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# A Foretaste of Heaven: Musical Teleology in Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*, K618

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## Abstract

In June 1791, having composed almost no church music for ten years, Mozart wrote the short motet *Ave verum corpus*, K618, a setting of the Latin medieval eucharist hymn. The theological teleology in the text introduces a process-like aiming at a goal that cannot, however, be reached. This study is about how teleology operates in the motet – the ways in which the text's ultimately unfulfilled goal-directed processes operate in Mozart's music. The music is approached from a variety of analytical perspectives that reflect different aspects of this theme: the new *Formenlehre* and phrase structure, topic theory, and the analysis of voice-leading structure, register and hypermetre. Together, these approaches elucidate the multiplicity of musical processes that, as in the motet's text, announce a goal but fail to reach it.

**Keywords:** Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; musico-poetic connections; musical narrative; Schenkerian analysis; musical topics

## Theological Teleology

In June 1791, having composed almost no church music for ten years, Mozart wrote the short motet *Ave verum corpus*, K618, a setting of the Latin medieval eucharist hymn. The text of the motet is:

- |                             |                                     |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Ave verum Corpus natum   | Hail, true Body, born               |
| 2. de Maria Virgine:        | of the Virgin Mary,                 |
| 3. Vere passum, immolatum   | [who] truly suffered, sacrificed    |
| 4. in cruce pro homine:     | on the cross for mankind,           |
| 5. Cujus latus perforatum   | from whose pierced side             |
| 6. unda fluxit et sanguine: | water and blood flowed:             |
| 7. Esto nobis praegustatum  | be for us a foretaste [of heaven]   |
| 8. in mortis examine.       | in the trial of death. <sup>1</sup> |

Mozart set the text by dividing it into two four-line segments, both further subdivided into two pairs of lines. The text refers to two temporal layers: the present (humankind and the earthly world), in which Christ was born and crucified, and the future, the Last Judgment and the blissful ascent to heaven granted to the chosen. This hoped-for ascent forms the telos of the text. The connection between the crucifixion and salvation is not only temporal but also causal: the death of

<sup>1</sup> I present the text and the music as they appear in the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*, series 1, volume 3; see 'Ave verum corpus', in *Geistliche Gesangswerke: Kleinere Kirchenwerke*, ed. Hellmut Federhofer (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963), 261–262. The punctuation of the text is different in Mozart's manuscript.

Christ leads to the redemption of humankind at the Last Judgment. Both the temporal and causal layers feature prominently in Mozart's music.<sup>2</sup>

The text reflects the core of the Christian view on time and history: motion from creation and original sin via crucifixion to the Last Judgment, the second coming of Christ. Zdeněk Vašíček describes the narrative, teleological aspects of this view of history:

The first great world religions are closely related to epic poetry and written records. Their Grand Narrative assumes a beginning, a middle, and an end – it is linear. The end represents an explanation of particular peripetia [*sic*] and is identified with their meaning. The great theist religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) basically share the outline given by Zoroaster in the twelfth century BC: a perfect, eternal, and infinitely good God created both nature and man. He established a moral order and endowed human beings with immortality and free will. History is a fight between good and evil, into which God can intervene. *History is divided into two main parts by the advent of a Prophet or a Messiah, and a Final Judgment will follow the final defeat of evil, whereupon an eternal empire of happiness will begin, with hell as its complementary supplement.*<sup>3</sup>

Each of the four pairs of lines in *Ave verum corpus* has a specific role in such a 'Grand Narrative', in particular in the division of the motet's narrative into two main parts, following the division to which Vašíček refers above. The first two lines are a neutral description of the starting-point: Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. In mentioning the birth of Christ, the text clarifies the division of history 'into two main parts by the advent of a Prophet or a Messiah'. Lines 3–4 introduce crucifixion, the redemption that opens up the possibility for the telos of the 'Grand Narrative': the ascent to heaven and Paradise. Lines 5–6 signify an increase in emotional intensity, mentioning Christ's pierced side and the flowing of his blood. If lines 3–4 also refer to the hereafter in the future (crucifixion as the redemption of humankind), lines 5–6 depict the suffering of Christ in this world. The final lines 7–8 make concrete the wish to reach the telos, mentioning the foretaste of heaven in the trial of death: given the redemption made possible by Christ's crucifixion, the Last Judgment provides human beings with the possibility of admittance to Paradise. However, the ascent to heaven is not automatic, but can only be reached through the 'trial of death'. All in all, underlying the text are two features of relevance to this analysis of Mozart's motet, namely (1) the juxtaposition of the present and hope of what is to come and (2) an expressive trajectory moving from the neutral statement of the opening situation via agony to the hope of a joyous future. I argue that both the juxtaposition of two temporal planes and the text's expressive trajectory govern Mozart's music.

Table 1 summarizes the text's expressive juxtapositions and the implied narrative that underlies *Ave verum corpus*. The left-hand column (state 1) represents the earthly present, which creates negative associations: earthly human existence is governed by original sin, and spatially it is associated with the low. However, the final, third line of state 1 is not solely negative – it also reveals the option of a positive future. Although Christ's suffering refers to pain in the present earthly world, at the same time it represents redemption and the hereafter, the possibility of the second state in Table 1. Thus the final line of state 1 leads to the arrow in Table 1 that signifies the hoped-for motion to state 2, which is governed by heaven, spatially by the high and temporally by the hereafter for believers.<sup>4</sup> State 2 represents the telos, which cannot, however, be reached in the present reality of state 1.

<sup>2</sup> I discuss the theological aspects of the text only to the extent that is necessary for analysing the musico-poetic relationships in *Ave verum corpus*.

<sup>3</sup> Zdeněk Vašíček, 'Philosophy of History', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 34 (my italics).

<sup>4</sup> The association of heaven with height is visible in the medieval thinking that underlies the text of *Ave verum corpus*, such as in the numerous paintings of the Last Judgment with the saved souls positioned in the upper parts. Likewise, in Dante's

**Table 1.** Oppositional pairs underlying Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*, K618

| state 1 (negative, present)      | → | state 2 (positive, future) |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| earth                            |   | heaven                     |
| low                              |   | high                       |
| suffering of Christ (redemption) |   | hereafter for believers    |

### Theological Teleology and Music-Analytical Approaches

The text of *Ave verum corpus* includes a network of signifying elements, of which the primary ones for the present study are the following: (1) a teleological process that ultimately fails to reach the telos, (2) a division of the whole into hierarchically organized units and (3) an expressive narrative moving from a neutral beginning via agony to the hope of a blissful end. Each of these appears to be reflected in the music. The musico-poetic associations in Mozart's motet are not based on any one musical layer, hence the need for a variety of music-analytical tools to elucidate the multi-layered connections between music and text.

