Das Lied von der Erde: Mahler’s Musical Ontology

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To Philipp, who understood, and listened to Mahler in his final hours.
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Earth, isn’t this what you want: to arise
in us invisibly? Isn’t it your dream
to be invisible someday? Earth! Invisible!
What, if not transformation, is your urgent charge?
Earth, my darling, I will! Oh believe me,
you need no more of your Springs to win me—, one,
just one, is already too much for my blood.
Namelessly I’m wed to you forever.
You have always been right, and your most sacred tenet
is Death the intimate Friend.

Look, I am living. On what? Neither childhood nor future
grow less . . . . . Overabundant existence wells up in my heart.

—Rilke, from “The Ninth Elegy”
Introduction

While living in Vienna in 1907—just as he began to imagine Das Lied von der Erde—Gustav Mahler spent an evening with the ubiquitous Count Henry Graf Kessler. In the Count’s diaries we learn what Mahler believed was the basis for Richard Wagner’s popular success:

Mahler said that with Wagner …[he was successful] because he had been the first great composer who *paint*ed *nature*. The romantics… made a beginning, but Wagner had carried this to completion. With him as in nature everything remains in flux. Nowhere is there a conclusion, nothing returns in exactly the same way as in earlier music.¹

From Kessler’s first-hand account we are privy to what Mahler himself admired in Wagner—to *paint* nature. It is often said that to know Mahler one must know Wagner, and some scholarship has been devoted to the discussion of compositional techniques that Mahler inherited from Wagner. Yet, the particulars of how Wagner—in method and style—*paint*ed *nature* is not the subject of this thesis. Nor shall we trace how Mahler heard Wagner’s brush painting the natural world. We are, here, more concerned with what Mahler is saying about his own compositions; in praising Wagner as a *painter of nature*, Mahler in one stroke identifies what he sees as the genius of Wagner, implicitly aligning himself with that genius and appropriating it for himself.

The idea of Nature as ever-changing underscores both the philosophical framework behind Das Lied von der Erde (hereafter Das Lied) as well as the musical materials used to compose out these concepts. Theodor Adorno asserts that in Das Lied,

as in Symphony 9, Mahler celebrates “the splendor of immediate life reflected in the medium of memory.” By approaching Das Lied largely from the standpoint of nature in flux, we may begin to imagine how it is possible that Mahler could create in music both the immanent sensation of “the splendor of immediate life” while still holding it in the “medium of memory.” This seeming paradox becomes an ontological truth once we enter into the piece with Nature as our key.

Mahler shared with Rainer Marie Rilke (1875-1926) an intellectual world in the early 20th century in which artists, like Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, and T. S. Eliot, all steeped in Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, were taking on problems concerning man’s way of being in the world, ontological questions which stand at the fore of the art Rilke and Mahler created. The question at the center of this ontology concerns man’s mortality. Rilke’s “The Ninth Elegy” from Duino Elegies (1923) poses the same questions of man’s mortality that Mahler’s song-symphony Das Lied poses. An understanding of Nature led them both to speak of the earth as well as the knowledge we gain from this relationship to Nature that aids us in answering these questions. Mahler’s piece is literally The Song of the Earth (Das Lied von der Erde) and the “The Ninth Elegy” asks the same ontological question, namely, how is man to leave the earth.

Rilke, like Mahler, addresses the earth as “liebe”—dear earth. He points to “transformation” as the defining characteristic of Nature and the dissolution of man into Nature as Nature rises up invisibly inside man. The image seen in the poem of spring’s renewal as contrasted with the surety of death, “the intimate friend,” is important to Das Lied. Finally, the protagonist describes childhood as not growing less intense but rather

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welling up inside of him. Similarly, Adorno speaks of the “sensation of immediate life reflected in the medium of memory.”

In this thesis, I will highlight Mahler’s profound embrace of Nature in *Das Lied*. In his world-view “[n]ature embraces everything…” – an idea synonymous with the infinite wholeness of all things. Through this approach we perceive how Mahler shows man in various ways standing apart from Nature (movements 1-5) until “Der Abschied” (movement 6) in which man experiences transcendence into the wholeness of all things and thereby, the infinite reality of Nature.

I will proceed in my interpretation of *Das Lied* with a background chapter in which I will lay out a few crucial points of biographical information surrounding this time in Mahler’s life. The chapter will also lay the foundation of Mahler’s philosophical background. His exposure to and understanding of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and others are absolutely crucial to piecing together Mahler’s ontology. In Chapter Two I will analyze Part I of *Das Lied*, which lays the ground work in terms of dramatic and spiritual preparation for the transcendence in Part II. In Chapter Three I will treat the text, which Mahler set and altered for Part II. This will prepare us to understand the last movement, which I will tackle in Chapter Four.

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Chapter 1

Setting the Stage

Mahler started composing Das Lied von der Erde in the summer of 1908. The prior year was a tragic one for Mahler. He left his prestigious position at the Vienna opera in mid-June of 1907 under tenuous circumstances. Shortly thereafter, in July of 1907, he and his wife Alma suffered the loss of their elder daughter Maria (Putzi), age 4, to diphtheria. Immediately following the death of his beloved daughter, Mahler was diagnosed with a heart condition forcing him to restrict his levels of activity. Alma wrote of the diagnosis in her diaries as “the beginning of the end for Mahler.” Her dramatic take on his diagnosis has inspired much over-romanticized interpretation of Das Lied von der Erde as Mahler’s reaction to the knowledge of his impending death. Yet, this proves not to be the case, as we find that Mahler suffered from mitral incompetence or stenosis—a heart condition that, though debilitating in some ways, is not immediately fatal. Deeply disturbing to Mahler was the fact that his doctor ordered him to abstain from his long nature walks that were so dear to him.

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6 Ibid., 695.
The concern with mortality does not make its first appearance in Mahler’s oeuvre in *Das Lied*. From Symphony 1, where Mahler provides the funeral march of the hero, to the *Kindertotenlieder*, death has been ever-present as a concern in Mahler’s compositions. But in preparing to write *Das Lied* something had changed for Mahler:

But I can only come to myself and become conscious of myself here in solitude… If I am to find the way back to myself, then I must give myself up to the horrors of loneliness. But basically I am still only speaking in riddles, for you do not know what transpired and is transpiring in me; but it’s not at all that hypochondriac fear of death, as you imagine. I already realized previously that I shall have to die. But without here trying to explain or describe to you something for which there are perhaps no words at all, I shall only tell you that quite simply at a stroke I lost all the clarity and reassurance that I ever achieved; and that I stood *vis-à-vis de rien* and now at the end of a life I must learn to walk and stand as a beginner.\(^7\)

The quotation above is taken from a letter Mahler wrote to Bruno Walter around the time he composed the second movement of Das Lied. In it, Mahler attributes to solitude a regaining of self, to help counter a defamiliarization with being-in-the-world. This marks an evolution in Mahler’s tenuous relationship with his own mortality at the time of Das Lied’s composition. Inexplicably, the composer who deals with questions of mortality through composing is suddenly at a complete loss. Whether this new paralysis was due to the death of his child, the uncertainty of his career, or his diagnosis, we cannot know for sure. To attempt to explain Mahler’s complicated psychological state at this time with biography would not help us to understand the piece. What we can be sure of is that he decided to write a piece of music that set out a full musical ontology.

In Das Lied, Mahler composes about mortality in a different way than in any of his other works. From start to finish this piece is concerned unlike any of his others with death. This is no longer the heavenly life of Symphony 4 or 2. Though we do not know why Mahler felt like a beginner we know he felt ready to try and take Das Lied on as a full-blown discussion of mortality. The question remained about how he would go about doing this. For this compositional task, Mahler drew upon his central philosophical beliefs, the underpinnings of which we need to examine.
Philosophical Underpinnings

Mahler embraced the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Gustav Fechner (1801-1887), as well as some aspects of Eastern thought. Access to this material dates back at least to the composer’s early years in Vienna and finds expression in his earlier compositions perhaps most vividly in Mahler’s second and third symphonies. Mahler found a particular importance in Nietzsche’s symbol of the Dionysian art as the touchstone of freeness, laid out in *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music* (1872):

> In Dionysian art and its tragic symbolism the same Nature cries to us with its true, undissembled voice: “Be as I am! Amid the ceaseless flux of phenomena, I am the eternally creative primordial mother, eternally impelling to existence, eternally finding satisfaction in this change of phenomena!”

This image of Nature calling out to the artist to embrace its ceaseless flux resonates strongly with Mahler’s idea of *painting nature in flux*.

Nietzsche goes on to discuss Dionysian “primordial oneness.” This oneness embodies the idea of man reconnecting with Nature. And through the union of man with Nature the world is redeemed from its suffering:

> Under the charm of the Dionysian, not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but Nature, which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man.\(^9\)

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\(^9\) Ibid., 37.
As did Nietzsche, Mahler understood Nature as more than the sum of its constituent parts, as the underlying force in the world that connected everyone and everything. Through the act of transcending into wholeness—which Nature embodies—man overcomes a fear of death as the seeming end of self. Rather, death presents itself as the moment of absorption into the wholeness of Nature. This shift from the idea of individual death to absorption into Nature will prove to be central to the trajectory of *Das Lied*.

Mahler sets forth the specifics of how he understands Nature’s wholeness in a gloss on the vivid marking found in his First Symphony—*Wie Ein Naturlaut* (like a voice of Nature):

That Nature embraces everything that is at once awesome, magnificent, and lovable, nobody seems to grasp. It seems so strange to me that most people, when they mention the word Nature in connection with art, imply only flowers, birds, the fragrance of the woods, etc. No one seems to think of the mighty underlying mystery, the god Dionysus, the great Pan; and just that mystery is the burden of my phrase, *Wie Ein Naturlaut*. That, if anything, is my program, or the secret of my composition. My music is always the voice of Nature sounding in tone…Through them [music and poetry] the world, Nature as a whole, is released from its profound silence and opens its lips in song.  

The notion of Nature’s wholeness, important to Nietzsche and, as we see, Mahler, modified one important aspect of Schopenhauer’s idea of the Will as he describes it in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). The Schopenhauerian Will, as described, is the essence of man’s desire. This Will causes man to long or desire, linked to an infinite weariness. In so far as man desires, he will suffer:

All willing springs from need, therefore from efficiency, and therefore from suffering. Satisfaction brings the need to an end, but for every desire that is satisfied there are at least ten that are denied. Moreover, desiring

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10 Engel, *Gustav Mahler*, 73.
Salvation from Schopenhauerian suffering, according to Nietzsche, is achieved through
the absorption into Nature’s wholeness. Man can thus revel in Nature and its ever-
changing character. This idea of Nature as ever in flux is present also in Buddhist
philosophy. The Buddhist term for this—in Pāli anicca—refers to the impermanence of
Nature. “In Nature there are no static and stable ‘things’; there are only ever-changing,
ever-moving processes…change is the very essence of Nature.”

Stephen Hefling describes the act of Mahler’s composing and work of Buddhist philosophy as comparable
ways of “stilling the will.”

Fechner too describes a stilling of the Will when he describes the stilling of
restless thoughts and a lack of seeking. His writings resonate with Mahler ideas in their
description of how man exists in relation to Nature, in life and in death:

World as Will and Presentation, vol. 1 (Upper Saddle River, NJ. Prentice Hall, 2011),
Book III, 196.
12 Lily de Silva, The Buddhist Attitude Towards Nature
http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/desilva/attitude.html (Accessed April 5, 2012)
13 Hefling, Cambridge Music Handbook to Das Lied von der Erde, 43: “Western interest
in oriental culture had been both widespread and eclectic… Moreover, as we have seen,
Mahler was from his youth steeped in Schopenhauer, whose call for the Buddhistic
stilling of the will, ‘the veil of Maya,’ is liberally laced with allusions to classics of
Eastern literature. Such meditative withdrawal from earthly hubbub is precisely what
Mahler sought to compose into the Ruckert song ‘Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen’
shortly after his brush with death in 1901. Thus spiritual transformation is one root of the
orientalism in Das Lied.”
The spirit will no longer wander over mountain and field, or be surrounded by the delights of spring, only to mourn that it all seems exterior to him; but, transcending earthly limitations, he will feel new strength and joy… Stilled is all restlessness of thought, which no longer needs to seek in order to find itself…

He describes man’s way of being with Nature in life as something that seems external from man; the divide still persists. Yet, he goes on to describe the stilling of the Will. There is no longer restlessness and seeking. Fechner also explains man’s relationship to Nature after death as a merging of man and Nature—the divide is finally torn down:

When man dies, … as the waves roll forth into the sea of ether and the sea of air, he will not merely feel the blowing of the wind and the wash of the waves against his body, but he will himself murmur in the air and sea; no more wander outwardly through verdant woods and meadows, but himself consciously pervade both wood and meadow and those wandering there.

These descriptions of Nature as an all-encompassing entity connect directly to Mahler’s musical ontology.

Important also to Mahler’s perspective is the notion of letting oneself live within the uncertainties of this impermanence, as described in Buddhist thought. The English poet John Keats wrote of “Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” To Keats, this “being in uncertainties” was the mark of a “Man of Achievement”—a great artist. Rilke, too, understood the importance of living the questions now, so that

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15 Ibid., 117.
“perhaps [one] will then gradually without even noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

This manner of being is akin to Mahler’s realization of letting go of control and goal-oriented living—of the constant striving and longing of the Will. It is the release of the all-important ego in Western culture. In Western thought, where so much emphasis is placed on the individual, death is tragic because it consists in the loss of the ego. Therefore, man must find another mode of living—another ontology—that does not leave him in such a pitiful state at the end of life. From an infinite viewpoint, attained through wholeness, death is no longer tragic and one is privy to this understanding only when open to the uncertainties that the infinite implies.

Throughout his entire symphonic repertoire, Mahler tried out different solutions to the problem of how to be in the world and deal with death. In Das Lied, as it is in the Eastern thought that Mahler is clearly gesturing towards, the value of the ego (of the hero) is non-existent. The solution Mahler ultimately comes to in Das Lied and the Symphony 9 is an understanding of one’s existence as taking part in the wholeness of all things. What Das Lied did for Mahler was to intimate the reconciliation of the contradictory realities of life and death through the notion of transcending a wholeness of being into Nature.

Mahler chose eighth-century Chinese poetry from a German translation by Hans Bethge to serve as the text for Das Lied. Bethge himself came to know the poetry in a French translation, as he was not a speaker of Chinese. A year later his translations of the Marquis d’Hervey-Saint-Denys, Poésies de l’époque des Thang and Judith Gautier’s Le

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*Livre du Jade* were published under the title *Die chinesische Flöte* (The Chinese Flute).

