

THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL  
IMPLICATIONS OF MAHLER'S  
*KINDERTOTENLIEDER*

THESIS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF EXAMPLES.....	viii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1. MAHLER, RÜCKERT, AND THE <i>KINDERTOTENLIEDER</i> : PRELIMINARY REMARKS .....	3
1.1. Mahler's Life and Work .....	3
1.2. Preliminary Remarks on Mahler and His <i>Kindertotenlieder</i> .....	8
1.3. Rückert's Life and Work and Mahler's Attraction to Rückert .....	17
1.4. Additional Remarks .....	22
2. MAHLER'S STATE OF MIND AND BELIEFS .....	24
2.1. Mahler's Motivation and His Crisis of 1901 .....	24
2.2. Psychoanalytical Observations .....	26
2.3. Mahler's Completion of the Cycle in 1904 .....	30
3. PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE <i>KINDERTOTENLIEDER</i> .....	32
3.1. Links to Different Philosophies in the <i>Kindertotenlieder</i> .....	32
3.1.1. Eastern Ideals and Mystical Qualities .....	32
3.1.2. Hegelianism .....	35
3.1.3. Hermeneutics .....	42
3.1.4. Post-Structuralism .....	46
3.1.5. Aesthetic Realism .....	50
3.2. The Search for Meaning and an Outlet for Grief and Comfort .....	55
3.2.1. The Search for Meaning .....	55
3.2.2. Grief.....	56

4. SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE <i>KINDERTOTENLIEDER</i> .....	73
4.1. The Romantic Artist and Audience .....	73
4.2. The Reception of the <i>Kindertotenlieder</i> .....	78
4.3. The <i>Kindertotenlieder</i> 's Effect on Audiences .....	85
CONCLUSION .....	90
LITERATURE.....	95
APPENDIX: CHARTS.....	98

## LIST OF EXAMPLES

<b>Example</b>	<b>Page</b>
Example 1: Contrapuntal opening of Song 1.....	58
Example 2: Ascending vocal line of Song 1.....	58
Example 3: Reoccurring cadence of Song 1.....	59
Example 4: Central motif of Song 2.....	60
Example 5: D major moment of Song 2.....	61
Example 6: German augmented sixth chord of Song 2.....	61
Example 7: Harmonic departure of Song 3.....	62
Example 8: Text emphasis of Song 3.....	63
Example 9: Unresolved moment of Song 4.....	64
Example 10: Climax of Song 5.....	66

## INTRODUCTION

Mahler's orchestral song cycle *Kindertotenlieder* is known for its brilliant expressivity and unique musical language. Written in 1901-04, the cycle takes on the challenging subject of the death of children. It was Mahler's second song cycle and is considered one of his late works. It is a work that definitely characterizes the late Romantic period. This thesis will focus on aspects of the cycle that make it such a significant composition – the philosophical and sociological aspects of the *Kindertotenlieder*. I will examine existing research on the *Kindertotenlieder* and the background and context of their composition. I will explore Mahler's state of mind at the time and examine his beliefs that allowed him to write such intimate and emotional music, music for which he supposedly had no outlet for motivation at the time. I will uncover the cycle's links to different philosophies and their relationship to the concept of grief. The song cycle as a whole represents the ultimate search for meaning. This thesis will explore the levels of meaning of the songs of the *Kindertotenlieder* that were able to provide some consolation for the ultimate loss. As far as the sociological implications of the *Kindertotenlieder*, I will discuss the first performances and reception of it. Rückert's role as a poet will be discussed, as well as Mahler's life at the time, in order to uncover how these songs were so effective and touching to all that heard them. A study of the philosophical and



sociological connotations of the *Kindertotenlieder* will help to clarify aspects of the song cycle that have been heavily debated, such as the chronology of the songs, the question of the cycle's unity, the source of Mahler's motivation, and the relationship between the *Kindertotenlieder* and other works by Mahler.

# **1. MAHLER, RÜCKERT, AND THE *KINDERTOTENLIEDER*: PRELIMINARY REMARKS**

## **1.1. Mahler's Life and Work**

Gustav Mahler was born in Bohemia on July 7, 1860. His oeuvre consists only of symphonies and songs that encompassed the Romantic ideal, but also foreshadowed the originality of the twentieth century. His music, along with the music by Richard Strauss, was thought of as “‘New German’ modernism” (Franklin 2006). Mahler wrote nine large scale symphonies – he left a tenth unfinished – and most of his songs are accompanied by orchestra. As the director of the Vienna Hofoper from 1897 to 1907, he displayed “post-Wagnerian idealism” (Franklin 2006). He established his career, which was plagued by discrimination and criticism, as an innovative conductor. Mahler was a student at the Vienna Conservatory, and his early conducting career consisted of various positions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His work at a position in Vienna proved to be impressive, which led to an important post in Kassel from 1883 to 1885. His later positions in theaters established his reputation as difficult, disrespectful, and even cruel to performers.

Upon leaving Kassel, Mahler accepted a position in Prague. Although he did not get along with his superiors, he did help to win back the German audience. Mahler then

took a post in Leipzig in 1886 with the Neues Stadttheater, a first-class theatre. During this time, he wrote the first drafts of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, the First Symphony, and the first movement of the Second Symphony, entitled *Todtenfeier*. Mahler then returned to Prague and secured a position as director of the Royal Hungarian Opera in Budapest, where he had complete artistic control. Mahler had the difficult task of filling seats for the performances, while at the same time being sensitive to Magyar concerns. In this post especially, he concentrated on administration, yet some members of the audience resented him because he was Jewish. In 1889, Mahler's father, mother, and younger sister died. He became head of the household and had to take care of his siblings.

Mahler became the chief conductor at the Hamburg Stadttheater in 1891, where he conducted Wagner operas, as well as familiar and new operas. The scandals surrounding Mahler's behavior and tensions between him and his superiors often proved to be productive for Mahler. He became interested in conducting symphony concerts because of his admiration for Hans von Bülow, their conductor at the time. In 1893, he began a pattern of working summers, initially at the beach near Steinbach in Austria. In the 1894-95 season, he took over conducting the symphony concerts, due to von Bülow's death, and completed the Second Symphony that summer. Tragedy struck in 1895, when Mahler's brother Otto committed suicide – Mahler then had his two sisters move in with him. The previous year, he had signed a five-year contract with Hamburg, yet his radical portrayal of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony caused his dismissal. He finished his Third Symphony in 1896. He wanted to go to Vienna, and he aimed for a position at the Vienna Hofoper. Mahler even went to extremes of converting to Roman Catholicism in 1897 in order to secure the post.

