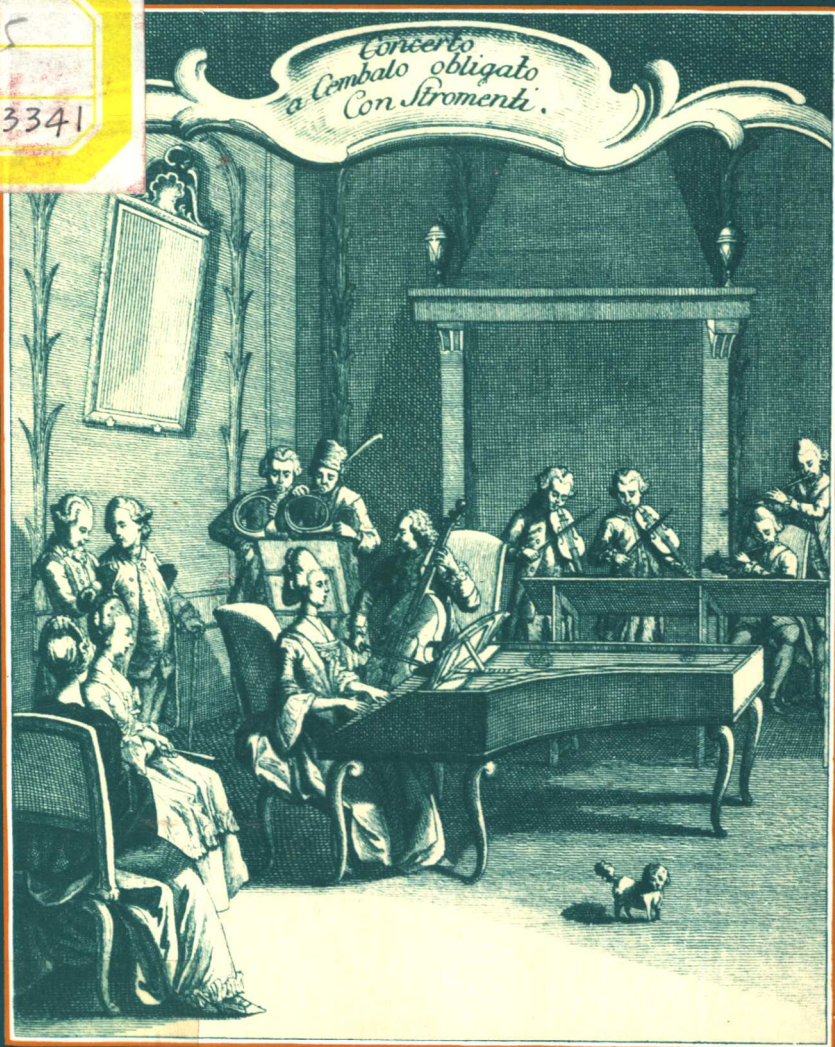


# HAYDN

*and the Classical Variation*

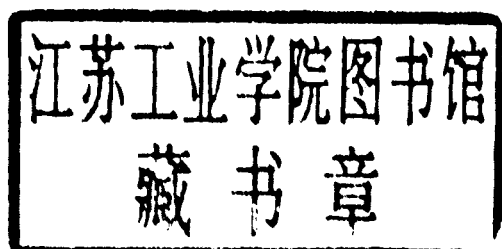


cal Variation  
dn, J.)

ELAINE R. SISMAN

ELAINE R. SISMAN

*Haydn and the Classical Variation*



Harvard University Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England 1993

Copyright © 1993 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on acid-free paper, and its binding materials have been chosen for strength and durability.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Sisman, Elaine Rochelle.

Haydn and the classical variation / Elaine R. Sisman.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-674-38315-X (acid-free paper)

1. Haydn, Joseph, 1732-1809. Variations.

2. Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 1756-1791.

Variations. 3. Beethoven, Ludwig van, 1770-1827.

Variations. 4. Variation (Music)—Analysis, appreciation. I. Title.

I. Title.

MT90.S58 1993

781.8'25'09033—dc20 92-28292

CIP

MN

## *Preface*

"It is not sufficiently considered," said Dr. Johnson, "that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed." In the musical form we know as theme and variations, we are typically "informed" only once, during the theme, and then "reminded" subtly or overtly ever after. Perhaps the long history and popularity of this form, which for its first few hundred years was associated exclusively with dances and with well-known melodies, rest upon its tireless assertions of the familiar. Sometimes found as movements in suites or, later, sonatas, most variations were free-standing or "independent" works usually for keyboard. It is the thesis of this book that Haydn and a few of his contemporaries developed and popularized the variation movement and its aesthetic, but that Haydn's own innovations—placing it in every position of a multi-movement cycle, broadening its array of theme types, and transforming its larger shape—created, in effect, the Classical variation. Mozart and Beethoven in individual and innovatory ways drew on Haydn's achievements and were thus both generally and specifically indebted to him as participants in the Classical variation aesthetic. Independent sets of variations, nearly always for keyboard or keyboard and strings, share in that aesthetic in matters of technique rather than overall shape, and with a few exceptions are less central to it; in a sense they are documents primarily of social history. The arguments adduced in support of this thesis are reasonably wide-ranging, drawing not only on the music itself but on discussions of variation in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writings and on related ideas in contemporaneous aesthetics and rhetoric.

