

Review of Timothy Jackson's  
*The Tragic Recapitulation in the German Classical Tradition*  
by Andrew Schartmann

Appearing in the Spring 1996 edition of the *Journal of Music Theory*, Timothy Jackson's article entitled "The Tragic Reversed Recapitulation in the German Classical Tradition" examines how tragedy is represented in the so-called reversed sonata form. The essay is divided into four parts, beginning with a definition of the form's structural elements from a Schenkerian perspective, and ending with a discussion of the reversed recapitulation's tragic significance. The middle sections of the article describe the various ways in which German composers, from Haydn to Brahms, have used the reversed recapitulation, and how Brahms in particular occasionally employs a partially reversed recapitulation.

Jackson first differentiates reversed recapitulations in the early classical period from those of later works. Whereas the tonic at the beginning of the recapitulation is real in the former (symmetrical sonata form), that of the latter is somehow displaced or false. Thus, after 1770, reversing the recapitulation is perceived as a special deformation rather than an ordinary and stable means of organization. From a Schenkerian perspective, the post-1770 reversed recapitulation eliminates the interruption (*Unterbrechung*) usually found in the *Ursatz* of a work in sonata form. This yields an undivided structure in the upper voice:  $V^2$  is prolonged through the development and the recapitulation of the subordinate theme(s), only resolving to  $I^1$  at the return of the main theme. Since this  $I^1$  completes the large-scale structural descent in the upper voice, the return of the main theme functions simultaneously as a coda (see example 1).

Using this formal logic, Jackson criticizes certain analysts for invoking obscure notions of ambiguity or convoluted explanations in order to explain aberrant sonata forms. He then

demonstrates that the seemingly problematic nature of certain works is often nothing more than an instance of reversed recapitulation with an undivided large-scale melodic descent. Using a series of examples, Jackson explores the various ways in which this uninterrupted descent is supported, particularly with respect to the recapitulation of the second group (i.e. subordinate theme(s)). The methods identified include stating the second group over dominant or submediant prolongation, over a passing tone, or within a large-scale 5-6 exchange. Jackson's final examples explore the partially reversed recapitulation, mainly associated with Brahms. Here, a truncated version of the first group is stated before the recapitulation of the second group, which is in turn followed by the initial part of the first group. This results in the shifting of the *Kopfton* from the beginning of the recapitulation to the coda.

Although the analytical concepts put forth by Jackson are sound, the suggested semantic analysis is somewhat troubling. While several of the works in question are indeed tragic, there is no evidence to suggest that the use of reversed recapitulation is necessarily associated with tragedy. Moreover, the analogy with linguistic rhetorical theory's *hyperbaton* suggests that the working out of an entire movement is somehow comparable to the abrogation of normal word order and semantic logic within a single sentence. The vast difference between perceptual timeframes alone calls for a scrupulous reevaluation of this claim. Nonetheless, Jackson's approach solves many of the analytical problems previously encountered by theorists when studying sonata form, and opens the door to a more in-depth study of how the relationship between tonal and formal organization affects the emotional impact of a given work.

Example 1 - Uninterrupted *Uralinie* of Reversed Sonata Form

Sonata Form - Interruption      Reversed Sonata Form - No Interruption

5 4 3 2      5 4 3 2 1      5 4 3 2      1

Recapitulation      Development + Second Group      Recapitulation of First Group (also functions as coda)

Example 2 - Mozart, *Idomeneo*, Act III, Quartet, Middleground

15 17 20 25 28 30 33 34 39 56 66 67 72 77 80 86 89 90 91

First Group      Bridge      Second Group      Dev.

False dominant!

Recap.      Second Group      First Group

False tonic!      False tonic!

xx4!

Example 2: Mozart, *Idomeneo*, Act 3, Quartet, Middleground

In opposition to the bipartite structure proposed by Daniel Hertz, Jackson's analysis divides Mozart's quartet into three parts representing a reversed sonata form. The unusual tonal structure is characterized by the false dominant at m.39 (minor instead of major), the false tonic at m.97 (allows the 2-step to continue, thus undermining the return of the 1-step), and the false tonic at m.142 (caught within the underlying motion from  $\flat$  VI back to V).

This demonstrates a variant on the most common way of composing the second group's recapitulation in reversed sonata form (i.e. continuing dominant prolongation through the second group's return); the  $I^{\flat 3}$  is caught in the underlying motion from V to  $\flat$  VI, which is itself a prolongation of V via neighbouring motion.

This reading improves upon that of Daniel Hertz in that it better represents the underlying tonal structure of the work, and also provides what is perhaps the most convincing argument for the reversed recapitulation's alleged embodiment of tragedy due to the formal-textual correlation. As Jackson writes, "These massive, false harmonic spaces in the second group, which appear to contradict the underlying harmonic logic, may embody Idomeneo's dilemma: either he violates natural order through infanticide, or political-social-moral order (which, as king, he is duty-bound to uphold) through the breaking of his vow."