Mahler saw his position in Vienna as a revolutionary one, a chance to revive the artistic direction and the audience. He struggled with the status of his opera company as a court institution. His performances of Wagner and Mozart operas, essential to his operatic repertory, showed his commitment to German culture, yet he also showed an interest in non-German works. Mahler took advantage of this creative role and amended what he felt were weaknesses in the orchestration of Schumann and Beethoven. Adding to his difficulties was the fact that many influential people in Vienna were anti-Semites, and his friend Hugo Wolf was committed to an asylum at this time. Mahler involved himself in every aspect of the productions, and he formed relationships with – in his opinion – competent singers. The result was a decade of memorable opera performances in Vienna, yet it took his toll on him, and he began to suffer from physical and mental health conditions. In addition, in 1889 he began to conduct subscription concerts and continued to support his sisters. He spent three more seasons conducting the Philharmonic concerts in Vienna. His methods were controversial, and many criticized his dramatic conducting gestures.

Mahler met his future wife Alma in 1901, the same year he resigned as conductor of the Philharmonic concerts. Mahler also had to undergo an operation that year. In 1902, he married Alma, who was twenty years younger than him. She introduced Mahler into a circle of Modernist Viennese artists. He profited both mentally and creatively from the marriage, for their honeymoon in Russia was actually a conducting tour. This tour, in addition to the successful premiere of the completed Third Symphony, led to many engagements outside Vienna, where he performed his own music. The public eagerly

awaited premieres of Mahler symphonies, and the Eighth turned out to be the last one he conducted.

In the 1906-07 season at the opera house, the scandals surrounding Mahler, such as his numerous absences due to conducting trips and many complaints of displeased singers, worsened. He had signed a contract with the Metropolitan Opera in New York, yet tragedy struck Mahler again in the summer of 1907. His two daughters became ill, and one of them, Maria, did not recover and died. Following Maria's death, Alma and her mother needed medical attention, and Mahler learned he had heart problems. Later that same year, he left Vienna for New York, which he found to be elitist and conservative, but he admired the musicians at the Metropolitan opera. He conducted the operas of Wagner and Mozart, as he grieved for Maria. Mahler then took over the New York Philharmonic and drafted the Ninth Symphony in the summer of 1909. Fatigue caused an illness in February of 1911, which led to a serious bacterial infection. Mahler traveled to Vienna, and died there on May 18, 1911.

Mahler's Second and Third Symphonies became very popular, which paved the way for the Mahler festival in 1920 in Amsterdam, a testament to his posthumous reputation. Mahler's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies are considered his most successful and rewarding experiments in a new style. The Sixth Symphony in particular displays the philosophical and psychological implication of the new style. Mahler was undergoing a crisis in his marriage during the time he wrote the Ninth and the unfinished Tenth Symphonies. The multi-media character and theoretical incompleteness of the Tenth Symphony confirm Adorno's opinion of Mahler's music as "paradoxically inimical to the cultural category of art it nevertheless contributed to, relied upon, and heightened in so

significant a manner” (Franklin 2006). In the 1960s, due to the centenary of his birth, there was a renewed interest in Mahler’s symphonies. A young and unrestricted generation was attracted to the “passionate engagement and often cathartic power of his music” (Franklin 2006). The following decade, his symphonies became part of the canon, and they are considered a link between Austro-German tradition and twentieth century modernism.

All of Mahler’s early works, except one, link poetry with music. He wrote the poems for *Das klagende Lied* and *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*. Such poems show the relationship to early German Romanticism, a dual symbolism of nature as both nurturing and threatening (Plantinga 1984, 450). His first four symphonies are considered a tetralogy – they displayed the *Wunderhorn*-style of the 1890s and created a genre of allegorical songs that utilize contrasting voices in the manner of a discourse. Many of his symphonies utilize, or are related to, his songs. He felt that the symphony and the song with orchestral or piano accompaniment were “intimately connected” (Plantinga 1984, 450). His songs were a pool of musical ideas in his process of constantly revising and constructing his massive symphonies. Mahler’s three song cycles are *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (1883-85), *Kindertotenlieder* (1901-04), and *Das Lied von der Erde* (1907-08). For Mahler, the song cycle was a medium in which he could experiment, establish coherence on a larger level, and establish a source for his later symphonies (Agawu 1983, 81).

## 1.2. Preliminary Remarks on Mahler and His *Kindertotenlieder*

The *Kindertotenlieder* is made up of five songs; Mahler began the composition in 1901 and completed it in 1904. The poems are taken from Friedrich Rückert's collection with same title. Mahler also composed five other songs utilizing Rückert's poems that are not a cycle and are referred to as the *Fünf Rückert Lieder*. One of the most valuable sources on the philosophical characteristics of the cycle is Peter Russell's published dissertation *Light in Battle with Darkness: Mahler's Kindertotenlieder* (Russell 1991). Russell found that Mahler was incredibly sensitive to the poetry, enhanced the musical interpretation, and was aware of the imagery in the poetry. Donald Mitchell also conducted extensive research on Mahler. Mitchell (1985) has displayed the many examples in *Kindertotenlieder* of Mahler's musical genius: the artistry of the songs, the musical connections, and the musical coherence of the cycle. It is generally agreed that Mahler's musical language is represented in his orchestration, which is purposefully symbolic. Russell believes that "Mahler combines his musical patterns with detailed attentiveness to his texts" (Russell 1991, 65).

Russell concludes that the research on the *Kindertotenlieder* had focused on four areas: Mahler's motivation – he had not suffered the loss of a child at the time of composition; the question of the sequence of composition of the songs – the evidence is conflicting; the question of the cycle's unity; and the relationships between the songs of the *Kindertotenlieder* and other works by Mahler (Russell 1991, 2). The problem of Mahler's motivation will be discussed in chapter two of this paper. The question of the

cycle's unity will be addressed in chapters two and three. The chronology of the songs and the *Kindertotenlieder*'s relationship to other works by Mahler will be discussed here.

