

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE IMPORTANCE OF RHYTHMIC AND
MELODIC VARIATION FOR BRAHMS'S DEVELOPMENT SECTIONS,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS FOUR SYMPHONIES.

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At times I reflect on the Variation form and I come to the conclusion that variations should be kept purer, more strict.

The older composers adhered strictly to the bass of their theme - the bass is the actual theme - throughout.

Beethoven varies his melody, harmony and rythm so beautifully.

However, I am sometimes inclined to think that the moderns (we both!) rummage about too much with the theme. We anxiously hang on to the melody, but don't treat it freely. We create nothing new out of it; we merely overload it, and hence the melody is rendered unrecognizable.^{1.}

1. From a letter by Brahms to Joseph Joachim, Düsseldorf, June, 1856.

"Composers on Music" An Anthology of Composers' Writings.
Edited by S. Morgenstern, Page 211.
Faber and Faber
24 Russell Square, London.

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INTRODUCTIONTHE METHODS OF RHYTHMIC AND MELODIC VARIATION

"Variation is one of the oldest and most elemental types of music, beloved and practised by all musicians since the early lute and keyboard composers." 1.

The principle of the variation is that of "variety within unity, secured by the reproduction of limited musical material in changing aspects and is fundamental to composition." 2. Typical instances are the use of fugal themes in changing combinations and with changing counter-material; continuous sequential expansion of a single motif in the baroque sonata or suite; the symphonic development in classical sonata form; ornamentation, compression, extension or elaboration of recapitulated sections.

The form results from numerous special applications of the principle. A tune, or subject, is given out in all its simplicity, and then repeated many times with changes such as do not conceal its identity. The matter to be varied may be as follows:

- (a) a melody;
- (b) a bass;
- (c) a polyphonic texture;
- (d) a harmonic progression;
- (e) a metrical or rhythmic pattern.

Each of these may be developed independantly, or they may be found in combination. The melody, bass, progressions and rhythm may be separated, and the same theme may be linked to variations in turn melodically, harmonically, rhythmically, or through any combination of these elements. The link may be either strict or free, but the new matter must always be acceptable as a transformation of the original.

1. Paul Henry Lang: "Music in Western Civilization", Page 995. London - J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 1942.

2. Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians - Volume VIII, Page 670. (London, MacMillan and Co. Ltd. - 1954)

The Manner of Variation:^{1.}

- (1) Heterophony
- (2) Parallel Treatment
- (3) Division
- (4) Canto fermo treatment
- (5) Melodic superimposition
- (6) Melismatic treatment
- (7) Troping
- (8) Free figuration
- (9) Expansive development
- (10) Symphonic development
- (11) Fugal development
- (12) Involution
- (13) Harmonic modification
- (14) Modal modification
- (15) Rhythmic modification
- (16) Metric modification 2.

These different methods of variation may be explained as follows:

- (1) Heterophony: the doubling of a melody almost but not quite identically.
- (2) Parallel treatment: the doubling of a melody in consecutive or almost consecutive harmonic intervals, such as 8ve, 4th, 5th, 3rd, 6th, i.e. "organum" in its early sense. However, this effect belongs more to scoring than to harmony.
- (3) Division: the doubling of a melody by an elaborated version of itself - the original and figuration heard simultaneously with satisfactory harmonic consequences.
- (4) Canto fermo treatment: the elaboration of moving parts above, beneath, and around a melody.

1. As given in Grove's Dictionary - Volume VIII, Page 671.

2. See however later in discussion on Brahms's methods.

- (5) Melodic superimposition: the elaboration of one or more parts above a bass line.
- (6) Melismatic treatment: the elaboration of ornate figuration on certain selected notes of a melody.
- (7) Troping: the insertion of similar figuration between notes or phrases of a melody.
- (8) Free figuration: the elaboration of a more or less ornately figured version of a melody, the figured version not being intended for simultaneous performance with the plain version.
- (9) Expansive development: the continuous growth of a melodic line after the fashion of the baroque sonata and suite movements. This does not result in variation form by itself, but may be combined with other elements.
- (10) Symphonic development: the fragmentation and recombination of complex thematic material after the fashion of a classical sonata movement. This does not result in variation by itself.
- (11) Fugal development: the elaboration of a fugal texture or fugue; this may be combined with other elements.
- (12) Involution: the inversion or retroversion or combined inversion and retroversion of a melodic theme.
- (13) Harmonic modification: the support of a melody, or the completion of a bass line with harmonies in greater or less degree other than those originally present.
- (14) Modal modification: the transposing of a complete variation from major to minor or vice versa.
- (15) Rhythmic modification: the recasting of a melody by changing the relative duration and accentuation of the notes comprising it. This also includes the processes of proportionate augmentation and diminution of all the note-values.
- (16) Metric modification: the adapting of a complete melodic section from one time scheme to another as, for example, from quadruple time to triple time.

CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VARIATION TECHNIQUE IN DIFFERENT PERIODS

Ever since the beginnings of music, the element of variation is found in various branches of musical composition.

Already in primitive music, the principle of variation is present beyond the mere repetitive pattern. For example, in Veddoid and Patagonian music, the original motif and its first repetition were tied together to form a complex unit by varying the final notes, thereby resulting in a simple periodicity.^{1.}

Later in Oriental music, more elaborate forms were found, e.g. the different continuously varied elaborations on a given pattern as they exist in the interrelated forms of the Indian raga, the Arabic maquam and the Greek nomos.^{2.}

Variation technique may be detected in the tropes and sequences of Gregorian Chant.^{3.} It is also encountered in the monodic forms^{4.} of the same period, as illustrated in the songs of the Troubadours, Trouvères, and the Minnesingers.

In the Middle Ages, during the Ars Nova, a very intellectual approach to the variation was encountered in the isorhythmic motets of Philippe de Vitri, Guillaume de Machaut, and others, where the continuous overlapping of a rhythmic (talea) and melodic (colour) pattern in one and the same voice-part, resulted in ever new presentations of a basic design.

1. The first time, the phrase ended on a semicadence, and the second time on a full cadence (or to use the French terms of the Middle Ages, the first ended in an overt, the second in a close). For an example, see Curt Sachs: "The Rise of Music in the Ancient World", Page 35, example 5. - W.W. Norton & Co. New York.

2. For further details on this point, see Curt Sachs: "The Rise of Music in the Ancient World", Page 191.

3. Gustave Reese: "Music in the Middle Ages", Page 185ff. New York : W.W. Norton & Co.

4. Gustave Reese: "Music in the Middle Ages", Page 225.

An interesting instance of variation-technique is also found in the 16th century in the variation-chain sequences^{1.} of Josquin des Pres and Claudin de Sermisy. This was continued into the High Renaissance with Willaert, Palestrina and Victoria.

In the field of secular dance music, one encounters the origin of the varied couples,^{2.} which influenced the later dance-suite. This subsequently developed into the typical German variation-suite where more dances were interrelated. Variation-technique was also found in organ music of the time, especially in the works of "the Colorists". In the case of vocal music transferred to the keyboard, these composers developed two new methods of variation, i.e. melodic variation (with the thematic material in the superius) and harmonic variation (with the thematic material in the bass).