Schenkerian theory, hypermetrical analysis and the new *Formenlehre* give my interpretation a framework through which to elucidate musical connections with the first two textual elements mentioned above (unfulfilled teleology and the division of the whole into units). Schenkerian theory makes it possible to distinguish between elements that are structurally primary and those that flesh out the structural skeleton. This hierarchical distinction is helpful in defining which musical elements signify arrival at a goal – and particularly those which fail to reach a goal, as such non-arrivals could be perceived as forming a musical counterpart to the text's inability to reach the contemplated telos.

A distinction between structurally primary and elaborating elements is particularly pertinent to my discussion of the use of registers in *Ave verum corpus*. The one-line octave is the structurally primary register of the top voice, the 'obligatory register', as Heinrich Schenker calls it.<sup>5</sup> The top-voice elements of the background all occur in the one-line octave. The sonic primacy of this register is repeatedly challenged by a rhetorically emphasized  $d^2$ , which is always a structurally elaborating pitch. This rhetorically emphasized but structurally secondary pitch could be interpreted as a musical counterpart to the telos that is contemplated in the text – a goal that is never reached. In other words, the reality of the obligatory register is paired with an emphasized but subordinate  $d^2$  – the tonic pitch in a higher register. This juxtaposition of two registers could be considered a musical counterpart to the low, earthly reality (the obligatory register) and the high telos associated with heaven (the structurally subordinate tonic pitch  $d^2$ ). Given that the  $d^2$  lies outside the background structure occurring in the one-line octave, it is as impossible to establish it as a stable pitch at the deepest structural levels as it is to reach the telos in the present world that governs the text.

The new *Formenlehre*, in turn, is related to the second of the elements of textual signification mentioned at the beginning of this section, the division of larger units into distinct segments. It provides the means for describing the segmentation of music that corresponds to the segmentation of the text. Together with hypermetrical analysis, examination of form also makes it possible to distinguish between musical segments that are conventional and those that deviate from common patterns. Various kinds of phrase-structural expansion – deviations from conventions that also affect the hypermetre – are of particular significance because they enhance the sense of expectancy:

*Divina Commedia*, which reflects ancient ideas of cosmology, Paradise can be reached by climbing the mountain of Purgatory.

<sup>5</sup> For Heinrich Schenker's discussion of obligatory register see *Free Composition*, trans. and ed. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), 107–108.

**Table 2.** Mozart, *Ave verum corpus*, K618, chart of form

| 1st reprise (bars 1–21)  |                                       |   |                                   |                                   |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| form                     | intro. (1–2)<br>(instrumental)        | 1st phrase (3–10)<br>hybrid 3                       | 2nd phrase (11–18)<br>sentence    | codetta (18–21)<br>(instrumental) |
| <b>key</b>               | D                                     | D   | A                                 | A                                 |
| <b>cadences</b>          |                                       | I:HC  | V:PAC                             | V:PAC                             |
| <b>hypermetre</b>        | upbeat                                | 1234,1234,  | 1234,1234,=1                      | 4,=1234                           |
| <b>text</b>              | —                                     | lines 1 and 2                                       | lines 3 and 4                     | —                                 |
| 2nd reprise (bars 22–46) |                                       |   |                                   |                                   |
| form                     | 3rd phrase (22–29)<br>hybrid 3, loose | 4th phrase (30–43)<br>continuation, expanded, loose | codetta (43–46)<br>(instrumental) |                                   |
| <b>key</b>               | A → (F) → d                           | D   | D                                 |                                   |
| <b>cadences</b>          | I:HC                                  | I:PAC   | I:PAC                             |                                   |
| <b>hypermetre</b>        | 1234,1234,                            | 1234,1234,123456,=1                                 | 6,=1234                           |                                   |
| <b>text</b>              | lines 5 and 6                         | lines 7 and 8                                       | —                                 |                                   |

expansions defer arrival at formal boundaries, the goals at which the music aims. Such expansions and deferrals in *Ave verum corpus* could be associated with the teleological narrative of the text.

Whereas the first two signifying elements of the text (the teleological narrative and the division of larger units into segments) are mainly structural, the third one (the expressive narrative) relates to an emotional trajectory. The different shades of textual expression find musical counterparts in the use of musical topics. Similar to emotional states implied by the text of Mozart's motet, topics may be associated with various types of positive and negative affect. In addition, their object of reference may be emotions shared by a group or affects experienced by an individual. The topical course of *Ave verum corpus* appears to reflect the expressive narrative of the text.

### *Ave verum corpus*: An Overview

The overall form of *Ave verum corpus* is straightforward, and the musical and textual forms map onto each other (Table 2). The music divides into two reprises, the first of which starts with an introduction and ends in a codetta, and the second ending in a codetta. Both reprises further subdivide into two phrases, each concluding with a cadence.<sup>6</sup> The first reprise moves from the tonic to the dominant, the second from the dominant back to the tonic. The first three phrases consist of conventional phrase-structural types, as defined by William Caplin, although the third does so in a somewhat loose manner.<sup>7</sup> The fourth phrase, on the other hand, only consists of a continuation, in an expanded and loose form, and so lacks a functional initiation. Hypermetrically, the first three phrases consist of symmetrical four-bar hypermeasures, whereas the fourth, more expansive, has a six-bar group. In terms of both phrase structure and metre, therefore, the fourth phrase is set apart from the other three. Each of the four phrases sets two lines of the text, meaning that the first reprise sets lines 1–4 and the second lines 5–8.

The form of *Ave verum corpus* follows principles that Heinrich Christoph Koch recognized in 1793. He refers to pieces 'in which four melodic sections are connected, of which one contains a

<sup>6</sup> I use the term 'phrase' as defined by William Rothstein: 'a phrase should be understood as . . . a directed motion in time from one tonal entity to another . . . If there is no tonal motion, there is no phrase'. *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1989), 5 (original italics). In other words, a phrase ends only when a cadential arrival occurs. The two codettas excluded, there are four cadences in *Ave verum corpus*; consequently, there are four phrases.

<sup>7</sup> For a definition of these phrase-structural types see William Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

cadence in a secondary key', mentioning as one option the order of cadential endings found in *Ave verum corpus* (I:HC, V:PAC, I:HC, I:PAC).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he refers to the harmonically more active quality of the third phrase, again a feature found in Mozart's motet. Yet despite the clarity of Koch's description, published two years after Mozart composed *Ave verum corpus*, simple binary was by no means a common formal pattern for complete works at the end of the eighteenth century. Indeed, in his comprehensive discussion in *Classical Form*, William Caplin does not describe binary as a formal schema governing entire works; likewise, David Beach and Ryan McClelland only discuss movements from baroque suites as representatives of binary form in *Analysis of 18th- and 19th-Century Musical Works in the Classical Tradition*.<sup>9</sup>

Both the studies focus solely on instrumental music, but the straightforward binary form such as the one that underlies *Ave verum corpus* was not common in operas either. In other words, Mozart did not use it in the vocal genre in which he was active before composing this motet. Mary Hunter assigned the roughly eight hundred arias she studied in *The Culture of Opera Buffa* to nine categories, one of which was 'binary'.<sup>10</sup> However, the tonal return in her binary type aligns with a repetition of earlier thematic material, which is not the case in *Ave verum corpus*.<sup>11</sup> James Webster, on the other hand, in his exhaustive taxonomy of formal types in Mozart's operatic arias, recognizes a type that aligns with Koch's definition referred to above, and therefore might describe *Ave verum corpus* as a binary key-area form with a tonal-return section (rather than a recapitulation that brings back earlier thematic material).<sup>12</sup> However, the only instance that Webster mentions is No. 27, Figaro's aria 'Aprite un po' quegl'occhi', from *Le nozze di Figaro*, which differs considerably from *Ave verum corpus*: in the second reprise the aria shows neither unequivocal cadential punctuation that divides the music into distinct phrases nor temporal symmetry among the segments that constitute the tonal reprise.

