

The Hybrid Forms of Mahler's Late Symphonies

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The problematic status of sonata form in Mahler's late symphonies has been well documented. Monahan (2015) argues that neither the opening movements of the Ninth nor the Tenth "feels much like a sonata" (29). All six outer movements of the late symphonies project varying degrees of dialogue with sonata form, and they do so by way of the principle of rotation. Instead of depending upon some clear overarching teleology to organize the form within sonata procedure, these movements employ rotations that fit the mold of "exposition" and "recapitulation" function as it plays out in Mahler's late style. Given these competing considerations, each of Mahler's late outer movements begs the question: *What is the virtue of a sonata form reading?*

In this paper, I juxtapose two of Mahler's late finales. At issue is the extent to which elements of sonata form—in particular, rotational function—are analytically useful in contextualizing these movements within the broader late style. This intertextual approach favors Mahler's personal compositional tendencies, rather than the norms of Sonata Theory. I will show that "Der Abschied," the finale of *Das Lied von der Erde*, exists in meaningful dialogue with sonata form, with some deviations that reflect narrative considerations. On the other hand, the *Adagio* of the Ninth Symphony shares some rotational characteristics with "Der Abschied" but lacks most sonata hallmarks. These two slow movements represent formal hybrids reflective of Mahler's broader tendency to blend genres and stretch the functional application of sonata rhetoric.