The cycle of theme and variations probably began with the Spanish lute and keyboard composers in the first half of the 16th century,^{3.} and soon became a favourite form of the English Virginalists, in whose works the technique of figural variations reached a climax.^{4.} The type of virginal music most often encountered in collections consists of variations that have folk songs or dance tunes as their basis.^{5.}

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1. For the method of the variation-chain sequence used by Josquin, and other composers, see Gustave Reese: "Music in the Renaissance", Page 251ff. London : J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd.
 2. See Manfred Bukofzer: "Music in the Baroque Era", Page 44. New York - W.W. Norton & Company.
 3. Here the works of Cabezón (1510-1566) were outstanding, e.g. his diferencias on the "Song of the Cavalier".
 4. Whether the popularity of the variation form at that time is in some way connected with Cabezón's diferencias and his visit to England, is not clear, but the possibility exists.
 5. For example "Goe from my window" and "O Mistress Mine" are some of the folk melodies drawn upon.

During the 17th century the variation principle permeated so many of the instrumental forms of the period that Grout¹ refers to it as the "age of variation". The same author distinguishes 3 techniques of variation as being characteristic of this period:

- I. Cantus firmus variations, where the melody remains essentially unchanged, but is surrounded by different counterparts.
- II. Figural variations, which employ different ornamentation for each variation, the harmony remaining unchanged however.
- III. Passacaglia and Chaconne type.

The variation technique was however not restricted to mere variation sets, but could also be applied within other forms, e.g. in the polyphonic forms of *ricercar* and *canzona*. Within these forms two different methods are encountered:

- (a) the theme is subjected to the customary contrapuntal variations, i.e. inversion, reversion, and rhythmic modification, without interference with the melodic line;²
- (b) melodic variation of the theme, a method which corresponds frequently to development technique. Frescobaldi and Sweelinck were the two chief exponents of these types.

In the High Baroque, variation technique achieved a climax in the works of J.S. Bach and G.F. Händel. Bach's "Goldberg" Variations sum up the entire history of baroque variation. Written on a chaconne bass in saraband rhythm, they are arranged strictly in the order of two free variations and one in canon. The technique of variation of *ricercar* reached a last climax in the "Art of the Fugue."

The technique of variation, as established in the previous era, was carried on in the 18th century. The principle of

1. Donald Jay Grout: "A History of Western Music", Page 302. London : J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.

2. Incidentally, this is one of the main techniques employed in 12 tone composition.

figural variation is encountered, e.g. Mozart's keyboard sets are virtuoso pieces, but may also reach great emotional heights as in the finale of his C minor piano concerto (K. 491). With Haydn, the variation form is more significant than with Mozart. He also uses cantus firmus variations, e.g. in the slow movement of the "Keiser" Quartet (Op. 76 No. 3). Haydn's influence on Beethoven, may be observed in his use of double variations,¹ or his inclusion of the traditional Baroque techniques, e.g. the cantus firmus treatment in the "Eroica" variations or the chaconne from his 32 variations in C minor for the keyboard. Beethoven had a great interest in the possibilities of variation technique and attempted to create a "new method",² involving a complete transformation of the theme which was a mere germ-cell. This technique set the example for Brahms's treatment of the form. Beethoven applied this "new method" of his not only in variation sets as such, but also in independent movements of sonatas and symphonies, which were written in this form.

Apart from the variation sets as such, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven also applied this treatment outside the form itself, i.e. in the development³ sections of their sonatas and symphonies. One of the characteristics of Beethoven's late style is the deliberate working-out of themes and motives to the utmost of their potentialities. This is partly a continuation of his earlier technique of motivic development, which he now carries to its extreme limits; it also reflects a new conception of the possibilities of thematic variation.

In the 19th century, the Romantic composers used more or less the established standard techniques of the Classic period.

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1. E.g. the double variations in the slow movement from the 9th symphony.
 2. Beethoven himself attached particular importance to this "new method", and it is mentioned by him in one of his letters: Beethoven's Letters, Page 41, in a letter dated Vienna, October 18th, 1802, to the Music Firm of Breitkopf and Härtel, Leipzig. J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. London.
 3. The principle of variation differs from development in that it involves an entire theme, and not just fragments or motives,

A few examples of figural variations, as well as virtuoso-like variations are found, while Shumann's "Etudes Symphoniques" present an excellent instance of the application of Beethoven's "new method" in a Romantic work of art.

CHAPTER IIBRAHMS - HIS APPROACH TO THE VARIATION PRINCIPLE.

The importance of the variation form for Brahms, not only in piano music, but in other media as well, is one evidence of his inclination towards classical principles of construction.

For the purpose of studying composition, no form is so useful as that of variations on a given theme. By means of it a composer discovers how a theme may be ornamented and expanded without losing its identity, and without being hampered by considerations of balance and design upon a large scale such as is found in sonata form. In each variation a new type of development is given; variations have continuity of subject, but each presents a different aspect of it. They offer unlimited opportunities for unfolding and expanding the hidden possibilities of a theme.

It may rightly be said that Brahms's different sets of variations on a given theme are the experimental ground for the development in his symphonies. His procedures are in the main a continuation of Beethoven's "new method" technique, his characteristic sets for the piano being the most significant since those by Beethoven. In these sets different variation techniques are encountered, which he later employs again in his symphonic output.

An instance where Brahms, following the example of Bach's "Goldberg" Variations, displays all the resources of contrapuntal art is found in his Variations on a theme by Schumann (Op. 9) : No. 8 introduces a canon in the octave, No. 14 one in seconds, and No. 15 one in sixths. In No. 10 the melody (originally the bass of the theme) is even employed as a canon in contrary motion. At the same time the middle voices repeat the subject in diminution.¹ The Variations on a Theme by Handel are especially notable for their striking contrapuntal

1. For an example, see P. 89 in "Brahms" by J.A. Fuller-Maitland. Methuen and Co. Ltd., 36 Essex Street, London.

skill, inversion and augmentation of the theme, or a combination of the two, as well as for its logical consistency of development.

With regards to other aspects, the sets are noticeable for their continuity and for the way in which one variation seems to glide into the next one,^{1.} e.g. Nos. 1 and 2 from the Variations on an Original theme; Nos. 4 and 5 in the Schumann Variations; and Nos. 23 and 24 in the Handel Variations.

A love of rhythmic experiment of every kind is a strong feature of Brahms's art, and it was largely his power of combining all kinds of rhythms which made him so great a writer of variations. In the Variations on a Hungarian theme, the emotion is heightened by the use of rhythmical diminution in the figuration - first triplets, then semiquavers, followed by demi-semiquavers^{2.} - in the variations from the 10th to the 13th.^{3.} This technique of acceleration by diminution is also found in Beethoven's 32 Variations in C minor.

Real character variations are also found with Brahms, e.g. the free fantasia-like elaborations of the theme, as seen in No. 15 of the Schumann Variations.^{4.} Simultaneously it also contains an augmentation of the theme. In the set on a theme by Handel, the theme is only used as the basic idea, but otherwise the variations are completely free. Note especially No. 20 for its elaborate use of chromaticisms. Free treatment is also encountered in the Haydn Variations.

1. A procedure also encountered in Beethoven's 32 Variations in C minor.
2. Although this in principle resembles the long established technique of continuous rhythmical building-up characteristic of the Virginalists' figural variations, Brahms's treatment of the same is totally different, since each variation follows quite different basic ideas.
3. Incidentally, the same technique is found in the central D major section of the Romance in F major, from Op. 118. See 'Brahms Klavierwerke' Band II, Page 97 - Edition Peters.
4. This variation also bears a resemblance to Schumann's style.