It is worth emphasizing two features that distinguish *Ave verum corpus* from the two later eighteenth-century binary forms referred to above, namely Hunter's definition and most of Webster's types of binary arias. First, the tonal return in the second reprise in Mozart's motet does not coincide with the recapitulation of thematic material heard earlier (in other words, this is simple rather than rounded binary). Second, the fourth phrase that brings the tonic back consists only of a continuation, meaning, as noted earlier, that there is no functional initiation. In other words, in addition to not bringing back any earlier thematic material, the tonic return begins as if in the middle of a process, *in medias res*. As I shall show, both of these features have an effect on the teleological organization of *Ave verum corpus*.

It is still possible to find unequivocal binary forms in Mozart's oeuvre, at least in his baroque pastiches, including the Allemande and Courante from the Suite, K399 (1782), and the Gigue,

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Introductory Essay on Composition*, trans. Nancy Kovaleff Baker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 95. Danuta Mirka lists all the cadential options that Koch gives for a two-reprise form consisting of four phrases, the seventh of which shows the punctuation schema appearing in *Ave verum corpus*; see *Hypermetric Manipulations in Haydn and Mozart: Chamber Music for Strings, 1787–1791* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 114. Koch's terminology with regard to harmonic resting-points is close to, but not identical with, the modern cadential terminology that I use. L. Poundie Burstein conducts a perceptive and thorough discussion of the similarities and differences between Koch's ideas on phrases and harmonic resting-points on the one hand, and the views presented in the new *Formenlehre* on the other; see *Journeys through Galant Expositions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> See David Beach and Ryan McClelland, *Analysis of 18th- and 19th-Century Musical Works in the Classical Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 151–153.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: A Poetics of Entertainment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 305–307.

<sup>11</sup> In Hunter's binary aria form, the thematic material comprises 'A B: (x) B', the tonal return bringing back the contrasting thematic material heard in the aria's first part in the secondary key. In contrast, in her 'sonata-like' aria forms the tonal return brings back the opening thematic material.

<sup>12</sup> James Webster, 'The Analysis of Mozart's Arias', in *Mozart Studies*, ed. Cliff Eisen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 114–122.

\* =  $d^2$

|                 |             |            |             |            |
|-----------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| <b>cadences</b> | I:HC        | V:PAC      | I:HC        | I:PAC      |
| <b>form</b>     | 1st reprise |            | 2nd reprise |            |
| <b>phrases</b>  | 1st phrase  | 2nd phrase | 3rd phrase  | 4th phrase |
| <b>text</b>     | lines 1–2   | lines 3–4  | lines 5–6   | lines 7–8  |

Example 1. Mozart, *Ave verum corpus*, K618, overview

K574 (1789).<sup>13</sup> In other words, Mozart used this form in works that apply historical models. Indeed, one could speculate that the formal type that appears in *Ave verum corpus*, which Mozart may have associated with historical styles, is a conscious glance backwards in time. I will return to this historicist quality of the motet at the end of the article.

The deep-level tonal structure underlying *Ave verum corpus* is straightforward (Example 1). The first phrase ends in a local back-relating dominant, whereas the second begins immediately with the structural dominant that ends the first branch of the interrupted background structure. The top voice of the second phrase consists of a descending fifth-progression, such that the local tonic pitch of A major is reached in its concluding V:PAC. There is a register transfer within this fifth-progression, which brings the important  $d^2$ , the symbol of the textual telos, into the middle-ground structure (asterisks indicate this pitch in the analytical examples). The third phrase, which begins the second reprise, prolongs the dominant, the uppermost voice showing a fourth-progression that regains the  $\hat{2}$  of the deep-level interruption. Via the process of mixture, this third phrase introduces pitches borrowed from D minor. The fourth phrase constitutes the second branch of the interrupted background structure. The tonic is first prolonged through a voice exchange, after which the phrase ends with the completion of the background structure. The voice exchange again, through a register transfer, brings  $d^2$  to the middleground top voice.

### First Reprise: Statement of the Situation

Example 2 is an annotated score of the brief introduction and the first phrase of *Ave verum corpus*, bars 1–10. The music faithfully follows conventions of the time: after a two-bar introduction, which hypermetrically constitutes an elongated upbeat, bars 3–10 consist of a ‘hybrid 3’ and two four-bar

<sup>13</sup> On a smaller scale, Mozart often used binary form, particularly in themes that begin sets of variations – the themes of the last movements of the Clarinet Quintet, K581, or the Piano Concerto K491 are only two of numerous examples. However, such themes in Caplin’s taxonomy are in a small binary form, which cannot underlie complete movements; see Caplin, *Classical Form*, 87–93.



**Example 2.** *Ave verum corpus*, bars 1–10, annotated score (all relevant examples are based on the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*, series 1, volume 3, *Geistliche Gesangswerke: Kleinere Kirchenwerke*, ed. Hellmut Federhofer (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963)). Used by permission

hypermeasures.<sup>14</sup> The Lully schema in bars 3–6 (I–II<sub>2</sub><sup>4</sup>–V<sub>5</sub><sup>6</sup>–I), which is a common eighteenth-century opening gambit,<sup>15</sup> enhances the conventional musical style of the first phrase; this maps well onto the character of lines 1–2 of the text that it sets, namely the neutral statement concerning the birth of Christ of the Virgin Mary.

The first phrase introduces the motet’s primary topical quality, which like the overarching binary form, recalls earlier musical styles. The four-part texture moving in a slow-paced *alla breve* metre refers to the choral guise of *stile antico*, a topic associated with the high style of church music. The music also refers to the ‘grave style’: as Keith Chapin notes, ‘by the end of the eighteenth century . . . the term “grave” had dissipated into a field of adjectives that circumscribed the affective quality of learned styles: ceremonial (*feierlich*), serious (*ernst*), grand, and so forth’.<sup>16</sup> Such adjectives are close to the affective quality of *Ave verum corpus*.

