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Feinting Repeats, Repeating Feints: The developmental “Double Return” in Brahms and Sonata Theory Typology

One of the most prominent characteristics of Johannes Brahms’s approach to sonata form is the return to the tonic at the start of the second section (or “rotation”) for a restatement of the exposition’s primary theme. Well-known examples include the finales of the First and Third Symphonies, the opening movements of the G minor Piano Quartet and Fourth Symphony, and the *Tragic Overture*. This common basic principle can nevertheless underpin a variety of formal typologies in James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy’s sonata theory (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006). A three-part or tri-rotational sonata design in which all three sections (exposition, development, and recapitulation) start with the primary theme in the tonic would, on the face of it, most readily be classified as a sonata-rondo or type 4 sonata.¹ The other possibility offered by sonata theory is to view the developmental “double return” in terms of the familiar type 3 sonata, in which “the immediate return of the P theme in the tonic” is mistaken for “an expositional repeat,” thus playing the “sonata-game” with listener expectations (Hepokoski and Darcy christen this the “op. 59 no. 1’ variant of the Type 3 sonata” after the celebrated instance in Beethoven’s first “Razumovsky” Quartet [350–1]).² A two-part or bi-rotational design with the same double return at the head of the second rotation would, meanwhile, be likely classified as a form of the type 1 sonata, either a straightforward “sonata without development” (or “sonatina”) form, or the expanded

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¹ For ease of comparison I adopt the policy of describing the standard type 4 sonata as tri-rotational here; since a final return of the refrain is deemed to be necessary following the third, recapitulatory rotation, Hepokoski and Darcy suggest that there is in fact a fourth, normally incomplete rotation present in this design, which in sonata terms occupies coda space (2006, 405). As type 1, 2, and 3 sonatas can all commonly feature P-based codas (i.e., may initiate a further partial rotation), I take this additional part rotation as generally insignificant for the purposes of inter-type comparison, even if its presence is essential for the type 4.

² Obviously a real exposition repeat preceding the double return in such a movement would complicate this reading – a point hinted at on p. 211.

type 1 sonata, in which the second section incorporates elements of development within the second, recapitulatory rotation (349–50). The latter in particular is closely associated with Brahms, and has given rise to a design informally named after him, the so-called “Brahmsian deformation” (in fact the pure type 1 seems not to be part of his practice).³ The alternative would be to consider it a “Type 1 Sonata-Rondo Mixture” (Type 4¹), which can similarly be found in simple and expanded variants (407–12). The type 4¹ can be distinguished from a type 1 by the presence of an extensive retransition at the end of the second rotation that leads to a final refrain of the primary theme (408); in other respects the two can be effectively equivalent.

In theory, then, a double return to the tonic and primary theme together at the start of the second section of an ostensible sonata movement may result in one of three different sonata types, 1, 3, or 4. In practice, indeed, even the type 2 may be implicated – at least insofar as Hepokoski and Darcy list two Brahms movements in *Elements of Sonata Theory* as examples of both the expanded type 1 *and* the type 2 sonata (namely the *Tragic Overture* and the finale of the C minor String Quartet, Op. 51 No. 1).⁴ Thus only the type 5 (concerto-ritornello) sonata is missing from the list – a design with its own peculiar type of double return in the guise of the double exposition.

However, there are some restrictions on application of sonata types to these movements. The “expanded type 1,” so closely associated with Brahms, is essentially to be found in finales. “When this occurs in a first movement,” Hepokoski and Darcy explain:

the issue of considering the possibility that the tonic-P at the outset of Rotation 2 might be the beginning of a recapitulatory rotation does not emerge. These are situations in which Type 1 formats are extremely rare: as such they do not rise to the level of a significant compositional options for first movements (despite the deformational case of Brahms’s op. 25/i). (351)

³ The term “Brahmsian deformation” is not in fact used in the 2006 *Elements of Sonata Theory*, but was labeled as such by Hepokoski in earlier writings, such as Hepokoski 1993, 94, and has since widely entered circulation. The expanded type 1 form in Brahms has received substantial scholarly discussion: see especially Pascall 1974; Daverio 1994, 115–19 (who terms the design “amplified binary”); and Galand 2008 and 2013. See also the more recent consideration by Horton 2017a, 267–75.

⁴ Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 350 (as expanded type 1) and 364 (as type 2). However, on p. 353 they specify that “Type 2’s Rotation 2 normally begins with the first theme (P) sounded either as an explicit thematic reference or in an immediate developmental elaboration but *in a nontonic key*” (emphasis in original). One suspects the type 2 interpretation of these two pieces is a slip.

Significantly, Brahms provides the sole named exception; in fact beyond the G minor Piano Quartet Op. 25 they reference, the first movement of the C minor Piano Trio, Op. 101, might also be added as an example. Still, Hepokoski and Darcy's point, if arguably slightly overemphatic and historically undifferentiated, is not wide of the mark: the expanded type 1 "Brahmsian deformation" is much more common in finales than first movements, even if a few examples of the latter can be found in the later nineteenth century.⁵

More categorical, though, seems the association between sonata and movement type with regard to the type 4 sonata-rondo. Here Hepokoski and Darcy warn that one should not "mistake the 'op. 59 no. 1' variant of a Type 3 sonata for a Type 4 design (sonata-rondo): Type 4 sonatas are historically and generically unavailable for first movements" (351). And elsewhere, they underscore that "for first movements and overtures in all periods, the Type 4 format (sonata-rondo) was never an option and should not be entertained as a possibility – even in repertories as late as Brahms and Mahler" (211–12, n. 17). Even in his recent *A Sonata Theory Handbook*, Hepokoski will similarly insist that "Rondo-oriented structures are never available for first movements or overtures" (2021, 268).⁶ In other words, while a finale may be a sonata-rondo, a first movement cannot be, at least within sonata-theory terms. When the beginning of the development section reverts to the tonic and primary theme in a (three-part) opening movement without an exposition repeat, we are left with the possibility of considering it a "Type 3 Sonata with Expository-Repeat Feint."⁷ In contradistinction, both these types are available for finales: "In a nineteenth-century finale," they continue, "the issue is less clear. The Type 4 format was very much at home here." The Type 3 exposition feint is also possible, albeit less usual here (the finale of Brahms's

⁵ Other instances in first movements from this time are found in Anton Rubinstein's Piano Trio No. 5 in C minor, Op. 108 (1883), Dvořák's Piano Quartet in E \flat , Op. 87 (1889), and String Quartet in A \flat , Op. 105 (1895), but the design does seem to be rare in a first movement before this period. The latter two movements are discussed further in Smith 2018.

⁶ Caplin (2013, 644) agrees that, at least within the classical repertory, "Sonata-rondos are used almost exclusively for fast finale movements, rarely for slow movements (and never as an opening movement)." Nevertheless, Hepokoski's influential reading of Strauss's *Don Juan* (Hepokoski 1992) relies on sonata rondo being generically available for a single-movement symphonic poem.

⁷ If the exposition is repeated the question changes; see the discussion in Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 211.

Second Symphony is given by Hepokoski and Darcy [352] as the solitary example), along with varieties of type 1 such as the expanded “Brahmsian deformation.”

Table 1a Opening sonata-form movements by Brahms with a double return (primary theme in tonic) at the start of the second rotation

Two-part sonatas (typically Type 1 ^{exp})	Three-part sonatas*
Piano Quartet in Gm, Op. 25, i (1856–61)†	Serenade in A, Op. 16, i (1858–9) Violin Sonata in G, Op. 78, i (1878-9) Piano Trio in C, Op. 87, i (1880) Symphony No. 4 in Em, Op. 98, i (1885) Violin Sonata in A, Op. 100, i (1886)
Piano Trio in Cm, Op. 101, i (1886)	Violin Sonata in Dm, Op. 108, i (1886-8) Clarinet Sonata in E \flat , Op. 120/2, i (1894)

* Additionally, the opening movement of the Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115 (1891), presents a special case of off-tonic “double return” (discussed below).