A typical example of a cantus firmus variation, i.e. where the theme remains essentially unchanged, save for the addition of a new counterpoint, is found in the first variation from the set on a theme by Schumann.

Brahms's special liking for the "siciliano" type, is seen in variation 19 from the Handel-set, and in variation 8 from the set on a theme by Haydn.

Special attention should be paid to Brahms's method of closing his variation-sets with a fugue, as in the Handel variations.¹ The finale to the Haydn Variations is built entirely upon a "ground bass", 5 bars in length, derived from the first phrase of the original theme. For the most part, this is heard in the bass, treated in a contrapuntal manner. This movement is important, not only as a masterly modern use of an ancient form, but because it may be taken as the predecessor of an even greater movement of the same kind, i.e. the finale to the fourth symphony. As a counter-example to this, the completely independent finale to the "Variations on an Original Theme" may be mentioned, which is a real "Nachgesang" (after song).

The unusual periodic schemes of certain subjects attracted Brahms as a point lending itself to variation. The subject from his "Variations on an Original Theme" consists of 9 instead of 8 bars. Another instance is the peculiar rhythm of the Hungarian theme of the second set belonging to Op. 21. Brahms wrote it in bars of 3/4 followed by bars of 4/4, in order to make its accentuation clear. Lastly, the first phrase of 10 bars from the Haydn Variations is divided into two 5-bar periods, this 5-bar measure being preserved throughout all the variations. Such irregularly phrased themes appeared also later in his symphonies.²

A favourite device applied by Brahms was to evolve certain

1. This became an established rule with Max Reger.

2. E.g. the 2 5-bar phrases in the main theme from I/iii.

variations which appear later from the earlier numbers in the same set, as seen in the Handel and the Paganini variations. This technique is later applied in the Passacaglia from the Fourth Symphony.

Following Mozart's example of writing virtuoso variations for the piano, Brahms wrote the "Variations on a Theme by Paganini", appearing in two volumes and headed "Studies for the Piano forte." All Brahms's skill in writing pianistically difficult passages, is here brought into play, in order to exhibit the pianist's virtuosity.

The influence of Haydn and Beethoven's technique of writing double variations is obvious in Brahms, e.g. in the Variations on a Theme by Haydn.

Like his predecessors, Brahms also used the form as an entity in itself within some other cyclic work, e.g. the slow movements of his sextets in B^b and G are sets of variations. A good example of his employment of straightforward figural variations is found in the Andante from the Piano Sonata, Op. 1, where Brahms takes a real folk-song for his theme and uses this technique to embroider this old tune.

The Clarinet Quintet in B minor, Op. 115, offers an example of the use of applied variation technique within a large-scale work. The nucleus of the whole lies in the finale, which forms a series of variations of a rondo-like character, since the 3rd and 5th variation express the theme much more distinctly than the others. In the 5th variation there appears as a counterpoint to the theme, a semiquaver figure which was used in the first movement. The coda of the finale leads directly to the beginning of the first movement. The second movement is built on a single motif which is reminiscent of part of the main theme of the first movement. At the opening of the third movement the theme begins like the main subject of the finale. In its choice of instruments, and the narrow range of principal keys

used in the different movements (B minor, B major, D. major) this quintet is akin to the old form of the Variation-Suite, in which one movement represents the theme, and the others its variations.¹.

All these various applications of the form of theme and variations, are in a way really only preliminary studies for his later symphonies, where the different variation techniques employed are brought to a climax.

1. Doubtless Brahms was acquainted with this form, so often used in the 17th and 18th centuries, as Haydn's Feldpartita, containing the "Chorale St. Antonii" from which Brahms took his theme for the Haydn Variations, is just such a Variation-Suite. The method of the Clarinet Quintet which brings out the actual theme only in the 4th movement, had already been employed in the Variation-Suite. There it was always a rule never to begin with the theme, but to let it appear only in the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th movement, so as to give more variety to the work.

CHAPTER III.

THE MODIFICATION OF THEMES.

For the purpose of this discussion, Grove's classification, as quoted on page 2 in the Introduction, is only partly applicable. It is clear that certain of these techniques have always been used in development sections, and Brahms therefore follows a long established tradition. In others, however, he differs from his predecessors and contemporaries in employing other methods: this may partly be the outcome of his particular development technique, but may equally well be caused by the fact that his subjects do not necessarily adhere to classical principles.

Unlike his predecessors who have a strong predilection for unisonal themes,¹ Brahms likes to present his themes from the onset in double 3rds and 6ths,² subsequently, Parallel Treatment as a means of variation is of little importance. The only instance encountered is in III/iv, where the main theme, is introduced in unison in bars 1-9. At its repeat in bars 9-13, it is doubled in 3rds and 6ths. (E.g. 1)

Another example occurs in I/i/322-328 where the 3-note motif (introduced as a single line in bar 157ff) appears, doubled in 3rds and 6ths in the wood-wind.

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1. E.g. Mozart's "Haffner" symphony, Beethoven's 5th and 9th symphonies.
 2. This may be due to the fact that his melodic material in general is much more lyrical, with the result that real symphonic themes do not occur - see B. Mus Thesis: "The Subject Construction in Brahms's Symphonies" for the classification of the subjects.

The most straightforward examples of Division (i.e. the doubling of a melody by an elaborated version of itself) are found in III/ii, where various fragments of the main theme appear simultaneously with their simple figuration, as e.g. in bars 23-32 (E.g. 2);

E.g. 2 Bar 23ff

Oboe
Clar.
Piano
Violins

etc.

and bars 77-84³. (E.g. 3)

E.g. 3 Bar 77ff

Oboe
First Violins
Second Violins

From bar 84⁴ to 107 this treatment affects the entire subject.

The figuration is continued as before, changing into triplets from bar 100⁴ onwards.^{1.} Bars 62³-77¹ of the same movement contain a combination of two figurations of different portions of the same theme, i.e. a variation of the figure marked (x) with a variation of the first few bars of the main theme (y). (E.g. 4)

Another example occurs in II/ii/86-88, where part of the main theme appears in the 2nd violins, together with its semiquaver-

1. Note how the accompanying pattern is dissolved by gradual retardation. (E.g. i)

figuration in the 1st violins. (E.g. 5)

E.g. 5 R. 86ff

Horns

1st Violins

2nd Violins

etc.

Two kinds of Canto Fermo Treatment are encountered:

- (i) a proper - or quasi - set of variations: the successive appearance of the theme with different counterparts;
- (ii) the combination of a theme with one counterpoint only.

The passacaglia from the Fourth Symphony is perhaps the most convincing example of a proper variation-set. In bars 17-24, a smooth counterpoint, mostly in 3rds and 6ths, is added to the theme.¹ (E.g. 6)

E.g. 6 R. 15ff

etc.

1. By introducing this counterpoint already in the last bar of Variation 1, Brahms overbridges the cadence between Variations 1 and 2 very successfully.