His vibrant description of his first encounter with the poetry illuminates also some of the reasons why Mahler might have been attracted to this poetry:

> When I first laid my eyes on some of these lyrics from the Chinese, I was utterly enchanted. Imagine my feelings on encountering so lovely a lyric art! I perceived a fragile, quasi-evanescent tenderness of lyrical sound. I gazed at a fully realized imagistic art in words that illuminated melancholy and the riddle of existence. I sensed a tremulously delicate, fine-tuned lyrical quality, pregnant with symbolism, something tender, fragrant, of the nature of moonlight, flower-like in a graceful rendering of emotion.¹⁸

“‘The volume was remarkably successful, no doubt because it tapped into a vein of japonaiserie already mined by Jugendstil artists.”¹⁹ It consisted of eighty-three poems.

Much debate surrounds precisely when Mahler received a copy of Bethge’s book. As La Grange has it, Mahler received the book in the summer of 1907 as a gift from Theobald Pollack.²⁰ Others have argued that the book would not have been available to Mahler until the fall of 1907. Regardless, the poems given to him by Pollack inspired Mahler to compose *Das Lied*.

Mahler selected seven poems from Bethge’s collection that would become the six movements of *Das Lied*. The poems underwent serious alteration from the Chinese originals, first by the French translators, then by Bethge and, finally, by Mahler himself. In choosing the poems to include in movements 1-5, Mahler asserts the ontological project he is undertaking with the piece as a whole. All the poems Mahler chose are ripe with images of Nature. Despite the great variety within these poems, there must have

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²⁰ La Grange vol. 3, 700.
been a clear picture in his view of how these disparate poems would coalesce to provide some kind of dramatic trajectory. The poems exhibit a unity of themes and images. This thematic imagery as well as Mahler’s alterations to the text serve to unfold the overarching path to transcendence. The specific topics of each movement and their various images and modes of narration, coalesce to form the precondition, realization, and transformation necessary to achieve the ecstatic acceptance of death in the final movement. Each movement focuses on one aspect of the journey: awareness of the human condition (mvt. 1); longing (mvt. 2); youthful ignorance (mvt. 3); lustful longing (mvt. 4); drink-induced denial (mvt. 5); and ecstatic acceptance of death (mvt. 6).
Chapter 2

On the Dramatic Trajectory

The symphony divides into two parts: Part I, movements 1-5 (“The drinking song of the misery of the earth,” “The lonely one in autumn,” “Of youth,” “Of beauty” and “The drunkard in spring”) and Part II, movement 6 (“The farewell”). Within Part I movements 1 and 5 work together to frame the inner movements 2, 3, and 4. The first movement establishes the dramatic conflict of man’s mortality that is to be reconciled in the last movement of the symphony. Movement 5 reasserts that conflict, although still unresolved, through the recurring images of spring, drink, and man’s mortality. Part II, a single movement, equal in length to all of Part I, resolves the conflict first established at the beginning of Part I.

Within the middle movements, Mahler paints vignettes of the conflict—vignettes of people who enact the human condition as it is described in the first movement. Together, they forecast, in a non-prescriptive manner, the preparation needed to achieve the resolution at the end. These movements do not trace from beginning to end the journey of man, but rather weave between non-narrative portraits of human life. Even within these disparate vignettes Mahler continues to reference Nature. In fact, Nature is the overarching idea that connects them. He gives us autumn in “Der Einsame im Herbst,”

21 “The conflict that the first ‘Trinklied’ unfolds is, as it were, put to one side, and, in the four songs that follow, the alternating soloists explore contrasting aspects of the human condition in songs that are self-containedly melancholy (Song 2), gay (Song 3), exuberantly poignant (Song 4) and protestingly ironic (Song 5).” Donald Mitchell. *Gustav Mahler, Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death: Interpretations and Annotations* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986), 217.
spring in “Von der Jugend,” summer in “Von der Schönheit,” and spring again in “Der Trunkene im Frühling.” That the seasons appear “out of order” signals Nature’s omnipresence, which in turn explains the seeming non-linearity of the dramatic unfolding.

“The Lonely One in Autumn” longs in solitude for the return of spring and thus in her longing suffers. “Von der Jugend” describes a scene of ignorant youth who enjoy the fleeting pleasure of life, oblivious to the suffering that will befall them once they are awake to it. The artificiality of the music (discussed below) strengthens this interpretation, as does the central image in the poem of reflection, as reflection is counterfeit and artificial in its nature. “Von der Schönheit” depicts a scene of suffering through the longing and lust of a young girl daydreaming about handsome horsemen as she sits by a riverbank. Mahler takes the opportunity to play with the contrast between masculinity and femininity, as we’ll see in the musical discussion. Mahler’s textual alterations are there described. In “Der Trunkene im Frühling,” Mahler prepares the listener for the finale by reminding him of the conflict set up in the first movement of the mortality of man as contrasted to the renewal of the earth. The drunkard in the song rejects the image of spring and chooses mindless oblivion, i.e., drink, in lieu of spiritual reawakening.

Movement 3 is often considered to evoke summer along with movement 4. However, in an early manuscript (see Figure 2.1) Mahler labels the movement “Lenz.”
Figure 2.1 Movement 3 Manuscript inscribed with “Lenz”\textsuperscript{23}

It is important to note that the “song” cited in the symphony’s title is not heard until the very end of Part II. This ecstatic song, (hereafter “the song of the earth”) as will become clear, appears because transcendence through death is achieved. Yet Mahler names the entire symphony *The Song of the Earth*. These vignettes are all connected by the fact that they are fragments of human experience on earth—of people trying to sing *Das Lied*. It is only in the last movement that the song is realized but all six movements have it as their goal. In Part I the protagonists of each song fail to reach transcendence and this withholding of *Das Lied* makes its long-awaited iteration all the more powerful.

The separation between man and Nature lessens over the course of the symphony. Achievement of “the song of the earth” comes once this separation is mended. Mahler’s notion of *painting nature* is directly related to the attempt to tear down that division. What man achieves at the end is the dissolution of that divide. And what we see in each of the songs leading up to it is the permeability of the divide. Man stands apart from Nature in much of the symphony. Yet, Mahler prepares us for that ultimate breakdown of the wall, by intimating man with Nature in a few of the movements of *Das Lied*. Mahler moves freely between various human experiences in the way that man would pervade Nature after death as Fechner describes it.

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24 “Der Einsame,” for example.
Drinking song of the misery of the earth

The wine in the golden goblet is already beckoning, but do not drink yet, first, I will sing you a song! The Song of Sorrow shall sound, laughing its way into your souls.
When sorrow draws near, the gardens of the soul will lie desolate, joy and song will wither and die.
Dark is life, dark is death.

Lord of this house! Your cellar is full of golden wine! Here, this lute I call my own! To strum on the lute and empty glasses – these are the things that go together. A full goblet of wine at the proper moment is worth more than all the riches of the world! Dark is life, dark is death.

The firmament is forever blue and the earth will long stand fast and blossom in spring. But you, Man, how long will you remain? Not a hundred years are you allowed to enjoy all the rotten triviality of this earth!

Look down there! In the moonlight, on the grave crouches a wild ghostly figure – It is an ape! Hear how its howls resound piercingly in the sweet fragrance of life! Now take the wine! Now is the time – enjoy! Empty the golden goblet to the bottom! Dark is life, dark is death!
Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde

In the first movement, “Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde,” Mahler establishes man’s profound alienation from Nature and, therefore, from the possibility of accepting his own mortality. Reconciling this alienation will become the journey of Das Lied. As Hefling says “Das Lied is founded on syzygial polarities.” The polarity that drives much of the work is the tension between life and death. More specifically, the Heldentenor’s realization of the relative brevity of human life as opposed to the earth’s constant renewal in spring becomes the focus of this conflict:

The firmament is forever blue and the earth will long stand fast and blossom in spring. But you, Man, how long will you remain?

The third stanza (fragment above) emphasizes the contrast between man’s short life vs. the renewing earth, while also drawing out the distinction between the firmament and the earth. If these important elements are not regarded as distinct from one another in considering the work’s meaning, Mahler’s central message can easily become difficult to decipher (see discussion of movement 6 below).

Returning now to the beginning of the poem and also the opening of the symphony, we observe a very interesting rhetorical gesture in the first stanza:

The wine in the golden goblet is already beckoning, but do not drink yet, first, I will sing you a song!

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25 Hefling, Das Lied von der Erde, 80.
Mahler begins this symphony with a meta-song—a song that is about singing a song—thereby problematizing the idea of song and the ability to sing. This will continue to be the case for the first two stanzas. The tenor thus continues:

The Song of Sorrow shall sound, *laughing its way into your soul.*
When sorrow draws near, *the gardens of the soul will lie desolate,*
*joy and song will wither and die.*
Dark is life, and so is death.

Mahler’s changes are shown in italics. Although the changes in lines one and three are small alterations, the italicized portion in line two shows Mahler’s insertion of completely new text. He adds the image of the soul as a garden that has become a wasteland. His addition conjures the image of Nature, and does so in an important way. This is not Nature at its best; rather, Nature also suffers. The central theme of the song is the suffering of man. Mahler has inserted an image of Nature also suffering, thus joining man with Nature by implying that the soul consists of a garden.

This being a drinking song, drink plays an important role. Within the context of the entire symphony, movement 1 serves to establish drink as an important image that will reappear in movement 5 when the drunkard rejects spring. Movement 1 establishes the close relationship of drink and song. In the second stanza singing and drinking go hand in hand:

To strum on the lute and empty glasses –
these are the things that go together.

It is not until stanza four after we’ve actually heard the Song of Sorrow (stanza three) that we may in fact “take the wine!” Once we understand the misery of the human condition, then we deserve to drink as an antidote to suffering. The song, however, breaks down. If we understand song as the ability to lament the human condition, then the
breakdown of the song form points to the breakdown of expression and the ability to deal directly with the suffering in life. The inability to sing, and the absence of real song creates a kind of paralysis that causes one to revert to drinking.

In the third stanza (printed above) Mahler makes another significant alteration to Bethge’s text. In Bethge’s translation, the second line of stanza three reads “will long stand firm on its old feet” which Mahler changed to “will long endure and blossom again in spring.” Here again, Mahler introduces an image of Nature that wasn’t originally there. As described in the musical discussion of this movement, the musical interlude, preceding stanza four establishes the sound world of spring. This image of spring’s renewal plays an important role in the resolution of the symphony, when, in movement 6, the same image is recalled: “The dear earth everywhere blossoms in spring and grows green again!” [RH58].

Mahler also removes three lines from original at the end of stanza three. Following the image of the eternal blue firmament and the contrast drawn between it and man’s short life on earth, Bethge had the following lines:

Only one possession is surely yours:
   it is the grinning grave at the end.
Dark is life, dark is death.

The image of the “grinning grave” is the only quasi-morbid reference to death. The other references to death in the symphony are far more poetic than this. This strange specificity and anthropomorphizing of the grave render it somewhat trite. Elsewhere in the symphony death is presented as an abstraction. Mahler denotes “Farewell” in the title of the last movement to communicate leaving the earth. The image of the grinning grave does not coincide with the metaphysical leave-taking with which Mahler concerns
himself. Had he retained this imagery, his project of spiritual transformation would have been obscured. Not only does the imagery obscure the spiritual project of the entire symphony, it also contradicts the poem on its own terms. References to death within the poem include the refrain—“Dark is life, dark is death”—and the reference to man’s mortality—“Not a hundred years may you enjoy all the decaying baubles of this earth!” The refrain in its absolute simplicity communicates a somber sense of understanding that both life and death are “dark.” It is interesting to note the syzygial polarity of life and death. In the refrain, the poles are brought together. The reference to man’s mortality is philosophical in that it consists of a measuring of ourselves against Nature. With those references in mind, the phrase “grinning grave” seems almost cartoonish.

If we consider for a moment the original Chinese poem by Li-Bai (below) we see that the image of the grinning grave is not present. (My italics where grinning grave appears in Bethge). In fact, the image of the grinning grave was a product of Bethge’s poetic license in translation, because it is not present in Hervey St. Denis French version either. The line reads: “To live and die but once, that is all any man can be sure of.” Mahler’s decision to remove these lines was necessary to maintain a poetic continuity to the poem:

Sorrow comes; sorrow comes
Host has wine; pour not yet
Listen to my singing a sorrowful song
Sorrow approaches, neither sob nor laugh
This world—nobody knows my heart
You have several measures of wine,
I have three-foot lute
Lute playing complements happy drinking
One drink equals thousand taels of gold
Sorrow comes; sorrow comes
Everlasting as the heaven and the earth
Yet roomful of gold and jade shall not last
Hundred years of wealth amounts to what?
Everyone lives and dies only once
Lonely ape sits, howls the moon over the grave
Must empty this cup of wine in one gulp.

The final important alteration in this first poem comes in line four of the fourth stanza. Mahler changed “Abends” (evening) to “Lebens” (life) so that the sentence reads: “Hear how its howls resound piercingly in the sweet fragrance of life!” La Grange discusses this text alteration, citing Peter Oswald who states: “this change in wording makes the ape a symbol of death and its ‘howling’ suggests the irruption of death into life.”26 The howling ape image embodies man’s ardent cry in the face of his mortality, answered by transcendence at the symphony’s conclusion.

26 Oswald quoted in La Grange vol. 4, 1326 (footnote 154).
Musically, “Das Trinklied von Jammer der Erde” is organized as a synthesis of sonata-allegro and strophic form.\footnote{“Mahler has synthesized strophic song procedures with tonal modulation and large-scale deployment of thematic materials more characteristic of a binary sonata form.” Hefling, “Das Lied von der Erde” in The Mahler Companion. Andrew Nicholson and Donald Mitchell, eds, (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1999), 447.} Robert Bailey’s chart of the first movement (Figure 2.2) is often referenced in order to show both the strophic and sonata form forms at play.

Figure 2.2 Robert Bailey’s formal chart of Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde

The movement divides into four parts that clearly relate to sonata form: exposition I, exposition II, development, and recapitulation. Also in the vein of sonata form, each of the larger divisions listed above divide into A and B material, corresponding to 1\textsuperscript{st} theme and 2\textsuperscript{nd} theme, respectively. The A material is generally energetic and declamatory while...
the B material is more reflective and meditative. Later in the analysis, we will see how in the development section the order of A and B material is reversed so as to provide a better fit for the text. The strophic aspect of the form is conveyed through repetition of the refrain, “Dark is life, dark is death.” The refrain occurs three times—at the end of each exposition and at the end of the recapitulation.\(^\text{28}\)

This movement is the most “symphonic” of Das Lied’s six movements. Its bombastic use of the full arsenal of the orchestra is important to its dramatic function of opening the symphony and presenting the ontological crisis at hand. The use of sonata form helps this movement establish its presence as a large-scale orchestral first movement. Additionally, Mahler’s merging of song and sonata forms underscores the importance of song and its expressive means, central to the unfolding of the symphony’s musical ontology.

The pentatonic cell (Figure 2.3) appears as a generative motivic element in all of the movements, serving as the hallmark of Nature’s presence. This cell will guide the journey forward, as Mahler paints nature in flux in its various guises. Guido Adler (1855-1941), Moravian-born musicologist who befriended Mahler during their overlapping years in Vienna, charted the pentatonic cell in each of the movements (Figure 2.3).