In the first four chapters I explore several sets of apparent oppositions: between variation as a ubiquitous musical technique and variation as a circumscribed musical form; between rhetoric as a speaking art and rhetoric as a critical tool; between the mechanical and the meaningful in musical figures; between the sonata aesthetic and the variation aesthetic; and between repetition and return. To eighteenth-century writers on music, variation had three different, though related, connotations. First, it was a method of composition, by which a simple melody or bass line could be elaborated in shorter note values

to create a fully worked-out piece.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, all music could be seen as composing out a simple framework. Indeed, the source of melodic invention itself was sometimes thought of as variations or permutations of a basic underlying harmony.<sup>2</sup> Second, it was a technique designed to add interest to a composition by modifying simpler material previously heard, usually in unmediated repetition; this could be accomplished by either the composer or the performer or both. Finally, variation could be elevated to the dominating structural principle of a musical work, resulting in the well-known form of theme and variations. Here, both pattern and elaboration are experienced in a temporal series. The pleasure of the pattern, arising from its “ordering of elements by identity and difference,”<sup>3</sup> is the chief *raison d'être* of the Classical variation. As a form and as a technique, variation may also be elucidated by the rhetorical modes of thought still broadly informing musical thinking in the later eighteenth century. Indeed, ideas derived from a study of rhetoric in both musical and non-musical sources, together with eighteenth-century discussions of variation, can illuminate a new approach to Classical variations.

In the second half of the book I examine and evaluate the variations of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven (to the middle period), as well as, although to a lesser extent, those of mid-century Vienna. Composers working in Vienna, of the generation before Haydn, generally did not cultivate the variation. Most of the works I have found by contemporaries of “the great triumvirate,” in Charles Rosen’s words, are of indifferent quality.<sup>4</sup> My survey of over 1,300 multi-movement works in all instrumental genres, by fifty-five composers working in and around Vienna, has yielded 110 variation movements written between about 1760 and 1800, most from the later part of that period.<sup>5</sup> Many sources remain to be investigated; since variation movements are often not headed as such (with “Andante con variazioni,” for example, or even with individual headings such as “Var. 1”), the difficulties of locating variations in the first place are not trivial. Perhaps this book will inspire other scholars to undertake a comprehensive survey of the eighteenth-century variation. Although the variation *œuvres* of Haydn and Mozart themselves also contain the run-of-the-

1. Friedrich Erhard Niedt, *Handleitung zur Variation des Generalbasses* (Hamburg, 1706; rev. ed. [Mattheson] 1721); Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Anleitung zum Clavierspielen* (Berlin, 1755; 2nd ed. 1765); Johann Friedrich Daube, *Der musikalische Dilettant* (Vienna, 1773) and *Anleitung zur Erfindung der Melodie* (Vienna, 1797). See also David Schulenberg, “Composition as Variation: Inquiries into the Bach Circle of Composers,” *CM* 23 (1982), 57–87.

2. Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister* (Hamburg, 1739), Part II, par. 24ff.; Daube, *Der musikalische Dilettant*, chap. 7; Joseph Riepel, *Grundregeln zur Tonordnung insgesamt* (Regensburg, 1755), *passim*.

3. E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1979), p. 72.

4. Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York, 1971), p. 19. Although there are some good variations by *Kleinmeister*, their contributions to the form seem to me not to merit a prominent place in this book. I mean no disparagement to the achievements of these composers in other areas.

5. Most of these works have no modern edition, and exist in autograph, manuscript copies, or in early editions. Library sigla throughout the book are taken from *RISM*.

mill, their many artfully crafted movements include variations of greatness, even sublimity, concepts not usually invoked to describe these pieces. My aim is not to provide a complete descriptive survey but rather to refocus attention, through the means suggested in the first half of the book, on achievements that are imperfectly understood and hence undervalued. Locating the transformation of the Classical variation aesthetic in the defamiliarizing ethos of Beethoven's works of the decade beginning in 1799, rather earlier than is usually supposed, forms the subject of the final chapter.