The question of the chronology of the songs of the *Kindertotenlieder* has many conflicting answers. We know that Mahler composed some of the songs in 1901, and the others probably in 1904 – we just are not sure which ones were composed when. Many look at the similarities in character of the songs to answer the question, for the treatment of the material in Songs 1, 2, and 5 is very different from the treatment of Songs 3 and 4. Edward Kravitt's (Kravitt 1978) argument is that Songs 1, 2, and 5 were composed in 1901, and Songs 3 and 4 in 1904, which is the general consensus. Kravitt's argument corresponds with Donald Mitchell's examination of Mahler's manuscripts. All of the manuscripts of the *Kindertotenlieder* are undated, and the manuscript of Song 1 is missing. The manuscript paper of Songs 2 and 5 is the type that Mahler used frequently. The manuscript paper used for Songs 3 and 4 is a completely different brand. This indicates that these two pairs of songs were composed at different times. Christopher Lewis also examined the composition drafts and the manuscripts of the *Kindertotenlieder*. Although Kravitt and Lewis agree that Songs 2 and 5 were written at the same time, and Songs 3 and 4 were written together, Lewis concluded that Songs 1, 3, and 4 were written in 1901 and Songs 2 and 5 in 1904 (Lewis 1996, 218). Mahler scholars also mention the fact that the manuscript for *Kindertotenlieder* No. 3 was in the possession of Mahler's long-time friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner. An auction of Bauer-Lechner's possessions included a manuscript of Song 3, and Mahler's relationship with her ended when he got married in 1901, which indicates that Song 3 would date from 1901. Alma Mahler's statements add to the confusion, because her three books present



conflicting information. Although we do not know which songs were written in 1901, we can conclude that the number is three. Since this issue is unresolved, composition of *Kindertotenlieder* is generally assigned to 1901-04.

The relationship between Mahler's symphonies and songs has been well-documented. *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and the *Wunderhorn* songs find reflection in the first four symphonies, and the *Kindertotenlieder* and the Rückert songs relate to symphonies 5-7. The Fifth Symphony is the first without a dramatic program, voices, songs, or movements based on songs. *Kindertotenlieder* No. 1 and the Fifth, which Mahler worked on in 1901, have an identical cadence. Jens Brincker shows that a figure in Song 1 provides motivic material throughout the Fifth (Brincker 1974, 165). The opening phrase of Song 2 resembles the beginning of the fourth movement of the Fifth Symphony. The Adagio movement of the Fourth, written in 1900, pre-quotes the opening vocal figure of Song 2. Song 3 has obvious links with the Fifth Symphony. Song 4 ends with a vocal figure that is quoted in the concluding, slow fade-out of the Ninth Symphony (1908-11). Song 5 has links to the finale of the Sixth (1904). There is also a broader relationship. The "somber world" of tragedy portrayed in *Kindertotenlieder* is also present in the Sixth and the Seventh Symphonies. Alma made statements that attest to the relationship between *Kindertotenlieder* and the Sixth. She described the third movement as two children playing a game, their voices becoming more and more tragic, eventually dying out. The Sixth was a very emotional work for both Gustav and Alma, because it was so personal and prophetic. "In the *Kindertotenlieder*, as also in the Sixth, he anticipated his own life in music" (Alma Mahler 1973, 70). In this aspect, the *Kindertotenlieder* is very forward-looking and innovative.

In order to comprehend the philosophical and sociological implications of the *Kindertotenlieder*, an overview of the general characteristics of the cycle and the individual songs is necessary. The most obvious unifying factor of the cycle is the theme of the death of children. Hans Redlich believes that this theme symbolizes a quintessential Romantic feature: the songs “revolve around the solitary, suffering ego at its centre” (Redlich 1963, 144). Many Mahler scholars have noted that the *Kindertotenlieder* represent a transition in Mahler’s song-writing. Mahler was trying something new at the time – “an exclusively instrumental symphonic style” (Russell 1991, 12). The style of *Kindertotenlieder* differed in that it was symphonic, extremely sparse, linear and contrapuntal, and transparent. The voice is treated as another instrument in the contrapuntal texture. This technique allowed Mahler to explore different sonorities in different songs, or within the same song. Philip Barford believes that the *Kindertotenlieder* display “a deepened psychological insight, intensified chromatic inflection, and a fascinating orchestration, which develops the style of the *Wayfarer* songs” (Barford 1971, 15).

Song 1: “Nun will die Sonn’ so hell aufgeh’n” (“Now the sun is about to rise as brightly”)

Mahler’s Text:

*Nun will die Sonn’ so hell aufgeh’n,  
Als sei kein Unglück, kein Unglück die Nacht  
gescheh’n!<sup>1</sup>  
Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein!*

*Die Sonne, die Sonne, sie scheint allgemein!<sup>2</sup>  
Du mußt nicht die Nacht in dir verschränken,  
Mußt sie ins ew’ge Licht, ins ew’ge Licht*

Translation:

Now the sun will rise as brightly  
As if no misfortune had happened in  
the night!  
The misfortune moreover happened  
to me alone!  
The sun, it shines for all alike!  
You must not enfold the night within you,  
You must drown it in the eternal Light!

<sup>1</sup> Mahler’s text, translation, and changes made to Rückert’s text from Russell 1991, p. 68. Mahler made a few changes to Rückert’s text: In stanza one Mahler changed *Sonne* to *Sonn’*, *aufgehn* to *aufgeh’n* and *geschehn* to *gescheh’n*. He repeats *kein Unglück*.

<sup>2</sup> In stanza two, Mahler changed *auch* to *nur* and repeats *Die Sonne*.

versenken!<sup>3</sup>  
*Ein Lamplein verlosch in meinem Zelt!  
 Heil! Heil sei dem Freudenlicht der Welt,  
 dem Freudenlicht der Welt!*<sup>4</sup>

A little lamp went out in my tent!  
Hail! Hail to the gladdening light of the world!

This song displays the desolation of the poet. Many have noted that it was the perfect choice for the initial song of this complex and sorrowful cycle, both poetically and musically. The poem is full of light and dark imagery, and the symbolism provides “a setting off point for the cycle.” (Russell 1991, 69.) It seems to have been written on the morning after the child’s death, but interestingly, it moves efficiently from the “immediacy of loss and lament to emotional resolve and finally optimism” (Russell 1991, 45). However, this is just a hint of optimism. Song 1 displays many of the emotions expressed throughout the cycle within it, and it establishes a conflict that is definitely left unresolved. The key is D minor (D major).

