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The ‘Reopened’ Half Cadence: A Striking Cadential Anomaly

ABSTRACT

Background

This paper identifies a striking cadential situation that I term the *reopened half cadence*. To create this cadential anomaly, an initiating phrase promises to close with an authentic cadence, usually a perfect authentic cadence (PAC). But the final tonic suddenly ‘reopens’ onto a root-position dominant, thus creating the sense of a half cadence (HC), one that seems to override the initially expressed authentic cadence. When the phrase is repeated, the originally implied PAC returns to close the ongoing thematic process. The handful of reopened half cadences that I have so far uncovered in instrumental music of the classical style seem not to have been recognized as such by theorists. To be sure, Danuta Mirka describes one such case (to be discussed later on) as a ‘twisted cadence’, but her other examples of such cadential twisting do not conform to my category of reopened half cadence (Mirka, 2010). The theoretical approach to phrase structure and cadence taken here is based on my prior writings on these topics (Caplin 1998, 2004).

Aims and repertoire studied

The body of the paper presents detailed analyses of five reopened half cadences from works by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Beyond merely describing this unusual cadential phenomenon, I aim to reveal what motivates its usage and how it functions as an appropriate mode of formal closure. For each case, I explore the formal context in which the reopened half cadence arises, assess the particular way in which the authentic cadence is manipulated to become a HC, and posit reasons for why the technique is appropriately employed, often in reference to the motivic or harmonic content of the initiating *basic idea* of the theme.

Methods

Beethoven, Symphony No. 2 in D, Op. 36, iv, main theme. The theme begins with a two-bar basic idea that, rather unusually, is immediately followed by a four-bar continuation phrase, one that aims to close with a PAC on the downbeat of bar 6. Upon reaching its final tonic, however, that harmony moves immediately to the dominant to effect a HC, one that is supported texturally by the caesura that follows. This reopened half cadence creates an antecedent phrase, whose consequent immediately appears at bar 7. The resulting period theme-type is then fully closed by the very same PAC that was undermined in the antecedent. The use of a reopened half cadence here is most likely prompted by a chain of motivic connections arising from the stepwise ascent from scale degrees 3 to 4 presented in the opening basic idea. The rest of the phrase develops this ascending motivic gesture, such that the rise from 1 to 2, ensuing from the reopened half cadence, forms a direct connection to the 3-to-4 motion of the returning basic idea. In addition, the metric irregularity that results from the reopened half cadence establishes a rhythmic motive that rhymes with the same double quarter-note pattern ending the basic idea.

Beethoven, Violin Sonata in F (‘Spring’), Op. 24, iv, second subordinate theme. Within a subordinate theme group in C major, the theme begins with a modal shift to minor for its opening basic idea. A contrasting idea, shifting back to major, promises to end with an imperfect authentic cadence (IAC) at bar 42; but the final tonic suddenly yields to dominant to create a reopened half cadence, one that marks the end of an antecedent phrase. When the phrase is repeated in the manner of a consequent, the original sense of a closing IAC is suggested by the melody, which arrives on scale degree 3 in bar 46. But the surprising harmonic support of I⁶ produces a type of deceptive cadence instead, one that serves what I call a *way-station* function on the road to a projected PAC. Indeed, this final cadence appears when the contrasting idea is immediately repeated. A rationale for Beethoven’s use of a reopened half cadence here can be found in the motivic play of the initial stepwise descent from flat-3 to 2 that occurs two times in the course of the basic idea, in contrast with the natural-3 to 2 descent that occurs with the HC. This set of melodic connections thus emphasizes all the more the modal mixture at the heart of the theme.

Mozart, String Quartet in E-flat (‘Hunt’), K. 485, i, main theme. This passage illustrates an important variant on the reopened half cadence, whereby the originally promised authentic cadence itself is initially undermined by its final tonic appearing in first inversion, thus creating a type of deceptive cadence (akin to the way-station cadence discussed in the ‘Spring’ Sonata). This cadential deviation then leads immediately to a reopened half cadence to conclude an antecedent phrase. The following consequent ends with the PAC that was implied, but denied, in the antecedent. Similar to the previous examples, the reopened half cadence (which ends the contrasting idea of the antecedent) forges a special link to the opening basic idea, in that both end with identical half-cadential content. To mitigate an excessive redundancy, the reopened half cadence re-contextualizes the overall harmonic environment in which the specifically half-cadential content (of both the basic and contrasting ideas) arises, thus helping to camouflage what might otherwise have been an all-too-obvious connection between these two ideas.

Mozart, String Quintet in C, K. 515, i, main theme. In this passage, which Mirka discusses as a ‘twisted cadence’, we find another case where a first-inversion tonic is used in place of a root-position one just prior to the cadential reopening. This main theme, stretching to fifty-seven bars, is perhaps the longest in the entire classical repertory. In order to achieve such startling length and degree of complexity, Mozart employs a variety of devices that allow him to extend the theme in time, prominent of which, is a reopened half cadence at bar 19. Prior to this moment, the theme had been organizing itself as a sixteen-bar compound sentence (extended by three additional bar). Following the reopened half cadence, the theme then backs up to its very beginning, and we eventually understand that the repeated compound sentence makes up both the antecedent and consequent units of a *doubly* compounded period, a theme type that does not normally occur in this repertory. So when Mozart promises a PAC for bar 19, we expect that full closure of the compound sentence will surely occur at that point. The reopened half cadence thus comes as a com-

plete surprise, since it implies a theme-type that listeners of the time would never expect to occur.

Haydn, String Quartet in A, Op. 55, No. 1, i, main theme. Unlike the previous examples, the reopened half cadence featured in this theme is not associated with a periodic theme-type. Rather, an initiating phrase (to be discussed momentarily) is followed by a continuation phrase that is poised to create a PAC on the downbeat of bar 8; however, the implied cadential tonic is inverted and is then followed by a sudden reopening onto dominant (as in the previous two examples). After this moment, the music does not return to the beginning of the theme, in the sense of a consequent, but rather, backs up to the start of the continuation, whose repeated attempt to gain a PAC is now successful at bar 12. Looking back, we see that the reopened half cadence at bar 8 functions not to end an implied compound antecedent phrase, but rather as a way-station cadence on the path towards a final PAC. What seems to motivate the reopened half cadence is the unusual organization of the opening four-bar unit of the theme, one that closes, quite prematurely, with a PAC. As we hear the following continuation strive towards a second PAC, which would seem in itself to be superfluous, the reopened half cadence creates a surprising turn. But rather than allowing this cadence to mark a structural end of some kind (which would give rise to a *reversal* of the standard cadential ordering, i.e., HC followed by PAC), Haydn repeats the continuation phrase, this time allowing it to effect PAC closure for the theme as a whole. The resulting arrangement of the three cadences — initial PAC, reopened HC, and final PAC — engenders a series of remarkable re-evaluations of implied cadential processes.

Implications

I conclude my paper with some general observations on how the reopened half cadence encourages a listener-oriented analytical approach, one that focusses on cadential expectation and retrospective reinterpretation. The various perceptual complications that ensue from the use of this technique account perhaps for the rarity of its usage. But those few cases that do arise raise a host of fascinating questions of motivic, harmonic, cadential, and formal interpretation.

Keywords

Cadence, form, retrospective reinterpretation, classical style

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