

Sonata Theory according to Hepokoski and Darcy

Dr. Lavengood

Introduction

Many important pieces from the 18th and 19th centuries (and beyond) utilize sonata form. The term “sonata form” is something of a misnomer, as the form is not restricted to pieces titled “Sonata” or that have sonata instrumentation: symphonies, concertos, operas, string quartets, etc. also use sonata form.

Sonata form is best understood as a *process* (a way of composing), rather than as a jello mold or set of boxes that the composer fills with materials. Many things are variable in sonata form.

In this handout, you will learn about the normal expectations for a piece that is said to be in sonata form, as well as some common deviations from these norms.

Something can still be a sonata even when these expectations are not met!

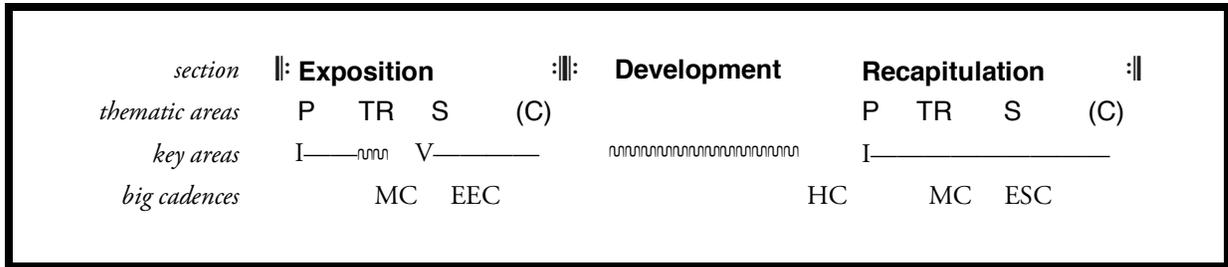
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Overview of a basic sonata form

(Abbreviations like P, TR, S, C, MC, EEC, ESC are explained beginning on pg. 3.)

TYPICAL SONATA FORM — MAJOR



Sections of Sonata Form

Exposition

- Presents the thematic material for the whole movement.
- Concludes in a new key (typically V for major and III for minor).

Development

- The harmonic digression takes place here. The key is unstable with a lot of sequences.
- Concludes with a HC (normally in the tonic key).

Recapitulation

- Brings back the material from the exposition.
- Concludes in the tonic key (rather than modulating to the new key).

Key Areas in Sonata Form

- Sonatas explore at least two different keys in the exposition. We call these the **primary key area** and the **secondary key area(s)**.
- In major-mode sonatas, the typical secondary key area is V.
- In minor-mode sonatas, the typical secondary key area is III, and less commonly, minor v.

The **sonata principle** is this: any thematic material that was stated in the secondary key areas during the exposition will be brought back in the tonic key during the recapitulation.

The Exposition: Thematic Areas

Primary thematic area (P)

- The sonata will begin with a theme in the tonic key. This will be referred to as the **P theme**.
- The **P area** is the span of music that is controlled by the P theme and is in the tonic key.
- P ends with a cadence in I (I:PAC, I:HC, or I:IAC).

Transition (TR)

- TR begins after P's concluding cadence.
- The TR area functions to bring us from the tonic key to the new secondary key.
- TR can be **dependent** if it is based on P material, or **independent** if it uses new thematic material.
- TR typically features **energy gain** that drives toward the MC, an important cadence that indicates the end of TR.

- **The medial caesura (MC) is the goal of the TR.**
 - Usually a HC, in I, V, or the secondary key.
 - Sometimes an authentic cadence in the secondary key.
 - Rarely, it could be an AC in the tonic key.
 - Some features are commonly present with the MC:
 - a. **Chromatic approach:** the dominant of the MC is often approached chromatically from $\#4$.
 - b. **Dominant lock:** After $\#4$, V is prolonged.
 - c. **Energy gain:** the material leading up to the MC will be high-energy and *forte*.
 - d. **Hammer blows:** The MC will repeat the V chord; often there will be 3 hammer blows.
 - e. **Caesura:** A pause follows the cadence—this is where the “caesura” part of the term “medial caesura” comes from. Sometimes the pause is “filled in” with decorative notes (**caesura fill**), to carry over and smoothly connect to the S area.