† Op. 25/i may be analyzed either as an expanded type 1 or as a three-part sonata (discussed below).

Table 1b Sonata-form finales by Brahms with a double return at the start of the second rotation

Two-part sonatas (typically Type 1 ^{exp} or 4 ^{1exp})	Three-part sonatas
Piano Quartet in A, Op. 26, iv (1861) Piano Quintet in Fm, Op. 34, iv (1862-4) String Quartet in Cm, Op. 51/1, iv (1873) Symphony No. 1 in Cm, Op. 68, iv (1876)	Piano Trio in B, Op. 8 (original), iv (1854) String Quartet in Am, Op. 51/2, iv (1873) Symphony No. 2 in D, Op. 73, iv (1878) Violin Sonata in G, Op. 78, iii (1878-9)
Piano Concerto No. 2 in B \flat , Op. 83/iv (1881)†	Piano Trio in C, Op. 87, iv (1882)
Symphony No. 3 in F, Op. 90, iv (1883)	Cello Sonata in F, Op. 99, iv (1886) Violin Sonata in A, Op. 100, iv (1886)
Violin Sonata in Dm, Op. 108, iv (1886-8) Piano Trio in B, Op. 8 (rev.), iv (1889)	String Quintet in G, Op. 111, iv (1890)*
Clarinet Trio in Am, Op. 114, iv (1891) Clarinet Sonata in Fm, Op. 120/1, iv (1894)	

† Op. 83/iv may be analyzed either as an expanded type 1 / 4¹ or as a three-part sonata (discussed below).

* Op. 111/iv features an off-tonic “double return” (the movement starts on iii), followed by modal switch to tonic minor in place of the original tonic major.

Brahms’s practice presents some challenges to this clear-cut categorization, however, especially with regard to opening movements. The first problem is simply the

considerable number of first movements in which a double return is present at the start of the second rotation (see Table 1a). Beyond the Fourth Symphony, and the two examples of the expanded type 1 already named (the Op. 25 Piano Quartet and Op. 101 Piano Trio), we find this feature in the Serenade No. 2 in A, Op. 16, Violin Sonata No. 1 in G (the one further instance cited by Hepokoski and Darcy), Piano Trio No. 2 in C, Op. 87, Violin Sonata No. 2 in A, Op. 100, Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108, and Clarinet Sonata No. 2 in E \flat , Op. 120 No. 2. This means that after 1878, half of Brahms's first movements – seven out of fourteen – apparently feign an expositional repeat (Opp. 78, 87, 98, 100, 101, 108, & 120/2). This is more than those that actually possess an expositional repeat (five: the two String Quintets, Opp. 88 & 111 (1882 & 1890), Third Symphony, Op. 90 (1883), Second Cello Sonata, Op. 99 (1886), and Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115 (1891)).⁸

While the difference is not overwhelming, this feature undeniably raises the question of what exactly should be taken to constitute listener expectations. On encountering the primary theme in the tonic following the end of the exposition in the opening movement of the Third Violin Sonata, Op. 108, for instance, an “informed listener,” familiar with Brahms's previous works in the genre, in particular his previous two violin sonatas, may well be less likely to assume she or he is hearing an exposition repeat than simply following Brahms's now familiar practice. Put bluntly, if one repeatedly feigns an exposition repeat, at some point the effect is lost. Like the boy who cried wolf, no one will fall for the trick. Moreover, it is hard to hear several of Brahms's double returns as even attempting to allude to a repeated exposition.

This point is exemplified in the case of the Op. 108 Sonata, as the double return at the start of the development here could hardly be confused for the start of the exposition. Not only is the texture inverted but the harmonic context is changed (see Ex. 1a & b; the dominant pedal lasts throughout the development section); even an uninformed listener would be hard pressed to hear this as an expositional repeat feint. Although Brahms's practice is varied on this aspect, only a few of his first movement double returns are identical or sufficiently similar to their first presentation to be possibly mistaken for

⁸ The other two works from this period, without either exposition repeat or ostensible expositional-repeat feint, are the Clarinet Sonata in F minor, Op. 120 No. 1 (1891) – in which the opening motive of the primary theme actually returns near the start of the development at its original pitch (m. 96), but reharmonized in A \flat – and the Clarinet Trio, Op. 114 (1891).

repeated expositions. These exceptions are found in the unusual type 1 design of the G minor Piano Quartet (which replicates the exposition for ten measures, corresponding to the initial *a* section of the small-ternary first group), the similarly early A major Serenade (whose development retraces the opening almost exactly until the eighth measure), and the sole symphonic example, the Fourth Symphony (which replicates the movement’s opening for eight measures). In such instances the classification under the “Type 3 Sonata with Expositional-Repeat Feint” or “op. 59 no. 1” Type 3 variant seems unobjectionable (in Op. 25, admittedly, the movement later turns out to be a bi-rotational design, although the effect of exposition feint is nevertheless initially present). But in most of Brahms’s examples – and noticeably in all the later chamber music following the First Violin Sonata – this is not the case.

Ex. 1a Brahms, Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108, i, start of exposition

Ex. 1b Brahms, Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108, i, start of development

Some textural, registral, or harmonic alteration is found in all six opening movements. In some instances, the opening of the development is similar to that of the exposition, but with the texture inverted. This applies to the G major Violin Sonata, Op. 78 (the first seven measures are akin to the start of the movement, but the violin and piano have swapped accompanimental and melodic roles, Ex. 2a & 2b), and the E♭ major Clarinet

Sonata Op. 120 No. 2 (with comparable swapping, though here the parallelism holds for only two measures, Ex. 3a & 3b).

Ex. 2a Brahms, Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78, i, start of exposition

Vivace ma non troppo

Violin part: *p*

Piano part: *p dolce*

Measures 1-4 and 5-8.

Ex. 2b Brahms, Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78, i, start of development

Violin part: *pizz dolce*, *p*

Piano part: *p dolce*

Measures 82-85 and 86-89.

Ex. 3a Brahms, Clarinet Sonata No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 120 No. 2, i, start of exposition

Allegro amabile

p

Ex. 3b Brahms, Clarinet Sonata No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 120 No. 2, i, start of development

56

p

f

In the A major Violin Sonata, Op. 100, the piano is presented an octave higher (Ex. 6a & b below, again shadowing the opening for just two measures). In these cases an inattentive listener might, at a stretch, assume an exposition repeat is underway, though there is something disconcertingly inexact about the correspondence. More significant textual changes are present in the Piano Trios Op. 87 (the piano is added, imparting a new harmonic context, the correspondence in the string parts lasting for four measures, Ex. 4a & b), and Op. 101 (offering a dramatic compression of motivic material that parallels the opening for less than a measure, Ex. 5a & b). Most drastically, as we saw in Op. 108, harmonic recontextualization and textual changes can alter the return to a form that could never be confused with an exposition repeat.⁹

If a composer had wanted to feign the expositional repeat, it would have taken much less effort simply to have replicated the start of the piece, rather than make the changes

⁹ By contrast, in Brahms's finales the correspondence between start of exposition and second rotation can be much clearer, as seen in the sonatas Opp. 78 and 108 (here imparting a rondo feel), although textural change is just as likely (as with Opp. 87, 99, and 100).

seen here. Clearly the “Expositional-Repeat Feint” does not suffice to cover Brahms’s practice. (As will be seen, it may not be adequate for describing several instances of the double return in other composers’ music either.) There are many first movements that must either be categorized as type 4 sonata-rondos (apparently impermissible within sonata theory) or a new variant of the type 3 sonata needs to be developed.