In Variation 4 (bars 33-40) it is superseded by a new counterpoint¹. (E.g. 7)

E.g. 7 Bar 33ff

which in turn undergoes melodic modifications in Variations 5 (bars 41-48) and 6 (bars 48ff). (E.g. 8)

E.g. 8 Bar 41ff

1. The overbridging between Variations 3 and 4 is effected by carrying on the crotchet movement of Variation 3 into the next one. (E.g. ii)

E.g. ii Bar 31ff

Further interesting examples occur in Variations 8 and 9 (bars 65-80), 14 and 15 (bars 113-128)^{1.}, and 23 (bars 185-192).

In I/iii the theme (introduced in bars 1-5) appears successively with a number of different counterpoints, i.e. in bars 19-23 together with arpeggios in the clarinet, (E.g. 9)

E.g. 9 Bar 19ff

in bars 62-71 together with running semiquavers in the first violins and violas,^{2.} (E.g. 10)

E.g. 10 Bars 62ff

1. Note the descending scale for the horn in the last bar of this variation, leading on into the first bar of the next one, thus overbridging the cadence between Variations 14 and 15. This motion had already been used in the previous variation, and recurs again in the following one, serving the same purpose.
2. This counterpoint may also be regarded as a variation by diminution, since it is made up from short motives, which are but a rhythmical diminution of the portion marked (x) in the theme.

and in bar 115ff with a triplet figure in the upper wood-wind.
(E.g. 11)

E.g. 11 Bar 115ff

An example of Expansive Development is encountered in I/i/294-321, where the first minor 2nd of the motto motif remains unchanged, while the second interval expands to 3rds, 6ths and 8ves. (E.g. 12)

E.g. 12 Bar 294ff

An instance of additive expansion can be observed in I/i/157ff.¹ (E.g. 13)

E.g. 13 Bar 157ff

Violins

Violas

Celli

After the announcement of the subject, this motif is further expanded by sequential repetition, and from bar 177 onwards, it is inverted and imitated. (E.g. 14)

E.g. 14 Bar 177ff

2nd Violins

Celli

etc.

In bar 262ff it is expanded by the addition of its rhythmical augmentation. (E.g. 15)

E.g. 15 Bar 262ff

Violins

Bars 298ff show further development by displacing the accent and by a change in the phrasing. The alteration in shape coincides with one of character, the former rhythmical quality being replaced by a more melodic presentation. (E.g. 16)

1. The way in which this short motif is built up into a complete subject has been discussed earlier. See B. Mus Thesis, Page 23.

Eg. 16 Bar 298 ff

Involution, i.e. the inversion or retroversion or combined inversion and retroversion of a melodic theme, is very often employed by Brahms in order to present a theme in a new light. The numerous examples subjected to the laws of involution may be divided into 3 groups:

- (1) The different variations are introduced successively, though not immediately following each other, acting as a unifying element between otherwise unrelated melodies.
- (2) Two different versions are introduced simultaneously, with a predominantly harmonic function.
- (3) Two different versions are introduced simultaneously or in imitation, with a predominantly contrapuntal function.

(1) In I/iv/9-10, the motto motif, a descending line of 4 notes introduced in I/iv/1 ff, is inverted. (E.g. 17)

Eg. 17 Bar 44

The motto motif from II/i undergoes similar treatment in bars 187-190 : its inversion dominates the whole progression. (E.g. 18)

Eg. 18 Bar 183 ff

Both versions are combined in bars 236-242 (with independent rhythmical modifications. (E.g. 19)

Involution is not restricted to motto motives alone, but affects other themes as well, e.g. in I/iii/1 ff where the second phrase is an inversion of the first one. (E.g. 20)

A similar though freer example occurs in the main theme of II/i/2-19. Inversion also takes place in II/iv/170-181, with part of the first subject being inverted and developed. (E.g. 21)

A change in the theme from I/iv/105¹ff is effected in bars 231-272 by separating it into two segments and reversing their order. (E.g. 22)

1. Incidentally, the semiquaver figure of this theme is based on a rhythmic modification of the motto motif.

Fig. 22 Bar 105 ff

Bar 231 ff

(2) An example from this group occurs in I/i/1 ff, introducing a motif of two ascending semitones,¹ together with its inversion. (E.g. 23)

Fig. 23 Bar 11

Flute

Violins

Bars 38 ff incorporate the motto motif (in its original form as well as inverted) into the main subject making it an integral part of it. (E.g. 24)

Fig. 24 Bar 38 ff

Woodwinds

1st Violins

Here its essence is harmonic rather than melodic, the motif being shifted in a time-lag of one bar.

(3) An interesting instance from the third group occurs in III/i/90⁵-93¹, containing the continuation of the 2nd subject in A major in the wood-wind, with an accompaniment in the violas and 'cellos which is an inversion of this passage. (E.g. 25)

1. The motto motif of this symphony.

Eg. 25 Bar 91 ff

This treatment is continued in the next bars with different instrumentation. In bars 262ff the theme from I/i/157 appears together with its inversion. (E.g. 26)

Eg. 26 Bar 262 ff

A combination of two different techniques occurs in IV/i/206ff: the motif from bar 53ff is introduced, together with its inversion; a change to similar motion in bar 209ff, results in variation by division. (E.g. 27)

Eg. 27 Bar 206 ff

In IV/iii/35-40 the first phrase of the main theme appears together with its free inversion in the treble. (E.g. 28)

E.g. 28 Bar 35 ff

1st Violins

Celli

Further examples may be seen in I/iii/150-153, and in IV/iv/297-301.

An interesting example of involution, which cannot be classified into one of the above-mentioned groups, occurs in IV/i (E.g. 29(a))

E.g. 29(a) Bar 11

First Violins

While the shape of the melody alternates in regular sequential phrases between the intervals of 3rds, 6ths, and 8ves, the structural foundation may be reduced to a descending and an ascending chain of 3rds¹, as shown in (E.g. 29(b)).

E.g. 29(b)

The most obvious case of Harmonic Modification concerns the main theme of II/i, the harmonization of which changes with the subsequent entries in bars 183ff, 191ff, 246ff, 290ff, and 302ff. (E.g. 30)

1. The whole idea of construction may be compared to the "color" of the isorhythmic motet, or the "row" in modern 12-tone composition.



Other instances appear in II/iii/107-110, and in IV/i/246ff, both of which present portions of the corresponding themes in a varied harmonic progression.

Modal modification, i.e. the transposition of a musical passage from major to minor, or vice versa, (frequently connected with a change of character) is traditional in variation sets. Subsequently Brahms employs it in the passacaglia from the Fourth Symphony, where Variations 13-15 are in the major. However, the technique is also used in some development sections, e.g. in III/i/78-83, the second subject being intensely altered from its first statement in the Exposition. (E.g. 31)

The modification from minor to major, which was a common feature in the Classic period, more or less disappears in the works of Brahms. However, a few isolated examples do occur, e.g. in III/i/221-225, and in I/iv/418ff, the motif from bars 21 and 22 being transposed to major.

Rhythmic modification means the recasting of a melody by changing the relative duration and accentuation of the notes comprising it, and also includes the processes of proportionate augmentation and diminution of all the note-values. It may be combined with metric modification, whereby a complete melodic

section is adapted from one time scheme to another. Of the numerous examples occurring in the symphonies, the following may suffice to illustrate the point.