The title of this book, and some of its working hypotheses as outlined here, use the term "Classical" to describe the era of Haydn and Mozart.<sup>6</sup> In Chapters 5 and 6, I make a case for turning points in Haydn's style in 1772 and "after 1780," thus stepping into the middle of the debate over the issue of periodization, cogently formulated by James Webster.<sup>7</sup> I do not imply, however, that Haydn's variations before 1772 are "not Classical," nor that those after 1780 are "fully Classical." While it is hard to avoid tautologically transferring the term "Classical" from the realm of historical chronology to the realm of musical style—because Haydn and Mozart are Classical composers (that is, composers of the Classical era), they wrote Classical variations—nonetheless the aesthetics, rhetoric, and decorum of Haydn's and Mozart's mature variations may be termed Classical by more than simple analogy. The flowering of variation movements in the larger multi-movement genres (for example, symphony and string quartet) appears to be based on Haydn's efforts, as his contemporaries recognized; and the abandonment of suite variations, contrapuntally organized variations, and passacaglias by mid-century composers, including Haydn, marks a distinct era in terms of genre and technique. In addition, both of the turning points just mentioned concern generic issues, the new weighting of variations in a slow movement in 1772, for example, and the powerful ways in which a "variation principle" suffuses several movements in an instrumental cycle in Haydn's music after 1780. The rhetorical force of Mozart's variations is viewed in these contexts. Beethoven's participation in "the Classical variation," on the other hand, ultimately entails an irrevocable altering of its decorum as well as a reconceived rhetorical model of repetition in variation movements.

My interest in variations goes back many years, to the senior recital I prepared with Malcolm Bilson at Cornell University which fortuitously included Sweelinck's variations on "Mein junges Leben hat ein End," Beethoven's E-major Sonata, Op. 109, and the Brahms Handel-Variations, Op. 24. I would like to thank James Webster for early encouragement of that interest, and Kenneth Levy and Harold Powers for their advice on an earlier version of some of the material in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. Research for the present study has been generously supported by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Hu-

6. I use the term "classical" to refer to classical antiquity and its writers on rhetoric.

7. See the "Historiographical Conclusion" to his *Haydn's Farewell Symphony and the Idea of Classical Style: Through-Composition and Cyclic Integration in the Instrumental Music* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 335–373. See also Daniel Heartz, "Classical," in *The New Grove*, vol. 4, pp. 449–454.

manities, and by grants from the Columbia University Research Council in the Humanities and the Horace Rackham Faculty Research Program of the University of Michigan. The directors and staffs of music collections in libraries and archives in Austria and Germany have also been extremely helpful; I would like to note especially the unstinting access afforded by the archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna and the help of its director, Dr. Otto Biba; the Wiener Stadtbibliothek, and its director, Dr. Ernest Hilmar; the archive of Melk Monastery, and its director, Dr. Bruno Brandstetter; as well as the assistance of the Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, the Archivio "Benedetto Marcello" in Venice, and the Bayerische Stadtbibliothek in Munich.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the colleagues who have asked me just the right questions, put just the right volume in my hands, sounded just the right note of encouragement, or prodded me in a fresh direction: Eva Badura-Skoda, Ian Bent, Mark Evan Bonds, Richard Crawford, Mark De Bellis, Michelle Fillion, Walter Frisch, Sonja Gerlach, Janet Sisman Levy, Katherine T. Rohrer, László Somfai, Richard Taruskin, Maynard Solomon, Neal Zaslaw. Michael Long was generous with his time and his considerable knowledge of rhetoric in discussing with me some of the issues in this book. I am deeply grateful to James Webster and Eugene Wolf for reading the entire manuscript and providing exceptionally helpful detailed comments and materials. I have also benefited from conversations with A. Peter Brown, Georg Feder, George Gopen, Carla Pollock, David Rosen, Hollace Schafer, Alan Tyson, and Alexander Weinmann, all of whom generously shared unpublished materials with me. None of those mentioned here is implicated in the errors and omissions that remain.

I would like to thank Margaretta Fulton and Mary Ellen Geer of Harvard University Press, the former for her continuous encouragement of this project from its early stages and the latter for her excellent copyediting of the manuscript. Johanna Baldwin cheerfully provided beautifully engraved musical examples under trying time-pressured circumstances.

Thanking my family for their love and support seems too small a token for the size of the gift. My parents, Dr. Irving and Margot Sisman, have been a source of strength throughout. My children, Arielle and Daniel Fridson, have come up through the nursery-school ranks clamoring to take my place at the word-processor, and often succeeding; it was through their efforts ("Again!") that I understood viscerally the joys of repetition discussed in the text. To my husband, Marty Fridson, an extraordinarily gifted writer and scholar of high-yield debt, I owe more than any traditional avowals of love and gratitude could express. This book is dedicated to him.