The opening phrase introduces the important d<sup>2</sup>, which is heard for the first time on the third beat of bar 3. Attention is drawn to this pitch not only because of the register but also by means of the two largest leaps in the soprano line of the first phrase: the ascending fourth that precedes the d<sup>2</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the concept of ‘hybrid 3’ see Caplin, *Classical Form*, 61; for a discussion of the concept of ‘elongated upbeat’ see Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm*, 56–57.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the ‘Lully’ schema see John A. Rice, ‘Adding to the Galant Schematicon: The Lully’ [www.academia.edu/7783771](http://www.academia.edu/7783771) (26 July 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Keith Chapin, ‘Learned Style and Learned Styles’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 309.

Example 3. *Ave verum corpus*, bars 3–6, recomposition

Example 4. *Ave verum corpus*, bars 1–10, analytical sketch

and the descending sixth that follows it. Example 3 shows a recomposition in which the  $d^2$  is replaced by an  $f\sharp^1$ , a pitch that omits leaps larger than a third and makes the music more unified in its intervallic contours (ascending thirds shown by the brackets).

Structurally, the foreground  $d^2$  in bar 3 embellishes the deeper-level  $a^1$  that begins the bar (Example 4). Moreover, the skips that surround  $d^2$  set it apart from the completely stepwise middleground top-voice motions. All in all, when introduced in *Ave verum corpus*,  $d^2$  appears as an element detached from its environment – an unfulfilled option rather than a firm statement, as it were – in the same way as the textual telos does not directly appear in the earthly present described in the text's first two lines that the first phrase sets.

The second phrase (bars 11–18), which is entirely in the dominant key of A major, also follows phrase-structural conventions (a sentence, the continuation of which is reinterpreted as cadential) as well as exhibiting hypermetrical symmetry (Example 5). Nevertheless, there are two events that interfere with the music's steady flow: the first is the deceptive cadence, enhanced by an expressively emphatic chromatic  $E-E\sharp-F\sharp$  bass progression, that replaces the expected  $V-I$  motion in bars 13–14; the second is the unison texture on the downbeat of bar 15 that deviates from the governing chorale texture and highlights the important pitch  $d^2$ .<sup>17</sup> Both of these events play a significant

<sup>17</sup> Even if a  $V-I$  progression were heard in bars 13–14, it would not, as an ending of the presentation phase (basic idea + basic idea), constitute a proper functional cadence. In William Caplin's terminology, there would be cadential content but no cadential function; see 'The Classical Cadence: Conceptions and Misconceptions', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57/1 (2004), 81–85.



presentation
basic idea
continuation  
basic idea
fragmentation

**hypermetre** 1 2 3 4, 1

=> cadential
codetta  
cadential idea
expanded cadential progression

**hypermetre** 2 3 4,=1 2 3 4,

Example 5. *Ave verum corpus*, bars 11–21, annotated score

Example 6. *Ave verum corpus*, bars 11–21, analytical sketch

role in the tonal structure (Example 6). The deceptive cadence constitutes an unfolded 5–6 progression above the bass pitch A that opens the phrase. Thus it mediates between the first two pitches (A in bar 11 and B in bar 15) of a stepwise ascent from the tonic to the dominant. The deceptive cadence also removes any sense of harmonic arrival, thus heightening expectancy for what is to follow.

The deceptive cadence and the unison also modify the primary chorale topic: the chromaticism of the deceptive cadence introduces sighing gestures associated with sensibility, while  $d^2$  briefly introduces unison texture. Significantly for the expressive narrative, sensibility and unison imply two different modes of signification. Sensibility is associated with individual feeling. Unison, on the other hand, refers to the authority of a force stronger than an individual: as Janet M. Levy notes, ‘probably the single most pervasive quality of a unison passage is its aura of authoritative control’.<sup>18</sup> Sensibility and unison could be associated respectively with the present, earthly reality (the sensibility referring to the perspective of an individual) and with the hope of redemption (the unison referring to a force stronger than an individual). This pairing makes direct reference to the text that the second phrase sets: sensibility to Christ’s suffering and unison to God’s authority, with the power of redemption.

The unison  $d^2$  in bar 15 plays a key registral role: it emphasizes this important high pitch more than bar 3 did. The descending fifth progression that governs the top voice of the second phrase is divided between two registers: the initial pitch E is heard in the obligatory one-line register, whereas the progression’s second pitch  $d^2$  is heard a seventh above  $e^1$  rather than a second below it. A series of reachings-over gradually climbs from  $e^1$  to  $d^2$ . The rising gestures in bars 11–14 are then answered by the straightforward stepwise descent in bars 15–18.

These structural and topical events reflect the underlying text. The third and fourth lines mention Christ’s crucifixion on behalf of humankind, introducing the theme of redemption: in other words, the telos is mentioned for the first time. The emphatic  $d^2$  in bar 15 functions as a musical counterpart to the text’s reference to the telos. The deceptive cadence and unison set the two crucial words: ‘immolatum’ (sacrificed) and ‘cruce’ (the cross). The word ‘immolatum’ intensifies the emotional tone (by mean of that chromaticized deceptive cadence). The sensibility topic, a reference to emotions felt by an individual, may be associated with the suffering of Christ in the earthly present.

<sup>18</sup> Janet M. Levy, ‘Texture as a Sign in Classic and Early Romantic Music’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 35/3 (1982), 507.

Example 7. *Ave verum corpus*, bars 22–29, annotated score

At the same time, the deceptive cadence prepares for the word ‘cruce’, which is set by the unison  $d^2$ . Reflecting the way in which redemption, symbolized by the cross, is in God’s hands, the unison texture refers to an authority stronger than an individual.

The second phrase is followed by a brief instrumental codetta (bars 18–21) consisting of an expanded cadential progression (Example 5). The image of the telos is kept in view by a  $d^2$  in bar 19, which functions as an embellishing pitch, a passing note in the middleground – with the same structural function as the more emphatic  $d^2$  in bar 15 (Example 6).

### Second Reprise: From Agony to Hope

The phrase-structural organization of the third phrase, which begins the second reprise, outwardly seems straightforward (Example 7): a hybrid 3 consisting of two four-bar hypermeasures. However, the harmonic events considerably loosen the phrase-structural organization – the form-functional looseness maps onto the textual intensification. The opening compound basic idea moves from the initial A major, established in the second phrase, to F major, followed by a fleeting reference to D minor. Thus, there is no tonic-prolongational stability that usually characterizes the initiating function. Moreover, F major (and the D minor fleetingly referred to) introduce mixture, borrowing pitches and sonorities from the overall tonic’s parallel minor. The implied darker expression on the musical surface materializes in the continuation that concludes the third phrase, reaching its emotional culmination in bars 28–29, a half-cadential progression in the key of D minor. The

Example 8. *Ave verum corpus*, bars 22–30, analytical sketch

intensified expression of this cadential progression is enhanced by the chromatic bass progression  $B\flat-A-G\sharp-A$ , an instance of the Le-Sol-Fi-Sol schema.<sup>19</sup>

The tonal structure underlying the third phrase is more complex than in the first two (Example 8), and the expressive and harmonic instability of the musical surface is reflected in the underlying voice leading. The tonicized F major chord in bar 25 is an outgrowth of the initial A major triad. Its bass pitch  $F\sharp$  prolongs the dominant chord that begins the phrase by replacing the chord's fifth E with a sixth,  $F\sharp$ . This pitch then functions as an upper fifth of a  $B\flat$  that arrives in bar 28. This  $B\flat$  is an upper neighbour note prolonging A, the home-key dominant, and a  $G\sharp$  is interpolated between the  $B\flat$  and the return of the A. Example 9 summarizes the underlying harmonic and contrapuntal progression.