\(^{28}\) In Bergthe’s original poem, the refrain occurred four times. However, Mahler removed the end of the 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) strophe, thus merging the strophes 3 and 4 into one strophe.
Figure 2.3 Adler’s chart of pentatonic cell permutations

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These ongoing motivic transformations epitomize Mahler’s compositional technique of *painting nature in flux*. As Mahler explained to Kessler in their evening together, “nowhere is there a conclusion, nothing returns in exactly the same way as in earlier music.”30 Given the cell’s association to the essence of Nature and the earth, following the ever-changing appearances of the pentatonic cell reveals the continuing presence of the force of Nature in pressing toward the moment of transcendence in “Der Abschied.”

The first exposition begins with a fifteen-measure orchestral introduction. The very first sound we hear is the ardent cry in the horns that sets off a chaotic flurry of chromatic descent and flutter-tongue in the flutes (horns only shown in Example 2.1). This quasi-heroic fanfare in the context of the ensuing chaos loses its heroic quality in exchange for a feeling of intense struggle. As Hefling points out, “it is not until the third strophe that [we] realize that this is the howling of the monkey on the gravestones.”31 Hefling calls this image the symbol of death. Yet, let us consider this as an image of man as a primal beast unable to deal with his mortal condition. At the onset of the symphony what we hear is the ardent cry of man, struggling to come to terms with his mortality.

Ex. 2.1 Opening fanfare of *Das Lied*

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30 Count Kessler, *Diaries*, 401-402.
The chaotic feeling of the opening of the piece comes, also, as a result of meter and harmony. The triple meter is strange in that it doesn’t impose a waltz or Ländler\textsuperscript{32} rhythmic gesture to the movement. Mahler marks *Ganz Takte, nicht schnell*, (whole bars, not fast), so it is very clearly felt in one. If the opening has any residual dance-like energy, it is only that of a deranged waltz. The hectic feeling is also felt harmonically. In the first strophe of the song that the tenor sings, we move to four different key areas as shown in the chart below (Figure 2.4).\textsuperscript{33}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening</th>
<th>A Minor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH2\textsuperscript{2}</td>
<td>C Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RH2</td>
<td>B-flat Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RH4</td>
<td>A Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RH6</td>
<td>B-flat Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RH11</td>
<td>G Minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.4 Key Areas Strophe 1 *Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde*

These abrupt harmonic juxtapositions, especially the A Minor/C Major shift here, hint at the larger opposition in this movement between A Major and A Minor. Although in the last movement C will be the true reconciler of A Minor, here, A Major serves as a counterfeit reconciler of A Minor, and ultimately foreshadows the C Major/Minor tension

\textsuperscript{32}“A 3/4 … without much trace of a waltz or Ländler about it” (Mitchell, *Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death*, 181). Mitchell goes on to say that the transcendence section at the end of “Der Abschied” (Die liebe Erde) is also written in 3/4.

\textsuperscript{33}RH abbreviates rehearsal number. Superscript designates the number of measures before or after the rehearsal number – e.g. RH2\textsuperscript{2} indicates two measures after rehearsal number 2.
that appears in the last movement. Specifically, in that last strophe of the first movement, the A/a conflict begins at the text “Hört ihr, wie sein Heulen hinausgellt in den süssen Duft des Lebens!” (Hear how its howls resound piercingly in the sweet fragrance of life!), set in A Minor. Thus A Minor is associated with man’s suffering in the face of his mortality. The exhortation to get drunk which directly follows, “Jetzt nehmt den Wein!” (Now take the wine!) employs A Major for the first time. It offers reconciliation to appease the pain of hearing the howling ape. The association of drinking with A Major will resurface in movement 5. As Donald Mitchell says, “the drunkard’s self-annihilating A [in movement 5] offers an ironic obverse to the ecstatic acceptance of oblivion that is the goal of ‘Der Abschied.’” Here too, the idea of drink as a way of dealing with mortality is shut down; Mahler makes clear that A Major cannot provide a path for coming to terms with death.

The A/a conflict is compressed into just the last iteration of the refrain [RH17] that starts in A Minor but ends in A Major. This refrain rises by a half step each time it is uttered. In the early version of this song, Mahler set each of the refrains in A Major. This sort of harmonic return at the end of each stanza shows that Mahler at first had a more strophic conception of the piece. However, in later versions he changes the key of each refrain, such that with each iteration there is an upward progression by half step: G Minor to A-flat Major to A Major.

Mitchell maintains that “the ascending musical ideas … embody that part of the drinking song’s character …[that] … protest against the sentiments of the very poem that

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34 Mitchell, *Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death*, 183.
is being set.” If we apply Mitchell’s idea that the ascending lines in this movement are subtle indications of hope, then this upward progression of tonality can be interpreted as a striving for hope. As previously discussed, this movement only reaches A Major. It strives for something to appease the suffering and finds consolation in the counterfeit abundance of drink, which is part of the rotten triviality mentioned in the third strophe.

The poetry of this song invokes clear images of Nature—the moon, the ape, the earth. However, Mahler goes further in painting nature than this simple pointing. In the third strophe, Mahler takes care to paint nature itself. Previously in the movement we have been immersed in man’s sound world. In this section, we actually hear the sound world of Nature. According to Mitchell, Henry-Louis de La Grange has a sketch of this movement in which Mahler has marked the world Lenz (spring) above the English horn at RH25+30. There is a huge change in the music’s mood and character as we depart man’s sound world for that of Nature. It seems clear from Mahler’s inscription that he was thinking of painting nature in this section. The next strophe [RH31−1] introduces the idea of the Nature as infinite: “The firmament is forever blue and the earth will long stand fast and blossom in spring.” In the orchestral interlude that precedes it Mahler paints nature, thus foreshadowing the text we hear at RH31. The interlude conjures Nature in order to prepare us to hear it in the following strophe. So, too, will we be able to recognize Nature’s sound in the final release at the appearance of “the song of the earth.” Example 2.2 a) and b) shows the melodic similarity between these two moments.

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35 Ibid., 182.
Example 2.2

a) RH58 *Der Abschied* “the song of the earth”

b) RH31 *Das Trinklied*
The drinking song creates a reversal of expectations when the tenor declares that he will sing a song about the misery of the earth but then fails to do so. For the first two strophes he only muses about the idea of song. It is not until the third and final strophe after the spring-like orchestral interlude that we actually hear the song that he sets out to sing. When we finally do hear it [RH31], it is clear that the song is, in fact, a song about man’s misery, not the misery of the earth.
The lonely one in autumn

Autumn mists undulate bluish over the lake; all the grass stands stiff with frost; one might think an artist had strewn jade dust over all the delicate blossoms.

The sweet scent of flowers has flown away; a cold wind forces them to bow their stems low. Soon the wilted golden leaves of lotus flowers will drift upon the water.

My heart is weary. My small lamp has gone out with a splutter; it reminds me of sleep. I come to you, comfort place of rest! Yes, give me rest – I have need of rejuvenation.

I weep much in my solitude. The autumn in my heart has lasted too long. Sun of love, will you never shine again, gently to dry my bitter tears?
The second movement of Das Lied, “Der Einsame im Herbst,” falls at the opposite pole of the expressive spectrum from the first movement. As Johnson says, this movement “seems to start from a kind of lyrical degree zero” one that is matched in mood only by the last movement. In order to conjure this feeling of solitude, Mahler has significantly pared down the full force of the orchestra heard in the first movement. The opening two-part texture consists of an impersonal Lydian-based violin ostinato over which the oboe plays a tired melody. Mahler marks Ermüdet (weary), foreshadowing the moment in “Der Abschied” when “weary mankind”—“Die müden Menschen”—seeks rest and peace.

The difference in address between the first and second movements is also noteworthy. In the first movement the protagonist addresses an audience—“Lord of this House”—whereas this movement suggests no audience at all—but instead Nature is addressed, underscoring the portrait of solitude. As vividly displayed in Mahler’s work practice and confirmed in a letter her wrote to Bruno Walter in 1908, Mahler himself sought solitude as a means of self-recovery:

But I can only come to myself and become conscious of myself here in solitude. – For ever since that panic-stricken terror I felt that time, I have tried to do nothing other than to look away and avert my ears. – If I am to find the way back to myself, then I must give myself up to the terrors of [solitude].

Certainly Mahler could himself address Nature in this setting and discover the sounds of his musical ontology.

37 Hefling, Das Lied von der Erde, 34.
Four expressive outbursts erupt out of the pervasive weariness. As in the
Schopenhauerian context where weariness and outbursts of the Will are forever linked, so
here, each outburst depicts a musical outburst of the Will and a clear element in Mahler’s
musical ontology. Yet each time, the expressive voice returns to the tired landscape
established in the orchestral introduction. This movement ultimately fails to bring
transcendence, as does all of Part I. It is Mahler’s intention to say with them “No, that is
not the way.”

The second movement explores the idea of expression through these alternating
moments of exhausted emotional emptiness and outbursts of desire. The expressive
outbursts are labeled on the chart below with a star. The tonalities Mahler uses—B-flat
Major, D Major, G Minor and E-flat Major—are marked within his musical ontological
lexicon and as signposts on the journey to transcendence. Together the outbursts and the
tonal changes delineate a varied strophic form.
"Strophe" refer to stanzas of the poems as printed before. Each strophe divides into two parts. Part one consists of lines one and two and part two of lines three and four. Measure numbers refer to larger formal sections, i.e. A and B rather than duration of key areas. Here is where the formal pattern is undermined. D-major is a surprise here.

Figure 2.5 Formal chart of *Der Einsame im Herbst*

Paying close attention to Mahler’s performance directions explicates the unfolding drama. I use this word “drama,” pointedly to disagree with Mitchell’s claim that “the songs that comprise the central part (movements 2 to 5) of *Das Lied* are non-dramatic.”

Each expressive outburst punctuates the drama of movement 2.

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38 Mitchell, *Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death*, 217.
At the start of the movement, within the context of *Etwas schleichend* (somewhat lingering) and *Ermüdet* (weary), Mahler marks the oboe’s pentatonic fragmentary melody as *molto espressivo*. Already it seems that Mahler is playing with the idea of expression. The antecedent phrase of the oboe’s melody consists almost solely of the notes D-C-A (Ex. 2.3). The appearance of Nature’s pentatonic marker coupled with the fact that this is simply a rhythmic variation on three notes, gives Mahler’s *molto espressivo* marking a special weight. The oboe as designated “singing” voice is free to be expressive, although given little substantive musical material with which to be expressive. Mahler gives further performance instruction with the hairpin (m. 3) over the oboe’s first sigh motive. Later when the motive returns in the violins it is marked *ohne Ausdruck* (without expression) only to be immediately repeated in the flutes marked *espressivo* [RH3].

Example 2.3 Opening of *Der Einsame im Herbst*

When the voice enters [RH3\textsuperscript{15}] Mahler marks *Etwas zurückhaltend* (somewhat held back). Both the descending scalar antecedent and its consequent ascending scale are
restrained and quite unexpressive in character. The held-back feeling and the violin ostinato are maintained until the first full-blown expressive outburst of the piece [RH4\textsuperscript{+4}] led by the horn. Here the violin ostinato finally takes a break. The horn is instructed to play \textit{molto espressivo} and to “sing nobly.” The cello is also instructed to be expressive. For a brief six measures the music suddenly changes into an expressive outburst, a Schopenhauerian manifestation of the Will. A bit of chromaticism and the expressive leaps in both the cello and horn line communicate this change. This bout of expression is truncated at the moment when the voice enters [RH5\textsuperscript{+4}] on an E-flat. Here again, Mahler’s specificity is significant. He marks a crescendo on the alto’s first note, however it is immediately silenced by a \textit{subito pianissmo}. Sure enough the clarinet is marked \textit{ohne Ausdruck} (without expression) at the moment the unconsummated expressive voice is silenced and the weary violin ostinato recommences [RH5\textsuperscript{+5}].

The next expressive outburst comes at the start of the second strophe of the poem [RH8\textsuperscript{+4}]. The outburst is stronger and lasts longer this time. The same horn line initiates the outburst; this time supported by the cellos as the violas take the cello’s expressive melodic line. The voice is not immediately stifled this time. It’s allowed more expressive leeway as it is marked \textit{mit zärtlichem Ausdruck} (with gentle expression) [RH9\textsuperscript{+2}]. At RH10 when Mahler indicates \textit{zart drangend} (gently pressing) and \textit{zart leidenschaftlich} (gentle passion), the music becomes even more wrought with emotion. The violin melodies begin to soar and a rhapsodic element of slurred arpeggiated triplets is passed between the strings. The passion builds to an \textit{Adagietto-esque} broken chord in the
strings.\textsuperscript{40} At this moment, the speaker in the poem begins to come to terms with the human condition through her observations of Nature changing. She observes death in Nature, which conjures thoughts of her own death. This inspires an impassioned outburst [RH10-RH11], as she struggles with the idea of her own death. The next words she speaks, “Mein Herz ist müde,” (My heart is weary) mark her full embrace of the movement’s pervasive weariness. Mahler marks this text ohne Ausdruck (without expression), linking exhaustion and lack of expression absolutely. We will hear the same melodic contour again in “Der Abschied” (RH15\textsuperscript{+3}) at the resurfacing of weariness for one of the last times before the journey’s completion (Ex. 2.4).\textsuperscript{41}

Example 2.4

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example2.4.png}
\caption{Example 2.4}
\end{figure}

a) RH11 Der Einsame im Herbst – tiredness motive

b) RH15\textsuperscript{+3} Der Abschied “die müd en Menschen”

\textsuperscript{40} The Adagietto from Symphony 5 is, dramaturgically speaking, the perfect referent here, assuming that we accept that this movement portrays love.

\textsuperscript{41} After the musical landscape entered back into weariness, the flute for the first time in the movement accompanies the voice. The manner in which they interact is reminiscent of the first recitative of “Der Abschied.”
The third outburst in the movement is paradoxically a more interior outburst. Mahler marks *innig* (inner) [RH13] as the protagonist longs for death in a shocking turn to D Major. Inscribed in this outburst that turns inward, the protagonist asks for peace. Mahler in fact changed the original request—asking for sleep—to the request for peace:

> Ich komm zu dir, traute Ruhestätte!
> Ja, gib mir *Ruh*, [Schlafl originally]
> ich hab Erquickung not!

I come to you, comfort place of rest!
Yes, give me rest,
I have need of rejuvenation.

After this pronouncement, we return to the music of the orchestral introduction [RH15]. This time the bassoon plays the oboe melody in the lower octave. The fourth outburst quickly follows at RH17. The protagonist recognizes that “the autumn in [her] heart has lasted too long.” She has already realized that she wants to get to that place that we reach in “Der Abschied.” And she now also recognizes that holding onto autumn—holding onto anything—is not the way to reach that place. In this moment when autumn is deeply felt Mahler marks *mit voller Empfindung, leidenschaftlich* (with full feeling, passionate).