# Contents

*Preface* ix

- 1 Introduction: Repetition and Decoration 1
- 2 The Rhetoric of Variation 19
  - Rhetoric and Classical Composers 22    Rhetoric and Variation 25
  - Figures of Rhetoric and Music 30    Figures for Variation Form 35
  - Rhetorical Analysis 40
- 3 Variation as Form and Technique in Eighteenth-Century Musical Writings 48
  - Improvised and Composed Variation Technique 51    Improvised and Composed Variation Form 63
- 4 The Variation in the Universe of Classical Musical Forms 79
  - Expansion Techniques 80    Principal Periods 87    Haydn's Expansions 92    Variation and Expanded Forms 101
- 5 Convention and Innovation in Haydn's Variations to 1780 109
  - Early Variations 109    The Watershed of 1772 135    Haydn's "Creative Periods" 146    Hybrid Variations: Principles and Development 150
- 6 Synthesis: Haydn's Variations in the 1780s and 1790s 164
  - Symphonies 168    Quartets 172    Keyboard Works 185
- 7 Mozart's Variations 196
  - Inventio*: Choice and Adaptation of Themes 198    *Dispositio*: Ordering of Variations 210    *Elaboratio*: Figures and Figurations 223

8 Conclusion: Beethoven and the Transformation of the Classical Variation 235

Decorum 236 Piano Variations and the "New Way" 249

*Eroica*: Transformation of the Alternating Variation 254

*Appendix A Variations of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven*  
(Tables A.1–A.3) 265

*Appendix B Extended Original-Language Quotations* 276

*Selected Bibliography* 281

*Index* 303

### *Introduction: Repetition and Decoration*

Variation is the victim of a curious paradox: while variation technique is extolled as one of the most basic, natural, and essential principles underlying all music, indeed as a powerful stimulus to human creativity, variation form is routinely denigrated from nearly every perspective, whether historical, social, aesthetic, structural, or technical.<sup>1</sup> Although a number of masterworks in variation form by Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms have been admitted to the canon, the later eighteenth century is usually viewed as a valley between the peaks of the Goldberg Variations and the *Eroica*.

Why has variation form in general and the Classical variation in particular received such treatment? Simply put, its common practices do not accord with several cherished assumptions about musical value. First, the form is associated with borrowing a theme and keeping it in more or less full view, thus violating the principle of original thematic invention. Indeed, the eighteenth century presided over the shift in the meaning of invention from finding to making.<sup>2</sup> Second, as a repetitive series of short, discrete segments with the same structure, variations seem artificial and arbitrary, incapable of a sustained organic structure, and thus violate one of the central tenets of German Romanticism.<sup>3</sup> Third, the ornamental and decorative techniques assumed to prevail in the variations of Haydn and Mozart are considered "surface" features, failing to penetrate and transform the thematic model like "deeper" contrapuntal, character-

1. Perhaps the most acerbic of these is Jan LaRue's assessment: not only does he find it the most restrictive of any form, but its external shape turns it into "a kind of musical link sausage." See his *Guidelines for Style Analysis* (New York, 1970), p. 174.

2. Lawrence Manley, *Convention: 1500-1750* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), p. 330. See also Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), pp. 42-43. George Gopen has pointed out to me that the source of the Greek word for poem is *poiein*, to make, and that the medieval Scottish term for poet was *makar*.

3. On the acceptance of organicism as a locus of value, see Ruth Solie, "The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis," *19CM* 4 (1980), 147-156, and Janet Levy, "Covert and Casual Values in Recent Writings about Music," *JM* 5 (1987), 3-27.

istic, developmental, or transformational techniques.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the enormous numbers of variation sets produced by virtuosos between about 1790 and 1840 provoked a reaction against their empty display, or what Momigny called "much speech but little sense."<sup>5</sup>

Two values associated with the peaks of Bach and Beethoven were not shared by pieces of the intervening generations. In the Goldberg Variations, the harmony rather than the melody of the theme forms the basis of the variations, which are themselves both brilliantly contrapuntal and characteristic. And the *Eroica* finale is seamless, its variations on two themes yoked together by transitions, fugatos, alterations in period structure, as well as many departures from and one dramatic return to the tonic. That these techniques can operate within a single set condemns variations of the Classical era, a period in which no single set continuously mitigated or abandoned the melodic and structural model of the theme.

The traditional view of variations written by Haydn, Mozart, and their contemporaries goes something like this: in the early part of the eighteenth century, composers explored several different options for constructing a variation set, including decorating the melody of a well-known piece or creating contrapuntal complexities over a harmonic progression or an ostinato bass. Sometime after mid-century, the melodic type came to the fore, mandating decoration as the exclusive technique. Thus, the required figurative elaboration of the theme restricted Haydn's and Mozart's freedom and resulted in only a few stereotyped designs. Indeed, their variations were most successful when taking on aspects of other forms, that is, exhibiting contrast and return or recurrence, or development. Finally, after a weak start decorating popular tunes, Beethoven began to write variations in an "entirely new manner," liberating the variation from its trivial Classical phase.