However, the role of the important middleground B flat major chord is far from straightforward: indeed, it does not appear as such in the music. The staff above the voice-leading sketch of Example 8 clarifies the situation. The suspensions above the  $B\flat$  are not resolved to  $F\sharp$  and D while  $B\flat$  is still heard in the bass.<sup>20</sup> As a result, the main harmony that prolongs the background dominant in the third phrase ( $bVI$ ) is not, in fact, directly heard.<sup>21</sup> The gradual increase in

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the Le-Sol-Fi-Sol schema see Vasili Byros, 'Topics and Harmonic Schemata: A Case from Beethoven', in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Mirka, 381–414.

<sup>20</sup> Although unusual, this is not the only instance in Mozart's oeuvre in which the rhythmic displacement of a suspension leads to a situation where the primary structural harmony does not appear in the music. For another example, see bars 33–34 in the Larghetto from the Clarinet Quintet, K581, in which the music moves away from the bass pitch D before the suspension of the second violin is resolved; therefore the structurally primary D major triad does not occur in bar 34.

<sup>21</sup> In addition, Mozart's rhythm in bar 28 (♩ ♪ ♩) is unusual. In the strict style, which is quite closely adhered to in *Ave verum corpus*, quavers preceding the resolution of a dissonant suspension should occur on the weak beat of a bar (most commonly on the second beat, the resolution then appearing on the third beat). This is noted, for example, by Peter Schubert in the case of modal counterpoint and by Felix Salzer and Carl Schachter in their tonal application of strict counterpoint; see Schubert, *Modal Counterpoint, Renaissance Style*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88–89, and Salzer and Schachter, *Counterpoint in Composition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 103. Yet in bar 28 of



Example 9. *Ave verum corpus*, bars 22–30, underlying harmony and counterpoint

emotional intensity in the third phrase, which reaches its peak in bars 28–29, maps onto the text: this expressive culmination sets the word ‘sanguine’ (blood), which is a concrete reference to the suffering of Christ. This reference to the crucifixion is enhanced by the Le–Sol–Fi–Sol schema, which according to Vasili Byros has ‘mortal, funereal, and sacrificial connotations’.<sup>22</sup> Topically, chromaticism and harmonic uncertainty at the end of the third phrase refer to *ombra*, a topic associated with awe, terror and supernatural powers. The dark *ombra* enhances the affect of the Le–Sol–Fi–Sol schema.<sup>23</sup>

Lines 5 and 6 of the text, set in the third phrase, describe the suffering of Christ, which, as shown in Table 1, takes place in the earthly present. Because the text does not directly refer to redemption, it is fitting that the important  $d^2$  – a musical symbol of the textual telos – appears only fleetingly on the second beat of bar 24, clearly as an elaboration of the larger-scale neighbouring note Bb. Yet, notwithstanding its fleeting quality,  $d^2$  appears in a tonal environment, which has significance for the expressive narrative (Example 8). This pitch is heard within a process that tonicizes F major, a harmonic centre resulting from a 5– $b6$  progression above the dominant. In the third phrase, F major is the last reference to a major mode before the phrase culminates in D minor and in the *ombra* topic. As a major key, F major has positive associations, even though it results from a process of mixture that borrows pitches from D minor. All in all, the fleeting reference to  $d^2$  also keeps the possibility of redemption in mind when the description of the earthly present shifts the telos from contemplation.

Structurally, phrases 2 and 3 are unified by a top-voice octave-progression prolonging the  $\hat{2}$  that ends the first branch of the interrupted background structure, hence the two phrases create one unified structural whole (recall Example 1). The registral disposition of the octave-progression also implies a unified whole in the teleological trajectory:  $\hat{2}$  begins and ends the octave-progression in the obligatory one-line octave, the register that forms a kind of reality of the tonal structure and symbolizes the earthly present. In order to close the octave line in the same register in which it starts, there must be a registral shift at some point. As already noted, the shift occurs in bar 15 when a unison emphasizes  $d^2$ , the pitch associated with the textual telos. This hope emerges in the text when the redemption of humankind is mentioned in the second phrase. However,  $d^2$  is a passing note within a middleground stepwise progression, which brings the structural top voice back to the obligatory one-line register, to the earthly present after the glimmer of hope for the future.

*Ave verum corpus* the quavers occur on the strong third beat. As a result, from the perspective of figuration, the F $\sharp$  and D on the fourth beat suggest a resolution, whereas from the perspective of metre, it is the pitches appearing on the third beat that do so. However, as F $\sharp$  and D are parts of a dissonant formation on both the third and the fourth beats, the dissonant suspensions at the beginning of the measure are not, strictly speaking, resolved at all. This enhances the expressive intensity of bar 28.

<sup>22</sup> Byros, ‘Topics and Harmonic Schemata’, 383.

<sup>23</sup> Although operatic and instrumental music were the main domains of the *ombra* topic in the eighteenth century, it also appeared in liturgical works; for further discussion and representative examples see Clive McClelland, *Ombra: Supernatural Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Lanham: Lexington, 2012), 174–202.

This hope for the future is expressed most strongly in the fourth phrase (Example 10). It begins with a two-bar model, which is then repeated twice sequentially (the second repetition is, however, incomplete). In the second bar of the model, the two lower voices of the four-part texture begin an imitation of the two upper parts. The ascending sequence also presents the *gradatio* figure, which in eighteenth-century rhetoric signified an increase in intensity.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, given that the fourth phrase begins with a continuation, there is no functional initiation – it is as if the music had resumed the striving towards the telos initiated in the second phrase. In other words, the tonic return in bar 30 does not imply a new beginning, as a recapitulation of earlier thematic material supported by the tonic would do. Rather, the sequential progression, which represents a medial function, enhances the impression of one continuous trajectory extending throughout the motet, the new structural beginning in bar 30 notwithstanding.