The main theme from II/i is subject to rhythmic modifications in bars 59 and 60 (in bassoons and lower strings), bars 61 and 62 (in violins), and in bar 63 (in bassoons and lower strings)(E.g. 32),

E.g. 32

Bar 24

Horns in D

Bar 59 ff

Violins

Celli

and to a metric change from $3/4$ to $3/2$, resulting in a typical hemiola,¹ in bars 248-249. (E.g. 33)

E.g. 33 Bar 248 ff

Clarinet

2nd Violin

The motif from I/iv/21 and 21 returns in bars 147ff, in a rhythmical variation, and developed into a complete theme. (E.g. 34)

1. It is interesting to observe that this is combined with a diminution of the motto motif in the strings.

Eg. 34 Bar 21f

Flutes

Bar 41f

Phrase-extension through retaining the closing note, is seen in I/iii/19-32, the two original 5-bar phrases being extended to 7 bars each. (E.g. 35)

Eg. 35 Bar 19f

Violins

Extended from 5 to 7 bars

Extension

Fragments of the same theme appear in diminution in bars 50-53, (E.g. 36)

Eg. 36 Bar 1f

Clav.

Bar 50ff

Diminution

and in augmentation in bars 142 and 143. (E.g. 37)

Eg. 37 Bar 138ff

Oboe

Clav.

Augmented

An interesting example of acceleration by phrase-shortening occurs in I/i/322ff, the length of the motif being reduced progressively. (E.g. 38)

Eg 38

Violins

Bar 322

2 bars

2 bars

1 bar

1 bar

Pianos

The theme from III/iii/53ff presents an example of a "written-out ritardando" ¹ in bars 86³-98². (E.g. 39)

Eg 39

Violins

Bar 86

Pianos

Variation and/or expansion achieved through repetition, may be divided into 2 groups:

- (1) Double statements: applied particularly to the 2nd subjects, and connected with a change in instrumentation, e.g. in II/iv/78-86 and 86-98¹, (E.g. 40)

1. A method frequently employed by Pre-classic (e.g. C.P.E. Bach's 4th Württemberg Sonata-Andante - Page 7 - Nagels Musik-Archiv) and Classic composers (e.g. J. Haydn's C minor Piano Sonata - Universal Edition - Volume III, Sonata No. 26 - Page 60.)

E.g. 40 Bar 12 ff

Violins

Bar 86 ff

Flute etc.

and in III/i/36-40¹ and 40-44¹. (E.g. 41)

E.g. 41 Bar 36 ff

Clarinet

Bar 40 ff

Viola etc.

Other instances occur in the 2nd subjects in II/i/82-101, III/iv/52-56, and IV/i/57-64.

- (2) Free repetition: especially employed in the themes from the slow movements, which are usually extended melodic subjects and therefore not very suitable for rhythmic modification, e.g. in I/ii/38-66: this entire section is built up around one theme introduced by the oboe in bar 38ff, and expansion is achieved by repetitions (sometimes fragmentary) in other instruments. (E.g. 42)

E.g. 42 Bar 38^{ff}

Oboe

Clar.

etc.

Another example occurs in I/iii/45^{ff} : the theme is given out by the clarinet and then transferred to different instruments, e.g. in the third bar to the flute and oboe in octaves. (E.g. 43)

E.g. 43 Bar 45^{ff}

Oboe

Clar.

Similar instances occur in II/ii/12⁴-17¹ and the theme from bars 32⁴-34 from the same movement. In III/ii/32⁴-40 the figure marked (a) in E.g. 44.

E.g. 44 Bar 14

Clar.

is seen in various combinations of instruments.

Isolated examples of the application of this treatment to other themes, are also encountered, e.g. in the imitations in II/i/44-47. (E.g. 45)

E.g. 45 Bar 62ff

Oboes

First Violins

Second Violins

Cello

and in bars 292-298, and 454-464 of the same movement.

In all these examples only single techniques have been discussed. Following in principle the grouping of Grove's table of variation techniques, one particular aspect of a thematic change was put into the centre of interest. In fact, many of these modifications are more involved than the previous discussion may indicate. In the majority of such changes several techniques of variation are combined. As an illustration the theme from III/i/78-83 should be mentioned: in addition to modal (change from major to minor), metric (change from 9/4 time to 2 x 6/4), and rhythmic modification (omission of one of the first three and prolongation of the first half of the fourth bar), the instrumentation is changed to bassoons, violas, and 'cellos, thereby effecting a gypsy-like character which contrasts with the more pastoral tone-colour of the earlier appearance in the clarinets. (E.g. 46)

E.g. 46
 6^{or} 24 ff

The musical score consists of four staves. The first two staves are in treble clef, and the last two are in bass clef. The music is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The second staff continues the melody. The third staff is in bass clef and begins with a key signature of one sharp. The fourth staff continues the bass line. The music features various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, with some passages marked with slurs and accents.

There are many instances which show a similar amalgamation of different thematic modifications. This procedure is intensified with those main subjects which serve as a unifying element throughout a movement of, or an entire symphony. In their case one can no longer speak of modification in the sense of specific techniques, but shall rather discuss their transformation.^{1.}

1. It should be noted that the term "transformation" refers to thematic variation in a wider sense, as opposed to "modification" which has been connected to specific techniques.

CHAPTER IV.THE TRANSFORMATION OF THEMES.

Transformation of themes implies a process of development which guarantees at the same time variety and unity. Such thematic transformation is not a Brahms invention, but has also been discovered to be one of the major elements of symphonic unity during the Classic period.¹ Such unifying ideas exist in the 18th century with the emphasis on contrast, but naturally become more dominant during the Romantic era with its revival of Baroque tendencies, and subsequently assume greatest prominence in the work of Brahms. Moreover, it is in this technique where Brahms is able not only to combine Baroque techniques with inherited Classical forms, but also to materialize his desire "to create something new out of a theme"² by the application of a more advanced variation technique.

Since in a sense the individual movements of Brahms's four symphonies are built on continuous thematic transformations, it is obvious that for the purpose of this study only a limited number of typical examples can be discussed. These will suffice to illustrate the points, the inclusion of further examples would only be an increase in quantity, without yielding any new or different results.

In I/i, the passage from bar 4⁶ ff (E.g. 47)

1. See e.g. Hans Keller's article : "K.503 : The Unity of Contrasting Themes and Movements" I and II in 'The Music Review' - Volume 17 - 1956 - Pages 48ff and 120ff.
W. Heffer and Sons, Ltd., Cambridge, England.

2. See Page i.

Eg 47

Bar 4¹

Musical notation for Bar 4¹, featuring a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a complex melodic line with various ornaments and slurs.

Bar 21¹

Musical notation for Bar 21¹, showing a treble clef and a melodic line with a prominent slur and a final double bar line.

Bar 42²

Musical notation for Bar 42², featuring a treble clef and a melodic line with several slurs and a final double bar line.

Musical notation for Bar 42², showing a bass clef and a series of chords with various accidentals.

Bar 167

Musical notation for Bar 167, featuring a treble clef and a melodic line with a slur and a final double bar line.

Bar 185

Musical notation for Bar 185, showing a treble clef and a melodic line with a slur and the text "etc." at the end.

Musical notation for Bar 190⁴, featuring a treble clef and a series of chords with various accidentals and the text "etc." at the end.

Strings

Musical notation for Strings, showing a bass clef and a series of chords with various accidentals.

Bar 198⁴

Musical notation for Bar 198⁴, featuring a bass clef and a series of chords with various accidentals.