The remarkable element of this view is its tenacity. Even in the groundbreaking studies of the last two decades on the Classical period by Charles Rosen and Leonard Ratner and on the variation itself by Kurt von Fischer, assessments of the variation have not substantially changed.<sup>6</sup> Because discussions

4. For example, Arrey von Dommer's *Musikalisches Lexikon* (Heidelberg, 1865), a thoroughgoing revision of Heinrich Christoph Koch's dictionary of the same title (Frankfurt am Main, 1802; facs. ed. Hildesheim, 1964), divided variations into two classes, the higher one of which provided "deeper and freer transformations" of the theme.

5. Jérôme-Joseph de Momigny, *Encyclopédie méthodique: musique*, II (Paris, 1818; rpt. New York, 1971), s.v. "Variations." Negative reaction to virtuosity in general was of course a widespread critical attitude of the late eighteenth as well as the nineteenth century; cf. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London, 1984), pp. 155–156.

6. Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York, 1971); Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York, 1980); Kurt von Fischer, "Arietta Variata," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Music*, ed. H. C. Robbins Landon with Roger Chapman (New York, 1970), pp. 224–235; idem, "Variations," *The New Grove*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London, 1980), vol. 19, pp. 536–556 (a translation of "Variation," in *Die Musik im Geschichte und Gegenwart* [Kassel, 1962], vol. 13, pp. 1284–1309); idem, *The Variation* (= *Anthology of Music*) (Cologne, 1962); Robert U. Nelson, *The Technique of Variation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1948).

of eighteenth-century instrumental music invariably focus on the rise of the sonata aesthetic, sectional or additive forms are evaluated by how closely they adhere to this aesthetic and by how "organic" they become. Recent Schenkerian studies of variations also seek and not surprisingly find such organic unity.<sup>7</sup> Rosen even defines as truly Classical only Beethoven's variations with sonata-like elements; Mozart and Haydn retained the "Baroque" reliance on ornamentation.<sup>8</sup> In the five pages he devotes to variations, Ratner spends three of them discussing Beethoven. Although the comments he draws from contemporaneous theorists are valuable on other topics, he finds nothing on variation deeper than "fresh" and "tuneful."<sup>9</sup> And while Fischer comes closest to showing how diverse the variations of the period actually were—differentiation of character in C. P. E. Bach, hybrid structures in Haydn, improvisatory styles in Mozart—he seeks to show that the variation finale of the *Eroica* is a sonata movement.<sup>10</sup>

Up to a point, the critics of the Classical variation are correct: variations of that period may be seen as a series of frozen moments, of decorative tableaux, each maintaining a certain decorum, a certain melodic and harmonic resemblance, and a nearly inevitable pattern of cadences. Yet the resemblances are not immutable: a variation may be transparent, offering a window onto the theme, or it may be opaque, relegating the theme to the position of "absent signifier," in Genette's term.<sup>11</sup> The variation may refer literally to the theme via a feature common to both, or it may refer metaphorically to the theme via a feature the theme does not share.<sup>12</sup> Concepts of decoration, ornamentation, or figuration apply in both their technical (note-based) and rhetorical senses. And each final cadence calls attention to its own temporary status as it gives way either to a repeat or to the next variation.<sup>13</sup>

Variation form is founded on repetition: a discrete thematic entity—a complex of melody, harmony, phrase structure, rhythm, and the character resulting from these—is repeated several (or many) times, with various modifications. While the principle of repetition may seem among the sturdiest possible, it is

7. For example, Esther Cavett-Dunsby, *Mozart's Variations Reconsidered: Four Case Studies* (K. 613, K. 501, K. 421/417b, K. 491) (New York, 1989); Nicholas Marston, "Analysing Variations: The Finale of Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 74," *MusA* 8 (1989), 303–324.

8. Rosen, *Classical Style*, pp. 435–439.

9. Ratner, *Classic Music*, pp. 255–259.

10. Kurt von Fischer, "Eroica-Variationen op. 35 und Eroica-Finale," *Schweizerische Musikzeitung* 90 (1949), 282–285.

11. Gérard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse* (New York, 1982), pp. 49–50.

12. See Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences* (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1988), chap. 4, "Variations on Variation—or Picasso back to Bach" (the latter is never mentioned), pp. 66–82. Goodman calls these ways of referring "literal exemplification" and "contrastive exemplification." I am grateful to Mark DeBellis for turning my attention to this book.