Song 2: “Nun seh’ ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen” (“Now I can see why such dark flames”)

Mahler's Text:  
*Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen  
 Ihr spruhtet mir in manchem Augenblicke.  
 O Augen! O Augen! Gleichsam, um voll in  
 Einem Blicke  
 Zu drangen eure ganze Macht zusammen*<sup>5</sup>  
*Dort ahnt' ich nicht, weil Nebel mich  
 umschwammen,  
 Gewoben von verblenden Geschehnisse,  
 Daß sich der Strahl bereits zur Heimkehr schicke,  
 Dorthin, dorthin, von wannen alle Strahlen  
 stammen*<sup>6</sup>

Translation:  
Now I can see why such dark flames  
You flashed at me at many a moment  
O eyes! O eyes! as if into a single look

To concentrate your whole power.  
But I could not guess, because mists  
shrouded me  
Woven by blinding destiny,  
That the ray was already preparing to  
return home  
To the place from which all rays originate

<sup>3</sup> In stanza three, Mahler altered the position of *nicht*, changed the spelling of *verschrenken* to *verschranken* and changed *ewige* to *ew'ge*. He repeats *ins ew'ge Licht*.

<sup>4</sup> In stanza four, he changed *Lampchen* to *Lamplein*. *Freudenlichte* loses the final *e*, and both *Heil* and *dem Freudenlicht der Welt* are repeated.

<sup>5</sup> Mahler's text, translation, and changes made to Rückert's text from Russell 1991, p. 76. In stanza one, Mahler repeats *O Augen* and inserts *voll* before *in einem Blicke*.

<i>Ihr wolltet mir mit eurem Leuchten sagen Wir mochten nah dir bleiben gerne, Doch ist uns das vom Schicksal abgeschlagen<sup>7</sup></i>	You wanted with your shining eyes to say to me We would dearly like to stay near you, But that is denied us by fate
<i>Sieh uns nur an, denn bald sind wir dir ferne!<sup>1</sup></i>	Look at us well, for soon we shall be far from you!
<i>Was dir nur Augen sind in diesen Tagen In kunft'gen Nächten sind es dir nur Sterne<sup>8</sup></i>	What are only eyes to you in these days In future nights will be but stars to you.

Song 2 portrays an individual remembering tragic events, but references an “inauspicious future” (Revers 2002, 180). There is an emphasis on the images of eyes, seeing, and stars. This is also an indication of the children’s homecoming. Although there is a C minor key signature, the song is mainly tonally ambiguous. The key of C minor is not apparent until the last two measures. The tonal structure is defined by both functional harmony and assertion. The origin of vertical local harmonies suggests an emphasis on contrapuntal procedure, rather than actual surface sonorities. (Agawu 1983, 93.) The harmonic tension and delayed tonic, and any sort of foundation for tonal development “become a compositional program that translates the openness and uncertainty conveyed by the text in exemplary ways” (Revers 2002, 180). The key is considered to be C minor (C major).

### Song 3 “Wenn dein Mütterlein” (“When your mother”)

Mahler’s Text		Translation
	I	
<i>Wenn dein Mutterlein Tritt zur Tür herein, Und den Kopf ich drehe, Ihr entgegen sehe, Fallt auf ihr Gesicht Erst der Blick mir nicht,</i>		When your mother Comes in through the door And I turn my head And look towards her, My glance falls first Not on her face

<sup>6</sup> In stanza two, Mahler repeats *dorthin*.

<sup>7</sup> In stanza three, Mahler omits *immer*.

<sup>8</sup> In stanza four, Mahler changed *Sieh’ recht uns an!* to *Sieh’ uns nur an* and *dir noch Augen* to *dir nur Augen*.

*Sondern auf die Stelle,  
Naher, naher nach der Schwelle,  
Dort, dort, wo wurde dein  
Lieb' Gesichtchen sein,  
Wenn du freudenhelle  
Tratest mit herein,  
Wie sonst, mein Tochterlein!<sup>9</sup>*

But on that place  
Nearer the threshold,  
There, where your  
Dear little face would be  
If you, bright with joy,  
Were coming in with her  
As you used to, my daughter!

## II

*Wenn dein Mutterlein  
Tritt zur Tür herein  
Mit der Kerze Schimmer,  
Ist es mir, als immer  
Kamst du mit herein  
Huschtest hinterdrein,  
Als wie sonst ins Zimmer!  
O du, o du des Vaters Zelle,  
Ach, zu schnelle, zu schnell  
Erlosch'ner Freudenschein,  
Erlosch'ner Freudenschein!<sup>10</sup>*

When your mother  
Comes in through the door  
With the shimmering of the candle,  
It seems to me always as if  
You were coming in with her,  
Slipping in behind her  
Into the room as you used to!  
Oh you, the gladdening light  
Of your father's cell,  
Alas, too quickly extinguished!

Song 3 symbolizes the painful void left by the children. Mahler made the most textual changes to this poem. This is the only song in which the key does not change, so Mahler brings out the emotion in other ways – mainly through a dialogue among the instruments. This song is thought of by some scholars to be in a completely different character than Songs 1, 2 and 5. It portrays the domestic aspects of the poet and is thought to represent “house and hearth.” The key is C minor.

Song 4 “Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen” (“Often I think they have only gone out”)

Mahler's Text  
*Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen!  
Bald werden sie wieder nach Hause gelangen!  
Der Tag ist schon! O, sei nicht bang!*

Translation:  
I often think they have only gone out!  
Soon they will get back home!  
The day is fine! Oh do not be afraid!

<sup>9</sup> Mahler's text, translation, and changes Mahler made to Rückert's text from Russell 1991, p. 84. He began the song with the second stanza of the poem and omits the last three lines. He continued with the first half of the first stanza and disposes of the second half. Mahler repeats *naher, dort*, and *tratest mit herein*.

<sup>10</sup> In stanza two, Mahler changed the opening line to *Wenn dein Mutterlein! Tritt zur Tür herein*. He changed *der Vaterzelle* to *des Vaters Zelle*. He repeated *O du, zu schnelle* and *erlosch'ner Freudenschein*. Mahler inserts the three lines omitted from Rückert's second stanza at the end of the song.