Bar 216⁷

Musical notation for Bar 216⁷, showing a bass clef and a series of chords with various accidentals.

Bar 424¹

Musical notation for Bar 424¹, featuring a treble clef and a series of chords with various accidentals.

Bar 460

Musical notation for Bar 460, showing a treble clef and a series of chords with various accidentals and the text "etc." at the end.

Bar 475

Musical notation for Bar 475, featuring a treble clef and a series of chords with various accidentals.

Bar 490

Musical notation for Bar 490, showing a bass clef and a series of chords with various accidentals and slurs.

serves as a "thematic reservoir" ^{1.} for the first two phrases of the theme in bar 42³ff. The motif marked (x) which returns in bars 21-24 in augmentation and expansion, becomes the first phrase of the above main theme, whereas the syncopated notes (marked *) correspond with the descending second phrase. Bar 169ff presents part of the subject in inversion, which is further reduced in bars 185-190. Later, in bars 190-225, further development occurs by presenting it in an imitatory manner, while in bars 198⁴ff the portion from bars 42⁶-46¹ appears in an augmented version. From bars 216-225, it is changed to square patterns, with a different phrasing, effected by a rhythmic change in the accent to a downbeat character.^{2.} Further development occurs in bars 459-495 where fragmentary excerpts are used in an inverted form leading to a metric change from 6/8 to 4/4 in bars 493 and 494.

An interesting example of rhythmic transformation occurs in I/ii; the motif contained in bars 27²-28² gives rise to the accompaniment figure in bars 28³ff, which is transformed into a syncopated pattern in bars 39ff. The passage commencing in bars 55ff starts with an augmentation of the syncopation from bars 39ff, but then leads to a new pattern. (E.g. 48)

1. Mosco Carner uses this term in connection with the introductions to Schumann's Second and Fourth Symphonies. See "Schumann" A Symposium. Edited by Gerald Abraham, Page 183. Geoffrey Cumberlege - Oxford University Press - London - 1952.

2. Thus Brahms prepares the way for another theme (i.e. bar 157ff) which has even more pronounced downbeats.

E.g. 48

Bar 27 f

Bar 28 f

Bar 29 f

The motto motif of I/iv (E.g. 49)

Eg 49

Bar 1ff

Bar 19ff

Bar 9ff

Bar 21

Bar 22

Bar 23ff

Bar 26

Bar 29

Horns in C

Bar 40ff

Bassoon

Detailed description: The image shows a handwritten musical score on aged paper. It consists of ten staves of music. The first staff is labeled 'Bar 1ff' and 'Bar 19ff' and includes a 'Cello' part. The second staff is labeled 'Bar 9ff' and shows a treble and bass clef. The third staff is labeled 'Bar 21' and the fourth 'Bar 22', both featuring dense, rhythmic patterns. The fifth staff is labeled 'Bar 23ff' and continues the rhythmic patterns. The sixth staff is labeled 'Bar 26' and shows a simpler melodic line. The seventh staff is labeled 'Bar 29' and 'Horns in C'. The eighth staff is labeled 'Bar 40ff' and 'Bassoon'. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings like 'ff'.

consists of either 4 (bar 1f) or 3 (bar 19) descending notes, both versions being subject to chiefly rhythmic variations. In bars 9 and 10, the motif is inverted, and its individual notes are shortened in their time-value. Rhythmic diminution proper takes place in bar 19, followed by further transformation in bars 21 and 22. From bar 23 onwards, the 3-note version gains prominence, preparing the entry of the "horn theme" in bar 29, and returning in a last modification in bar 40ff.

Another rhythmic transformation concerns the motif marked (x) in E.g. 50 (I/iv/94-100).

E.g. 50 Bar 91 ff

Flute

Violin

Bar 243 ff

Flute

Oboe

Bar 266 ff

etc

The image displays a handwritten musical score for 'E.g. 50' across four systems. The first system includes parts for Flute and Violin, with a specific motif in the Violin part marked with an 'x'. The second system continues the Violin and Flute parts. The third system features Oboe and Flute parts, with the Flute part starting at 'Bar 243 ff'. The fourth system shows the Flute part starting at 'Bar 266 ff' and concludes with 'etc'. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as accents and slurs.

Bar 383 ff

Violino

Celli

Bar 390 ff

Oboe

Violino

Bar 446 ff

Violino

A change of character is brought about by diminution of the motif and the subsequent shifting of the accent (y). The gradual lengthening of the closing note in bars 243-250 and in 266-277, enhances its rhythmic impact. Further transformations occur in the coda: in bars 383ff, the motif is concentrated into a 3rd (the essential interval of its compass), while from bar 390 onwards it is distributed between various parts (marked *). In this version it assumes a rhythmical quality of such prominence that continuity of thought is guaranteed even though the melodic aspects of the motif have been dissolved (bar 446ff).

By continuous melodic and rhythmic variation, and above ostinato repetitions of the motto motif, the subject from I/iv/117ff is developed out of the initial motif marked (x). (E.g. 51(a))

Eg. 51 (a)
Bar 117ff

Oboe

Violins

Celli

→ Imitation by inversion

Bar 129 ff

Bar 131 ff

Oboe

Celli

Inversion of x

Bar 141 ff

First Violins

Second Violins

Violas

Celli

Imitation by inversion is added in the upper wood-wind in bars 123-125. In the further course, both motto motif and motif (x) are subject to a number of transformations. In bar 130, motif (x) occurs in strict inversion, (y), as well as in a free modification (z), the two figures being identical in rhythm. In bars 131 and 132, (z) and (x) are combined (with certain overlapping) into a new phrase, which immediately after its introduction undergoes melodic and rhythmic development (bars 133-137 and bars 141ff). Similar transformation can also be noted with regard to the motto motif, (E.g. 51(b))

E.g. 51 (b)

Bar 117f

etc.

Bar 129ff

Bar 131ff

etc.

which appears in syncopation (bars 129ff), providing a counterpoint to repeated entries of (z), and in augmentation and melodic alteration (bars 131ff).

In the third movement of the second symphony, Brahms continuously employs rhythmic and melodic transformations, building the entire movement out of one theme¹, (E.g. (52(a)))

1. The movement may even be called a "study in variation technique", a successful application of Brahms's "new method" (in analogy to Beethoven's use of this term.)

Eg 52 (a)

Bar 1 ff

Handwritten musical notation for the first staff, starting with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including accents and slurs. A bracket above the staff spans the first few measures.

Bar 33 ff

Handwritten musical notation for the second staff, starting with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and slurs. A bracket above the staff spans the first few measures.

Bar 40 ff

Mute

Handwritten musical notation for the third staff, starting with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and slurs. A bracket above the staff spans the first few measures. The word "etc." is written to the right of the staff.

Bar 51 ff

Violins

Handwritten musical notation for the fourth staff, starting with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and slurs. A bracket above the staff spans the first few measures. The word "etc." is written to the right of the staff.

Bar 132 ff

Clar

Handwritten musical notation for the fifth staff, starting with a bass clef and a 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and slurs. A bracket above the staff spans the first few measures. The word "etc." is written to the right of the staff.

Bar 164 ff

First Violins

Handwritten musical notation for the sixth staff, starting with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and slurs. A bracket above the staff spans the first few measures.

