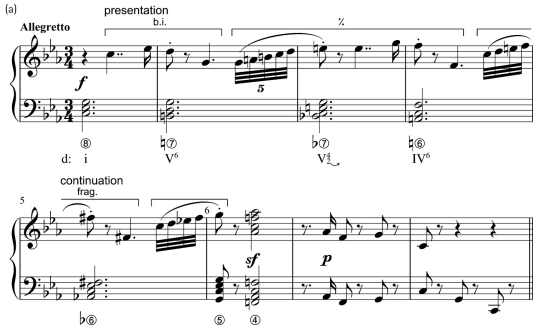
Example 15.21 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in C major, Op. 53, "Waldstein": (a) ii, mm. 1–9; (b) i, mm. 1–9.

My last two examples of classical usage involve cases where the composer seems to be making an explicit reference to an earlier musical style. Beethoven's Thirty-Two Variations in C minor, WoO 80, is constructed as a ground bass, whose theme brings the lament topic, as shown in Example 15.22a. The choice of ground-bass technique itself is a throwback to earlier eighteenth-century practice, and the use of the chromaticized lament bass right at the start of the theme further associates it with the High Baroque. Other baroque-like features include the uniform texture and regular harmonic rhythm that prevail until the downbeat of m. 6, whereby each link of the bass regularly appears at the downbeat of the measure. This uniformity breaks down when the bass moves one (p. 445) step further to ④ at the second beat of m. 6, thus "too early" in some sense. The full chords in both hands at that point also effect a change from the melody-and-accompaniment texture to a fully homophonic one, which is then changed again by the monophonic texture (with octave doubling) that ends the theme. These dramatic changes in texture and harmonic rhythm (further supported by the various dynamic changes within these measures) situate the theme as more classical in nature. As well, the clearly sentential structure with its manifest fragmentation in mm. 5–6, which also develops motivic material from the initial basic idea, betrays a classical sensibility. As for the form-functional expression associated with the lament bass, we can continue to identify its essential medial functionality. That the arrival on ⑤ is noncadential is evident by its (p. 446) being harmonized as a passing six-four sonority that effects a broader prolongation of the subdominant. As for the schema articulating an initiating function, the situation is a bit cloudy. On the one hand, its use at the very opening of the theme projects a degree of form-functional dissonance of the type we have examined in the last number of examples. But a closer look reveals that the specific harmonies chosen by Beethoven downplay the sequential potential of the schema and even let us recognize that the bass notes ⑧–♮⑦–♭⑦, which bring the progression i–V^6–V^4_2/IV, could be seen to prolong tonic for three bars (in that the last chord still has a root C), which provides a fairly substantial harmonic support for a sense of initiating function.[17] Finally, it is instructive to observe the changes Beethoven makes when writing a *maggiore* variation to the theme (Example 15.22b). The first two measures see the bass begin its descent from ⑧ to ♮⑦ supporting again the progression I–V^6 as at the opening of the theme. But then Beethoven abandons the bass descent entirely and has that voice move upward in stepwise motion. A hint of sequence is offered by the progression V^6_5/ii–ii, and the following diminished-seventh harmony in m. 101 promises to continue the sequence by functioning as a secondary dominant of iii. Instead, the diminished-seventh undergoes a common-tone resolution to I^6, which initiates the cadential progression to close the theme with a PAC.[18] The structure of this bass line, with its stepwise ascent from ① to ⑤ conforms much more to classical norms (see again Example 15.15a) than to the descending line of the lament schema, which evokes the world of the Baroque.

My final classical example of the lament topic comes from Mozart's Adagio and Allegro in F minor, a late work that Lawrence Dreyfus has characterized as being "in neo-Baroque high style," which includes "the use of extreme chromaticism, strict part writing and imitation, contrapuntal artifice and, above all, an appeal to nearly extinct gestures from the musical past," the latter being the descending tetrachord of the lament bass (1991: 330–31).

Indeed, Mozart highlights the lament topic right at its opening theme (Example 15.23a).[19] To this list of neo-baroque features, at least for this theme, we could add the generally uniform texture and steady harmonic rhythm. Here, the theme consists exclusively of the lament schema, such that the arrival on ⑤ brings a half cadence. The harmonic plan of the very opening resembles the Beethoven variation's theme just discussed, and so a modicum of initiating function is projected by the harmonic dimension. But unlike Beethoven's theme, which was clearly structured as a sentence theme-type, Mozart barely hints at classical phrase structure: the passage does not readily parse into discreet ideas or phrases, and the sense of its constituent formal functions is largely projected by harmony alone, albeit mm. 4–5 bring a modest acceleration in surface rhythm to support a sense of medial functionality. Indeed, a listener hearing the piece for the first time would be unlikely to guess that it was written at the height of the classical period. This backward-looking stance even continues into the opening of the Allegro (Example 15.23b), where Mozart brings a kind of *maggiore* variation on the lament bass (also noted by Dreyfus [1991: 330]), and even continues the stepwise bass descent down a full octave, thus evoking the Romanesca–Prinner combination of the earlier galant style. Compare this, of course, to Beethoven's *maggiore* (Example 15.22b), which transports his baroque-tinged theme fully into the high classical era.



