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## An investigation of the cadence in early nineteenth-century syntax

### ABSTRACT

#### Background

Despite representing one of the most fundamental aspects of formal theory, a single, codified definition for the cadence remains elusive. Given the ubiquity of the cadence in tonal music and the numerous recent contributions to *Formenlehre*, it is surprising that theorising of the cadence has lagged behind understanding of form and syntax. Examples of major contributions to cadential analysis include studies by Janet Schmalfeldt (1992), William Caplin (2004), and Markus Neuwirth and Pieter Bergé (eds. 2015). In their introduction to *What is a cadence?*, Neuwirth and Bergé opine that ‘even if everyone agrees, however, that cadences are of the utmost importance to the analysis of tonal music, a key question remains: what exactly is a cadence?’ (Neuwirth and Bergé 2015, 7). Encapsulating the established, preponderant opinion, Caplin observes that the cadence ‘essentially represents the structural end of broader harmonic, melodic, and phrase-structural processes’ (Caplin 1998, 43). Classification of cadences has typically concentrated on abstracted principles of concluding harmony; culmination on tonic harmony produces authentic cadences, resolution on dominant harmony yields half cadences, while deceptive/interrupted cadences represent substitution of another concluding harmony in place of the tonic, and the plagal cadence, a motion from subdominant to tonic. The two emphasised properties here are the syntactic parameters of tonal music – melody and harmony (Sears, Caplin, and McAdams 2014, 398). Further parameters, such as the rhythmic and rhetorical, have received less attention in cadential studies, largely because they are challenging for generic abstraction (Anson-Cartwright 2007, 2). Additional studies have yielded significant additions to cadential considerations, such as cadential evasion and prolongation (Schmalfeldt 1992), the importance of cadences in goal-orientation (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006), and cadential, formal, and tonal relationships (Anson-Cartwright 2007). Each of these provide a significant advancement of concepts of closure, or specific cadence-related activities, but a single, systematic means of describing the cadence is yet indefinable. These issues are compounded in the largely virgin, untouched territory of the early nineteenth-century, particularly in light of the expansion of strategies used to produce formal articulation. The assumption, for example, that cadences act as means of articulating formal space is not always born out post-classicism. Reliance on classical models has inhibited the production of comprehensive theories detailing the new syntaxes of the romantic period, and by association the interaction between syntax, formal articulation, and cadence. While closure and cadence are often

synonymous with one another, in Romantic repertoires closure is achieved through a variety of different means.

#### Aims and repertoire studied

The aim of this paper is to interrogate the current literature pertaining to cadences, evaluate the cadential and non-cadential strategies generating formal articulation and closure, and to present a new method for understanding cadences and closing function in the early nineteenth-century. The analysis focuses on the sonata-form outer movements of Mendelssohn’s String Quartets as representative case studies. The music of Mendelssohn provides a provocative point of departure, given his synthesis of the classical style and the new, progressive Romantic aesthetic, and this research provides a springboard for future study of form-functional issues in the Romantic period.

#### Methods

The theory of formal functions presents the most fruitful starting point for syntactic analysis, but modified to a more fluid perspective, allowing for Romantic syntactic change. This paper challenges the traditional means of analysing and classifying cadences, which has privileged melodic and harmonic parameters. Other factors, such as rhetorical markers, acquire greater significance with this repertoire, in light of changing Romantic syntax. Principal among these changes include considerations of syntactic proliferation (expansion and extension), elision, and truncation, as each of these issues directly interact with cadential strategies (Horton 2015). These routinely alter cadential expression, and can lead to evasion, deferral, and indeed often the overriding, undermining, and obfuscation of formal articulation. Presented as an empirical study, this paper examines the specific devices employed by Mendelssohn to create formal divisions, considers these findings in light of current cadence theory, and advances the case for renewed attention to Romantic cadential strategies.

#### Implications

This paper addresses how theorising of the cadence and understanding of formal closure must adapt to integrate factors where the traditional elements of harmony and melody are altered, or are absent, and advances a new approach for serious consideration of diverse agents of formal articulation. Perhaps more so than any other formal component, cadences inform our perception of syntax and formal-space, given that they act as a primary delineator of cessation. In order to understand novel nineteenth-century practices better, we must produce a flexible theory capable of encompassing a variety of cadential and non-cadential strategies, rather than a prescriptive set of normative models. This theory must be capable of addressing weaker cadential articulation, deferral of structural closures (particularly as this relates to syntactic proliferation), elision

(given the obfuscation of clear formal boundaries), and non-congruence. In particular for the nineteenth century, any cadential theory must allow for reinterpretation of inter-thematic cadences as intra-thematic cadences, and vice-versa, in view of the surge of syntactic proliferation and truncation at this time. This paper advances a serious consideration of the cadence in light of these issues in the early nineteenth-century, examining multiple modes of formal articulation. These investigations produce a theoretical model better suited to Mendelssohn's music, and consequently accommodates further consideration of cadence theory for broader repertoires of the Romantic period.

### Keywords

Cadences, Mendelssohn, formal articulation, Formenlehre

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