Bar 172 ff

Second Violins

Handwritten musical notation for the seventh staff, starting with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and slurs. A bracket above the staff spans the first few measures.

Celli

Handwritten musical notation for the eighth staff, starting with a bass clef and a 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and slurs. A bracket above the staff spans the first few measures.

which, in its ritornello-like re-entries undergoes certain harmonic or melodic modifications, e.g. a different harmonization in bars 108-110, a transposition and certain melodic modifications in bars 194ff. Modal modification and expansion in bars 222ff. None of these changes, however, transgresses the border of traditional development technique. Actual transformation on the other hand, permeates the episodes, the thematic material of which is drawn from various fragments of bars 1-8 of the main theme. In particular, full use is made of the opening motif, with its latent potentialities of variation; it appears in a metric modification in bars 33ff, in a free inversion in bars 40ff, while it appears in another free inversion and new rhythmical pattern in bar 51ff, and undergoes further changes in 132ff, 164ff and 172ff. Other fragments are treated in a similar way. (See E.g. 52(b)).

E.g. 52 (b)

Handwritten musical score for Example 52 (b), showing rhythmic variations across various instruments. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The instruments and their parts are:

- Bar 1ff:** Flute part with a melodic line featuring accents and slurs.
- Bar 33ff:** Flute part with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Bar 63ff:** Violin and Cello parts. The Violin part has a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the Cello part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The word "etc." is written at the end of the section.
- Bar 116ff:** Oboe and Violin parts. The Oboe part has a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the Violin part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The word "etc." is written at the end of the section.
- Bar 180ff:** First Violin, Second Violin, and Viola parts. The First Violin part has a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the Second Violin and Viola parts have rhythmic patterns of eighth notes.

Two motives (the opening motif, and the interval of the 4th in bars 5 and 6) from the theme in II/iv/24-31 yield a number of rhythmic variations : the opening motif (E.g. 53(a))

Ex. 53 (a)

Bar 24 ff

Bar 114 ff

Bar 126 ff

Flute

Oboe

Bar 206 ff

Flute

1st Violin

etc.

appears in diminution in bar 26¹, inserted into the restatement of the full subject for the purpose of phrase-expansion. In bars 114-137 it undergoes development by means of rhythmic transformations, expansions, repeats, and imitations, e.g. in bars 126-129. In bars 206-214¹ a triplet version² occurs,

1. A similar instance may be observed in III/ii/bar 1 vs. bar 80. (E.g. iii)

Ex. iii

Bar 1

Bar 80

2. Similar treatment occurs in III/iv/252-260 (E.g. iv).

Ex. iv Bar 262 ff

Violins

Celli

alternating between wood-winds and strings. A development of the motif from bars 5 and 6 (E.g. 53(b))



is found in bars 44²-55 in the strings, its phrasing being changed from legato to staccato and its rhythmical shape being slightly altered. Intense transformation takes place in bars 138-154, while rhythmic augmentation occurs from bars 234ff.

In II/iv/98-113 (E.g. 54)

Eg. 54

Bar 78ff

Bar 98ff

Bar 102ff

Bar 103ff

Bar 109ff

Bar 109ff

Bar 111ff

Bar 353ff

Trombones

etc.

Violas

Bar 369ff

Bar 417ff

Horns

the first two bars of the 2nd subject are developed in various ways, chiefly through rhythmic transformation, but also by a change of mode in bars 102f and by expansion in bars 103ff and 109ff. Bars 353-362 present another variation, returning in bars 363-374. The same motif features prominently in rhythmic diminution in bars 421-424.

The descending quaver arpeggios in III/i/50⁶-55, mostly beginning on the 3rd or 6th beats, are rhythmic and melodic transformations of the main theme, from which also the six bars of ascending and descending syncopated arpeggios in bars 72-77 are derived. In bars 223-225 a rhythmic augmentation occurs in the lower strings. (E.g. 55)

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Example 55, illustrating transformations of a motif. The score is divided into three systems:

- System 1:** Labeled "Eg 55 Bar 50⁴". It features two staves: "Flute" and "Clarinet". Both staves show a descending quaver arpeggio motif. The flute part includes a slur over the first two measures. The clarinet part also shows a similar motif. The word "etc." is written at the end of the system.
- System 2:** Labeled "Bar 72⁴". It features two staves: "First Violins" and "Cello". Both staves show a syncopated arpeggio motif. The first violin part includes a slur over the first two measures. The word "etc." is written at the end of the system.
- System 3:** Labeled "Bar 222ff". It features two staves: "Violins" and "Cello". The violin part starts with a slur and includes markings for "pizz." (pizzicato) and "arco" (arco). The cello part also includes markings for "pizz." and "arco".

Two motives from the main theme of III/ii yield a number of transformations. (E.g. 56(a))



E.g. 56 (a)

Clar. Bar 44 etc.

Clar. Bar 44 etc.

Rhythmic variation → (a) inverted

Bassoon Augmented etc.

Horn Bar 56 + f

Oboe etc.

Clar. etc.

First Violins

In bars 40⁴-59, the figure (a) assumes a more distinct character and appears in two entirely different versions, both being characterised by marked upbeats, which also dominate the portion from bar 56⁴ onwards. In this passage Brahms exploits some of the possibilities of suspensions, producing a harmonic indeterminateness which is enhanced by the unusual spacing of the component parts. The closing phrase of the same theme (E.g. 56(b))

E.g. 56 (b)

Bassoon Bar 41 f

Clar. Bar 41 f

Continued etc.

serves as a thematic nucleus for the melodic expansion in bars 108ff.

The simplicity of the main theme from IV/i (E.g. 57)

Eq. 57 Bar 11

First Violins

Bar 12f

Bar 108

First Violins

Second Violins

Eq. 57 Bar 14 ff

Bar 19 ff

Flutes

Oboes

Clars.

Bar 23 ff

Horns

Oboes

Violins

Bar 15 ff

A single musical staff containing a sequence of notes, including eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests.

Bar 19 ff

A musical staff with notes and rests, featuring some slurs and dynamic markings.

Bar 19 ff

First Violins

A musical staff for the first violins, showing notes with slurs and dynamic markings.

Second Violins

A musical staff for the second violins, featuring notes with slurs and dynamic markings.

Cello

A musical staff for the cello, showing notes with slurs and dynamic markings.

E.g. 57

Bar 246 ff

Oboes

A musical staff for the oboes, featuring notes with slurs and dynamic markings.

First Violins

A musical staff for the first violins, showing notes with slurs and dynamic markings.

A musical staff for the oboes, featuring notes with slurs and dynamic markings.

A musical staff for the first violins, showing notes with slurs and dynamic markings.

Bar 374 ff

A musical staff for the oboes, featuring notes with slurs and dynamic markings.

A musical staff for the first violins, showing notes with slurs and dynamic markings.

makes it amenable to variation, and new contrapuntal features are added at every return. In addition, the principle of variation is inherent in the theme itself, (e.g. rhythmic diminution in bars 13 and 14). In bars 18⁴-37¹ it appears in broken octaves, alternating between the first and second violins. The quaver-figure in the violas and various wood-wind groups may be seen as a rhythmic diminution of the passage in bars 15 and 16. In bars 33-36, a varied statement of bars 9-12 occurs in the violins, while the wood-wind states fragments from the principal theme in a different rhythm. The cadential part of the theme is largely extended and varied in bars 39-52, culminating (in bars 39 and 40) in 3 different rhythmic presentations of one basic line, derived from bars 15 and 16. Note also the augmentation of the first 4 bars of the main theme in bars 246³-258, and the syncopation in bars 398ff.