Ex. 4a Brahms, Piano Trio No. 2 in C major, Op. 87, i, start of exposition

Allegro

poco f

poco f

poco f

Ex. 4b Brahms, Piano Trio No. 2 in C major, Op. 87, i, start of development

129

f

f

mf

mf

f

mf

Ex. 5a Brahms, Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101, i, start of exposition

Allegro energico

Ex. 5b Brahms, Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101, i, start of development

The Type 4 Sonata (Sonata-rondo) and Brahms's practice

While Hepokoski and Darcy's assertion that the type 4 sonata was not "generically available" for a first movement may seem rather sweeping, there is good reason to agree that what we are dealing with in Brahms's instances are not sufficiently covered by the formulation of the type 4 sonata they give. On one side, the type 4 sonata is distinguished from the "pure" rondo by the presence of a sonata-like exposition (essentially meaning some sense of transition between primary and secondary theme, rather than block-like juxtaposition of closed thematic groups) and recapitulatory resolution of secondary material (402, 404).¹⁰ On the other hand, the presence of a

¹⁰ The former quality is more important for Hepokoski and Darcy: recapitulatory resolution by itself is also a common feature of what they term the symmetrical seven-part rondo. Some developmental activity in the second rotation may also be a significant indication of sonata-thinking (p. 405), though an episodic R2 is possible even within a type 3 sonata.

sonata-rondo, rather than a pure sonata, is normally indicated by one or more of: a “clear retransition” at the end of the exposition; an “obvious ‘rondo-character’” to the P theme (elsewhere this is clarified as implying a closed form, probably a rounded binary design); or “being labeled by the composer as a rondo” (351).¹¹

Few of these latter traits mark the Brahms first movements in question. None of them is labeled rondo or possesses a closed primary theme (as with Brahms’s customary practice, their primary themes consist of small ternary or periodic designs with dissolving reprises or consequents); the material, in other words, is not characteristic of a rondo theme. The question of retransition is trickier in the later nineteenth century, as the classical tendency to set off the end of a type 3 exposition by a clear cadence (or series of cadences) and brief caesura had long become complemented by the Romantic predilection for textural continuity (elaborate lead-backs to exposition repeats, when present; smooth transitions into the development) and in some cases the avoidance of structural cadential articulation at the end of an exposition. For instance, the expanded secondary theme of the A major Violin Sonata undermines the posited cadence at m. 88 through a measure’s rest (see Ex. 6b); the resolution at m. 89 offers at best an IAC into the secondary key of E major (incomplete, as only scale degrees 1 and 3 are present), and no complete root-position tonic is given in the following eight measures, which destabilize E major as a key in its own right and revert it to its global role as the dominant of A major (note the d \exists s from m. 94).

On the one hand, this absence of a clear cadence and transformation of V to V/I preparation for the returning tonic, might seem typical of sonata-rondo finales. On the other, the use of primary-theme material in these measures suggests the closing-theme rhetoric of a type 3 movement (here the apparent primary-theme liquidation serves as thematic linkage); the sense of gentle winding down is contrary to the energetic drive of many sonata-rondo retransitions;¹² and such harmonic linkage is hardly unknown at the end of type 3 expositions by the 1880s (it is a typical procedure of first-time bars). Indeed, had there been an exposition repeat marked at the end of m. 96 the passage would be accepted without question as belonging to a conventional type 3 exposition.

¹¹ Although Hepokoski and Darcy’s definition has come in for some criticism (see for instance Wingfield 2008, 160–6), the distinction between sonata-rondo and sonata seems inevitably a fine one.

¹² As Caplin 2013, 646, underscores, the retransition in a rondo (or sonata-rondo) is often the most dramatic part of the form, more than the transition between first refrain (primary theme) and first couplet (secondary theme).

Ex. 6a Brahms, Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 100, i, start of exposition

Allegro amabile

Musical score for the start of the exposition of Brahms' Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 100, i. The score is in 3/4 time and A major. It features a violin part and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Allegro amabile'. The piano part begins with a series of chords in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. The violin part enters with a melodic phrase. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *dim.* (diminuendo).

Ex. 6b Brahms, Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 100, i, end of exposition and start of development

Musical score for the end of the exposition and start of the development of Brahms' Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 100, i. The score is in 3/4 time and A major. It features a violin part and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Allegro amabile'. The piano part begins with a series of chords in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. The violin part enters with a melodic phrase. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *dim.* (diminuendo). The score is divided into three systems, with measures 86, 92, and 97 marked at the beginning of each system.

Notwithstanding the presence of a passage possessing retransitional function, there is little that points to this design being a sonata-rondo rather than simply a sonata, a quality common to the other movements under consideration. As with the A major Sonata, the Trio Op. 87 undermines the cadence at m. 115 through an unexpected

silence (an EEC may be present earlier at m. 101, though, if the cadence there is read as a covered PAC); here the linking passage is not P-based, but is in no way suggestive of a sonata-rondo retransition. The E \equiv Clarinet Sonata is similar to Op. 100 in possessing a P-based closing passage serving as a link back to the tonic (mm. 52–5), though it provides an initial cadence in the secondary key of B \equiv . In minor-mode movements the route from secondary key back to tonic may be less straightforward if the dominant is not used for the former. No transition is offered at all in Op. 108; that in Op. 101 is abruptly achieved by three *forte* chords in the piano (E \equiv ⁶₃, the augmented triad [E \equiv , G, B \exists] substituting for V/Cm, Cm), calling to mind the opening bars of the work. The most “rondo-like” of these opening movements is probably the G major Violin Sonata. Here it is no doubt the relaxed feel of the work that brings to mind the tone of a sonata-rondo finale.

In other words, apart from the fact of the subsequent double return, there is nothing in these first-movement expositions that suggests type 4 rather than type 3 design. Indeed few of Brahms finales provide straightforward examples of type 4 sonatas either. The double return in the finale of the Second Symphony, Op 73, is, as Hepokoski and Darcy propose, probably best heard as an exposition-repeat feint in a type 3 sonata (the parallelism with the opening is exact for four measures, though the added lines in the woodwind gradually disabuse the listener of this assumption). Op. 78’s finale certainly appears sonata-rondo-like for much of its course: the cadentially closed small-ternary primary theme returns in full at the head of the second rotation (m. 61) and again, in compressed form, to initiate the third (m. 124). But the ostensible recapitulation fails to bring back secondary material (itself not strongly characterized) from the exposition, replacing it with parts of the cyclically recalled slow-movement theme that had occupied much of the development section, now resolved from the original submediant E \equiv into the tonic, before hinting in the closing measures at the opening theme of the work (a connection already latent in the dotted anacrusis to the finale’s primary theme). An erstwhile sonata-rondo dissolves through the broader principle of intermovement cyclic return; by the end, the slighter third rotation may even appear more akin to a nostalgic coda than recapitulation.¹³ The finale of the C major Op. 87 Piano Trio might

¹³ The finale of the F minor Piano Sonata, Op. 5 (1853), prefigures this design in reprising in the tonic the new chorale-like theme that appears in D \equiv as the second episode rather than the ostensible second theme

seem more obviously a sonata-rondo, with three main rotations, all starting with the primary theme in the tonic, and a substantial coda, starting with the theme in augmentation (paralleling the opening movement). On the other hand, the primary theme's developmental return is significantly varied in presentation, appearing in melodic diminution and textural inversion, with the result that the movement is actually rather less straightforwardly "rondo-like" than one might expect from a finale.¹⁴ Such varied returns need not cause us to withhold its characterization as a sonata-rondo, but it is worth noting that the resulting design is hardly distinct from many of Brahms's first movements (such as that to this very same Piano Trio), for which the type 4 label is proscribed by sonata theory.