*Sie machen nur einen weiten Gang*<sup>11</sup>

They are just going out for a long walk

*Ja wohl, sie sind nur ausgegangen  
Und werden nicht wieder nach Haus verlangen!  
O, sei nicht bang, der Tag ist schon!  
Sie machen nur den Gang zu jenen Hoh'n*<sup>12</sup>

Yes indeed, they have only gone out  
And now they will be reaching home!  
Oh do not be afraid, the day is fine!  
They are only taking a walk to those  
heights!

*Sie sind uns nur vorausgegangen  
Und werden nicht wieder nach Haus verlangen!  
Wir holen sie ein auf jenen Hoh'n*

They have only gone on ahead of us  
And will not want to come home again!  
We will catch up with them on those  
heights

*Im Sonnenschein! Der Tag ist schon auf jenen  
Hoh'n*<sup>13</sup>

In the sunshine! The day is fine on  
those heights!

There is an apparent change in mood in Song 4. It represents a homecoming – the children will find their way home to where their parents will one day join them. It is the only song in a major key, it seems to have a positive spirit, and there is no imagery of darkness or night. However, this song is extremely restless, and in this matter it contributes to the unresolved quality of the cycle. Its anticipation of the “gladdening light” is more convincing than in Song 1, but still does not resolve the emotional conflict of the cycle. Mahler followed the structure and patterns of the poem. The song has greater momentum than the poem, because the music does not rest at the end of a stanza, but is “urged on by a need to find a resolution” (Russell 1991, 100). It climatically reaches a major key at the end. Though the song differs in some aspects from the previous ones, it is linked to them by imagery and should be thought of as a development of them, rather than a departure. The key of this song is E flat major, with some harmony surrounding the parallel minor.

<sup>11</sup> Mahler's text, translation and changes Mahler made to Ruckert's text from Russell 1991, p. 91. In stanza one, Mahler changed *Haus* to *Hause* and *weitern* (further) to *weiten* (far).

<sup>12</sup> In stanza two, Mahler changed *Haus* to *Hause* and *Hohn* to *Hoh'n*. He inserts *nur* in the last line.

<sup>13</sup> In stanza three, Mahler replaced *hier* with *wieder* and changes *Hohn* to *Hoh'n*. He repeats *auf jenen Hoh'n*.

## Song 5 "In diesem Wetter!" ("In this weather!")

## Mahler's Text:

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,  
Nie hatt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus,  
Man hat sie getragen, getragen hinaus  
Ich durfte nichts dazu sagen<sup>14</sup>*

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus,  
Nie hatt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,  
Ich fürchtete, sie erkranken,  
Das sind nun eitle Gedanken*

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,  
Nie hatt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,  
Ich sorgte, sie starben morgen,  
Das ist nun nicht zu besorgen<sup>15</sup>*

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus!  
Nie hatt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus,  
Man hat sie hinaus getragen,  
Ich durfte nichts dazu sagen<sup>16</sup>*

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus, in  
diesem Braus,  
Sie ruh'n, sie ruh'n Als wie in der  
Mutter, Der Mutter Haus  
Von keinem Sturm erschreckt,  
Von Gottes Hand bedeckt,  
Sie ruh'n, sie ruh'n  
Wie in der Mutter Haus,  
Wie in der Mutter Haus!<sup>17</sup>*

## Translation:

In this weather, in this raging,  
I would never have sent the children out.  
They have been carried out,  
I was not allowed to say anything  
about it.

In this weather, in this rushing,  
I would never have let the children go out;  
I would be afraid they might fall ill;  
Those are now idle thoughts.

In this weather, in this horror,  
I would never have let the children go out.  
I would worry they might die tomorrow;  
Now that is no cause for worry.

In this weather, in this horror!  
I would never have sent the children out.  
They have been carried out;  
I was not allowed to say anything about it!

In this weather, in this rushing, this raging,  
  
They rest as in their mother's,  
Their mother's house  
Frightened by no storm,  
Covered by God's hand  
They rest, they rest,  
As in their mother's house,  
As in their mother's house!

A combination of a storm and lullaby, Mahler's fifth song is an exquisite work of art. Not only does it play a significant role in the cycle, it masters a musical evocation of a storm. It climaxes the cycle as a whole by bringing its conflict to the forefront and

<sup>14</sup> Mahler's text, translation, and changes Mahler made to Rückert's text from Russell 1991, pp 101-102 In stanza one, Mahler changed *Man hat sie hinaus getragen* to *man hat sie getragen, getragen hinaus* and reversed the positions of *dazu* and *nichts*.

<sup>15</sup> There were no changes made to the second stanza. In stanza three, Mahler added *Nie* to the second line.

<sup>16</sup> Stanza four is a repetition of stanza one, but Mahler replaced *Braus* with *Graus*

<sup>17</sup> Mahler used Rückert's fourth stanza for his fifth stanza. Mahler adds *in diesem Saus* and changed *ruhn* to *ruh'n*. He repeated *der Mutter* and discards the *e* on *Sturme* Mahler extended the stanza by adding *Sie ruh'n, sie ruh'n wie in der Mutter Haus, wie in der Mutter Haus!*

leading it to resolution. The fifth poem is the denouement of the cycle. There is a definite transition when the storm suddenly subsides and the lullaby emerges. The sense of finality is highlighted by Mahler's musical language. The effect is a feeling of acceptance and coherence of the last song of the cycle. In Song 5, the children find their home and the poet's anguish rests. The key is D minor, then D major.

### **1.3. Rückert's Life and Work and Mahler's Attraction to Rückert**

Compared to Mahler, Rückert had a very uneventful and private life. Rückert was born in Schweinfurt in Franconia in 1788. He wrote some notable poetry and was an editor and contributor to periodicals. He was devoted to scholarship, translation, poetry, and the interpretation of oriental literature. He taught oriental languages at Erlangen. Rückert loved country and rural life. He was "content to live in the confines of the family circle" (Russell 1991, 29). Scarlet fever caused the deaths of Rückert's daughter Luise, at the age of three in December of 1833, and of his son Ernst, at the age of five in January of 1834. Three of Rückert's other sons were also ill and did not recover until the Easter of 1834. Rückert worked on the *Kindertotenlieder* from the end of 1833 to June of 1834. He wrote at a rate of two to three poems a day, which was not unusual for him. He sought relief from anguish in his writing. (Russell 1991, 33.)