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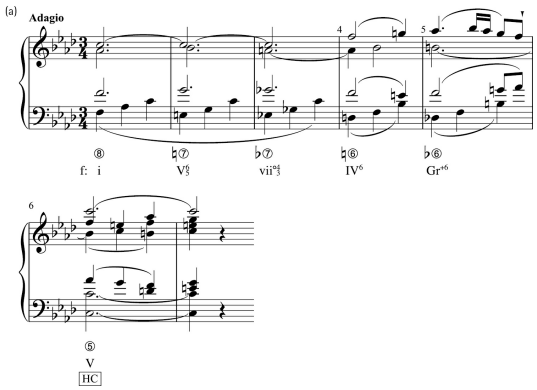

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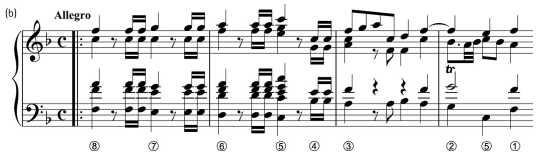
Example 15.22 Beethoven, Thirty-Two Variations in C minor, WoO 80: (a) Theme, mm. 1–8; (b) Variation 12 (*Maggiore*), mm. 97–104.



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Example 15.23 Mozart, Adagio and Allegro in F minor, K. 594: (a) mm. 1–7; (b) mm. 40–43.

(p. 447) (p. 448) We have seen in the course of this study that the lament topic is highly adaptable to a wide variety of form-functional situations within a thematic unit. Its most natural formal position is that of "being-in-the-middle," since its fundamentally sequential harmonic expression associates itself directly to various medial functions, especially the continuation phrase of a theme. But the schema is also suitable for closing a thematic unit when its concluding pitch ⑤ supports a cadential dominant of some sort (either the ultimate dominant of a half cadence or the penultimate dominant of an authentic cadence). Indeed, when the lament topic is used as a ground bass, the potential for playing with listeners' expectations of closure can especially be engaged, as the Bach "Crucifixus" examples well illustrated. More complicated are the various ways in (p. 449) which the lament schema can project a sense of formal beginning: the various examples discussed here have shown a continuum of possibilities, ranging from the powerful expression of initiation offered at the very opening of Mozart's D-minor quartet (Example 15.19) to the barest hint of a beginning, as with the Introduzione of Beethoven's "Waldstein" (Example 15.21a). We observed as well that, when the lament appears at the very start of a theme, a sense of form-functional dissonance can arise between the schema's intrinsic expression of medial functionality and its contextual position as a formal beginning.

With its stepwise descending bass line, the lament schema assimilates itself well to baroque compositional practice, which tends to emphasize melodic descent in its lowest voice. Despite the many examples of the topic in the classical era and beyond,[20] its use in baroque compositions is ubiquitous, as Williams's survey and Dreyfus's comments on a "nearly extinct gesture" affirm. In the classical style, the descending bass rubs somewhat against the standard practice of ascending bass lines, and so the topic tends to appear most typically in sequential passages, where descending bass-line structures more readily arise within that style. Occurring at the opening of a classical theme, the topic often seems to reference earlier compositional eras.

Finally, the kind of detailed technical discussion that I have brought to bear on the relationship of topic to formal function might seem somewhat out of place in a larger study of musical topics, such as the present volume, which naturally enough tends to focus attention on the aesthetic and historical issues associated with topical reference. We must always be aware, however, that a composer's decision where and how to employ a given topic is not exclusively a matter of his or her desire to express a specific affect or to allude to some extra-musical meaning; a topic cannot simply be thrown into the formal discourse willy-nilly. Rather, the use of a topic must also be grounded in the set of constraints—be they harmonic, melodic, rhythmic, formal, and so forth—that govern all compositional activity. The appearance of any given topic must ultimately be integrated into the compositional fabric in ways that conform to the structural goals intended by the composer.

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Notes:

(1) . The designations "natural" and "flat" are made in reference to the key of C minor, whereby in the course of the scalar descent, the seventh and sixth degrees are notated first with a natural sign and then with a flat sign, as shown in Example 15.1b. This designation of the scale-degrees will be retained throughout this study, even in other tonal contexts, where different combinations of natural, flat, and sharp signs might obtain in the actual musical notation.