However, heavenly bliss can only be longed for and contemplated, but never reached, in the earthly world. Reflecting this, the sequence, which apparently implies a straightforward growth of intensity, includes a hypermetrical conflict, thereby introducing uncertainty into the *gradatio* figure. The two-bar model and its repetitions suggest that the even bars are hypermetrically strong whereas the odd bars are weak (Example 10). However, the underlying contrapuntal structure shown in Example 11 indicates the reverse organization, with strong odd bars. The sequence includes a series of 7–6 suspensions; eighteenth-century musicians discussing both counterpoint and harmony were unanimous in maintaining that dissonant suspensions occurred on a strong beat and their resolutions on a weak beat, a metrical ordering followed in Example 11.<sup>25</sup> This hypermetrical conflict is further enhanced by the imitation pattern, in which lower voices emphasize odd bars. I use the term ‘shadow metre’ (coined by Frank Samarotto) in Example 10 to describe the secondary hypermetrical pattern that emphasizes odd bars and challenges the primary hypermetre stressing the even bars.<sup>26</sup>

The inclusion of a hypermetrical conflict in the *gradatio* figure indicates that the musical aspiration towards the telos is not quite self-assured, the apparently straightforward organization of the sequence notwithstanding. The dialogue between metrical uncertainty and musical topics creates tension. Topically, the fourth phrase begins in the learned style, suggested by the suspensions and imitation. Because of its associations with the high style and with church music, the learned style – especially in its *stile antico* guise as here – normally signifies clarity. That it is now underlain by uncertainty reflects the textual situation, in which the telos is contemplated but its arrival is uncertain. Likewise, the learned *stile antico* is expressed in a situation that includes a metrical conflict, an element of uncertainty.

The metrical conflict is not the only element in the fourth phrase that interferes with the reaching of the music’s goals. Following the sequence, there is a cadential idea in bars 36–37. However, the expected perfect authentic cadence is replaced by a deceptive cadence in bar 37. As a result, the musical motion continues uninterrupted, omitting the expected punctuating goal. This continuity has registral consequences: there is a skip in unison texture from  $g^1$  to  $d^2$  in bars 37–38,  $d^2$  recalling the unison in bar 15 that set the word ‘cruce’. The important  $d^2$ , the symbol of the telos, is thus reached in a texturally enhanced manner.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the *gradatio* figure see Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 220–224.

<sup>25</sup> For a contrapuntal description see Johann Joseph Fux, *The Study of Counterpoint from Johann Joseph Fux’s ‘Gradus ad Parnassum’*, trans. Alfred Mann (New York: Norton, 1971), 55–56; for a harmonic description see Johann Philipp Kirnberger, *The Art of Strict Musical Composition*, trans. David Beach and Jürgen Thym (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 91.

<sup>26</sup> Frank Samarotto, ‘Strange Dimensions: Regularity and Irregularity in Deep Levels of Rhythmic Reduction’, in *Schenker Studies 2*, ed. Carl Schachter and Hedi Siegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 222–238. Harald Krebs uses the term ‘displacement dissonance’ for this phenomenon; see *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33–36.



**continuation (expanded, loose)**

model                      sequence                      sequence (incomplete)                      cad. idea

**hypermetre**      1                      2                      3                      4,                      1                      2                      3  
 (shadow hypermetre      1                      2                      3                      4,                      1)

**codetta**  
 expanded cadential progression

(dec.)                      cad. idea (evaded)                      cad. idea

6                      6                      6                      4                      6 6                      6 7                      6 7                      6 6                      5 3

4,                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6,=1                      2                      3                      4,

**Example 10.** *Ave verum corpus*, bars 30–46, annotated score

30 31 32 33 34 35 36  
 s s w s w s w s  
 10 7-8 7-8 7-6  
 s = strong  
 w = weak

**Example 11.** *Ave verum corpus*, bars 30–36, shadow metre

This arrival at  $d^2$  in bar 38 begins a passage that is significant in several respects: it includes (1) the work's first proper instance of melismatic writing, (2) an increase in chromaticism, (3) the work's only deviation from four-bar hypermeasures, (4) the juxtaposition of major and minor and (5) the motet's only word repetition ('in mortis examine' (in the trial of death)). Preparation for a cadence begins in this intensive passage, reaching a pre-dominant  $V_5^6/V$  in bar 40. However, the expected succeeding root-position dominant is evaded, replaced by a  $\frac{4}{2}$  chord, meaning that the cadence does not materialize. Preparation for another harmonic closure starts immediately after the cadential evasion, and the concluding perfect authentic cadence occurs in bars 42–43. These expressively emphatic elements and the cadential conclusion create the motet's narrative highpoint and structural closure, respectively, after which only a brief instrumental codetta is heard.

Given the two unsuccessful cadential progressions, the fourth phrase does not subdivide into smaller segments as did the first three, all of which follow a 4 + 4 construction: on the contrary, it consists of one undivided fourteen-bar unit.<sup>27</sup> As a result, in terms of musical utterance the fourth phrase seems more extended than those heard thus far, which enhances its weight. Again,  $d^2$  is a crucial pitch: its arrival in bar 38 is texturally emphasized by the unison, as well as by the skip  $g^1-d^2$ , the largest ascending skip heard vocally in the motet. The unison  $d^2$  also creates a strong musico-poetic connection, associating with each other the words 'cruce' (bar 15) and 'mortis' (bar 38). Both words refer to the two states shown in Table 1: 'cruce' to the redemption offered by the crucifixion in the first state, and 'mortis' to the gateway to the hereafter in the second. Together, the two unison occurrences thus refer to the telos – to the hoped-for transition from this world to the hereafter. Moreover, given that unison texture refers to an authority more forceful than an individual, in both instances (bars 15 and 38) the decision about the future is not in the hands of an individual. The pitch  $d^2$  occurs again in bar 41, this time supported by a first-inversion tonic. After this final occurrence, the structurally primary obligatory register returns; the pre-dominant  $IV^6$  on the last beat of bar 41 supports  $g^1$ , after which the structural closure occurs in the one-line octave. The emphasis on  $d^2$  in the fourth phrase does not provide this pitch with structural stability: the telos of heaven is not attainable in this world.

The tonal structure of the fourth phrase subtly supports these registral and musico-poetic events (Example 12b). The two unsuccessful cadential progressions could be interpreted as intensified stages in both contemplating and aiming at the ultimately unreachable telos. The cadential progression in bars 35–36 prepares a structural ending in the obligatory one-line octave that would concur with the ending of the text's last line, but the deceptive cadence denies the musical closure. Poetically, the music first refuses to accept a tonal closure in the obligatory register referring to the earthly world. The melismatic repetition of the final textual line then follows, the music emphasizing  $d^2$  and achieving intensification through hypermetrical expansion, chromaticism and minor-mode colouration. Bars 37–40 in the middleground expand the pre-dominant function, transforming the  $IV^6$  of bar 37 into a  $V_5^6/V$  in bar 40: the expanded pre-dominant enhances expectations of a

<sup>27</sup> Danuta Mirka shows that fourteen bars extend the limit of phrase length accepted by eighteenth-century theorists; see *Hypermetrical Manipulations*, 111–112. However, she also indicates (231–244) that twisting expected caesuras, a procedure occurring in the fourth phrase of *Ave verum corpus*, may lead to quite extended phrases in late eighteenth-century music.