One of the features of this movement suggestive of a rondo is the tonal feint at the apparent point of recapitulation, at which the preceding long V/I pedal slips up to V/iii (mm. 114–16), as if about to recapitulate in the mediant E minor. This suggestion is immediately quashed when the primary theme returns *sotto voce* in C major, as had been originally expected. Such tonal subterfuge is a typical rondo ploy, though, and the finales of the Second Cello Sonata, Op. 99, and Second Violin Sonata, Op. 100, take up and extend the tonal anomaly seen here in the Second Piano Trio.¹⁵ In both the primary theme returns in the tonic at the start of Rotation 2, but the third rotation proceeds from a non-tonic key: \cong II (G \cong major) in Op. 99, IV (D major) in Op. 100, the tonic being restored in a subsequent coda statement (in Op. 100 over a 6/4). In fact, the categorization of these two movements as sonata-rondos may be questionable, given that neither display prominent sonata qualities; secondary material is not strongly characterized, with the corollary that there is little sense of recapitulatory purpose to the third rotation. At a stretch, Op. 100 could be considered a continuous exposition (an IAC EEC given at m. 59),¹⁶ and does contain some developmental activity in its second

(or first episode). Since the latter appears originally in the tonic major, though, the movement is better considered a rondo rather than sonata-rondo (it has little claim to being a sonata).

¹⁴ Conversely, the returns in the finale of Op. 108 (mm. 118 (preceded at m. 114) and 293) are much more literal and "rondo-like," though this movement is better considered an expanded type 4¹ (two rotations plus final refrain) rather than pure type 4, owing to the recapitulation of S material from m. 218.

¹⁵ See Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 407, on precedents for such tonal quirks in Beethoven's sonata rondo finales; also Caplin 2013, 653–4.

¹⁶ A possible V:HC MC in mm. 48–9 is undermined by the absence of subsequent material that could meaningfully serve in form-functional terms as a theme.

rotation, although the reprise is considerably shortened. Op. 99 does feature fairly extensive recapitulatory parallelism, though the first rotation, slight in scale, already deemphasizes points of cadential articulation along the three keys (I–iii–V) it traverses and the second rotation is essentially episodic (the use here of the subdominant – B \equiv minor – is typical of a rondo). While the designs of these finales are more continuous than the standard classical rondo, the underlying principle seems to be the continual returns of the primary theme interspersed with other, less-strongly characterized material, rather than working through any tonal or thematic opposition set out in the exposition. Both occupy a position very much at the rondo end of the sonata-rondo spectrum.

Sonata-rondo is clearly one of the forms with which Brahms's finales can be considered to be “in dialogue,” and at least a few of them can be categorized as such, though it is worth noting the greater predilection in this composer's output for bi-rotational designs for this movement (roughly twice as many, as Table 1b shows). Admittedly, in some instances (such as in Op. 108 or Op. 51/1) these could be analyzed as expanded type-1 / type-4 mixtures (4^{1exp}) rather than simply expanded type 1s, though in many cases the latter interpretation (the eponymous “Brahmsian deformation”) may seem preferable.¹⁷ This broadly accords with a comment in *Elements* tucked away in a footnote to an earlier section (212, n. 17): “Since the Type 4 option declined rapidly in the nineteenth century, even within finales, one should normally suppose that mid- and late-nineteenth-century finales – as Brahms – are in dialogue with Type 1 or Type 3 variants, not with Type 4s.” All that would be meant by the appeal to sonata-rondo in the case of Brahms's first movements, meanwhile, is the fact that the developmental second rotation starts with the primary theme in the tonic; in all other respects the movements behave like a regular type 3 sonata. In this sense, it makes more sense to view the design as a specific subset of the type 3 sonata.

The Type 3 Sonata with developmental double return (“Type 3⁴”)

¹⁷ The often marginal distinction between type 1^{exp} and 4^{1exp} readings in finales is not ultimately of significance for the larger argument made in this article; my default position is to consider such movements 1^{exp}, but I am open to alternative 4^{1exp} readings. Hepokoski and other writers taking their bearings from sonata theory often tend toward a 1^{exp} reading (see, e.g., Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 408, 411, who warn against assuming 4¹-type interpretations too easily). For an alternative account of Brahms's finales against a type-4^{1exp} background see Hunt 2014, 29–43.

While the double return to tonic and primary theme at the head of the development is especially characteristic of Brahms, there is a significant prehistory to his practice. Jack Adrian, in a pair of articles from the early 1990s treating the topic, has dubbed this design “the ‘ternary-sonata’ form.” “The mature version of this form is a structural innovation of Brahms” he claims. “There are, however, some fifty first-movement forms in which the tonic is clearly articulated at the beginning of the development section” (Adrian 1990, 58).¹⁸ Adrian is concerned with this feature from a Schenkerian perspective, in which the tonic return can cause some difficulty for the theoretical presupposition of an *Urlinie*. Thus in the majority of these cases where the music does not fit the theoretical model the return is explained as merely to an “apparent” and not “real” tonic. The validity of this distinction is certainly moot, but not the concern here, my interest being directed instead at the question of double return from the perspective of modern *Formenlehre*. Nevertheless, Adrian’s two articles offer a useful survey of the prevalence of this design from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

As mentioned earlier, probably the most celebrated feigned exposition repeat is found in the first movement of Beethoven’s F major “Razumovsky” Quartet (1806, the source of Hepokoski and Darcy’s “op. 59 no. 1” moniker), though an earlier instance of the double return following a non-repeated first-movement exposition appears in Haydn’s Piano Sonata in D major, Hob XVI:51 (1794), and later instantiations are given by Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 (1824), Mendelssohn’s E♭ String Quartet, Op. 12 (1829), Schumann’s Piano Quartet (1842), Dvořák’s Symphony No. 8 (1889), and Mahler’s Symphony No. 4 (1900). Just as in Brahms’s practice, however, here it would be useful to distinguish cases where the return is more or less literal, and might be mistaken for an exposition repeat (thus suggesting a calculated playing with listener expectations), and those in which this is unlikely to arise: the latter might include modification sufficient to dull the effect of literal repetition, and instances where the exposition is in fact repeated before reaching this point of double return. In both the latter cases the “Type 3 Sonata with Expository-Repeat Feint” is insufficient to characterize the movement’s design. Moreover, the expectation of an exposition repeat is subject to historical change: given

¹⁸ Further coverage is given in Adrian 1991; see esp. the Appendix. Adrian lists four works by Brahms: the Violin Sonata No. 1, Symphony No. 4, Piano Trio, Op. 87, and Clarinet Sonata, Op. 120 No. 2 (the Piano Trio, Op. 101, is also mentioned in the companion article, though the Second and Third Violin Sonatas are not touched on).

the normative nature of the exposition repeat in the first movement of a late-eighteenth-century sonata, a non-repeated exposition followed by fairly literal double return is likely to be heard as a feigned repeat, but by the later nineteenth century with the exposition repeat more optional the situation becomes much less clear. (In a finale, the frequency of the sonata-rondo format, alongside the availability of a type 3 sonata with exposition repeat, means that a literal double return raises this ambiguity already at an earlier point in history.)

Thus, whereas Beethoven's Op. 59 No. 1, Symphony No. 9, and Mendelssohn's Op. 12 do at least start their developments identically to the (non-repeated) exposition (the parallelism persisting for four, eight, and eight measures respectively), Haydn's D major Sonata already introduces slight variation at this point (Ex. 7a & b).

Ex. 7a Haydn, Piano Sonata in D major, Hob XVI:51 (1794), i, start of exposition

Andante

Ex. 7b Haydn, Piano Sonata in D major, Hob XVI:51 (1794), i, start of development

Understood in light of historical performance practice, the variation introduced by Haydn if anything increases the supposed authenticity of the feigned repeat, since a repeated section in a late-eighteenth-century keyboard sonata would have been likely subject to ornamentation the second time round. Still, this is not as literal a “feint” as those in Beethoven's or Mendelssohn's movements: paradoxically the notated conception is closer to Brahms's customary practice, even if it is probably meant to be heard in a contrary way. Moving on almost a century, the development section of Dvořák's Eighth Symphony retraces the movement's opening theme almost literally for its entire 16-measure span (there are tiny changes – the bass is for the most part an octave lower – but the two statements are effectively indistinguishable). This could easily be confused for an exposition repeat, but at this historical juncture with the

repeated exposition less pervasive than before, the possibility of a “ternary sonata” is surely available too, especially after a slightly unorthodox exposition like Dvořák’s. A double return in the 1880s invites ambiguity (“is this an exposition repeat or might it be a ternary sonata?”) rather than direct misconstrual (“ah, this is the exposition repeat... oh no, it’s not!”).