At the moment of her recognition that she has been holding onto autumn for too long, we hear an upsurge of Nature. We hear in the passage that Nature is aiding and abetting this desire. In the course of *Das Lied* our relationship to Nature is changing. The manifestation of desire and the expression of it in the music are changing. This is how Mahler paints *nature in flux*. At this point this is the protagonist’s relationship to Nature. As will become clear, a different kind of relationship to Nature emerges in “Der Abschied”—one of ecstatic entering into and becoming one with Nature. That is certainly not what we hear at the climax of this movement [RH18].

The “Sonne der Liebe” moment in this movement marked “with great upsurge”—*mit großem Aufschwung* (with greater drive)—precurses the “O Schönheit” moment in
the last movement. Both of these moments are celebrations of love-life-Nature, however in both instances the protagonist is not adequately prepared to achieve transcendence.

Contrastingly, in “Der Abschied,” at the arrival [RH58] of the “song of the earth”—“die liebe Erde”—Mahler writes ohne Steigerung (without increase). Finally, desire no longer rules.

The last phrase the alto sings is also the “die müden Menschen” motive. After the last emotive bout in E-flat Major the music returns to the D Minor ohne Ausdruck (without expression). Despite all her striving, the protagonist ultimately fails to reach transcendence. The silencing of the expressive voice in the movement is not an oppression of the self, but rather a quieting of the desire that causes man’s suffering.
Of youth

In the middle of the little pond stands a pavilion of green and white porcelain.

Like the back of a tiger the jade bridge arches across toward the pavilion.

In the little house sit friends, beautifully dressed, drinking, chatting, many are writing verses down.

Their silk sleeves slide backwards, their silk caps sit jauntily on the backs of their necks.

On the little pond’s still surface, all things are reflected wonderfully in a mirror image.

Everything is standing on its head in the pavilion of green and white porcelain.

The bridge stands like a half moon, its arch inverted. Friends, beautifully dressed, drinking and chatting.
The flowing eighth notes in the flutes (mm. 3-7) at the beginning of the movement derive from the pentatonic cell of the first movement (see Hefling’s chart above). The pentatonic cell, as previously mentioned, signals Nature’s presence. Its reoccurrence as a variation, i.e., transformed, shows Mahler, once again, *painting nature in flux*. An extremely intricate motivic development characterizes this movement. All of the thematic material of the movement, as noted by Arthur Wenk, derives from the tenor’s first vocal phrases. ⁴²

Example 2.5 Opening of *Von der Jugend*

The three parts of movement 3 utilize preludes and postludes to delineate the individual parts. Stanzas one and two constitute section A (beginning); stanzas 3, 4, 5 comprise section B [RH5]; and stanzas 6 and 7 conclude with section A’ [RH14].

Harmonically, the movement’s primary tonality is B-flat Major. As Hefling describes it, “the modulatory scheme forms an arch of third-relations, B-flat-G-E (Major/Minor)—G

⁴² For a more detailed discussion that shows this motivic development see de La Grange, vol. 4, 1344.
(Minor/Major)—B-flat,” constituting on the surface a strikingly straightforward harmonic scheme.

The light orchestration supports Mahler’s proscribed mood at the outset—
Behaglich heiter (comfortable cheerfulness)—with its simple, child-like character. The movement features woodwinds and uses very little of the lower, bass instruments. As captured in Mahler’s invented title, “Von der Jugend” (Of youth), this movement, which comes on the heels of the dark mood of autumn that precedes it, may be a memory, or a reexamination of life’s earlier pleasures.

The horn and triangle provide the initiating gestures for the movement. The final movement of Das Lied, “Der Abschied,” also begins with a comparable gesture—the two iterations of C heard over the strokes of the tam tam (see Chapter Four). These gestures function in a similar manner, yet they communicate two very different tones for each movement. The tam tam strokes in “Der Abschied” set a ritualistic atmosphere as they harken to the tolling of funeral bells. Here, in this significantly more upbeat tempo, the two-accented whole note Fs from the horns joyously announce the beginning of the movement. Mahler’s marking Behaglich heiter makes clear the jovial tone.

The only other work in Mahler’s oeuvre that opens with such a specific character indication is Symphony 4, in particular the fourth movement, which depicts a childlike vision of heaven. The song, called “Das Himmlische Leben,” projects the same kind of carefree, naïve, and youthful attitude. Though the vocal line in Symphony 4 is not pentatonic, it bears a close resemblance in its child-like simplicity to that of “Von der Jugend.”
Despite the seeming promise of “straightforwardness” at the opening of the movement, in the short section between RH9 and RH14 the child-like aspect breaks down. Immediately, [RH9], we land on E Minor—this is the first time the movement has moved into the minor and the jovial tone is replaced with anxious worry. After four bars of build-up in the minor, the solo violin enters [RH9\textsuperscript{+5}], drastically altering the musical landscape. Invoking another movement of its companion Symphony 4, namely the scherzo, the solo violin projects an eerie quality. The solo violin’s crescendo [RH9\textsuperscript{+8}] continues the reversal of the carefree childlike world. When the voice enters [RH10] in G Minor, marked Ruhiger (calmer), the texture feels strangely distorted as if time has been stretched. The use of chromaticism and the bare augmented seconds within the minor mode, to which the listener is not accustomed in this movement, contributes to the sense of a changed world in which there appears a reflection in the water of the scene of friends chatting.

The increasingly mäßig (moderate) tempo and the molto ritard before RH14 creates the impression that the music is breaking down. It is not as if there is some extramusical force that causes the music to experience such collapse, rather it seems like an internal failing. As Peter Oswald says, it is as if “the music—because of uncertainty as to how to proceed in establishing a fiction—had become uncertain of itself.”\textsuperscript{43} The keeping up of the pretenses of a “fiction” as Oswald calls it, relates to the movement’s artificiality that has been commented on by many. The connections to the childlike Symphony 4 make clear that the emphasis isn’t on the artificiality alone, but more specifically, the artificiality of youth.

\textsuperscript{43} Quoted in de La Grange vol. 4, 1348. Oswald, ‘Perspektive’, 57.
The sudden break into the return of the A section provides this movement’s moment of failure. As Adorno describes:

The sadness of the pond as a mirror is that for Weltschmerz, which finally cuts the threads, the allure of real life seems like the dream that the first line of the poem invokes, even while objectless inwardness is turning itself into reality, its opposite.\footnote{Adorno, \textit{Mahler}, 153.}

The earlier sounds of distortion might have had the potential of breaking through to some kind of realization of the trivial nature of life lived in this youthful way, but then the music turns away from this thought and chooses to reassert the required reprise of strophe A.

In this movement G Minor is heard at the moment where the text describes the chatting friends reflected in the water, described above as a breaking-down. G Minor marks important moments in movements 1 \([\text{RH11]}\) and 2 \([\text{RH5}^{+5}]\) as well, where interior reflection becomes tinged with nostalgia. In movement 1, G Minor accompanies the first iteration of the refrain “Dark is death, Dark is life.” In movement 2, G Minor enters for the text, “one could think an artist had scattered jade dust over the delicate blossoms.” These moments both step outside of the immediate diegesis to reflect on some aspect of what has been described. In movement 1 it is a knowing reflection on the sadness of life and death. In movement 2 it is a poetic reflection on the beauty of the scene. This reflective quality associated with G Minor remains in movement 3. These are the only moments of G Minor in the entire symphony. This moment when the reflected image in water is revealed is this movement’s most poignant expression of contemplative knowing.

Mahler’s small, yet significant alterations to the poem are worth noting. In particular Mahler reversed the order of the last two stanzas. Mitchell and others have
argued that Mahler’s choice to do this strengthens the arch form of the movement, a connection to the imagery of the bridge in the poem. I agree that in switching the strophes Mahler creates an A’ that is a true return to A. In doing so, he could treat the first two and last two stanzas as units that reflect one another symmetrically.

Despite the clear symmetrical formal shaping, as La Grange notes, Mahler varies many details of orchestration and melody in the A’ section:

The vocal phrase is a faithful replica of the beginning only this time it is accompanied an octave below by the bassoon instead of an octave higher by the piccolo. The end of the movement continually varies the details. The tenor’s last phrase… once more shows the richness of Mahler’s imagination and the innumerable forms he is able to invent with the same melodic cells. This continuous change relates again to Mahler’s notion of painting nature in flux.

However, I disagree with Hefling, who asserts that, “the little piece concludes with the young people chatting and sipping endlessly, just as when it began.” In fact, the piece began with the image of the pavilion. If Mahler had kept the poem as it was written, the last image would have also been that of the pavilion. As it stands, the scene of friends chatting becomes the last image. Changing the order of the stanzas has in fact weakened the arch form inherent in the text. The two halves of the poem no longer reflect one another. I have made these subtle distinctions clear in the schema below (Fig 2.7).

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45 “The upshot is “in my end is my beginning”: the little piece concludes with the young people chatting and sipping endlessly, just as when it began.” Hefling, Das Lied von der Erde, 95.

46 La Grange, vol. 4, 1348.
If we treat the text as the formal units A B A’ (as Mahler had to treat them when setting the poem in this ternary form) then the change he made reflects a step toward strengthening the symmetry of these formal units.

By switching the stanzas the movement ends in medias res as the drinking and chattering simply drops off. Mahler emphasizes this open frame by finishing the piece on a six-four chord in the high register of the woodwinds and bringing back the material associated with the B section. The last idea that the reader is left with in Li-Tai-Po’s poem is the reflected image of the pavilion positioned at the close, thus emphasizing the idea of representation and the reflection of real life. Though these ideas are present, too, in Mahler’s song, his switch of the last two stanzas causes the focus to change in a subtle way. The last thing we are left with is the idea of youth, drinking and chatting. Mahler further underlines this shift of focus by changing the name of the title of the poem from “The Porcelain Pavilion” as Bethge had it, to “Von der Jugend” with its stated emphasis on youth.

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47 In doing so Mahler harkens to Nietzsche’s Also Sprach.
Of Beauty

Young maidens pick flowers,
pick lotus flowers at the edge of the shore.
Among bushes and leaves they sit,
gathering blossoms in their laps and calling
to one another teasingly.

Golden sunlight weaves among the figures,
mirroring them in the shiny water.
The sun reflects their slender limbs,
their sweet eyes,
and the zephyr lifts caressingly
the fabric of their sleeves, wafting the magic
of their fragrance through the air.

O see the handsome young men galloping
there along the shore their lively horses,
glittering like sunbeams;
already among the branches of the green willows,
the fresh-faced young men are approaching!
The trotting horse of one whinnies merrily
and shies and canters away;
over flowers and grass, hooves are flying,
trampling up a storm of fallen blossoms.
Ah, how wildly its mane flutters,
how hotly its nostrils flare!
The golden sun weaves among the figures,
mirroring them in the shiny water.

And the fairest of the young women sends
a long, yearning gaze after him.
Her proud appearance is only a pretense.
In the flash of her large eyes,
in the darkness of her ardent glance,
the agitation of her heart leaps after him, lamenting.
“Von der Schönheit,” much like Mahler’s song *Der Schildwache Nachtlied* from *Der Knaben Wunderhorn*, inhabits two distinctly different sound worlds. “Von der Schönheit” is a sparkling example of Heffling’s claim that *Das Lied* is founded on “syzygial polarities.” Mahler depicts the “absolute loveliness” of the feminine in contrast with the masculine world of the military as these two worlds collide in a fleeting daydream. A young girl sits at the bank of a river and conjures a vivid memory of a group of young men on horseback. The movement is in ternary form, and we shift between the two worlds as we move from A to B (RH7) to A’ (RH16). Strophe A begins in G Major, closing in E Major; Strophe B also begins in G Major, venturing to C, A-flat, and F; Strophe A’ starts out in B-flat moving directly to G. This constellation of key centers strongly connects movements 3 and 4. In the A section, Mahler depicts the feminine world described in the poetry of strophes one and two. The lovely, peaceful world of the girls picking lotus flowers by the riverbank is interrupted by the B section (strophes 3 and 4), comprised of two alternating orchestral marches. Finally we return to the world of the girls in the A’ section.

In the first six bars of the piece Mahler sets up these two different worlds by presenting the musical material that will come to represent each later in the movement. Example 2.6 (below) shows the most prominent masculine elements that occur in both the A and B section. Example 2.7 (below) shows the characteristic feminine music, which contrasts the masculine materials.
Ex. 2.6 Masculine elements of *Von der Schönheit*

(a) Woodwinds and harp

(b) RH$^+3$. Excerpt from first interlude of March in B section

(c) RH$^+3$. First instrumental break between stanzas in the A section

(d) RH$^+3$. Another element of the first instrumental break between stanzas in the A section
(e) RH5 Instrumental break in A section during Stanza

(f) Start of the B section (piccolo)

Ex. 2.7 RH1 Feminine element of *Von der Schönheit*
The music that represents the masculine world runs throughout the movement from the very beginning. This music incorporates a more aggressive profile in contrast to the feminine music’s more lyrical flow. Given that the masculine is present musically throughout, even in the scenes when the men are not textually present, suggests that the young women pine over the men for the entirety of the movement. We are reminded that masculine and feminine are joined in syzygial partnership. When the sound world of the men dominates in the B section, one can imagine that the protagonist has been carried away into a daydream and we follow her into it. Johnson nicely describes the relationship between the orchestra and the daydream: “the young girl narrates their appearance and disappearance, but the orchestra enacts what she describes.”48

Signaling Nature’s newest permutation, the melody played during the orchestral introduction (Example 2.6 (a)) in the woodwinds and harp sets out another variation of the pentatonic cell. This melody returns in the climactic moment in the orchestral march interlude (RH8^3 (b)). Its appearance in the bombastic scene of the handsome lads passing by marks it with the masculine world. After the alto sings the first strophe, which is evocative of the girl’s sweet beauty [RH1], the music shifts momentarily to the “masculine” music again (Example 2.6 (c)). In this example, the dotted rhythm of the march contrasts greatly with the flowing straight-eighth notes of the alto’s song. The final important masculine element to take note of in this movement is shown in Example 2.6 (d to f).

Suffice to say, the men don’t actually ride by on horseback and interrupt the peace of her lounging by the water. Through the use of motivic development, Mahler,

48 Johnson, Mahler’s Voices, 220.
adds subtlety to the text. This moment provides a perfect example of Theodor Adorno’s
notion of the “splendor of immediate life reflected in the medium of memory.”49 The
manner in which Mahler interweaves the two sound worlds makes clear that there is in
fact only one world throughout the movement—that of the girl’s—and that it is “reflected
in the medium of memory.” When we hear “immediate life” (i.e., the men galloping by)
it is “reflected in the medium of memory” (i.e., the girl’s memory). The masculine world
comes to the foreground as it consumes the young girl’s mind. The absorption of
masculine into feminine once again makes clear the unbounded unity of Nature.