There were two collective editions of Rückert's *Kindertotenlieder* published. The first edition was first published in 1872 with a total of 425 poems. This edition was



organized in four sections. In an effort to organize the poems chronologically, the editor uses four headings: *Leid und Lied* (*Suffering and Song*), *Krankheit und Tod* (*Sickness and Death*), *Winter und Fruhling* (*Winter and Spring*), and *Trost und Erhebung* (*Solace and Exaltation*). Rückert's sister bought out the second edition of the poems in 1881 entitled *Leid und Lied*. She reduced the number of poems to 241 and arranged them under the headings: *Leid: Luise. December 1833, Ernst: Januar 1834, Unzertrennlich* (*Inseparable*), *Trost und Erhebung*, and *Zeit und Ewigkeit* (*Time and Eternity*). (Russell 1991, 35.) Russell believed that it was important to decipher which edition Mahler used. It is not likely that Mahler used one source in 1901 and a different source in 1904. Russell concluded that Mahler used the 1872 edition, because of the arrangement of poems in that edition. The 1872 edition would have been available to Mahler, as it was the better-known edition. It has an unmistakable title, and copies of it are easy to come by today. Mahler chose no poems from the *Leid und Lied* section or the *Winter und Fruhling* section. He chose the poems "Wenn dein Mütterlein" (Song 3) and "Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen" (Song 2) from the *Krankheit und Tod* section. He chose the poems "Oft denk' ich sie sind nur ausgegangen" (Song 4), "In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus" (Song 5) and "Nun will die Sonne so hell aufgehn" (Song 1) from the *Trost und Erhebung* section.

When Mahler turned to Rückert in 1901, it was a turning point in his career. Mahler's shift from the *Wunderhorn* texts to Rückert was a shift down a different path – his late songs demonstrated his artistic maturity. Rückert was a conservative choice, given Mahler's modernist connections at the time. Russell discusses what he calls "the improbable conjunction of minds" that took place during the composition of the

*Kindertotenlieder* (Russell 1991, 54). Mahler was a bachelor, 41 years old, a complex genius, full of conflict, and self-searching. His four symphonies had pegged him as a modern composer by 1900, he had a prestigious position, and he was in the public eye. “The genius, the difficulties of whose artistic mission so intensely preoccupied him that they left neither time nor energy for mundane tasks of everyday life, became magnetized – briefly, to be sure, but momentarily – by the poetry of Rückert” (Russell 1991, 54). Rückert was an academic, middle-class, a father of six, of mild temperament, and was satisfied with the study of languages, nature, and his family. He was considered “a paterfamilias of the Biedermeier” (Russell 1991, 54). Rückert was a professor of Eastern Studies. He translated Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew into German. He identified closely with the East, and “seemed to be an Asiatic speaking German as a foreign tongue” (Kravitt, 349). Kravitt believes that this gives insight to connection between Mahler and Rückert. Mahler was often criticized in the anti-Semitic press as an Asiatic who “speaks musical German with the accent, inflection, and above all, the gestures of the East, the ever-Eastern Asiatic Jews” (Louis 1909, 182).

Kravitt points out other ties. Both Mahler and Rückert had lost a brother named Ernst. Both of them had an attraction toward *Symbolistes*. “Rückert had used unusual syntax, diction, and orthography, solely for evocative purposes, many decades before the French *Symbolistes* made extensive use of such devices” (Kravitt 1978, 350). Examples of such language in the second poem include “von *wannen* alle Strahlen”; *verblendenden* Geschieke”; “Ihr *spruhtet*,” referring to “Augen”; and in its context, “Zelt” as opposed to “Welt” (Kravitt 1978, 350). One more interesting link: Mahler suffered a near-death experience on February 24, 1901, which will be discussed in chapter 2. In a letter, he

referred to his near-death as “Unglück.” Rückert also uses this word to refer to his child’s death. “Inverse expressions in the poems of Rückert – day and night; light and darkness; life and death – were also an essential part of Mahler’s individual artistic expressions” (Kravitt 1978, 350). In 1901, upon discovering the *Kindertotenlieder* poems, Mahler agreed with the mystic language and philosophy of Rückert.

Some Mahler scholars feel that the theme of the death of children was the link to this attraction of opposites. Perhaps also the expression of withdrawal and world-negation in the poems was attractive to Mahler at a time when he suffered a near fatal illness. Russell believes that though Mahler and Rückert may have held similar philosophical views, their connection is still unusual. Two men so different in character and artistic merit “appear to meet so intimately, in so intimate an area” (Russell 1991, 54). Mahler’s song “Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen,” one of the *Fünf Rückert Lieder*, is considered by many to be his best song, but the poem is considered to be amateur. In fact, Rückert’s poetry was considered quintessentially ordinary. Yet, it was not odd for a Romantic composer to turn a sub-par poem into a remarkable song. But Mahler went above and beyond with “Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen” and especially the *Kindertotenlieder*. So, when Mahler read Rückert, he was not only seeing Rückert’s soul, but his own – “he saw more than was actually there” (Russell 1991, 55). It is an error to think that Mahler simply selected the most “beautiful” of the *Kindertotenlieder* poems. Mahler chose carefully, and while he did not chose the most notable poems, he created with them an integrity of his own.

Lewis felt that the Rückert lyrics captured the essence of Mahler: “The powerful voice that cried out to him from Rückert’s poetry, the voice with which he felt such

affinity, was his own, and it spoke to him of the one thing that mattered to him above all else – his existence as a creative artist” (Lewis 1996, 244). Kravitt contends: “For Mahler, Rückert’s poetry embodied the composer’s new attitude toward existence, one that was crystallized in the crisis of February 24. After 1901, Mahler directed his long-burdened and obsessive thought on death and hereafter into new channels” (Kravitt 1978, 349). His semi-Catholic outlook was transferred to a more mystical view of eternal renewal, a view expressed by Eastern ideals and the writings by Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801-1887). “Fechner’s philosophy and panpsychism – his belief that the entire cosmos is animate – became of central importance to Mahler ... Fechner, and eventually Rückert, became complementary exponents of Mahler’s mystical ‘feeling’ about existence” (Kravitt 1978, 349).