Then, of course, there are examples of movements already including an exposition repeat whose developments return a further time to the primary theme in the tonic. Prominent examples include Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Op. 31 No. 1 (the first seven measures of the development mirror the start of the repeated exposition) and Schumann’s String Quartet Op. 41 No. 3 (whose first five measures correspond). Brahms’s own Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115 (1891), plays with this idea in an imaginative way (the development starts with the same off-tonic D major harmony found at the point the exposition repeat had returned to (m. 5); this is not, admittedly, a “tonic” return, and in fact simply continues the secondary tonality, but it nevertheless briefly replicates the repeated exposition).¹⁹ Clearly it is implausible to interpret such movements as feigning an exposition repeat if an exposition repeat has in fact already been given.²⁰ A final case would involve the double return in sonata forms in which no exposition repeat would be generically expected, such as the single-movement overture. Brahms’s *Tragic Overture* provides a pertinent example, as does the earlier instance of Mendelssohn’s *The Hebrides*.²¹ In neither is the correspondence with the opening exact; the double return is clear, but altered from the opening.

In short, there is ample precedent by the time we get to Brahms for considering a double return at the start of a first-movement development section not as a feigned exposition repeat but as a distinct, albeit infrequently encountered procedure (or “lower level default”). Granting that this design need not imply a type 4 sonata-rondo, we are left to accommodate it as a specific variant of a type 3 movement. But how might this be understood within sonata theory?

¹⁹ As is often acknowledged, the models of Haydn’s two B minor String Quartets, in particular Op. 33 No. 1, stand behind Brahms in this respect.

²⁰ One might choose to interpret this type of procedure in ad hoc terms as deliberate overemphasis, suggesting a comic (or tragic) sense of being stuck in a loop (Op. 31 No. 1 being somewhat skittish in tone; Op. 41 No. 3 dreamily fixated on its opening ii⁶₅ harmony), though given the wider prevalence of the double return I would argue the design has to be understood as a formal possibility in its own right.

²¹ See also the brief consideration of this topic in Vande Moortele 2017, 194–5.

It is the tonal return that causes greater problems than the thematic recurrence. Use of the primary theme to initiate the development is itself hardly unusual; indeed Hepokoski and Darcy consider such rotational parallelism normal, if not normative (pp. 205–6). A brief return to the tonic near the start of the development is also a feature noted by them, but normally this occurs after an initial statement in the secondary key, and not at the very beginning. “It is not uncommon” they claim “for the original tonic to be visited early on, as nearly all of the theorists around 1800 not only remarked but specified” (p. 196).

The initial sounding of P in V [in a major mode sonata] often gives way almost immediately to a second sounding of P a fifth lower, that is, on I (the tonic). This exemplifies a common strategy to being the development with a descending circle of fifths on P: {P, P ...}. The appearance of P in the tonic here should not be misconstrued to suggest anything “reprise-” or “recapitulation-” like. (p. 207)

For this reason, when such a double return occurs right at the start of the development following a non-repeated exposition, it is tempting to assign the movement to the “Type 3 Sonata with Expository-Repeat Feint” category, without much further thought. Thus Hepokoski and Darcy (p. 351) list the first movements of Brahms’s Op. 78 Sonata and Symphony No. 4 (as with Beethoven’s Op. 59 No 1 and Ninth before) as instances of the expository-repeat feint. As argued above, while the Fourth Symphony may well be included in this description, the First Violin Sonata is a less obvious candidate, though, as the return is significantly altered.

The option for considering a three-part sonata with developmental double return neither as a sonata-rondo nor as an expository-repeat feint but rather as another variety of type 3 is, however, hinted at by Hepokoski and Darcy later in their chapter on development sections, but left undeveloped. Here, an immediate return to the tonic at the head of the development (which may, though need not, coincide with a thematic return to the primary theme) is understood as implicitly bypassing the first stage and moving directly to the second stage in the circle of fifths progression:

when we find that a development begins with an immediate return to the tonic – seeming to reinstate a tonic-return that had been earlier associated with the expository repeat – what is doubtless implied is the suppression of the normative +1 (dominant) level (which might be “prematurely” tucked into the second ending or even earlier) in order to begin directly with the 0-level [the tonic]. (p. 211)

As examples, Beethoven’s G major Sonata Op. 31 No. 1 and Symphony No. 2 (which changes mode from the major to the tonic minor at this point) are given. The possibility

of an expositional-repeat feint is raised once more for works without an already repeated exposition, though without suggesting any incompatibility with the “suppressed dominant-level statement” rationale (it seems that a “Type 3 sonata with expositional-repeat feint” could be implicitly considered a specific manifestation of the underlying “suppressed dominant-level statement” mechanism).²²

This perspective offers a potential path towards understanding the double return in a type 3 context without necessarily invoking the idea of a feigned expositional repeat. One might nevertheless question the full efficacy of this explanation for the early nineteenth-century sonata – especially given that the one literal (modally consistent) example of tonal return given – Op. 31 No. 1 – features a secondary theme in the mediant, not the dominant. It is not obvious, in other words, to see how a hypothetical “suppressed” D major statement of the primary theme could be thought of lying between the B minor close of Op. 31 No. 1’s exposition and the double return of the primary theme in G major (especially given that the listener has heard the same shift from B minor to G major with the repeated exposition). The same issue would affect any movement with a secondary theme not given in the dominant, in other words most minor-mode sonatas and a fair handful of major-mode ones too.²³ And by the later nineteenth century, and in particular for the music of Brahms, who shows such a predilection for the double return at this point in bi- and tri-rotational sonatas alike, doubts may be even greater.²⁴

²² “In cases where the exposition had not been repeated – as in the first movements of Mozart’s *Wind Serenade in E-flat*, K. 375, Haydn’s *Piano Sonata in D*, Hob. XVI:51, and Beethoven’s *Quartet in F*, op. 59 no. 1 – the local impression can be that of an expositional repeat begun, then aborted.” Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 211.

²³ The opening movement of Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*, one of the few minor-mode sonata forms to feature the double return from this time, would admittedly present an interesting case, as the exposition and development both start on the dominant. Still, the exposition has ended not there but in its upper neighbor, the flat submediant B \flat major.

²⁴ There are arguably some minor inconsistencies here in sonata theory. Recall that the tonic return in the suppressed dominant-level statement “should not be misconstrued to suggest anything ‘reprise-’ or ‘recapitulation-’ like” (p. 207). In other words, the double return in an expanded type 1 sonata may sound identical to a double return in a type 3 sonata, but is actually fundamentally different. On the other hand, elsewhere the type 3 expositional-repeat feint is introduced as “a related but differing structure” to the expanded type-1 sonata (p. 350).

In some instances Brahms's practice admittedly does correspond with the descending fifths pattern identified by Hepokoski and Darcy. Most pertinent are the opening movements of the A major Violin Sonata and E \flat Clarinet Sonata, alongside the somewhat different case of the D minor Violin Sonata's finale. The expositions of the first two both end with a closing-theme statement of the primary material in the dominant, the movement's secondary key (mm. 89–96 and 52–5 respectively), before the primary theme is restated in the tonic at the start of the development (the dominant level statement here “prematurely tucked into the second ending”).²⁵ On the other hand, this feature can be explained at least as well by the common tendency to reuse P material as closing theme or codetta; rather than seeing this “prematurely” enfolded into the end of the exposition, the close of the exposition seems instead a generically customary place for such a statement to occur.