(2) . Note that for the sake of consistency, I continue to identify the stages here in reference to the bass notes, even though this creates a conflict with the underlying sequential pattern of descending triads; in the perception of this version, we might alternatively associate each stage with each harmony of the sequential progression.

(3) . The following description of the sentence follows Caplin (1998: 35–48).

(4) . That the melodic goal C♯ at m. 4 still seems to be part of the sequence, in fact, diminishes somewhat our sense of half cadence at this moment; moreover, the prominent appearance of the dissonant seventh within the dominant harmony clouds our perception of a genuine half-cadential articulation.

(5) . Most typically, the initial harmony of the pattern is VI^6, but other non-tonic chords are found as well (e.g., $IV^6{}_4$ at m. 25, V^9/iv at m. 41).

(6) . Though each PAC is equally strong syntactically, the first one is slightly less "perfect" rhetorically than the second, inasmuch as the structural melodic descent ˆ3–ˆ2–ˆ1 appears in the alto voice (lying above the soprano) in mm. 28–29, while that same descent is restored more appropriately to the soprano in mm. 48–49; on the distinction between *syntactic* and *rhetorical* strength of cadences, see Caplin (2004: 106).

(7) . On the distinction between an ultimate dominant of a half cadence and a penultimate dominant of an authentic cadence, see Caplin (1998: 29).

(8) . See, for example, the bass-line reductions in Lester (1999: 27–33, esp. exx. 2–3 and 2–5).

(9) . Bach's "Air" also opens with a variant of the Romanesca.

(10) . See also, Mozart, String Quartet in C, K. 465/iv, mm. 55–59; Beethoven, String Quartet in G, Op. 18 No. 2/iii, Trio, mm. 1–8.

(11) . A compound basic idea consists of a two-measure basic idea followed by a two-measure contrasting idea without cadential closure (Caplin 1998: 61).

(12) . There are actually some unusual features of mm. 3–4 that challenge the interpretation of an IAC at the end of the opening phrase. In the first place, where we would expect a pre-dominant to appear in the first half of the measure, given the bass support of ④, the harmony is actually more dominant than pre-dominant, the F in the soprano and D in the alto being suspensions from the prior $i^{6}{}_{4}$; but inasmuch as this dominant first appears inverted, then we should be suspicious of interpreting a genuine authentic cadence on the downbeat of m. 4 (see Caplin 2004 for the harmonic requirement that a cadential dominant must remain at all times in root position). Second, we will shortly discuss that the PAC closing the consequent phrase appears in the middle of m. 8. It is very unusual for the cadence of an antecedent to be metrically positioned earlier in the measure than that of the consequent; normally both cadences occur on the same position. Indeed, many of the cadences in the rest of the movement appear in the middle of the measure, thus suggesting that we are dealing with a situation of what eighteenth-century theorists called "compound meter," whereby each notated measure consists of two simple measures. For that reason, we might wonder whether the opening phrase might also be seen to end in the middle of m. 4. In order to find a cadence there, we would have to hear the arrival on the A in the melody as articulating dominant harmony (despite the lack of bass voice), a possible, but not immediately obvious interpretation.

(13) . We thus must be open to recognizing that whereas we would probably still want to interpret the second phrase as a consequent, inasmuch as there is a clear return of the basic idea in mm. 5–6, these measures nonetheless project a certain "continuational" quality due to the harmonization of the idea.

(14) . The harmonic pattern is based on that shown in Example 15.2f, except that the subtonic harmony is minor (vii), a most unusual realization of the lament pattern.

(15) . In both movements, it should be noted, the lament bass is used within a prevailing major-mode context, a classical feature already noted in connection with the Haydn sonata (Example 15.17).

(16) . On the distinction between *tight-knit* and *loose* formal expression, see Caplin (1998: 13, 17).

(17) . Compare this to the "Waldstein" first movement, where the tonic prolongation is broken already at the arrival of ♭⑦, which supports the sequential repetition beginning on VII.

(18) . Alternatively, the diminished-seventh chord could be enharmonically interpreted as a secondary dominant of V, and thus the I^{6} could be seen as a passing chord within a broader pre-dominant prolongation, just as the $i^{6}{}_{4}$ functioned in the theme (see Example 15.22a, m. 6).

(19) . The topical reference here is explicit, in that the work was commissioned to memorialize the recently deceased Field-Marshal Gideon Baron von Laudon, a national war hero (Dreyfus 1991: 330).

(20) . See Williams (1997) for a survey of the topic as it appears throughout the nineteenth and well into the early decades of the twentieth century.

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