In addition to personal and philosophical factors, we must note that the formal structure of Rückert’s poems appealed to Mahler, because they resemble folk poems and allow for musical repetition, variation, and development. The same short lines allow for a sharing of material between voice and orchestra and the same frequent use of contrasts. There have been many reasons suggested for Mahler’s interest in Rückert in 1901, some extraordinary. There has been enough speculation to suggest that it was probably a combination of several factors. When the *Kindertotenlieder* were completed in 1904, there is no evidence that Mahler went back to Rückert’s poetry or philosophy; his intense interest proved to be only temporary. Rückert’s writing did not make a lasting impression on Mahler the way that Goethe did. Mahler’s interest in Rückert’s orientalism may have been a precursor to his inspiration for *Das Lied von der Erde*. (Russell 1991, 26.)

#### 1.4. Additional Remarks

There is no biographical information that discussed Mahler's process of selection of poems from Rückert's *Kindertotenlieder*. Russell rejects the theory of Hans Mayer that Mahler was so engulfed in self-projection that the poems were a "pretext" for self-expression. Although a very powerful personal psychological attraction to the poems was present, Mahler was very aware of the poems he chose and what they meant and what their images were. "... they were poems to whose detailed imagery and symbolic content not only spoke to his emotional well-being, but also met his artistic aims and could eventually be combined in a cycle with his own artistic coherence" (Russell 1991, 55). We can assume that Mahler read more than the five poems he chose, because they are dispersed so widely in both editions of the *Kindertotenlieder*.

It is interesting that Mahler did not choose any poems with a single image of nature from the *Kindertotenlieder*, which was full of nature imagery. Nature imagery was not something that Mahler was opposed to in his other works. We can assume that at this point in his life, Mahler had turned away from nature and to himself, probably due to his illness of 1901, resulting in introspection. The outside world proved to be "unresponsive," and he was "engaged in the troubled probing of a world of darkness" (Russell 1991, 56). He was drawn to the imagery of light and dark in four out of the five poems he chose. Only a small number of Rückert's poems, thirty-six out of 425, contained such imagery, and their connection in the song cycle is entirely Mahler's doing: "...having selected the poems he wanted, he placed them in a sequence in which

they would interact and reflect meaning one upon the other, and saw to it that they would constitute a satisfying unity” (Russell 1991, 57). It is amazing that Mahler was able to wade through the plethora of “unsuitable” poems and recognize the imagery and potential of the poems he chose. He looked at the poems through composers eyes, in the mind set of writing in a new style – one that even went beyond his own. The poems he chose were not really suitable for the established song styles, but they were for his new style. He passed up poems that were “obvious songs” and instead made imagery paramount.

## 2. MAHLER'S STATE OF MIND AND BELIEFS

### 2.1. Mahler's Motivation and His Crisis of 1901

The composition of *Kindertotenlieder* begs a specific question: What drew Mahler to such a subject? Mahler began the composition in 1901 when he was not married and had an important post as the director of the Vienna Hofoper Opera. He completed the composition in 1904, when he was married, had two daughters, and was enjoying his success. One explanation is that Mahler had “general emotional preoccupations” with death and the Romantic inclination toward childhood and children. Some feel that Mahler had a “need to suffer,” which was part of his complex character. (Russell 1991, 3.) Yet another explanation is that Mahler was oblivious to the content in the *Kindertotenlieder* and simply wanted an “artistic challenge.” However, that interpretation implies a detachment uncharacteristic of Mahler – for him, and most Romantic composers, composition was a means of expressing inner experiences (Russell 1991, 4). Mahler admitted to Natalie Bauer-Lechner: “It hurt him that he had to write them [the *Kindertotenlieder*], and he was sorry for the world which would one day have to hear them, so dreadfully sad was their content” (Bauer-Lechner 1984, 193).

Edward Kravitt provides a much more detailed explanation for the problem of Mahler's motivation, mainly based on a near-death experience Mahler had. Mahler suffered a crisis on February 24, 1901, that was brought on by ill health and exhaustion. He suffered from a hemorrhage late that night. The doctors were able to alleviate the immediate emergency, but Mahler had believed that his time had come. Kravitt contends that this critical period for Mahler was definitely reflected in the songs he wrote at the time, especially the *Kindertotenlieder*. In "Um Mitternacht," the words of Rückert describe Mahler's crisis on February 24: "I took account of the pulses of my heart ... At midnight, I could decide nothing ... At midnight I placed my powers in your hands, Lord! Lord over life and death" (Kravitt 1978, 330). The song "Der Tambour'sell" reveals biographical and psychological information about Mahler. The poem is about a drummer boy who is being led to his execution. One of the boy's final statements was "Had I remained a drummer boy" (Kravitt 1978, 331). Mahler had been neglecting his health before the tragedy of 1901, but it was such relentless ambition that allowed him to rise so prominently from a provincial conductor, a drummer boy, so to speak, in small towns to the director of the Vienna Hofoper. With both "Um Mitternacht" and "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen," as well as the *Kindertotenlieder*, Mahler felt as if he were obligated to write the songs. "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen" is even more autobiographical. His "permanent feelings of alienation were expressed in 'Ich bin der Welt,' but with serenity" (Kravitt 1978, 332).

Kravitt's thesis is that the *Kindertotenlieder* are actually a dirge for Mahler's own death, thoughts brought on by his illness of 1901. His crisis shocked him into the idea of having a child in order to maintain his own mortality. Placing himself in the role of a



mourning parent, Mahler symbolized this desire in the *Kindertotenlieder*. (Kravitt 1978, 333-34.) However, Lewis believes that “it is curious that fear of death and a need to have progeny should find expression in songs about *dead* children” (Lewis 1996, 240). Lewis believes that Mahler’s hemorrhage of 1901 did frighten him, but did not cause an obsession about death. He had an operation the following year that dispelled any remaining fears, and he no longer had any anxieties about his health. Lewis believes that Kravitt’s thesis relies on an interpretation of the poems that depends on real, though unborn children, and real, though anticipated, death. It does not support Mahler’s knowledge of the literary context of Romanticism and the symbolism of his earlier songs. However, texts that have the loss of family as their subject do encompass the Romantic ideal.