Probably the best instance of the descending fifth pattern is actually found in the finale of Op. 108 – which, ironically, as an expanded type 1 (or 4¹) design does not need explanation in the same way as the double return in a tri-rotational form. The return of the primary theme in the dominant at m. 114, set off by a brief caesura, has been motivically prepared in the preceding measures and the subsequent return to the tonic in m. 118 in fact continues the interthematic statement just started (mm. 114–17 correspond to mm. 1–4 of the theme transposed to the dominant; mm. 118–29 to mm. 5–16 at the original pitch, with only tiny alterations in the bass). In this case a much stronger case can be made for the rotation starting in the dominant and then proceeding back to the tonic. As the secondary material is given in the dominant minor, this movement also provides a rare instance of the technique being used in a minor-mode sonata.

In most cases, though, it is unnecessary to assume a missing dominant-level statement prior to the double return: the music is just as readily explicable as treating the tonic level statement of the primary theme as normative or “default” for each rotation. (Why posit a feature that is more often missing and may quickly embroil us in complications for works not using the dominant for their secondary tonal area, rather than simply construct a theory on what is consistently and clearly present? After all, type 1 and 4

²⁵ Galand (2008, 240) in fact reads Op. 100's development as starting at m. 89 with the dominant statement, rather than at m. 97. These alternative locations for the sectional division can certainly be brought out in different performances.

sonatas all involve a double return at the start of the second rotation; no preceding dominant-level statement of P is considered necessary in these cases.)

Thus, summing up the argument of the preceding two sections, I would posit that Brahms's practice in the first movements of Opp. 78, 100, 101, 108, and 120 No. 2 – ultimately even in Op. 98 – can be best considered from the heuristic model of a tripartite (type 3) sonata in which each rotation or section starts from a statement of the primary theme in the tonic. Following Adrian, this might be called a “ternary sonata”; in sonata theory typology, I would suggest labeling it the “type 3⁴ variant” (the superscript 4 – type 3, subtype 4 – alludes to the mild intersection with the type 4 sonata-rondo feature of the double return at the start of R2, despite the fact that, taken as a whole, the design's categorization as a type 4 would be inappropriate). The type 3⁴ sonata includes those movements with an exposition repeat (as with Beethoven's Op. 31 No. 1) as well as those without (such as Brahms's examples). Those latter movements which appear to evoke the exposition repeat, only to undermine this interpretation, may potentially be considered type 3⁴s too – though it would be more accurate, I think, to call attention to the formal transformation (following the approach of Schmalfeldt 2011). A type 3 sonata with expositional-repeat feint “becomes” a type 3⁴; our understanding is transformed as the developmental rotation progresses (the opening movement of Brahms's Fourth Symphony offers a pertinent example). This contrasts with movements – Op. 108, for instance – in which, owing to the changes wrought at the start of R2, an expositional-repeat feint is never likely to be seriously considered, which are hence straightforward manifestations of type 3⁴. There are of course ambiguous instances, where it is a matter of interpretation whether the allusion to the exposition is really meant as a feint or not. This might apply to pieces like Dvořák's Eighth Symphony, in which the form could retrospectively be understood as an inventive working out of a type 3⁴ design. But in most of Brahms's examples, the case for an expositional-repeat feint is slight, and these movements are therefore best regarded as exemplars of the type 3⁴ model.

Thus conceived, the type 3⁴ variant becomes one of a family of sonata designs that all highlight the double return through the rotational structure. This double return of P in the tonic at the head of each rotation is the common principle underlying many of Brahms's sonata forms, a principle that nevertheless results in different sonata-theory formal types: the bi-rotational expanded type 1, the tri-rotational type 3⁴ identified here,

and the tri-rotational type 4 sonata-rondo. The following, final section explores some of the implications of this feature for understanding Brahms's sonata practice.

The double return principle in Brahms's music: compositional consequences

It is apparent that over his compositional career Brahms was repeatedly, and increasingly, drawn to the double return. While there are still many examples of sonatas whose developmental rotations start in a non-tonic key, his predilection for reverting to the tonic at this point is clear and one of his primary idiosyncrasies. Nevertheless, the ways in which this double return can be realized, and the implications for the movements in which they are found, can be quite varied.

Though the number of movements involved is quite small, and it would be wise not to infer too much from any patterns perceived, a few features immediately stand out from the overview of Brahms's practice given in Tables 1a & b. For a start, the double return in a first movement is largely restricted to Brahms's later chamber music after 1878. His one symphonic example, the Fourth Symphony, is the one clear case of a feigned expositional repeat (the only instance after the early Op. 16 Serenade and Op. 25 Piano Quartet of thematic return being literal). Moreover, whether by accident or design, employment of this technique seems largely genre-specific: it is concentrated on chamber works with piano – violin sonatas and piano trios especially.²⁶ Curiously the only later chamber works that do not contain the R2 tonic return in at least one of their outer movements are both quintets – the F major String Quintet, Op. 88, and the Op. 115 Clarinet Quintet (which as we saw nevertheless parallels the repeated exposition at this point, albeit in an off-tonic key). Unsurprisingly given the established precedent of rondo forms, the developmental double return is more common in finales; thus four works (the Cello Sonata Op. 99, G major String Quintet Op. 111, Clarinet Trio, Op. 114, and F minor Clarinet Sonata Op. 120 No. 1) use it for their finales but not in their opening movements. It is, however, quite often found together in outer movements. With the exception of the E \equiv Clarinet Sonata (whose finale consists of a set of

²⁶ Daverio (1994, 118) also notes the correlation between the expanded type 1 or 4¹ design (what he terms “amplified binary”) and use of the piano, observing that like Mozart, Brahms “associated the design with the concerto or with chamber music involving piano,” but “also involved it regularly in purely symphonic works.”

variations), all those later chamber works which feature this design in the first movement also employ in their finales.

The differences between the different sonata types to which this principle may give rise – when Brahms chooses to employ one type or another – depends partly on the movement's location.²⁷ As Tables 1a and 1b show, bi-rotational designs are much more prominent in finales, whereas more extensive tri-rotational forms predominate in first movements. Those tri-rotational designs found in finales are likely to have strong rondo elements. Several of these features reflect what appear to be generic norms: the sonata-rondo is not at all associated with first movements, while shorter, bi-rotational type 1 sonatas are also less likely to be found opening a work. In other cases – above all in finales – the choice of a two- or three-rotational design must surely reflect the specific demands of the movement: whether Brahms wanted an ensuing full recapitulation or not, whether concision was called for. At the risk of over-interpretation, the expanded type 1 sonata is tauter and more dramatic: it is potentially better suited to a movement of higher tension, often one in the minor-mode. There is a conspicuous preponderance of bi-rotational finales in minor-key works, or minor-mode finales to ostensible major-key works (such as the Third Symphony and the revised version of the First Piano Trio, Op. 8), though the association is not total (Op. 78's finale starts in the minor mode, but is a three-part form). The only instances of this type in opening movements (Opp. 25 and 101) are notably both in the minor mode (the single-movement *Tragic Overture* offers a further example). Tri-rotational designs tend to be more relaxed (especially in finales, where they can take on rondo characteristics), and are prevailing in the major mode.

It is worth examining a handful of movements at this point in order to understand Brahms's specific application of the double-return principle and the diverse implications drawn from it in different contexts. Of all his examples, the opening movement of the G minor Piano Quartet, Op. 25, presents an especially curious case: first as (along with the Op. 16 Serenade) it significantly predates the other first-

²⁷ Examples of the sonata with developmental double return in Brahms's music in movements other than first movement or finale include the bi-rotational designs of the Horn Trio in E \flat , Op. 40 (1865), ii (the outer scherzo sections of the movement's compound-ternary form) and the inner movements of the Symphony No. 4, Op. 98 (1885), ii and iii. John Daverio and Joel Galand list a number of additional instances in Brahms's music of designs they see as related to what sonata theory would call the expanded type 1 or expanded type 4¹ sonata; see Daverio 1994, 116, Galand 2008, 260 n. 37.

movement double-return forms; secondly as, like the Serenade but otherwise atypically for Brahms, it deceptively invokes an expositional repeat at the start of the second rotation; and thirdly as it appears to be one of the rarer bi-rotational first movements. Here, the expositional-repeat feint might be explained partly in terms of generic precedent (the “Op. 59 No. 1” model), but also (just as with the same Beethoven quartet) as a result of the richness of its expositional material. The quartet already possesses a very long exposition (160 measures), with multiple secondary themes in both the dominant minor and major (not all of which return later in the movement) and an extensive closing zone (PACs are given at both m. 101 and m. 130, followed by long codetta). A repeated exposition would have created an enormous movement. An urge to keep the length within bounds might also explain the unusual use of an expanded type 1 sonata for the post-expositional stages of the movement, though here the difference from a type 3 design is actually slight. In fact the movement may reasonably be interpreted as either.