Secondary thematic area (S)

- S begins after the MC.
- The **S area** will be in the secondary key.
- Usually, the S area will introduce a new **S theme**, but sometimes the theme is the same as that of P. (Either way, we will still label the area after the MC as S.)
- **The essential expositional cadence (EEC) is the goal of the S area.**
 - The EEC is the *first satisfactory* PAC that is followed by *new* material (not based on S).
 - It's a rule that you choose the first cadence; this is simply meant to make the identification of the EEC easier, as it can be difficult to determine the most "important" cadence at the end of the exposition.
 - The EEC is so named because at the moment of the EEC, the *exposition* has completed its *essential* task: introducing the themes in the two opposing key areas.

Closing area (C)

- There is often more material after the EEC that confirms the new key (often using more PACs in the secondary key area). This is called the **C area** and any new themes introduced therein will be called **C themes**.
- C themes are basically coda-like in function.
- The C area can be quite long! C can sometimes include elements based on the P theme.

Summary

In the exposition, you should be able to identify:

1. **P**, which usually ends with a **I:PAC**.
2. **TR**, which ends with the **MC**.
3. **S**, which ends with the **EEC**.
4. **C**, which will end with a **PAC in the new key**.

Paying close attention to the cadences is meant to help you identify the P, TR, S, and C areas.

The Development

- The development is a very free-form portion of the sonata and varies greatly from piece to piece.
- We can understand the development section better by paying attention to which keys are visited and where the thematic material comes from.
- When you analyze development sections, in your formal diagrams, note the **key areas** that are visited as well as designating from where the **thematic material** is borrowed (with **P**, **TR**, **S**, and **C** labels).
- The development ends with a **retransition**, or a prolonging of the V chord of the tonic key.
 - The end of the retransition is marked with a I:HC or sometimes a VI:HC.
 - The retransition can often seem much like the MC and involve dominant lock, energy gain, and a pause after the HC.
 - Unlike the MC, the retransition leads back to P, not to S.

The Recapitulation

- The recapitulation is basically a repetition of the exposition, but with important changes.
- The most crucial change is that the S and C material will now be in the *tonic* key rather than in the secondary key (remember, this was the **sonata principle**).
 - This often means that the TR is altered so as not to modulate to a new key.
 - Seeing where these changes occur can often be a point of interest.
- Just as the exposition ends with an EEC, the recap ends with an **essential structural cadence (ESC)**.
 - The ESC is basically like the EEC, in that it is the first satisfactory PAC in the tonic key that is followed by new material not based on P or S.

Sonata form “types”

Hepokoski and Darcy classify sonatas into five “types,” as a way of showing the immense variations that can happen while still considering the piece to be in sonata form.

- **Type 1: a sonata without a development.** Instead of a full-blown development, a minimal retransition link separates the exposition from the recapitulation. Some have called this the “slow movement form” (where this type of sonata form is often found) or “sonatina.” Example: *Marriage of Figaro* overture by WA Mozart.
- **Type 2: a sonata where the recapitulation begins on S.** P and TR are heard as part of the development and don’t appear in the recap. Example: the fourth movement of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* by WA Mozart.
- **Type 3: the standard “textbook” sonata,** as outlined at the beginning of this handout.
- **Type 4: the sonata-rondo.** A seven-part rondo is often characterized as having the form ABACABA; the sonata-rondo, then, would have an AB(A) that functions as the exposition at the outset of the piece, and another ABA that functions as the recapitulation. The C section serves as the development.
- **Type 5: a concerto-sonata.** Concertos often feature a dialogue between the orchestra and the soloist that necessitates more repetitions of thematic material. For instance, it is typical to have an opening orchestral ritornello that presents the full first theme, but ends in the tonic key. The soloist then comes in and plays through another rotation of the exposition which modulates. The orchestra will often repeat important cadences articulated by the soloist. Another convention of a Type 5 is to have a cadenza at the end.

Contextualizing Hepokoski/Darcy

Hepokoski and Darcy's book is based on the study of Mozart's music and the music of Mozart's contemporaries; this is where their notions of "norms" come from, from which other operations are perceived to "deviate." It might not always be appropriate to analyze something called a sonata through this lens. However, many theorists have found this approach useful for repertoires beyond Mozart-era composers.

There are many types of deviations that are not discussed in this handout. Hepokoski and Darcy analyzed hundreds of sonatas to write their book; if something odd is happening in a sonata you are analyzing, reference *Elements of Sonata Theory* and see if the phenomenon is discussed somewhere in there.

Glossary of abbreviations

Thematic terms

P – primary thematic area
TR – transition
S – secondary thematic area
C – closing area

Cadential terms

MC – medial caesura
EEC – essential expositional cadence
ESC – essential structural cadence

Bibliography

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Hepokoski, James and Warren Darcy. *Elements of Sonata Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

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