The manner in which we leave the B section solidifies this reading of the text. At
the end of the second march [RH16] there is no transition to A‘, back into the woman’s
world. The protagonist simply snaps out of her memory. Mahler makes a change in the
text that underscores his reading. He adds a first line to the last stanza that is the exact
copy of the first line of the second stanza: “Golden sunlight weaves around their forms,
Mirrors them in the shining water.” The second stanza directly precedes the first march of
the men. In placing the first line of stanza two directly after the second march ceases,
Mahler clarifies that no actual “event” has passed between the second stanza and the last
stanza. The repetition of the line also supports the idea that the girl slipped into a vivid
daydream of a memory of the boys on horseback. At RH16 she simply comes out of her
daydream. Her longing, before and after the boys ride by, remains intense. Nothing about
this event, even if only in memory, has changed her: “The tumult of her heart still surges
painfully towards him.”

49 Adorno, Mahler, 155.
The drunkard in spring

If life is only a dream,  
why then the misery and torment?  
I drink until I can drink no more,  
the whole, dear day!

And when I can drink no more,  
because my stomach and soul are full,  
I stagger to my door  
and sleep very well!

What do I hear when I awake?  
Listen!  
A bird singing in the tree.  
I ask him whether it is spring –  
it’s like a dream to me.

The bird twitters, “Yes! Spring  
is here, it has come over night!”  
With deep concentration I listen,  
and the bird sings and laughs!

I fill my goblet afresh  
and drain it to the bottom  
and sing, until the moon shines  
in the dark firmament!

And when I can sing no more,  
I fall asleep again,  
for what does spring mean to me?  
Let me be drunk!
In the final movement of Part I of Das Lied, “Der Trunkene im Frühling,” we move on from the summer scene of the last movement to spring. The bleak, depression of movement 1, though with no direct reference to the season, elicited winter. In movement 2, the season is made obvious in the title of the work as “the lonely one in autumn” awaits spring's arrival. In movements 3 and 4 in their joyous and youthful ruminations on life, summer pervades. In movement 5, made obvious by the title, spring, long awaited, has arrived, only to be rejected by the drunkard. The seasons do not come (as Mitchell points out) in their natural order. In painting nature in flux Mahler relies on the ever-changing aspect of Nature to underscore the philosophical journey. Throughout, engagement with Nature's constant change fosters the potential for embracing the self as also in flux and ultimately illusive.

The sounds of chinoiserie heard in the last two movements are retained. Pentatonicism and the focus on the upper registers of the woodwinds in terms of orchestration continues to dominate the sound world of this movement, as does the lightness of articulation and ornamentation, i.e., the staccato markings and ornamentation. Yet, after two movements of this distinct sonority the novelty of the exoticism wears off.

Movement 5 serves a dual purpose—concluding Part I and preparing Part II. In his preparation for Part II, Mahler reasserts the central ontological problem set out in the first movement, namely, how does man’s separation from Nature block the way to his achieving transcendence? He chooses a poem that shares much of the same imagery as the first movement to solidify their connection. The Heldentenor returns as does the
drinking, springtime, and lunar imagery. When we reach stanza five [RH10], the
drunkard we encounter most certainly is the very same “ape” who howls at the moon in
the first movement:

I fill my goblet afresh
and drain it to the bottom
and sing, until the moon shines
in the dark firmament!

The fanfares at the start of each movement are clearly related, further
strengthening their thematic connection. Note that the fanfare that begins movement 5
presents another derivation from the pentatonic cell (see Fig. 2.3 above). We also notice
the stark fanfare contour that begins movement 1 contrasts dramatically with the
movement 5 fanfare, which clearly incorporates bird sounds and the presence of Nature
(Ex. 2.8).

Example 2.8 Fanfare comparison opening of movement 1 and 5

![fanfare comparison](image)

(a)

(b)

One extremely important element of this movement is the birdsong (see Example 2.9).

![birdsong](image)

Ex. 2.9 RH5 Movement 5 solo violin ‘birdsong’
Although Nature has been present throughout the protagonist’s journey, beckoning him forward to the singing of Das Lied, it is the singing/speaking of the birds that prompts the protagonist into a direct dialogue with Nature for the first time. As Johnson notes:

Birdsong is used not only to denote the idea of nature, but also as a call to the human realm from the world of nature... In its simplest form, the birdcall in Mahler thus function as a kind of spiritual wake up call...Implied in this exchange is the solitary protagonist, lost in nature, in a state of unknowing, who gains insight through the intercession of a voice of nature (the birdsong) and thus comes to self-knowledge.50

Formally the movement divides into three parts.51 Stanzas one and two comprise the A sections; stanzas two and three constitute the B section (RH6); and we return to A’ [RH11+3] for the last two stanzas. The B section contrasts dramatically with the A sections on either side. In the B section the drunkard, upon waking or perhaps between sleep and consciousness, hears the birds and decides to pay attention [RH4+4], exhorting himself, “Horch!” (Listen!). Perhaps the moment has arrived where man and Nature will close the gap that divides them. The protagonist inquires of the birds whether spring has arrived, while remarking that he feels this is all a dream. “Yes, spring has arrived,” the birds reveal, yet the protagonist does not seize the moment to embrace the spring. He pushes it away and retreats back into drinking. The moment of transcendence must still be awaited.

This fleeting interaction with Nature and the birds concerning the coming of spring delineates a single moment of contemplation that disappears just as quickly and

50 Johnson, Mahler’s Voices, 64.
51 Hefling describes “a broad ternary format.”
sharply as when we departed from the girl’s memory in “Von der Schönheit.” A sharp “jump cut” in the diegesis rips him from this moment of contemplation and places him back in his original resolute nihilistic worldview in the reprise of A [RH11⁺³].

Mahler depicts the drunkard who turns a blind-eye to what Nature tells him. This movement, like the preceding movements, is a vignette of failure. The failure of this movement and of the drunkard is made abundantly clear by the constant striving for A Major; especially, the tenor’s continuous return to the high A. As in the first movement, A Major presents a false hope to reconcile the conflict between man’s mortality and the earth’s constant renewal. Mitchell again:

[T]he drunkard’s self-annihilating A [in movement 5] offers an ironic obverse to the ecstatic acceptance of oblivion that is the goal of ‘Der Abschied’. ⁵²

Rather than embracing the spring that is all around him, the protagonist asserts: “What do I care about spring? Let me be drunk.” He rejects ever-changing Nature, unable to even imagine any kind of relationship to Nature. The drunkard chooses to stay divorced from Nature in an intoxicated oblivion.

⁵² Mitchell, *Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death*, 183.
The farewell

The sun departs behind the mountains.
In all the valleys, evening descends
with its cooling shadows.
O look! Like a silver boat,
the moon floats on the blue sky-lake above.
I feel the fine wind wafting
behind the dark spruce.

The brook sings with melodious sound through the darkness.
the flowers grow pale in the twilight.
The earth breathes filled with rest and sleep.
All longing now turns to dreaming.
Weary men go homeward,
to learn anew in sleep
forgotten happiness and youth.
The birds crouch silently in their branches.
The world falls asleep!

It blows coolly in the shadows of my spruce.
I stand here and await my friend.
I await him for a last farewell.
I long, O friend, to enjoy the beauty
of this evening at your side.
Where are you? You leave me alone so long!

I wander back and forth with my lute
on paths brimming with soft grass.
O beauty! O world drunk with eternal love and life!

He descended from his horse and handed him
the farewell drink. He asked him, where he was
going, and why it had to be.
He spoke, his voice was veiled:
You, my friend,
this world has not been kind to me!
Where am I going? I go to wander in the mountain,
I seek peace for my lonely heart!
I journey towards my native land! To my resting place.
I shall never stray far away again,
my heart is still and awaits its hour.

The dear earth everywhere
blossoms in spring and grows green again!
Everywhere and forever the distance shines bring and blue!
Forever… forever…
"Der Abschied" is the movement of *Das Lied* that underwent the most textual alteration from the original Chinese poems. In this movement Mahler combines two different poems that came side-by-side in Bethge’s collection. The first poem by Megn-Haoran entitled “Staying at Teacher’s Mountain Retreat, Awaiting a Friend in Vain” became Bethge’s “In Erwartung des Freundes” (Awaiting the Friend). The second poem by Wang-Wei, “Farewell” became Bethge’s “Der Abschied des Freundes” (The Farewell of the Friend). The first part of “Der Abschied” consists of the Megn-Haoran poem. Then after an orchestral interlude the movement moves into the second poem by Wang-Wei.

As the poem begins, there is a very obvious lack of a subjective speaker:

The sun departs behind the mountains.  
In all the valleys, evening descends  
with its cooling shadows.

If we recall for a moment the assertive protagonist in movement 1 addressing his companions, the narrative voice at the beginning of this movement appears drastically different. There is no mention of an audience. In fact, there seems to be no speaker at all. Rather, the perspective seems to be what Mitchell calls a “God’s eye view” that perceives from afar as evening descends into every valley.\(^{53}\)

   In the second stanza, someone now implores us to see the moon. Mahler’s addition of an exclamation point after “look” makes clear that someone has entered the scene. In the third line, the subject “I” is actually used and thus reinforces the sense that

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\(^{53}\) Mitchell, *Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death*, 353.
this stanza consists of an individual’s personal experience. We also see the first significant change Mahler made to Bethge’s text with the addition of the image of the sky:

O look! Like a silver boat,  
the moon floats on the blue sky-lake above.  
I feel the fine wind wafting  
behind the dark spruce.

The line that follows is original to Bethge’s translation. However, Mahler inserts three of his own lines—two of which expand on the imagery of Nature:

The brook sings with melodious sound through the darkness.  
*The flowers grow pale in the twilight.*  
*The earth breathes filled with rest and sleep.*

These lines cause a retreat of the subjective presence. The focus on Nature in fact widens our perspective—as in a cinematic “zooming out”—from the experience of the personal “I” and propels us into the detached universal perspective found at the poem’s beginning. The astral perspective prepares Mahler’s last addition to this stanza—“All longing now turns to dreaming.” Assuming a wider, all-encompassing view makes possible this omnipresent claim. It also prepares for the following stanza.

The next stanza in the Bethge original reads, “[t]he working men head for home longing for sleep.” Mahler’s alterations result in “Weary men go homeward, to learn anew in sleep forgotten happiness and youth.” Mahler intensifies the straightforward image of workingmen seeking sleep into a semi-quieting of longing (semi-quieting because sleep is certainly not the key to silencing the Will). Sleep, like drink, only imitates the ultimate quieting of the Will, which is death. Mahler does not offer dreams as the solution to the weariness that comes as a result of the longing of the Will. He simply points out another means by which man deals with his suffering.
The perspective “zooms out” again this time to “the birds sit[ting] quietly in their branches” and the image of the sleeping earth returns, “The world is falling asleep,” which Mahler prepared earlier with the addition of the line “[t]he earth breathes filled with rest and sleep.” Mahler adds here another line that serves to re-establishes the passivity of the detached narrative heard at the beginning of the poem.\(^{54}\)

The next addition by Mahler that deserves our attention comes after “I stand here and await my friend.” Bethge’s original had “I stand here and await the friend, who has promised me to come.” Mahler’s version reads “I stand here and await my friend, /I await him for a last farewell.” (My italics indicating Mahler’s addition.) In adding this line, Mahler heightens the gravity of the scene. There can no longer be any doubt in our minds that this parting is the ultimate parting of friends, the full and permanent loss that is death.

In the final line of stanza three, Mahler changes Bethge’s “O kämst due, kämst du ungetreuer Freund!” (O if you would come, if you would come, disloyal friend!) to “O Schönheit! O ewigen Liebens—Lebenstrunkne Welt!” (O beauty! O world drunk with eternal love and life!). This alteration came after the music had been composed. The ecstatic music that accompanies this text prefigures the ecstatic release at the end of the piece. Bethge’s original line didn’t carry enough of the passion to match the musical sublimity.

After an orchestral interlude we encounter the Wang-Wei poem. The alteration to Bethge’s translation that has received the most comment is probably the pronoun change in the fourth stanza. Mahler changed the personal pronoun “I” to “he,” which results in a good deal of confusion regarding who is arriving and who is departing. In Bethge’s

\(^{54}\) This line marks the second recitative which (although it contains “I”) harkens back to the passivity and detached narration of the opening.
translation the distinction is quite clear. In the second sentence the “I” asks the departing friend “Where are you going?” Therefore, the “I” in the first sentence is definitely not the departing friend:

*Bethge*

I (not departing friend) descended from the horse and handed him (waiting and departing friend) the draught of farewell. I (not departing friend) asked him where to and also why he wanted to travel.

In Mahler’s alteration of the personal pronoun, the distinction becomes much less clear. The horseman could be *either* the departing friend or the friend who says goodbye as shown below:

*Mahler*

*He* (departing friend) descended from his horse and handed him (the waiting friend) the draught of farewell. *He* (the waiting friend) asked him (departing friend on the horse), where he was going, and why it had to be.

**OR**

*He* (not departing friend) descended from his horse and handed him (waiting and departing friend) the draught of farewell. *He* (not departing) asked him (waiting departing friend), where he was going, and why it had to be.

The second possibility above is identical to the interpretation gathered from Bethge’s original. Had Mahler wanted to keep these roles as they were, he would not have made the change that he did. Mahler changed the pronoun in order for this poem to have continuity with the first poem. I would argue that it is the first possibility given above
that Mahler intended to bring to light. The link between the Meng-Haoran poem and the Wang-Wei poem is the presence of the waiting friend. The waiting friend speaks the lines:

I stand here and await my friend.  
I await him for a last farewell.  
I long, O friend, to enjoy the beauty of this evening at your side.  
Where are you? You leave me alone so long!

I wander back and forth with my lute  
on paths brimming with soft grass.  
O beauty! O world drunk with eternal love and life!

These impassioned remarks, which are full of longing, are not the words of a man ready to take his final farewell from earth. They must be the words of the friend who is to be left alive and alone. Comparing this impassioned monologue with the language of the departing friend (who seeks peace for his lonely heart in the next stanza) makes quite clear that these are not the same man. The friend who waits in the Wang-Wei poem longs to enjoy the presence of his friend. It is this same desire that drives the waiting friend to ask the departing friend why it must be so—why he must leave—why he must die.

Had Mahler left the pronoun as “I” there would have been no room for the waiting friend to be the friend who does not depart and there would be a confusing rupture in the logic and continuity of characters and theme between the two poems.

Mahler alters the penultimate stanza leading up to the “the song of the earth” as follows:
Bethge:
I shall no more stray far away again,
my foot is tired, and tired is my soul.

Mahler:
I journey towards my native land! My home.
I shall never stray far away again,
my heart is still and awaits its hour.