In IV/i/156⁴-164, the initial 2-note unit of the main theme is expanded to one of 3 notes. (E.g. 58)

Ex. 58

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Example 58, consisting of five staves. The first staff is for Flute 1 (Fl. 1), the second for Flute 2 (Fl. 2), the third for Violin, the fourth for Viola, and the fifth for Cello/Double Bass (Cello/Bass). The music is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first four measures of the phrase are shown, with a 'etc.' written at the end of the second staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, accents (>), and dynamic markings (e.g., *f*). The first measure of each staff shows a two-note unit, which is then expanded to a three-note unit in the subsequent measures. The score is written in a clear, legible hand.

which, in bars 168⁴-184¹ is developed, effecting a continuous contrary motion and overlapping between the different instruments:

- (a) : 3-note unit as derived from bar 156;
- (b) : (a) inverted;
- (c) : interval of the 3rd, inverted, and with an additional note at the end of the 3-note unit, instead of in the middle as in (a);
- (d) : derived from (c), initial interval expanded;
- (e) : interval of the 6th, with additional note in the middle;
- (f) : interval of the 6th, inverted, and with additional note at the end.

The principal theme from IV/ii (E.g. 59)

E.g. 59

Handwritten musical score for E.g. 59, showing the principal theme from IV/ii. The score is written on five staves: Harp in C, Bar 30ff, Bar 41ff, Bar 98ff, and Violins. The Harp part shows a 3-note unit in bar 1. The Bar 30ff part shows a subsidiary theme. The Bar 41ff part shows a transformation and expansion of the main theme. The Bar 98ff part shows the theme continuing. The Violins part shows the theme continuing. The score is marked with 'etc.' at the end of the Bar 98ff and Violins parts.

offers another example of variation technique inherent in the theme itself. Modal modification from Phrygian (in the first 4 bars) to E major takes place in bar 5ff. At bar 30 the strings announce a subsidiary theme, which is a transformation and expansion of part of the main theme. It is accompanied by

triplet semiquavers in the lower strings, which become very prominent in bars 36-40, and are heard in a staccato dialogue between the wood-wind and strings, the melody being related to the three ascending notes in the theme from bar 30ff. Further transformation of the triplet figure from bar 30ff produces the second subject of the movement in bars 41-50³, the opening bars of which appear in syncopation in bars 98-101.

The main theme from IV/iii provides the material for a number of variations. In IV/iii/168²-173 and 174²-176, (E.g. 60)

E.g. 60

The image shows three staves of handwritten musical notation. The first staff is labeled 'Bar 168' and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents, some beamed together. The second staff is also labeled 'Bar 168' and shows a similar pattern with some notes beamed together. The third staff is labeled 'Bar 181' and shows a more complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes and accents. The notation is in treble clef and 4/4 time.

the first phrase of the theme appears in a rhythmic and melodic modification, preparing for the introduction of the seemingly new theme in bars 181-189 by the horns. In bars 19²-23, the second phrase of this theme (E.g. 61)

Eq. 61

Bar 64

Bar 124

Bar 124f

appears in a "reduced" form. Further development occurs in bars 117-138, of which bars 124-128 are especially interesting, since they contain three different rhythmic presentations of the same line simultaneously.

The motto motif of IV/iii, (E.g. 62)

Eq. 62

Bar 14

Bar 51f

E.g. 62 *60-44f*

First Violins

Cello

Flute

Clarinet

Bassoon

integrated into the main themes in a very subtle way, undergoes certain modifications: in bars 44-51 it occurs first in the rhythm of the second phrase of the first subject, followed by an augmented version. It is also affected by the rhythmic modification of the second subject in bars 258ff (see below), and in bars 307ff, it is further varied by means of melodic figuration.

In bars 258-281 the second subject from IV/iii (E.g. 63)

Eg. 63

Bar 264

Bar 268

Bar 272

is employed in the triplet rhythm from the third phrase of the first subject. The subsequent change in character from the lyrical to a more rhythmical one, is further emphasized by the detached crotchets in bars 276-281.

In IV/iv numerous examples are encountered. The passacaglia theme, given out in bars 1-8 in the wood-wind and brass in long-held notes, undergoes various transformations, while other instruments elaborate moving parts above, underneath, or around it. (E.g. 64)

Eg. 64 Bar 1ff

Flute

Bar 9 pizz.

Var. 1

Bar 25

Var. 3

Bar 33

Var. 4

Bar 57

Var. 7

Bar 65

Var. 8

Bar 113ff

Var. 14 Trombones

Celli

Bar 97ff Solo Flute

Var. 12

Bar 97ff Solo Flute

Var. 12

A# in second violins

It is interesting to observe that some variations are in fact variations of the previous ones,¹ e.g. No. 28 being a varied form of No. 27, as well as Nos. 24, 25, and 26, which are variations of Nos. 1, 2, and 3 respectively. The motto motif (prepared in No. 20, and further elaborated in No. 27) returns in No. 29, in a subtle combination with the passacaglia theme, which, at the same time, is also identical with the main theme from the first movement.

Bar 145
Vas. 18

Bar 153
Vas. 19

Bar 161
Vas. 20

Bar 233
Vas. 29
pizz.

Flute
Vas. 27

Obor.

Clar.

Bar 225
Clar.
Vas. 28

1. This procedure is already encountered in Brahms's variation sets on themes by Handel and Paganini.

CONCLUSION.

In his symphonies, Brahms utilized all the established variation techniques of his forerunners in order to effect a continuous transformation of the different themes, thus producing variety within unity.

The passacaglia from the Fourth Symphony, a revival of the Baroque ostinato variation, is a fitting end to the symphonic creations of a composer, who not only held the variation form as such in high estimation, but applied variation technique to many of his large-scale works. Revival of the Baroque style in its literal sense, i.e. to utilize Baroque principles in 19th century composition, was one of the main aims of the composer, whose position may subsequently be compared to that of Mozart, reflecting the past and incorporating it with the present. The extreme concentration of his writing, effected through continuous thematic transformation, and other methods of modification of themes, is a principle inherited from the Baroque, but equally prominent in the masterworks of the Classical period.

The classification of Brahms as a "posthumous musician",^{1.} however, presents only the retrospective viewpoint. Close investigation of his compository technique inevitably forces us to reconsider our attitude. The musician of modern times finds himself confronted with the question whether he can still afford to dismiss these symphonies as traditionalistic or conservative. Two elements in particular dominate Brahms's work, rhythm and logical continuity of thought, two elements, which in like manner govern many schools of modern composition.

It would transgress the limits of this essay to offer a solution to problems which as yet have not been fully investigated. However, even within the limited scope of this discussion, Brahms should have emerged as a master between the periods,

1. See Alfred Einstein: "Music in the Romantic Era" Page 150. J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., London.

reflecting the past, but also pointing towards "New Paths",¹ thereby fulfilling his desire to create something new out of the given.

1. See Schumann's article "New Paths" - Page 363 in the Appendix to Richard Specht's book on "Brahms"
J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., London.

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