Op. 25 offers an ingenious recapitulation strategy in its opening movement.²⁸ Following a fairly extensive development, at m. 236 the music comes to a halt on D major harmony. There is little sense that the preceding music formed a retransition, and when it first enters, the contrasting-middle phrase of the primary theme that is heard now, *piano* and *dolce*, does not seem to initiate a recapitulation so much as offer repose from the fraught preceding motivic activity. But in fact it is in the tonic major, and as the music continues into the primary theme’s small-ternary reprise, reverting now to the tonic minor, the listener comes to realize that the recapitulation is effectively already underway: it has just crept in by stealth, and proceeds from the equivalent of m. 11 rather than m. 1.²⁹ And thus in retrospect, the double return some 76 measures earlier, heard at the time as a deceptive expositional repeat before being reinterpreted as the start of the development (the ten measures are presented exactly as at the movement’s opening), might be rationalized as the head of a recapitulatory rotation that has been separated from its continuation by sixty-odd measures of developmental activity.

²⁸ The companion first-movement example of the developmental double return from this period, the Op. 16 Serenade, also features a sleight of hand at its point of recapitulation: the music has been back on A major harmony (heard initially as a dominant) for 26 measures before the return of the opening theme at m. 217, by which point the dominant must be reinterpreted as a tonic.

²⁹ What further disguises the return is the fact that this middle phrase was originally presented in the mediant, B \equiv major, in the exposition. The resolution to the tonic is itself new.

On the other hand, a case could equally be made for the movement's inclusion as a type 3⁴ sonata: the recapitulation from m. 237 only misses out the first ten measures of the primary theme, which is anyway heard in the small ternary reprise immediately afterwards (it is not uncommon for composers to compress the thematic repetition in a small-ternary theme into a single statement in the recapitulation). Put another way, had the return of the primary theme at m. 161 been in a key other than the tonic, no one would propose calling this a type 2 sonata: the reprise of primary theme material from m. 237 is adequate for a recapitulation. The movement's categorization as an expanded type 1 is probably slightly more precise and points forward to Brahms's later usage, but the movement is all-but tri-rotational.³⁰

What is noteworthy is how the formal conception arrived at here in the opening movement of Op. 25 is taken up by Brahms in his following chamber work, the A major Piano Quartet, Op. 26, but there introduced into the finale – the location where it will find its real home in his later music. Here the initial primary-theme return at the start of the second rotation (m. 205) is much more extensive, extending some forty measures into the small-ternary return before being taken over by developmental activity; this rotation is rejoined from m. 312 (corresponding to m. 71 of the exposition) with the primary theme's codetta passage, leading on to the second half of the recapitulation. The case for an expanded type 1 design is consequently much stronger, and indeed a type 3⁴ reading is not really viable here. The unusual design of Op. 25/i hence appears an intriguing experiment – successful in its own terms, but whose implications would be developed to quite different ends in Brahms's subsequent music.

In the following decade and a half the double-return principle in the expanded bi-rotational format seen in Op. 26 would be employed for a handful of finales – those to the F minor Piano Quartet, the C minor String Quartet, and the First Symphony. It is

³⁰ A similar quality is demonstrated in the finale of the Second Piano Concerto, Op. 83, and the scherzo of the Fourth Symphony, Op. 98. The second, developmental rotation of Op. 83/iv brings back only the opening phrase of the primary theme's small-ternary design, with the third, recapitulatory rotation resuming from the contrasting middle; either tri-rotational type 4 or bi-rotational 1^{exp}/4^{1exp} readings could be given to this (see also Horton 2017a, 271–5). Op. 98/iii's third, recapitulatory section (m. 199) is launched from the equivalent of m. 10 of the theme (a phrase missing from the start of the second rotation at m. 89, though transformed into a trio-like episode just preceding the reprise, m. 181, forming a type of linkage). The S theme does not feature in the development section (admittedly not unusual for type 3 sonatas, though also consistent with a bi-rotational reading that sees mm. 199ff as the continuation of the rotation started at m. 89). Again, both bi- and tri-rotational interpretations are possible.

really only from the G major Violin Sonata of 1878–9 onwards, though, that Brahms returns to the double return idea in earnest and develops it as a first-movement design. The primary theme appears in the tonic major no fewer than four times over the course of Op. 78's first movement, marking the start of each formal section (exposition, m. 1; development, m. 82; recapitulation, m. 156; coda, m. 223).³¹ Yet each time the idea is altered: the developmental double return is texturally inverted; at the recapitulation the tonic harmony is relaxed via addition of the seventh into V⁷/IV; finally in the coda the theme's re-emergence over first inversion tonic effectively turns the new section into an expanded cadential progression. The continual tonic returns of the opening material help imbue the sonata with its relaxed, lyrical tone (one that superficially might seem akin to a sonata-rondo); yet the continual modification and recontextualization of this material impart an evolving process that contributes to the movement's latent dynamism.³²

Such equipoise between cyclical repetition and ongoing process characterizes Brahms's mature usage of the rotational principle in his chamber works from the following years. A similar procedure to that witnessed in the First Violin Sonata can be found a decade later in the opening movement to the Third Violin Sonata, Op. 108. In this movement the opening theme likewise appears four times, at the head of each section, each time being harmonically reconceptualized. At first the theme is essentially unharmonized, appearing in the violin in two-part counterpoint with the heterophonically blurred piano line. The entire development (R2, m. 84) occurs over a long dominant pedal, which provides a larger harmonic context for the two-part complex that is now fused into a compound violin line. This is further clarified at the recapitulation (m. 130), where the piano adds the third to the initial dominant chord supporting the long $\Rightarrow 5$ upbeat. Finally, in the coda the theme appears twice: first harmonized with a i^6 (m. 218) and then over a tonic pedal, whose new-found stability supports a final relaxation to the subdominant (m. 236). By these means, the rotational

³¹ Additionally Brahms gives a tonic-minor statement near the end of the development, m. 140. This significant use of the tonic minor prior to a (major-mode) recapitulation is typical of his practice.

³² Galand aptly speaks of "Brahms's characteristic blend of lyricism and continuous motion" in his related type 1 designs (2008, 242).

principle supports a dynamic process over the movement, a gradual process of harmonic support and resolution.³³

This predilection to return to the tonic at the start of the development may also be viewed in light of Brahms's attraction to the tonic in areas traditionally seen as antithetical to this harmony, such as his oft-noted tendency to return prematurely or preemptively to the tonic (often in its parallel mode) prior to the rhetorical recapitulation.³⁴ Indeed two of the later chamber works that do not feature a developmental double return in their opening movements – both in fact offer repeated expositions – duplicate the double return at the recapitulation instead. The F major Quintet, Op. 88, feigns a possible 6/4 recapitulation at m. 111 following several measures of dominant build up,³⁵ but the thematic return quickly fragments as the dominant pedal continues, and it is only after much greater preparation at m. 137 that the real recapitulation ensues. Despite the extensive thematic foreshadowing the theme is reprised in full here, rather than being subjected to any compression. The F major Cello Sonata, Op. 99, meanwhile features a curious “double reprise”: the (root-position) tonic return of the primary theme's opening, in augmentation and *pianissimo*, at m. 112, followed by a further, *forte* full statement (both antecedent and consequent phrases) at m. 128. The latter comes across as the “real” reprise, rhetorically marked as such, though in truth we have been back in the tonic (and with the primary theme) for some time.³⁶

Concluding Observations

Putting this all together, we might draw some broader conclusions – hypotheses, pointers, or provocations to further investigation – from the preceding account. This article has been concerned with arguing for the recognition of a distinct formal subtype:

³³ Given the key, the comparable process of harmonic recontextualization in the opening movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony might seem a pertinent model.