(a) 'mortis' → *passus duriusculus*

(b)

30 35 36 37 38 40 41 43

I IV<sup>6</sup> V<sup>6</sup>/V V(<sup>3</sup>)<sub>4</sub> I<sup>6</sup> IV<sup>6</sup> V<sub>4-3</sub> I

deceptive cadence evaded cadence PAC PAC

F# D  
D F#

Example 12. *Ave verum corpus*, bars 30–46, analytical sketch

cadential closure, the top voice of which one assumes would conclude in a structurally stable  $d^2$ . However, the evaded cadence indicates that this musical telos cannot be reached, just as the text can only give a foretaste of the theological telos.

The evasion of the cadential bass pitch A in bar 41 also leads to a fairly concrete depiction of the key word ‘death’ that the melisma sets (Example 12a). As  $G\sharp$  descends to  $G\flat$  rather than ascending to A, as expected, the complete bass line of bars 37–41 consists of a descending chromatic fourth, an instance of the rhetorical figure *passus duriusculus*, which is often associated with death.<sup>28</sup> Topically, the *ombra* that results from chromaticism and evasion of dissonance resolutions enhances the awe suggested by that figure.

The deep-middleground voice leading indicates that the one-line octave is the obligatory register, and thus that the telos symbolized by  $d^2$  will ultimately remain a hoped-for element that cannot be established (Example 12b). The tonic chord that begins the fourth phrase is prolonged in bars 30–41 by means of a voice exchange (which appears in schematic form in Example 1 and is also indicated at the bottom of Example 12b). The highest pitch of the fourth phrase, namely the  $e^2$  in bar 40 prepared by a chromatic  $d^2$ – $d\sharp^2$  progression, is thus a passing note within a third-progression leading from the structurally primary *Kopftön*  $F\sharp$  to an inner-voice D. In other words, despite its registral emphasis,  $d^2$  is structurally an embellishing inner-voice pitch – first the top voice of a  $IV^6$  (bar 38) and then a pitch completing the voice exchange (bar 41). That this pitch cannot achieve structural stability could be perceived as a musical counterpart of the fact that the textual telos cannot be reached. The return to the one-line octave – the obligatory register – on the last beat of bar 41, in contrast, represents a return to the principal background structure, which then closes in this register in bar 43. The overall course of *Ave verum corpus* thus ends in the obligatory register that is associated with the temporal present and with earthly existence; it is as impossible to establish a structurally stable  $d^2$  as it is to reach the hereafter in this world.

The fourth phrase is followed by an instrumental codetta, which is close to the one that ended the first reprise (compare Examples 6 and 12b). However, there is one crucial difference between the two, which reflects the global narrative of *Ave verum corpus*. Whereas the pre-dominant  $IV^6$  (bar 19) in the codetta that ends the first reprise is prolonged through a chromaticized voice exchange that intensifies the musical expression (Example 6), the  $IV^6$  at the motet’s ending (bar 44) is prolonged through a diatonic 5–6 progression. By the end of the work it is as if the music has given up trying to intensify the musical expression: it is accepted that it is possible to contemplate the telos, but not to reach it.

### Interpretative Contexts for Teleology in *Ave verum corpus*

My analysis of musico-poetic associations in *Ave verum corpus* is based on the narrative implications of the text, which derive from Catholic views on time and history. Indeed, without this larger context it would be difficult to describe the text’s narrative structure, which relies on elements that are provided by the wider theological context rather than directly mentioned in the text. Notwithstanding the significance of this theological framework, my interpretation is not strictly theological. Apart from the motet’s setting of some key terms that includes indirect word painting, much of the above analysis could be clarified simply by referring to the formal correspondences

<sup>28</sup> The rhetorical figure *passus duriusculus* was so named in the late seventeenth century by Christoph Bernhard, who noted that it ‘occurs when a voice rises or falls a minor semitone’; *The Treatises of Christoph Bernhard*, trans. Walter Hilse, in *The Music Forum*, volume 3, ed. William J. Mitchell and Felix Salzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 103–104. The *passus duriusculus* is often associated with the *lamento* schema when chromatically descending from the tonic to the dominant in the bass. Nathan John Martin discusses the interconnections between *passus duriusculus* and the *lamento*, showing several instances in Mozart’s church music, in ‘Of Polyyps and Plenitude’, *Music Theory and Analysis* 6/1 (2019), 160–169. However, the *passus duriusculus* only indirectly refers to the *lamento* schema in *Ave verum corpus* because the descending fourth in the bass does not constitute a tonic–dominant progression.

between the elements constituting the text's and the music's narrative structures: examples include the telos, its ultimately unobtainable quality, the narrative role of the spatial opposition of high and low, and a variety of affects in the trajectory aiming at the telos. In other words, my analysis largely operates on the level of structure, even though the abstraction of the text derives from its religious meaning.

However, such a narrative reading does not exhaust the musico-poetic associations of *Ave verum corpus*. I will conclude by considering three other options for an interpretative context: (1) historicism, (2) late-eighteenth-century society and (3) Mozart's personal worldviews.

Bernd Edelmann argues that *Ave verum corpus* is, in part, modelled on Michael Haydn's *Lauda Sion salvatorem*, composed in 1775.<sup>29</sup> The reference to Michael Haydn is significant in the first of the interpretative contexts mentioned above, namely the historicist approach, which consciously glances back at past practices. As Jen-yen Chen argues, 'among eighteenth-century composers, Michael Haydn exhibited an affinity for the *stile antico* matched only by a handful of others'.<sup>30</sup> Thus references to Michael Haydn in *Ave verum corpus* would simultaneously be references to stylistically earlier conventions of church music. Indeed, Edelmann also recognizes other practices that derive from older music, referring, for example, to conventions that ultimately derive from renaissance polyphony as well as to cadential formulas resembling those used by Johann Sebastian Bach.

If one agrees with Edelmann, Mozart would have sought musical inspiration from conventions of earlier church music when composing *Ave verum corpus*. Likewise, a historicist reading of the text would follow traditional theology, not concentrating on its narrative structure as I have done above, or considering its relationship with Deist views of the Enlightenment, for example. One could even hypothetically extend the historicist view to Mozart's personal life: in the same way as the music of *Ave verum corpus* recalls earlier styles, Mozart might have wanted to recall his own youth in the work, when his relationship with Catholicism was more direct than at the end of his life.