Mahler does away with Bethge’s last two lines: “The earth is the same everywhere. / And eternal, eternal are the white clouds.” He adds instead a third and very important stanza of text at the end of the movement:

The dear earth everywhere
  Blossoms in spring and grows green again!
  Everywhere and forever the distance shines bright and blue!
  Forever… forever… forever … forever … forever … forever … forever …

The text beginning with “Die liebe Erde” (the dear earth) becomes “Das Lied von der Erde” (the song of the earth) anticipated since movement 1. This song, finally celebrates Nature as “allüberall” (everywhere and forever). Once grasped, this understanding opens the gates to the transcendence that, according to Mahler’s philosophical and musical ontology, is the culmination of life’s journey.
Chapter 4

Der Abschied: A Fond Farewell

The final movement, bipartite in itself, comprises the second main section of Das Lied:

DAS LIED: Part I (mvts. 1-5) / Part II (mvt. 6)

MOVEMENT 6: Part I (beginning-RH37) / Part II (RH38-end)

Three kinds of musical materials articulate smaller units within each part of movement 6. These include 1) orchestral introductions/interludes 2) recitatives and 3) arioso sections.55

The formal chart (Fig. 4.7) below shows the arrangement of these elements.

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55 I have chosen the designation arioso to avoid the formal connotations associated with strophe and aria.
PART I

INTRO
RH3          RECIT #1  C Minor
RH4          INTRO TO A¹  C Minor
RH4¹⁶        ARIOSO A¹  C Minor
RH7          INTRO TO B¹  F Major
RH9²³        ARIOSO B¹  F Major
RH10⁵       Interlude  D Minor
RH13⁵       ARIOSO B²  C# Minor
RH17         Interlude  F Major/Minor
RH19¹²       ARIOSO B³  F Major – D Minor
RH21³        Interlude  F Major
RH22         RECIT #2  A Minor/D Minor
RH23         INTRO TO C¹  D Minor
RH27         ARIOSO C¹  B-Flat Major
RH30         Interlude  D Minor
RH30⁹        ARIOSO C²  D Minor
RH33³        Interlude
RH33⁷        ARIOSO C¹  B-Flat Major
RH36-3       POSTLUDE-TRANSITION  A minor

PART II

RH38-48    Interlude/Introduction  C Minor
RH48        RECIT #3  C Minor
RH49        INTRO TO A²  C Minor
RH50        ARIOSO A²  C Minor
RH53        ARIOSO A³  C Minor
RH54¹        Interlude  C Minor
RH55        ARIOSO B¹  F Major
RH56⁵        ARIOSO B³
CODA:
RH58        ARIOSO C¹(Song of the Earth)  C Major
RH64        POSTLUDE  C Major
Concerning the A, B, and C Arioso Distinction:
A Internal: Protagonist separated from Nature in his own thoughts
B External: Sounds of Nature
C Bringing together of the Internal/External Dialectic
Superscripts denote variant versions of each

Figure 4.1 Formal divisions Der Abschied (adapted from La Grange pp. 1366-68)

The movement’s introduction begins with two low-register iterations of C. These two prominent strokes sounded by the tam tam signal the opening of Part II and the strong shift in tone from Part I. The absence of tonal definition contrasts with the very clear and specific worlds that are established at the start of each of the five preceding movements. The tam tam\textsuperscript{56} aided by the harps and low strings, suggests a primeval ritualistic atmosphere. It also intones a funeral knell, pointing to the broad topic of death and the movement stated purpose—farewell.

Within this registra\textsuperscript{56}lly vast, virtually timeless world, Mahler unfolds the musical motives that inscribe the journey’s culmination. These principal motives derive from materials introduced throughout Part I of Das Lied. The oboe’s birdsong-like turn figure (mm. 3-4) sounds surprisingly restrained in tone. It signals that the message of the birds, although rejected by the drunkard in movement 5, continues to dominate the path forward. The oboe at first feigns movement, but ultimately it simply adds ornamentation to the sustained Cs. It is not until the fifth measure that the oboe moves on from C. The turn also inspires change in the musical landscape as the minor thirds in the horns seem to play directly off of these turn motives. The stirring motion of the gruppetto appears to

\textsuperscript{56} The low Cs were not originally scored to include the tam tam, as seen from the composition sketched for Das Lied. (Hefling, Das Lied von der Erde, 475.)
incite their offbeat half notes. The march gradually unfolds as it grows out of these half notes. The first hint of this arrives [RH1^2] where the horns intone the sigh motive, the characteristic expressive marker of the march throughout the movement. This sigh is released by the turn gesture in the oboe. The augmentation of the gruppetto in the oboe [RH1] immediately precedes the violin entrance. This moment of exchange, as the oboe passes the F to the violins underscores how everything in this introduction grows organically out of the initiating tam tam Cs.
VI. DER ABSCHIED.

1. Oboe.
2. Horn.
3. Horn.
4. Horn.
Tamtam.
1. Harfe.
2. Harfe.
Violoncell.
Kontrabaß.

1. Ob.
2. Kl.
K. Fag.
1.8. Fag.
5. Fag.
Tamtam.
1. Harfe.
2. Harfe.

1. Vi.
Vlr.
Kb.

*) Hiss ohne Kontra-C passieren.
Example 4.1 *Der Abschied* First two pages
Moving forward, the eighth-note sigh motives become gradually closer together \([\text{RH1} – \text{RH1}^+^4]\) until they coalesce into a full iteration of the march motive \([\text{RH1}^+^5]\). The sighing eighth notes in the horns influence the gestation of the violin melody soaring above. \([\text{RH1}^+^2]\). This melody becomes the material for the strikingly optimistic section marked by the appearance of the mandolin \([\text{RH23}: \text{Part I}/\text{Introduction to Arioso C}^1]\). The violin’s melody appears not yet fully realized when the horn’s sighing eighth notes interrupt \([\text{RH1}^+^4]\).

The bass line abruptly \([\text{RH1}^+^4]\) becomes much more rhythmic as the eighth-note/quarter-note rhythm gives the music a lilting, dance-like quality. This quality supports the waltz-like character of the violin line as the melody passes back to the oboe \([\text{RH1}^+^5]\). However, even with the return of the violin melody in the oboe, the march sighs succeed in truncating it \([\text{RH1}^+^6]\). The oboe \textit{gruppetto} figure returns in full force with a somewhat “rebellious” continuation \([\text{RH2}^{-1}]\). The flute joins the oboe for a chromatic flurry\(^{57}\) that launches the entire musical landscape into a state of momentary chaos. At this point the music becomes cluttered with all of the motives introduced thus far. These elements sound together simultaneously – there is no order, only chaos.

The harp’s steadying eighth notes \([\text{RH2}^{-2}]\) attempt to impose order in preparation for Recitative #1 \([\text{RH3}]\). The grace notes and trill in the oboe/flute—a variation on the turn motive—accentuate the ongoing C tonality. Announcing the meterless landscape of the recitative, a fermata on the double bass C \([\text{RH3}^{-1}]\) prepares the first recitative. Marked \textit{ohne Ausdruck} (without expression) the protagonist enters a stark, twilight landscape from which the sun will soon depart, the first of many farewells. The introduction, filled

\(^{57}\) This chromatic flurry is a self-quotation on Mahler’s part. Mahler marked this figure with these words “Bird of Death or Bird of Night: in the manuscript for Symphony 2.
with sounds of Nature, made clear that man is no longer fully in charge. The motives grew out of one another connected by some cosmic tissue in a world with no harmonic motion, eliciting the feeling of Nature waiting and expecting that man will finally take the necessary last step, embracing Nature and achieving transcendence. This first recitative begins that journey in earnest.

Concerning the first arioso [Arioso A\(^1\) RH\(^{4+6}\)], Adorno writes:

The generality of a life and the almost material concretion of the movement are forced to stand still, then broken by sensuous joy to attain the supra-sensuous.\(^{58}\)

He describes the singer’s emotive gesture “O sieh!” (Oh see!), marked by Mahler to be sung “zart” (gently) as paralyzing the march motive (material concretion). In breaking through this “material concretion” with ecstatic appreciation of Nature, the protagonist momentarily transcends the realm of physical sensation. (As previously mentioned, in this moment, it is clear both musically and textually that we have a subjective “I” relating his/her experience of nature.) The “supra-sensuous”—beyond physical senses—experienced here signals intimations of the ultimate transcendence through death that awaits. The presence of the harp—always associated in Mahler with the ethereal—plays ascending arpeggios, which signals that this moment harkens to transcendence. Yet, it is made clear, almost immediately, that true transcendence will not occur at this moment as made evident through the return of the march-sigh motive [RH\(^{5-1}\)]. Its return in major joins the momentary hope of transcendence, but ultimately, it reverts to minor [RH\(^{5+1}\)] while it persuades even the protagonist to retreat.

\(^{58}\) Quoted in La Grange, vol. 4, 1374.
Mahler’s ongoing motivic saturation continues as made evident in the reemergence of the violin/oboe melody [RH1\(^+2\)] with the clarinet entrance [RH5\(^{-5}\)] as well as the oboe [RH5\(^{+2}\)]. As the march motive returns [RH5\(^{+3}\)] the oboe assumes the role of introducing the return of the chaotic chromatic sixteenth-note flurry. As shown in Examples 4.2 and 4.3, the unraveling of this section occurs in exactly the same manner as before, although it leads to somewhere new this time.

Example 4.2 Chromatic unraveling after RH5 in *Der Abschied*

Example 4.3 Chromatic unraveling after RH1 in *Der Abschied*
We are brought, after the second chromatic flurry, to full realization of the nocturnal scene that Recitative #1 and Arioso A¹ enact. Oscillating triplets, lifted from “Der Einsame im Herbst,” create a brief postlude to Arioso A¹ as nighttime falls. This motive captures the hypnotic sense of falling into the lull of sleep, bringing the protagonist closer to Nature. The chromatic flurry returns in bassoon and flute as the activity of the world again stills [RH6⁺]. Mahler specifies morendo as the bassoons and then, the lower strings fade out. The flutes’ final arrival back to C [RH7¹] is marked sforzando showing the importance of this voice finally coming to rest.

The ongoing motivic saturation provides a landscape of Nature ever changing. As Hefling describes:

In the course of “Der Abschied” chilly darkness, wind, water, and birds variously surface and fade from consciousness, yet this stylized collage never seems out of place; nor does it disrupt the deeper flow of inner consciousness, which is manifest through the extraordinary treatment of time and tonality.⁵⁹

Reflecting the logic of Nature, Mahler creates a texture that embraces both unordered chaos and organic unity. Nature continues to prepare the recognition of infinite space and time.

When we enter into INTRO B¹ [RH7], Nature sounds changed. The mosaic-like integration of various Nature motives heard up to this point is replaced with a direct mimetic experience of Nature—specifically that of the murmuring brook. Mitchell describes the singer’s entrance as follows:

[ARIOSO B\textsuperscript{1}] in one sense is indeed a song of the earth. But it is not the earth singing a song about itself. It is, I suggest, the voice of the protagonist...\textsuperscript{60}

What we hear in the INTRO TO ARIOSO B\textsuperscript{1} [RH7] is Nature itself. If we compare the texture of Recitative #1 to ARIOSO B\textsuperscript{1} we can observe two different modes of experiencing Nature. In Recitative #1 Nature is not heard. At the beginning of ARIOSO B\textsuperscript{1} Nature speaks directly when we hear the brook; when the voice enters, we understand that someone has been listening, creating the sense of an individual voice. The contrast between these two moments—the recitative and this arioso—is made even more interesting because the flute in both cases accompanies the voice. Despite this direct connection, the music in ARIOSO B\textsuperscript{1} creates an atmosphere that contrasts substantially with that of Recitative #1. The arioso’s oscillating triplets contrast dramatically with the stagnant pedal that dominates the recitative texture. From the flowing clarinet triplets, the protagonist enjoys Nature directly—“Der Bach singt voller Wohllaut durch das Dunkel” (The brook sings with melodious sound through the darkness). Mahler conveys this pastoral joy with F Major, also present in ARIOSO A\textsuperscript{1} [RH4\textsuperscript{+6}], marking intimations of transcendence.

This pleasant appreciation of Nature causes what seems to be an eruption of joy [Interlude at RH10\textsuperscript{+5}] on the part of the protagonist who is overwhelmed with its beauty. The violins suddenly explode into a more orchestral and strict melody [RH10\textsuperscript{+5}] than the free-flowing nature of this section so far. The outburst does not arrive unexpectedly; rather it is prepared by a stirring of emotion in the alto’s second phrase [RH10]. Her first phrase [RH9\textsuperscript{+3}] mimics the contour of the oboe and flute line uttered by Nature—there is

\textsuperscript{60} Mitchell, \textit{Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death}, 373.
no sense of desire in the phrase as it ruminates on the beauty of the brook. The flute line that accompanies the voice is an exact repeat of the oboe melody. The flute only strays from the oboe melody when the voice becomes more directed. When the alto sings of the pale flowers [RH10], there is a sense of desire – of building toward something. The vocal melody here is another permutation of the Nature-evoking pentatonic cell (Ex. 4.7). The flute supports this drive with a rising motive [RH10^+4] that adumbrates the *Ewigkeitmotif*[^61] heard at the moment of transcendence [RH57^+5]. Only after being thus prepared do the violins take up the emotionally charged music from the voice and express it further. It is as if the voice couldn’t quite reach the point where it could sing “Die liebe Erde” – *the* song of the earth, so the orchestra takes over where the voice left off.

Ex. 4.4 RH10 in Der Abschied Permutation of pentatonic cell

This longing music however, begins to breakdown almost immediately. When the violins first start this melody it is marked *etwas bewegter* (always moving) and the music certainly does have a sense of consistent motion [RH10^+5]. Underneath this outburst the horn plays a series of descending notes that harken to the melody of ‘Die liebe Erde’ (see Example 4.5 a and b). Mahler weaves a motive into this moment of longing, which signifies the release for all longing through transcendence.

[^61]: La Grange uses the term *Ewigkeitmotif* (eternity motive). He explains Mahler’s extensive use of the motive and that it is borrowed from Act III of *Siegfried* where it sets the text “ewig.” (see footnote 70).
Example 4.5

a) RH11$^{-3}$

Then the horn enters $[\text{RH11}^{+3}]$ with a bastardized turn figure that throws a wrench into the violin’s melody. At the horn entrance $[\text{RH11}^{-4}]$ he marks *etwas drangend* (somewhat urgent). The horn’s entrance signals a change in the trajectory of the buildup – it very clearly dominates the texture from the moment it enters and facilitates the collapse in the music $[\text{RH13}^{-3}]$. 

b) RH58 “The song of the earth”
Etwas bewegter.

Die Blumen blasen im Dämmerlicht.

Etwas drängend.

Der Abschied 103
Example 4.6 RH10-14 "Der Abschied"
The music here [RH10\textsuperscript{5} - RH13\textsuperscript{2}] as Mitchell points out, “makes precisely manifest the yearning that is the text’s sound as well as its sense.”\textsuperscript{62} The reference to “Sehnsucht” (“All longing will only dream”) that arrives in ARIOSO B\textsuperscript{1} [RH14] is a response to the yearning heard here. After taking up the yearning from the alto, the violins continue to build this extremely emotive melody in C Major. The melody, with its highly varied rhythms and accents, huge leaps in the melody and the sharp dynamic contrasts, is wrought with desire and longing.