13. On the issue of repeats, see Michael Broyles, "Organic Form and the Binary Repeat," *MQ* 66 (1980), 339–360; Jonathan Dunsby, "The Formal Repeat," *JRMA* 112 (1986/87), 196–207. The former is largely concerned with first movements, the latter with the analytical significance of repeats.

actually surprisingly fragile, because at any moment a greater-than-usual contrast can upset the perception of a repetitive form and seemingly reorganize the whole.<sup>14</sup> To critics of the variation, this is greatly to be desired, and thus they read a *minore* variation as a central contrast creating an ABA form, recurrences of the theme's melody lending elements of rondo form, and an Adagio-Allegro set of concluding variations as evidence for a "slow movement and finale."<sup>15</sup> A similar phenomenon obtains with the ostensible reliance of Classical variations on melodic decoration: any complication of texture is read as the composer's attempt to go below the surface and increase musical value.

The Achilles' heel of the Classical variation would seem to be its dual reliance on repetition and decoration. But these two elements, for all that their musical meaning appears self-evident, may be rendered less vulnerable to reflexive critical attack when we broaden the interpretive scope beyond the musical. Although the difficulties of applying models from literature, rhetoric, and art to the kind of repetition found in variation form soon become clear, these models offer ways of evaluating variation form that seem never to have been applied to it. Among the problems of comparing repetition in literature and poetry with repetition in music is, of course, that verbal meanings and musical structures may simply be incommensurable. To this may be added the inevitable problem of explaining the aesthetic effect of repetition: as the author of the [*Rhetorica*] *Ad Herrenium* stated, "The frequent recourse to the same word is not dictated by verbal poverty; rather there inheres in the repetition an elegance which the ear can distinguish more easily than words can explain."<sup>16</sup> Finally, literary critics and theorists do not consistently distinguish between repetition and recurrence, nor between these terms and return.<sup>17</sup> Such distinctions are important for musical analysts, for whom the repetitions of variation form, the recurrences of rondo form, the symmetrical return of *da capo* form, and the resolving return of sonata form yield quite different structural, not to mention aesthetic, results.<sup>18</sup> In fact, for variation the distinction between repetition and recurrence or return could not be more crucial, affecting as it does the very

14. Leonard B. Meyer suggests that in some cases repetition actually leads to less stability. See *Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations* (Chicago and London, 1973), p. 51.

15. On the tendency of all Classical forms to take on characteristics of ABA form, see Rudolf von Tobel, *Die Formenwelt der klassischen Instrumentalmusik* (Bern, 1935); on melodic reprises and rondo as well as the "final pair," see Kurt von Fischer, "Variations," pp. 546-547. I disagree with Adorno's identification of sonata form with closed form and rondo form with open form (*Aesthetic Theory*, p. 314). Adorno thinks the latter is open because it is open-ended, but the actual musical techniques employed in both reveal the open (or openable, or expanded or expandable) techniques in the former, and the closed (small) techniques in the latter. See Elaine R. Sisman, "Small and Expanded Forms: Koch's Model and Haydn's Music," *MQ* 62 (1982), 444-478.

16. [Pseudo-Cicero], [*Rhetorica*] *Ad Herrenium*, trans. and ed. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), p. 281. More on this treatise will appear in the next chapter.

17. Julie Ellison is more consistent in this regard than other writers; cf. her *Emerson's Romantic Style* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 160-174, to be discussed below.

18. A valuable discussion of the differences between repetition and return, as well as different effects of repetition, can be found in Meyer, *Explaining Music*, pp. 44-54.

existence of an autonomous variation form as opposed to variation technique embedded in another type of form entirely. In the rest of this introduction I consider repetition and decoration, the issues underlying variation form that are essential to understanding both its nature and its current valuation.

## I

Repetition is a topic of daunting size. Even the list purporting to reflect the "modern history of ideas about repetition," given by J. Hillis Miller, seems to be grandly proportioned while identifying itself as ominously selective: Vico, Hegel, and the German Romantics, Kierkegaard (*Repetition*), Marx (*The Eighteenth Brumaire*), Nietzsche (the eternal return), Freud (repetition-compulsion), Joyce (*Finnegan's Wake*), Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, Mircea Eliade, and Jacques Derrida.<sup>19</sup> Drawing on Deleuze's opposition of Platonic and Nietzschean repetition, Miller claims that modes of repetition within a literary work embody some form of the "contradictory intertwining" of these two types. The Platonic type is based on a "solid archetypal model which is untouched by the effects of repetition," while the Nietzschean type argues that everything in the world is "intrinsically different from every other thing."<sup>20</sup> That the distinction rests on the presence or absence of a "ground in some paradigm or archetype" suggests a parallel, not explored by Miller, with musical variations: the archetype is the theme, and the nature of the variations rests not only on the relationship between variations and theme, but on the extent to which the theme itself is perceived as being transformed during the course of the piece. The piece may indeed provoke a response in the contradiction between the "truth of correspondence" and the background of difference.