One might support the notion that the glance backwards in *Ave verum corpus* was conscious by invoking the Requiem that was composed during the same year. This, however, by no means restricts its musical rhetoric to *stile antico*. Indeed, contemporaneous commentaries suggest that composers were given the option to choose between older and more modern styles of church music. As Augustus Frederic Christopher Kollmann wrote in 1799, 'the different styles mentioned above [church, chamber and theatrical], with their varieties, may also be considered as the *ancient*, and the *modern* style of each sort'.<sup>31</sup> Describing the ancient style in church music, he notes that 'none but the most *plain* and most *solid* harmonies and melodies ought to be introduced in the pieces in question; and that all of the luxuries of vain modulation, melodious graces and passage-work, which do not support but interrupted votion [*sic*] should be carefully avoided in them, as if we were still limited to the imperfect scales of the Ancients'.<sup>32</sup>

Religious dogmatism was losing its hold in the late eighteenth century, as Enlightenment ideals promoted values based on equality among all humans and progress in society and science. New philosophical frameworks that promoted reform and the significance they had for late eighteenth-century society give a second possible interpretative context for *Ave verum corpus*.

The concept of progress, of motion towards something perfect and good, was pivotal in Enlightenment thinking. This idea of progress signifies motion towards a telos; as Daniel Little notes, 'Enlightenment thinkers rejected the religious interpretation of history but brought in

<sup>29</sup> Bernd Edelmann, 'Dichtung und Komposition in Mozarts "Ave verum corpus" KV 618', in *Mozart Studien*, volume 2, ed. Manfred Hermann Schmid (Tutzing: Schneider, 1993), 11–55.

<sup>30</sup> Jen-yen Chen, 'Catholic Sacred Music in Austria', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music*, ed. Simon P. Keefe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99.

<sup>31</sup> Augustus Frederic Christopher Kollmann, *An Essay on Practical Musical Composition* (London: author, 1799), 102 (original italics).

<sup>32</sup> Kollmann, *Essay on Practical Musical Composition*, 100 (original italics). The evidently incomplete word 'votion' suggests two possible corrections: a musical one referring to musical 'motion' and a religious one suggesting 'devotion'.

their own teleology, the idea of progress – the idea that humanity is moving in the direction of better and more perfect civilization, and that this progression can be witnessed through study of the history of civilization'.<sup>33</sup> Although not related to theology and ideas such as redemption and Paradise, this Enlightenment view of history shares with Christian doctrine a future-oriented approach: the future according to Enlightenment ideals also includes something valuable (the telos), which one may contemplate and strive towards but which cannot be attained in the present state of the temporal trajectory.

Enlightenment teleology could be taken as a translation – a change in the focus of signification – of Christian teleology in the text of *Ave verum corpus*. If the historicist approach charted above locates the interpretative context in the past and its ideals, the Enlightenment context suggests reading *Ave verum corpus* in line with contemporaneous societal values. Both contexts acknowledge the significance of teleology, but the telos is different.

With regard to the third interpretative context, namely Mozart's personal worldviews, his close connections with Freemasonry when he composed *Ave verum corpus* imply the possibility of reinterpreting the signification of the motet's religious text. There was a state of mutual distrust between Freemasonry and the Catholic Church in the eighteenth century, meaning that Mozart might have read the motet's text from a non-Catholic perspective.

A letter written to his father on 4 April 1787, four years before Mozart composed the motet, provides documentary evidence of his views on death as a gateway to something better, a central theme in the motet. In the letter he contemplated the idea of death as a telos not only in theology but also in his own life:

When looked at closely, death is the true goal of our lives, and so for a number of years I've familiarized myself with this true friend of man to such an extent that his image is not only no longer a source of terror to me but is comforting and consoling! And I give thanks to my God that He has given me the good fortune of finding an opportunity – you understand what I mean – that death is the *key* to our true happiness.<sup>34</sup>

The content of this letter deviates from the Catholicism in which Mozart was brought up: death seems to refer not to a gateway to the Christian hereafter but to some other form of comfort. Mozart certainly refers to God, but not through the lens of dogmatic religion. The letter might reflect some ideals of eighteenth-century Freemasonry, which, in the words of Paul Nettl, include 'the realization that beyond the dark and material world there is a realm of light toward which all men must strive'.<sup>35</sup>

Mozart's letter also shows an attitude towards death that resembles opinions expressed by some early romantic authors in the 1790s, the same decade in which Mozart composed *Ave verum corpus*. Novalis, one of the key theorists in the field of literary Romanticism, writes in No. 11 of the original version of *Pollen* (known in English as *Miscellaneous Observations*): 'Death is a victory over the self – which, like all self-conquest, brings about a new, easier existence'.<sup>36</sup> Death is seen here as victory in a personal struggle, with a better existence as the prize. Friedrich Schlegel, another major theorist of Romanticism, refers in his novel *Lucinde* to two lovers dying together:

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Little, 'Philosophy of History', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/history/>, section 2.2 (27 June 2022).

<sup>34</sup> Mozart, *A Life in Letters*, ed. Cliff Eisen, trans. Stewart Spencer (London: Penguin, 2006), 527 (original italics).

<sup>35</sup> Paul Nettl, *Mozart and Masonry* (New York: Dorset, 1987), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 24. Stoljar's translation of *Pollen* follows the original manuscript, not the publication; No. 11 was not among the fragments that were published in Friedrich Schlegel's edition that appeared in the journal *Athenaeum* in 1798.



What we call life is for the complete, timeless, inner human being only a single idea, an indivisible feeling. . . . There will come time when the two of us will perceive in a single spirit that we are blossoms of a single plant or petals of a single flower, and then we will know with a smile that what we now call merely hope is really remembrance.<sup>37</sup>

Death is an ultimate aim for both Novalis and Schlegel: they refer to a happier mode of existence brought forth by death, but, significantly, neither associates this changed state with the Christian hereafter.

The view of death expressed in Mozart's letter, Masonic ideals and the writings of Novalis and Schlegel imply death as a gateway to a better mode of existence that is not based on the conventions of Catholic religion. In other words, there is a telos, the reaching of which is made possible by death. This interpretative context retains the role of death but detaches it from Catholic dogma.

The three interpretative contexts briefly charted above indicate that the subtlety of *Ave verum corpus* is open to a variety of readings, some more direct, some more speculative. Those choosing to follow any of them (or others that are not mentioned) should thoroughly substantiate the given approach and justify its application: this obtains in particular with the second and third contexts, in which the Christian text would be read as a metaphor for something else. I have not offered such metaphorical explanations in this article, but rather have given a musico-poetic interpretation that takes the text at face value: having read the text as representing the core of Catholic religion, based on medieval theology, I have considered the narrative implications of this religious dogma, its 'Grand Narrative', to use Zdeněk Vašíček's expression quoted at the outset. What the three contexts do reveal, however, is that such a narrative interpretation is by no means the only starting-point for elucidating the relationships between text and music in Mozart's motet. *Ave verum corpus* eludes any attempt to exhaust its signification.

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<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *'Lucinde' and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 48–49. Schlegel's novel *Lucinde: Bekenntnisse eines Ungeschickten* was published in 1799 (Berlin: Heinrich Frolich).