³⁴ Examples are widespread: a few instances include the opening movements of the Op. 16 Serenade, Op. 26 Piano Quartet, Op. 78 Violin Sonata, Third Symphony, Op. 90, and Op. 111 Quintet. See further Frisch 1984, 82–3.

³⁵ A 6/4 recapitulation itself would hardly be exceptional and does not in itself argue against m. 111 having been a potential point of reprise: Brahms had provided several earlier instances, including the first movement of the Op. 18 Sextet, and it was commonplace in earlier nineteenth-century composers. See further Taylor 2022.

³⁶ Even in Op. 114/i, one of the other later movements without a developmental double return, the recapitulation function is diffused across several measures.

the type 3⁴ sonata, or type 3 sonata with a developmental double return, as distinct from the definitions of the type 4 and “type 3 with expositional repeat feint” set out by sonata theory, as well as the related but complementary expanded types 1 and 4¹. This new subtype seems most in keeping within the terms of sonata theory – tweaking the theory, rather than subjecting it to a radical overhaul. But an alternative approach, thinking outside the box as it were, might instead question how efficacious the sonata typologies formulated by sonata theory for late-eighteenth-century practice really are by the end of Brahms’s lifetime. For instance, as Hepokoski and Darcy themselves admit, the type 4 sonata declines significantly over the course of the nineteenth century. Yet the type 5 sonata, too, becomes rather obsolete over this period – a fact slightly obscured by Brahms’s unusual predilection for it in his own concertos. Certainly it exists in the generic background as a classical type, with which some concertos can be in dialogue, but this occurs in a minority of instances. And even the standing of the type 2 sonata in the nineteenth century has become something of a bone of contention (see most recently Vande Moortele 2021). That doesn’t leave much of sonata theory’s five-part typology that is undisputedly germane to the late-nineteenth-century repertory; at the very least, it would appear that a theory designed around nineteenth-century sonata practice would be pretty unlikely to come up with sonata theory’s types 4 and 5 as two of the five applicable categories. What would be the benefits of a more “positive” theoretical approach to understanding this design?³⁷

Sonata practice in this period appears to be reducing towards the use of type 1 (as a rule expanded) and varieties of type 3 (including the 3⁴ introduced here). This might, indeed, suggest that a more fundamental distinction should be drawn between sonatas possessing two and three rotations. As argued above, though, the distinction between such bi- and tri-rotational forms can be blurred (Op. 25/i is a case in point), while characteristic elements from types 1, 3 and 4 can permeate either of the others. The fact that the bi-rotational type 4¹ is conceived in sonata theory as essentially a variant of the tri-rotational type 4 points to the ease with which one can be transformed into the other.³⁸ This is suggested, in fact, by William Caplin’s categorization of what sonata theory would term the expanded type 1 sonata as a type of rondo “omitting the return of

³⁷ On “positive” and “negative” approaches see Vande Moortele 2013, as well as Horton 2017b; a recent skirmish is provided by Smith 2020.

³⁸ As explained earlier, I am speaking of full rotations and ignoring the obligatory coda refrain in rondo forms; more precisely, sonata theory would consider type 4¹ to have 2½ and type 4 to have 3½ rotations.

the refrain” – at least for classical examples such as Mozart (see Caplin 1998, 239, and 2013, 661). More recently (2021, 269) Hepokoski has allowed a similar possibility, in claiming that on occasions in the Type 4 sonata “an expected rondo refrain...will be omitted, thus running two episodes together.”³⁹ Hence while the distinction between 1^{exp} and 3^4 – between two and three rotations – can be useful in some cases, it may be rewarding to see these different types as manifestations of a common underlying principle or mechanism.

Obviously we may have no reason to assume that heuristic categories developed in the early twenty-first century to describe late-eighteenth-century music need to remain the most useful framework for interpreting late-nineteenth-century structures (regardless of the fact that nineteenth-century composers were composing partially in dialogue with classical precedent). But this might lead to question some underlying assumptions about how sonata form operates, its essential qualities, and whether these remain unchangeable over history and compositional practice. The appearance of the primary theme in the tonic is a highly salient formal gesture: the developmental double return underscores the latent rotational structure of the sonata, the sense of recycling through an ordered layout of thematic material, in which each rotation may be varied, but starts from the same point. The greater availability of the developmental double return in the later nineteenth century implies that by this historical juncture the revisiting of the tonic was becoming less of a formal determinant; it might point to a subtly altered conception of the potential of the sonata idea, shifting from a tonal to a thematic basis (or, put slightly differently, from primacy of tonality as the formal determining factor to thematic rotations).

This 3^4 design is especially characteristic of Brahms, being particularly concentrated in the opening movements of chamber works from the last two decades of his life, found alongside his extensive use of the expanded type 1 format and finales in (or in dialogue with) the type 4 sonata-rondo. Although far from confined to his music, I have not found quite as many examples in the music of other composers from this time, and thus, as a final point, one might query to what extent a distinct subtype should be extracted from what is primarily a single composer’s output – a situation which is hardly

³⁹ See also the recent contribution by Smith 2021 on the blurring of bi- and tri-rotational designs.

unprecedented given traditional constructions of classical sonata practice around the music of Mozart and early Beethoven, but nonetheless precarious.⁴⁰

These concerns are not all easy to answer. One might indeed wonder whether it would be possible to create a larger, coherent theory to cover the gamut of later nineteenth-century practice. But in their application to this repertoire, sonata-theory terms clearly need to be applied with some critical perspective; whether tweaked (as I have done) or removed to provide merely a background layer of potential dialogic context. If the latter, the development of a new – if possibly related – typology might be warranted.

⁴⁰ Other examples of the developmental double return can be found not just in figures like Dvořák, whom it would be conceivable for Brahms to have influenced, but also for instance in the opening movements of Woldemar Bargiel's Piano Sonata in C major, Op. 34 (1867), Anton Rubinstein's Piano Trios No. 4 & 5 (1870 & 1883, the latter an expanded type 1), and (perhaps) Ernest Chausson's G minor Piano Trio, Op. 3 (1881). Still, amongst this period Brahms seems to have the greatest propensity for this design in first movements.

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Abstract

One of the most prominent characteristics of Johannes Brahms’s approach to sonata form is the return to the tonic at the start of the second section (or “rotation”) for a restatement of the exposition’s primary theme. Well-known examples include the finales of the First and Third Symphonies, the opening movements of the G minor Piano Quartet and Fourth Symphony, and the *Tragic Overture*. This common basic principle can nevertheless underpin a variety of formal typologies. Ostensibly a three-part sonata form with developmental double return would be most likely labeled a sonata rondo (type 4 in Hepokoski and Darcy’s sonata theory), while a two-part design is so typical of Brahms’s practice that it has become known as a “Brahmsian deformation” (expanded type 1). However, numerous cases exist in which neither reading above is permitted – most notably three-part sonata forms with developmental double return used as opening movements. In these cases sonata theory is left classifying these designs as a conventional type 3 sonata with an expositional repeat feint. There are some serious problems, however, with this interpretation. First is the sheer number of pieces in which this double return occurs: in fact after 1878, Brahms is more likely to “feign” a repeat than provide one. Second, the way in which the primary theme returns is hardly ever identical to its opening appearance, and can rarely be confused with an exposition repeat (the Op. 25 Quartet and Fourth Symphony are exceptions in this sense). Exploring these works, I propose a new subtype of the type 3 sonata to classify Brahms’s mature practice, what I call the “type 3⁴.” Ultimately, though, my findings may lead to questions over the efficacy of a classically oriented typology confronted with late nineteenth-century practice.