Occasionally, the musical analogue of the idea of repetition is invoked explicitly by a literary critic; two such writers are Edward Said and Barbara Herrnstein Smith.<sup>21</sup> In his essay "On Repetition," Said compares Vico's ideas about large-scale cycles in human history with variation form:

Formally speaking, Vico's understanding and use of repetition bears a resemblance to musical techniques of repetition, in particular those of the *cantus firmus* or of the chaconne or, to cite the most developed classical instance, Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. By these devices a ground motif anchors the ornamental variations taking place above it. Despite the proliferation of changing rhythms, patterns, and harmonies, the ground motif recurs throughout, as if to demonstrate its staying power and its capacity for endless elaboration. As Vico saw in the phenomenon of human

19. J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), p. 5. Of course, many of the larger historical or autobiographical aspects of repetition are largely irrelevant to the present study, such as Kierkegaard's notion that recollection is living backward while repetition is living forward (*Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong [Princeton, 1983]).

20. Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, pp. 5–6, citing Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris, 1969), p. 302.

21. The latter will be discussed in section II.

history, there is in these musical forms a tension between the contrariety or eccentricity of the variation and the constance [*sic*] and asserted rationality of the *cantus firmus*. Nothing Vico could have said about the mind's triumph over irrationality can equal the quiet triumph that occurs at the end of the *Goldberg Variations*, as the theme returns in its exact first form to close off the aberrant variations it has generated.<sup>22</sup>

Said's reading of a purely instrumental composition in a conceptual framework is provocative, principally because the notion of the "asserted rationality" of the theme's return after the "variations it has generated" implies that the theme acts as agent rather than as first in a series. Yet his terms point up some of the problems with language about the elements of variation. For example, *cantus firmus* and "ground motif" usually mean a literally recurring bass-line (or less often, melodic) pattern; what the *Goldberg Variations* have instead is a constant harmonic progression. Similarly, "ornamental" usually describes a quality of melody, not texture generally. Here the variations have new melodies, figurations, and textures that are elaborate projections of the harmonic plan. Moreover, describing the variations, which are by turns brilliantly contrapuntal, dance-like, *cantabile*, and richly topical in other ways, as contrary, eccentric, bizarre, and aberrant seems misconceived, more dependent on an analogy with Vico than on Bach's music.

Jerome Robbins's brilliant choreography and staging of the *Goldberg Variations* for the New York City Ballet includes a detail that gives visual substance to the idea of theme as agent: the theme is danced—replete with elaborate hand-gestures—by a couple in full eighteenth-century courtly dress, while the invention-like first variation strips to leotards an energetic corps of dancers. Contrapuntal exegesis has nothing in common with decoration. About half-way through the piece bits of courtly apparel begin to appear on the dancers in successive layers of accretion until the final, thirtieth variation, which is fully decked out again. Then, with dramatic simplicity, the return of the theme features the original couple in leotards. What had originally seemed frippery, a superficial rococo ornateness, can in retrospect be interpreted as the underlying substance of the unadorned body, indeed, *pace* Said, the source of rationality in every variation.

## II

Repetition in prose fiction and repetition as a philosophical and historical idea inevitably require a broadening of pure repetition to include such recurrences and returns. Some forms of nonfiction also lend themselves to types of repetition. In Julie Ellison's sensitive analysis of Emerson's *Essays*, for example, repetition is a preeminent structural principle, including "classification . . . ; word association that generates a chain of synonyms; metaphoric variations; self-

22. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 113–114 (from the essay "On Repetition," pp. 111–125).

paraphrase that both repeats and elaborates an initial statement; quotation and allusion."<sup>23</sup> Particularly useful is Ellison's differentiation between "the repeated elements as substitutes for one another implicitly connected by 'or,'" and "repetitions . . . related by addition, by an implied 'and.'" In the former type, "[r]epetition forces us to take out one interchangeable part and substitute another . . . , intensifying the figural or fictive quality of language." With repetition by addition, on the other hand, "the original statement is persuasively extended, enriched, and complicated. We rise above the local difficulties of the catalogue and feel its terms cumulatively gather into hyperbole."<sup>24</sup> Variations exist in a series that has a necessary and identifiable beginning but no predetermined end; the organization of that series may be substitutive ("or") or cumulative ("and"), or may deploy figurative elements to both ends.