It is of major significance that immediately following the colossal collapse we hear anew the sounds of Nature surfacing in the reprise of ARIOSO B\textsuperscript{2} [RH13]. Understanding this moment in the parlance of Schopenhauer, we recognize that the protagonist must experience a Schopenhauerian quieting of the Will in order to reach transcendence. Mahler shows again as he did in “Der Einsame im Herbst” that desire leads to failure. The text that follows underscores indisputably that after denouncing desire, the protagonist turns to Nature, to the earth, for a better answer:

The earth breathes filled with rest and sleep.
All longing now turns to dreaming.

As we move through to the next section, the phrase “All longing now turns to dreaming” is accompanied by the same “Sehnsucht” music. The second eruption [RH14-RH15] doesn’t push to the point of collapse as in the first instance. Rather it subdues itself. Here again the text seems to be made manifest in the music in that the music is perhaps too “weary” to continue [RH17]. The clarinet takes up the violins “longing melody” [RH17\textsuperscript{8}] and transforms it into falling chromatic lines that gradually bring this section to its quiet close.

\textsuperscript{62} Mitchell, \textit{Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death}, 377.
In the Interlude that precedes ARIOSO B\textsuperscript{3}, the initiating motive of the gruppetto re-energizes the music briefly [RH18\textsuperscript{+1}]. The gruppetto motive signals a change in the musical landscape from the world of “weary men” to the ever-changing world of Nature. Triplet ostinati in harp and clarinet [RH18\textsuperscript{+1}] conjure the image of Nature. This oscillating gesture is passed between many different instruments in different modes of augmentation and diminution. The effect is a mosaic of sound fragments – a perfect depiction of painting nature.

Within ARIOSO B\textsuperscript{3} Nature changes very abruptly [RH20\textsuperscript{-3}]. Adorno’s notion of breakthrough seems to explain the music’s sudden shift.\textsuperscript{63} The sforzando tremolo in the first violins as well as in the flute is prepared only by the quintuplet eighth notes in the piccolo that erupts into the ensuing chaotic breakdown. The repeated eighth-note Fs in the piccolo are the very same birdsong motive heard moments earlier, however, the birds become more urgent. The sforzando birdcall [RH20\textsuperscript{-3}] signals a return to the nocturnal image of the earth that was touched upon in ARIOSO A\textsuperscript{1}. The alto tells us that “the world falls asleep!” [RH20] in the familiar language of Nature – oscillating thirds, this time in an augmented rhythm that expresses the tiredness of the scene. We are submerged into darkness, which summons a sense of gaining clarity – a deep recognition gained from the heightened awareness instilled by the earth’s stillness. At the Interlude, the chromatic flurry returns [RH21\textsuperscript{-3}] along with the thirds of Nature. As the earth falls asleep a peaceful, heightened awareness takes over. Again, one hears Nature differently. Hearing nature in flux is central to the journey of Das Lied.

\textsuperscript{63} Adorno, Mahler, 7. “[In a breakthrough] the rupture originates from beyond the music’s intrinsic movement, intervening from outside.”
Example 4.7 The world falls asleep in *Der Abschied*
The next moment that is “built up” occurs at the euphoric exhortation that is the last line of the Meng Hao-Ran poem; “O Schönheit! O ewigen Liebens - Lebenstrunkne Welt!” (O beauty! O world drunk with eternal love and life!). As mentioned in the text discussion, Mahler composed the music to this line before substituting his own (the one printed above) for the less emotionally wrought one that concluded Bethge’s translation. From this information, it is clear that Mahler dug himself into an emotional hole, for which he had to amp up the emotion of the text to match the emotion of the music. If we follow the build-up to this moment from the beginning of Recitative #2 through the ecstatic moment that concludes this section of “Der Abschied,” we can understand why Mahler felt the need to change the text of the last line.

The calm mood established as the world fell asleep is carried through in a sort of stasis into the next section, which begins with Recitative #2 [RH22]. The passage is similar to the first in its detached or passive narrative tone. The fact that this sense of suspension is maintained from the previous sections demonstrates that, despite the series of build-ups and collapses, this is an ongoing process at work. The protagonist waits for his friend within this attained state of knowing Nature.

In the Introduction to ARIOSO C¹ [RH23], Mahler provides the beauty of life that inspires the protagonist’s ecstatic exclamation: “O Schönheit! O ewigen Liebens - Lebenstrunkne Welt!” (O beauty! O world drunk with eternal love and life!). ARIOSO C¹ shares a striking resemblance to the Adagietto movement from his Fifth Symphony. The start of that movement and this beginning exude the same relaxed contentment. Both begin with a few measures of lute-like accompaniment in the harp (Symphony 5) and mandolin here in Das Lied. The first notes of each of the melody are also quite similar in
their staid character and in the fact that they both span the interval of a fourth—C to F in the Adagietto and D to G in Das Lied. Both lines build melodically upward for about four measures before reversing direction. In the opening of the Adagietto each mini phrase (denoted by breath marks in the example below) takes the last note of the one previous to it and pushes the melody higher in pitch until the subsequent phrase (m. 6) enters a half step lower than the previous unit ended. (B-natural to B-flat).

Example 4.8

a) Symphony 5 Adagietto (mm.1-6)

b) Das Lied Introduction to ARIOSO C\(^1\) RH23

In the equivalent place in Das Lied, the melody is suddenly taken over by the violins—as if the flute had summoned the violins to awaken and sing. The violins then begin to sing “the song of the earth” as it is heard at the end of this movement [RH58].

Example 4.9

a) “The song of the earth” RH58

b) RH24 in Introduction to ARIOSO C\(^1\)
This foreshadowing of the transcendent end is followed by a rising line—evoking the *Ewigkeitmotif*. However, this intensely beautiful music is interrupted by a measure of chromatic triplet staccati [RH26⁻¹]. The flute attempts to summon the song once again with the same material heard at the beginning of this section [RH26⁺³]. Next, the voice enters [RH27], beginning ARIOSO C¹. The vocal line, unlike either the violin line or “the song of the earth” [RH58], begins with a leap of a major sixth. This is the first sign in the vocal line of longing. Having just given us a shining moment of the beauty of life he says “I long to enjoy oh friend at your side the beauty of this evening!” [RH27]. The vocal line begins to expand upon the melody established in the instrumental interlude. As it diverges from the original melody it exhibits yet more longing, which is also reflected now in the orchestra as well. The violin melody rises upward with accented quarter notes and intones a fragment of “the song of the earth” [RH29]. The music subsides [RH30] and builds itself back up again for the third time with the fragmented flute melody. Once recharged we hear more fragments of “the song of the earth” as well as the *Ewigkeitmotif* [RH31] as the music builds to the final grandiose line “O beauty! O world drunk with eternal love and life!” [RH33⁺⁷].

This impassioned declaration from the protagonist incites the close of ARIOSO C¹. The first Part of “Der Abschied” is over. Another orchestral interlude introduces Part II and the second poem, comprised mostly of a march. At RH38 the march is latent. La Grange points out that the first gestations of the march [RH38-41] “provides all the material for the long symphonic interlude which is to come” [RH41-RH48].⁶⁴ The tremolo in the bass and accented dotted half notes and whole notes in the bassoons, horns,

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⁶⁴ La Grange, vol. 4, 1376
tam tam (who makes a second appearance here) and the harp, prepare for the immanent emergence of the latent march. The first sign of which we see $[RH39^1]$ in the dotted figure in the clarinets. The march gesture is in tension with the turn figure and the lyrical rising melody in the English horn. The tension between these elements renders the music painful. It is tearing itself apart—ripping at the seams. The distortion given by the falling chromatic line $[RH40^2]$ is unbearable. The different elements are wrenched together and this forcing causes such impossible discord that the music simply cannot go on. The entire piece struggles to a stop $[RH40]$ (Ex. 4.10).
Example 4.10 Interlude i.e. March. “Stop” at RH40 marked by red line.
Lyrical material in green, the march material in blue.
The cello [RH41\(^3\)] is the lonely human voice, resisting the march’s power. It, too, finally gives up. The descending major third at the end of its phrase signals resignation. At RH41 the march prevails and the cellos and basses intone a beautiful humanistic expression of giving in.

Example 4.11 RH41\(^3\)

According to de La Grange, this Interlude serves as a farewell to “youth, to love, and to beauty.” Within this farewell, the melodic and march elements are at odds. The march and the persistent C Minor tonality create its insistent sense of hopelessness. It is this hopelessness that the lyrical elements press against – at times succeeding in distorting the march. As shown in Ex. 4.12, the lyrical melody influences the march to leap to F and to convert its dotted rhythm to straight eighth notes, coinciding with the melody [RH42\(^2\)].

Example 4.12 Horn in F. March influenced by melody RH42\(^3\)

The lyrical impulse dominates and the march is momentarily quieted. RH42-RH43. Similar interactions between the lyrical and march elements occur as the power of

\(^{65}\) La Grange, vol. 3, 1377.
this section mounts to its climax [RH46]. The lyrical element has its final bout of expression before being overwhelmed right before the march prevails [RH46$^{+5}$].

At RH47, *fortissimo* C whole notes in the oboe and horns (with bells raised) and tam tam mirror the strokes at the beginning of “Das Abschied” functioning to initiate a postlude. Mahler paints time coming to a standstill [RH47$^{5+9}$] as the flutes, oboes and clarinets and horns exchange the march motive in seemingly different dimensions of the time/space continuum. Immediately following [RH48], the musical texture suggests a dreamscape in which the man alighting his horse, evoking a moment held in memory.

Starting in Recitative #3, Poem 2 begins. Everything now takes place in memory as signaled by the extraordinary shift of voice from “Ich” to “Er.” The notion of memory, in this context, needs to be understood almost metaphorically given that time itself has begun to stretch as we approach “transcendent infinity.” Mahler maintains the precedent he set with the first two recitatives, employing a detached narrative voice. As noted, the previous two recitatives were un-invested, lacking any action on the part of the speaker. In Recitative #1 there is no sense of an individual. And in the second the individual is completely inactive – there we see an almost disembodied “I.” Musically, the recitatives are almost identical.

Memory is central to the explication of Part II, “Der Abschied,” starting with Recitative #3 [RH48]. The prevalence of Nature that we have observed thus far in the symphony allows Mahler to create a permeable boundary between memory and the present. What appears to be a seamless transition between the two is in fact a symptom of
Nature’s omnipresence. In Nature, time and space become one. What we might experience as temporal shifts in the last movement are in fact the effortless ebbing and flowing of memory. This moving between memory and the present is especially prominent between RH47 and RH57 where shifts from one mode of experience to the other are signaled by distinct figures in the woodwinds that standout in the orchestral texture as seemingly “out of time.” By tracking these shifts we are better able to understand the dénouement that takes place in the section.

The ambiguity Mahler purposefully built into Recitative #3 through the use of the third person pronoun communicates the sense that this could be every man’s departure from earth. By eliminating the personal pronoun, he achieves universality. This tactic also resonates deeply with the ontological necessity of the dissolution of the individual required for ecstatic acceptance of death.

We leave the recitative and its objective narration, and enter into the scene of the departing friends. In preparation, the woodwinds set forth a conglomeration of motives [RH49-RH50, INTRO TO A²]. The waiting friend becomes our guide, narrating his own memory [ARIOSO A², RH50]. The monotone character of the line (Ex. 4.13, RH50) communicates the waiting friend’s reserved melancholy.

Example 4.13 RH50 “His voice was veiled.”

We enter more deeply into the thoughts of this waiting friend [RH51] as we hear the dialogue between friends. We are now inside the memory that the waiting friend

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66 Mahler, of course, knew Wagner’s famous composing-out of this idea in *Parsifal*, Act I.
established. The melodic contour of the vocal line becomes lyrical. Mahler has also shifted his marking from “immer Tonlos” (always toneless) [RH50] to “sehr weich und ausdruckvoll” (very tenderly and full of expression) [RH51\textsuperscript{+3}]. We experience “immediate life” in the “medium of memory.”\textsuperscript{67}

Example 4.14 RH51\textsuperscript{+3} “My friend, this world has not been kind to me!”

With the clarinet’s chromatic sighs [RH52\textsuperscript{+1}] Mahler signals an impending change in the narrative point of view, moving into ARIOSO A\textsuperscript{3} [RH53]. We recognize this as a variant of ARIOSO A because of the distinctive duples in the harp, the fragments of the march motive and the stayed quarter notes in the viola and cello. When the march finally dissipates, we enter into the departing friend’s thoughts. His somber tone suggests interior dialogue. Having answered his friend’s question, he now turns inward as he asks, “Where do I go?” He becomes enraptured by his own speech, no longer concerned with or aware of his friend’s presence. Mahler appears to have zoomed in on the departing friend, removing the waiting friend from the frame.

At RH53 when the march dissolves, the departing friend’s fear of death also dissolves. Previously, it remained the case that the departing friend was still affected by earthy troubles. He complained that fortune was not kind to him. Thus, the section between RH47 - RH53 functions as a transition between these two very different states of mind – from fear of death to acceptance. To reflect this transformation, the music

\textsuperscript{67} Adorno, Mahler, 155.
displays motives representing both states of mind. In this way, transformation in the music mimics the personal transformation. Mitchell puts it this way:

It is the aftermath of the march – its liquidation – that we are intended to be conscious of here. Because we are conscious of it musically, we are conscious of the particular dramatic significance of the dialogue taking place within the context, the diminishing perspectives, of the great funeral rite that has preceded it.68

The march’s gradual “liquidation” communicates the sense of progression/transition in this section. Mahler provides clear markers for the listener that signpost the departing friend’s process of dealing with his coming death. Almost immediately after RH53, his music becomes subdued as his melodic contour prefigures the reprise of ARIOSO B1 [RH55] with the oscillation in triplets. The departing friend has made one step towards acceptance of death—he’s no longer rebellious against it. His fear of death has died with the march. In his next phrase [RH543] he looks forward to what he must now do. Rather than bemoan the life that was unfair to him, he now seeks peace for his lonely heart. A very clear cadential gesture at the end of this phrase [RH54] communicates a sense of resignation rather than ecstatic acceptance of death. He still has some way to go, signaled in the text by the word “seek.” He’s still searching for peace. He has not yet found it but he’s being called to Nature, namely to the mountains, to find it.

Another very prominent woodwind moment occurs in the Interlude preceding ARIOSO B1 [RH54+7]. It is another chromatic flurry (Bird of Death) almost identical to the flurry leading into Recitative #1. This moment differs from the others in that we have an obbligato instrument that changes linear trajectory. The clarinet line provides more than simply a fragmented woodwind gesture, signaling a subtle change in perspective—it

68 Mitchell, Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death, 403.
brings the Interlude to a full stop. To this end, the clarinet executes a cadenza-like rhapsody over a sustained chord in the lower woodwinds. Once the pedal drops out, we leave the memory accompanied by the fragments of chromatic sixteenth notes in the bassoon, flute, clarinet and English horn.