Two art forms embody unmediated structural repetition: poetry and decorative art, the latter constituting a separate aesthetic problem to be considered in the following section. Poetry offers a primary model for variations in stanza forms with metrical and rhyme schemes; these are literal counterparts to the strophic structure of variations with fixed phrase-lengths and cadential patterns.<sup>25</sup> Barbara Herrnstein Smith describes repetition as the "fundamental structure of poetic form" in her study *Poetic Closure*.<sup>26</sup> She identifies the principal varieties of repetition by means of three sets of oppositions: systematic versus occasional repetition; unmediated versus mediated repetition, with the latter referring more precisely to recurrence, as of refrain lines, rather than repetition; and formal versus thematic repetition, in which the former term posits a kind of rhythm and the latter a definable meaning for elements in the work.<sup>27</sup> Largely unproblematic, these distinctions run into trouble when too rigidly maintained or when, as in the first, the elements are overlapping. For example, systematic repetition is defined as structural or metric, while occasional is described as "rhetorical," as in "Come forth, come forth, the gentle Spring"; yet structural repetition, as Chapter 2 will make clear, is just as rhetorical, even if based on a different understanding of figures.

Herrnstein Smith also differentiates between paratactic and sequential structures of poetry, two formal types of great importance to the present study.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps because her subject is poetry, she does not make the more common distinction between parataxis and hypotaxis, terms from classical grammar commonly applied to oratory and prose composition. Parataxis in both contexts sheds light on musical variations, but its older usage will be taken up first.

23. Ellison, *Emerson's Romantic Style*, pp. 172-173.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

25. An older study that considers this issue is J. P. Dabney, *The Musical Basis of Verse* (New York, 1901).

26. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago, 1968).

27. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-138. I will not address her third type of structure, "associative or dialectical," which she relates primarily to poems reflecting an "interior monologue" or other train-of-thought speech.

The rounded, hypotactic, or Ciceronian periodic style of antiquity (*oratio periodica*) featured sentences with many relative clauses and a central climax; it differed substantially from the more fragmented, “chopped-up,” Senecan, or paratactic sentence structure (*oratio perpetua*) with shorter clauses and sentences, parallelisms, and the aspect of a linear series.<sup>29</sup> Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* differentiated between them as the *style périodique* and the *style coupé*, identifying the former as the “most pompous, musical, and oratorical manner of composing . . . [which] gives an air of gravity and dignity to composition.” The latter, on the other hand, “suits gay and easy subjects . . . [and] is more lively and striking.” His examples bear this out. For the periodic style, here is William Temple in a letter to Lady Essex:

If you look about you, and consider the lives of others as well as your own; if you think how few are born with honour, and how many die without name or children; how little beauty we see, and how few friends we hear of; how many diseases, and how much poverty there is in the world; you will fall down upon your knees, and, instead of repining at one affliction, will admire so many blessings you have received from the hand of God.<sup>30</sup>

For the *style coupé*, Blair’s example from Alexander Pope suffices:

I confess it was want of consideration that made me an author. I writ, because it amused me. I corrected, because it was as pleasant to me to correct as to write. I published, because I was told, I might please such as it was a credit to please.<sup>31</sup>

The ideal in composition was to intermix both styles.<sup>32</sup> Seventeen-year-old Mozart sent to his sister an apparent parody of a high-flown periodic sentence:

I hope, my queen, that you are enjoying the highest degree of health and that now and then or rather, sometimes, or, better still, occasionally, or, even better still, qualche volta, as the Italians say, you will sacrifice for my benefit some of your important and intimate thoughts, i: which ever proceed from that very fine and clear reasoning power, which in addition to your beauty, and although from a woman, and particularly from one of such tender years, almost nothing of the kind is ever expected, you possess, O queen, so abundantly as to put men and even grey-beards to shame :!. There now, you have a well-turned sentence [*hier hast du was gescheides*].<sup>33</sup>

29. See Aldo Scaglione, *The Classical Theory of Composition from Its Origins to the Present: A Historical Survey* (Chapel Hill, 1972), pp. 26–37.

30. Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (rpt. New York, 1826), p. 118.

31. Cited from the Preface to Pope’s works by Blair, *Lectures*, p. 118.

32. As Scaglione put it in *The Classical Theory of Composition* (p. 36), “the *perpetua* and the *periodica* . . . are sufficient to produce the perfect mix by balancing the complication of sustained hypotaxis with the relative simplicity of smooth-flowing parataxis.”

33. Letter of 14 August 1773. Emily Anderson, ed. *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1985), no. 179a, p. 238; the Anderson edition does not include Mozart’s unusual markings that call attention to the clause. See Mozart, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, ed. Wilhelm Bauer and Otto Erich Deutsch [Bauer-Deutsch], 8 vols. (Salzburg, 1962–1975), I, no. 290, p. 488. Mozart might be making a pun on the idea of something clever (*geschickt*) that is separated off (*geschieden*) by vertical lines; it is also the most flowery part of the sentence.