This moment fulfills Mahler’s objective to disrupt the continuity of time. Silence suggests an ellipsis of time. The reprise of Arioso B¹ [RH55] is an important moment for the departing friend. He hears again, the friendly sounds of Nature – the oscillating triplets of the “brook sing[ing] melodiously” and the birdsong turn figures in the flute and violins.

ARIOSO B¹ returns, last heard in Part I [RH7] of “Der Abschied,” followed by ARIOSO B³ material [RH55-58], heard in Part I as well [RH19²]. The protagonist no longer is speaking to his friend. He has been wandering in the mountains but now he states, “I will no longer wander in distant lands.” Nature’s oscillating triplets announce the protagonist’s closeness to Nature. He remains still and ready for death. He has finally reached a state of being through his experience with Nature that allows for an acceptance of death.

As the moment of transcendence arrives at the end of ARIOSO B³ the woodwinds take us out of time with the flute and oboe sounding the ascending line [RH57⁺⁵] of the Ewigkeitmotif. The clarinet picks up the motive, further signaling the important change in perspective/experience. The motive reappears in augmentation in the second violins [RH57⁺⁸] that Mahler asks to be played both sul tasto and espressivo. The motive’s rising contour coupled with the augmentation removes any semblance of chronometric time. This moment takes place neither in memory nor the present as the ecstatic song
undertakes to transcend temporality. An omniscient view of the universe—what Mitchell describes as a “God’s eye view”—assumes control. It is from this, the perspective of all-encompassing Nature, that one can hear “the song of the earth.” La Grange refers to the pervasive *Ewigkeitmotif* heard at the moment of transcendence [RH57\(^5\)] “as dominat[ing] the last pages of the work, as this consoling thought emerges that Nature blossoms anew every springtime.”\(^69\) The spatio-temporal expansion achieved through stretching this motive, prepares for the long-awaited breakthrough of “the song of the earth”—“Die liebe Erde” [RH58].

Example 4.15 RH47\(^5\). Transcendent moment, *Ewigkeitmotif* highlighted.

The alto sings of earth’s renewal against a background of soaring violin melody, rolling arpeggios in the harp (to be join later by the celesta) and long tones in the woodwinds [ARIOSO C\textsuperscript{1}, RH58]. Mahler finally provides C Minor’s true key of reconciliation, namely C Major, in contrast to the drink induced A Major reconciliation offered in Part I. This music, marked \textit{Langsam! PPP! Ohne Steigerung} (Slowly! PPP! without crescendo), steadily unfolds into the infinite. As La Grange states: “Here is the eternity of Nature in which Mahler places all his hope and faith.”\textsuperscript{70}

Example 4.16 “Die Liebe Erde,” “the song of the earth”

The alto’s long phrases contrast to the rich and active orchestral texture. The vocal line’s alternation of descending and ascending scalar motion creates expansive long swells in her melodic contour (Figure 4.2). The peaks and valleys of her melodic line flatten out

\textsuperscript{70} La Grange, vol. 4, 1380.
completely by the end of the Coda. Space and time become one as the amplitude of her melodic waves decrease. In the final bars of the piece, as the orchestra fades out leaving just the voice and Mahler’s ethereal instruments, mandolin, harp, and celeste, the alto repeats “ewig” on E and D dipping down to C at first but never reaching a final resolution to C. The meter-less music has nothing that requires completion. Given that resolution is no longer the goal, the absence of resolution is not missed. On the scale of the infinite there is no longer a moment of “resolution.” If we attempt to visualize the shifts in contour, we can imagine what it is to experience moving into the infinite.

Figure 4.2 Graphs of melodic contour of “the song of the earth”

“The earth blooms in spring and becomes green anew! Everywhere and forever…”

a) Phrase One [RH58-62] Pitch as Y axis (number of half steps above middle C) and Time as X axis (beats after RH58)
“The distances brighter blue, ewig…”

b) Phrase Two [RH62-End] Pitch as Y axis (number of half steps above middle C) and Time as X axis (beats after RH58))

I disagree with La Grange’s contention that the consolation offered by “the song of the earth” is Nature’s renewal. In fact, Nature’s renewing had caused man to suffer in movement 1, making it clear that man, not Nature has changed. A change of perspective had to occur in order for man to make peace with his own mortality. Mahler makes this change of perspective abundantly clear in his use of the Ewigkeitmotif which, if put crudely, is a suggestion of life after death, thus a suggestion of hope. The afterlife that Mahler gestures to here is much different from the heaven of Symphony 2 or 4. At the end of Das Lied there remains an image of “afterlife,” suggesting there is something greater than life, namely, Nature - the infinite wholeness of all things, Nietzsche’s
primordial Oneness. At death, we merge ourselves with this wholeness. Adorno poignantly discusses entering into wholeness as a radical shift in ontological perspective:

It is said in the first Song that the earth has long—not forever—stood firm, and the leave-taker in “Der Abschied” even calls it the dear earth, as something vanishing that is embraced. To the work the earth is not the universe, but what fifty years later could fall within the experience of one flying at a great altitude, a star. For the gaze of music that leaves it behind, it is rounded to a sphere that can be overviewed, as in the meantime it has already been photographed from space, not the center of Creation but something minute and ephemeral. To such experience is allied the melancholy hope for other stars, inhabited by happier beings that humans. But the earth that has grown remote to itself is without hope, the hope the stars once promised. It is past hope, which fills the dying eye until it is frozen below the flakes of unbound space. The moment of delight before such beauty dares to withstand its abandonment to disenchanted Nature. That metaphysics is no longer possible becomes the ultimate metaphysics.\(^{71}\)

The relationship between man and earth established in movement one reverses or even becomes irrelevant in “Der Abschied.” As Adorno points out, Mahler makes a subtle distinction between the “heavens” and the “earth.” In the first movement of the symphony the text reads:

The firmament is forever blue and the earth will long stand fast and blossom in spring.

The firmament and the earth are often not distinguished, leading one to understand that man is finite and earth is infinite because of its constant renewal. But in fact what Mahler lays out is a distinction between the *firmament* that is forever blue, and the earth that will stand firm for a long time (not forever). It is against these two temporal units that the protagonist in movement one asks man to measure himself. On the scale of

\(^{71}\) Adorno, 154.
the infinite, though, the distinction between man and earth is made irrelevant. Earth becomes a star to turn away from and man enters into the infinite. This ties into Adorno’s notion of the ultimate metaphysics: the fact that metaphysics have no bearing in the infinite world is the ultimate metaphysics.

Thus man’s suffering is answered in the final moments of Das Lied, not by a superficial appreciation of the earth’s renewal, but of a new-found understanding of entering into Nature (the infinite wholeness of all things) through this appreciation. At the end of Das Lied the question posed in the first movement, “But you man, how long will you remain?” is finally answered: ewig.

Mahler names this symphony Das Lied von der Erde because everything shown and described in it takes part in the finite reality of the earth. We hear the earth opening up its boundary to the infinite at the end, not the infinite itself—Mahler saves that perhaps for the Symphony 9. Both symphonies seem to be saying farewell, but like a Janus head, one is looking backward to the finite as it says farewell while the other looks forward toward the infinite. It is this slight turn of the head, which dictates what we hear in each symphony. In Das Lied, the one who dies is released from the finite into the infinite. The topic of this symphony is not man’s infinite experience, but the finite human existence that precedes it. Thus when man hears “the song of the earth,” the earth opening up, he recognizes it as one finite part of the infinite. In hearing the cyclic rebirth of the earth enacted in the final moments of Das Lied one is released from this cycle and moves beyond it into Adorno’s metaphysic-less realm where linear-time and our teleological notions of being have no bearing and are replaced, instead with eternal all-
encompassing wholeness. The symphony shows man’s journey in preparing to “hear” his moment of transcendence—to hear *Das Lied von der Erde*. 
Conclusion

Mahler focused Das Lied on questions of human mortality understood within the dialectic of Nature and man. Through its musical discourse, the composer plots the path to achieving transcendence. Each step along that journey is given a musical embodiment that, taken together, offers Mahler's musical ontology, as I have termed it.

Mahler with Fechner understood man’s suffering in life as a symptom of his separation from Nature:

The spirit will no longer wander over mountain and field, or be surrounded by the delights of spring, only to mourn that it all seems exterior to him; but, transcending earthly limitations, he will feel new strength and joy…. Stilled is all restlessness of thought which no longer needs to seek in order to find itself.\(^{72}\)

Das Lied unfolds a journey of man’s separateness from Nature to the moment when “the song of the earth” is heard. This journey plots the various ways in which we exist in relation to Nature. In Part I of Das Lied Mahler tells us that desire, the Schopenhauerian Will, is that which makes us long—long for oblivion through drink, long for spring (as a counterfeit of the infinite)\(^{73}\) long for trite love, and long for companionship. Our longing for the counterfeit “rotten triviality of this earth,” is a product of our separateness, which distracts man from true abundance found through reconciliation with Nature. In Part II he depicts a way of being with Nature that resonates with Rilke’s image of earth “aris[ing] in us invisibly.” Man enters into Nature and becomes part of wholeness, letting go of the epistemological notions of “being” which

\(^{72}\) Fechner quoted in La Grange, vol. 4, 1383.
\(^{73}\) The earth renews itself in spring for “a long time” not “ewig” therefore it is not infinite but resembles it in it's cyclic rebirth.
imply that in “being” we are in fact separate.\textsuperscript{74} What being \textit{with} Nature does is breakdown that division between interior and exterior, re-integrating man into wholeness.

Mahler was not interested in the contradistinction between the finite and the infinite—between man’s mortality and the infinite reality of Nature—but rather in the dialectic between these two. Mahler \textit{paints nature in flux} in order to create this dialectic between the interior and exterior worlds of man and Nature. This is precisely what Mahler provides in the closing moments of this symphony. “The song of the earth” is an intermediary between life and death—finite and infinite. The “song of the earth” is heard as man passes from life to death.

Perhaps most challenging in Mahler’s project was how best to paint Nature always in flux while preparing for the timeless finale of “\textit{ewig}.” Primary among the musical elements he employs are form, metric/rhythmic development, texture, motivic development, and tonal trajectory. These elements comprise Mahler’s musical ontology and capture the journey to “\textit{ewig}.”

Mahler used form to distinguish between goal-oriented music and music that reaches ineffable meter-less space. Beginning in movement 1, strophic form establishes a dynamic formal world with goals that communicate man’s desire and longing. In “\textit{Der Abschied},” the formal units express the absence of goal-direction in both philosophical and musical terms. This culminates in the static coda where Mahler provides dissolution of meter and rhythm. An erasure of rhythmic regularity and pulse creates a changed dimensionality in which time and space are flat. The coda embodies the transformation of longing into dissolution, unresolved and, yet, not unfulfilling.

\textsuperscript{74} As Foucault describes in \textit{The Order of Things} the verb “to be” sets man apart from everything else around him as it declares man as a separate entity.
Throughout *Das Lied*, Nature is heard in various states of oneness with man. *Nature in flux* is seen through Mahler’s permutations of the pentatonic cell, which show Nature in its many forms (see chart above). But Nature’s interaction with man is also important. This is seen through Nature’s presence or absence in the various movements. At the beginning of “Der Abschied”, Nature is absent. Gradually, Nature’s presence pervades the musical landscape, encouraging man to hear Nature, until finally “the song of the earth” abounds. Man and Nature’s relationship is portrayed in increasing degrees of oneness throughout Part I and Part II. The mimetic ecstatic experiences of Nature in “Der Abschied” contrast with the rejection of any relationship with Nature in “Der Trunkene im Frühling.” As man moves farther down the path to transcendence and wholeness with Nature, the mode in which man interacts with Nature changes. In addition to the fairly standard use of birdsong as an intermediary between the world of Nature and the world of man, which he gives us in movement 5, Mahler brings into the musical texture direct encounters with other parts of Nature, such as the murmuring brook. It is a different kind of hearing of Nature, which is central to hearing “the song of the earth” at the end.

Mahler’s intricate motivic development in *Das Lied* relates to the philosophical idea of wholeness—that everything is always connected and constantly changing. The themes of human desire, suffering, and the Will connect to musical motives that Mahler weaves into the fabric of this piece. The “die müd'en Menschen” motive from movement 2, which reappears in movement 6, relates to the idea of man being tired from longing and seeking final rest. The *Ewigkeitmotiv* that Mahler employs in the final minutes of the piece seem to enclose the symphony and man’s longing in an embrace of eternity.
Throughout the symphony Mahler relies on a system of signifying tonal markers that mirror the journey to transcendence. As discussed, in movements 1-5, A Minor and A major play important roles. A Minor, established in movement 1, is related to man’s suffering while A Major, in movements 1 and 5, provides false consolation in association with the idea of drink. The a/A tension prefigures the c/C juxtaposition in movement 6. C Minor, associated with death, is overcome by a resounding C Major—the key of “the song of the earth.”

B-flat Major has strong associations with the human world. Mahler establishes this immediately with the tenor’s first entrance in movement 1 (“Schon winkt der Wein”). In movement 2, the outbursts of man's earthly desires are associated with B-flat Major and the weariness with D Minor. In movement 3 the scene of friends chatting at the beginning is accompanied by B-flat. After the episode of reflection in G Minor (which signifies reflective thought (discussed in chapter 2), B-flat returns with the recall of the chatting friends images. Similarly, in movement 4, the sudden shift from daydream to the girl's present reality occurs in B-flat Major. In movement 5, the protagonist’s interaction with Nature in an altered state of consciousness introduces D-flat Major – a key that appears only this one time in the entire symphony. The apparent closeness of D-flat to C (the key of “the song of the earth”) suggests also that the drunkard’s seeming closeness to Nature and transcendence will not be fulfilled. In fact, D-flat has no clear place in the harmonic scheme of Das Lied, which employs the two poles of A/C and B-flat/G as its anchors. The harmonic tension inherent between a key center (C) and its flat 2 (D-flat) makes clear that the protagonist cannot achieve transcendence. He quickly moves on to
the familiar ground of B-flat as he rejects spring and then to A Major, where he embraces, once again, false consolation.

As made evident by the lack of resolution in the final moments of Das Lied, Mahler maintains within his ontological assertions that transcendence is not climactic. To regard achieving transcendence as a kind of goal-oriented success is to misread the ontological project and conclusions presented here. Transcendence is all-encompassing. It embraces fullness of acceptance. As one pulls back from it, it is still massive and glorious, but it is not climatic. It dissolves any remnant of subject/object relationship and any division between man and Nature. It is as if “the doors of perception [are] cleansed [and] every thing…appears to man as it is, Infinite.”75 Given the spatio-temporal landscape Mahler unfolds, we do not wait for the final “ewig” to resolve. The music surely goes on forever.

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