## **2.2. Psychoanalytical Observations**

Two psychoanalytical views have been proposed in order to explain Mahler’s motivation for writing the *Kindertotenlieder*; both point to Mahler’s personal circumstances at the time in terms of the “emotional legacy” of his childhood. Psychoanalyst Theodor Reik’s theory surrounds the fact that many of Mahler’s siblings died as children. Mahler was greatly affected by the death of his brother Ernst, who died at the age of twelve. In 1901, at the age of forty-one, Mahler was contemplating marriage and fatherhood. This revived repressed memories of the child deaths of his siblings and unresolved anxieties. Mahler

thus identified with his father by putting himself in that frame of mind. (Reik 1953, 319). David Holbrook's theory developed from Reik's theory and describes an intense spirituality in Mahler at the time. Holbrook claims that Mahler was concerned throughout his life with finding a meaningful existence. In the face of death, Mahler "struggled to bring the core of the self to birth" (Holbrook 1975, 63). He suggests that Mahler's preoccupation was with the "repressed libidinal ego – the unborn infant self, the hunger to exist evoked by a child" (Holbrook 1975, 63).

The *Kindertotenlieder*, on the subject of a father mourning his children's death, reveals subtler autobiographic information. "A key to this paradox is provided in a proactive thesis by the psychoanalyst Stuart Feder" (Kravitt 1978, 332). Kravitt believes that Feder's theory deserves attention, because it reflects directly on Mahler's crisis of 1901. It is based on four points, the first being that Mahler's crisis shocked him into the thought of having children of his own, in an effort to gain immortality. The concept of immortality was essential to Mahler's thinking. His thinking was initially shaped by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and later by more scientifically inclined philosophers, such as Fechner, Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817-1881), and Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906). (Kravitt 1978, 333.) Fechner adopted a concept of "panpsychism," that is "man, animals, and plants, and all of the cosmos have a consciousness that persists eternally in mind and in the material universe, which, to Fechner, are one" (Kravitt 1978, 333). Kravitt feels that it was natural for Mahler to think of having children at this time. However, the desire to have children had different implications for Mahler the composer and Mahler the man.

The second aspect of Feder's theory is that Mahler's hasty courtship of Alma Schindler was a result of his newfound desire to have children. In 1902, he was a sought-after bachelor. He had a whirlwind courtship with Alma – they planned to marry two weeks after they met (Kravitt 1978, 334). It must have been extraordinary circumstances that compelled the forty-one year old into a hasty marriage with a nineteen year old. The third significant point of Feder's theory is that Mahler relieved his persistent conflict in his preoccupation about death in thought, life, and art, by embracing the concept of conquering death by birth. "Mahler's lifelong obsession with the omnipotence of death is well-known. Philosophically he had resolved the problem – death is conquered by birth or rebirth – in several ways" (Kravitt 1978, 334). When Mahler faced death in 1901, his associations with death became real and recurrent. This implication was still on his mind a year later, when his first child was born. Therefore, Mahler tried to rebut his death, not just philosophically, but in reality, with the conception of a child.

The fourth important aspect of Feder's theory is that Mahler symbolized his wish to have children in the *Kindertotenlieder* in the form of a mourning parent, a symbol that also reflects the opposite concept of death by birth. The nucleus of Dr. Feder's thesis is the symbol of the mourning parent. It concerns the connection between the death of children and the birth of others to replace them. Such a connection was solidified in Mahler at a young age. Mahler's father, Bernhard, had lost eight out of fourteen children. Gustav was the second child, and essentially a "replacement" for the first-born Isidor (1858-1859). (Kravitt 1978, 333-335.) According to Kravitt that Mahler could have easily identified with the grieving father because of this. Mahler stated to Guido Adler (1855-1941) that while composing the *Kindertotenlieder*, "I placed myself in the situation that a

child of mine had died. When I really lost my daughter, I could not have written these songs anymore” (quoted in Kravitt 1978, 335).

Kravitt believes that the most substantial evidence to support Feder’s theory concerns a change that Mahler made in the text of *Kindertotenlieder* No. 5, “In diesem Wetter.” In the manuscript copy, Mahler replaced the final word *Haus* (house) with *Schoß* (womb)<sup>18</sup>, giving the poem an entirely different connotation.

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus* (In this weather, in this storm)  
*In diesem Braus, sie ruh’n, sie ruh’n* (In this tempest they rest, they rest .. )  
*Sie ruh’n, sie ruh’n wie in der Mutter Schoß* (They rest, they rest as in their mother’s womb)

The inclusion of *Schoß* as a symbol of unborn children awaiting birth in a cycle about the death of children has great importance. It displays that Mahler did connect the death and birth of children, artistically and philosophically, as well autobiographically (Kravitt 1978, 337). Mahler changed the word *Schoß* back to *Haus* when the manuscript went to the copyist in 1905. By that time, Mahler had two daughters. Even though he deleted the word, just the inclusion of *Schoß* at one point, at the inauguration of the cycle, indicates an aspect of Mahler’s motivation. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, *Mutter Haus* is a symbol for *Schoß*. The lyric poetry that Mahler selected among Rückert’s huge collection also indicated his adherence between the link of death and birth portrayed in this mournful music. The two psychoanalytical theories of Reik and Feder actually complement each other. Both claim that Mahler’s consideration of fatherhood caused him to identify with his own father, and therefore he was drawn to the subject of the deaths of

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<sup>18</sup> A more common meaning of the word “Schoß” is actually “Lap.” In fact, “Womb” is not generally listed as a translation of the word “Schoß” in German-English dictionaries. It is possible that Kravitt was referring to a historical or metaphorical use of the word. Kravitt does not make any mention of the more literal translation of “Lap,” nor does Russell in his discussion of Kravitt’s arguments. Therefore, the last line of the poem could be interpreted as either “They rest, they rest as in their mother’s womb,” or “They rest, they rest as on their mother’s lap.”

children (Russell 1991, 5). Still, some scholars feel that there is no explanation for Mahler's motivation to write the *Kindertotenlieder*. We can never know for sure, but upon hearing the songs, one must wonder how he gave such expression of a loss he had never experienced. In 1907, his daughter Maria died of diphtheria at the age of four. From that point on, Mahler could not bring himself to study or conduct the *Kindertotenlieder*. There is commentary that Mahler believed his artistic creations to be precursors of the future. As interesting as this inquiry may be, it does not explain his *motivation*.

### **2.3. Mahler's Completion of the Cycle in 1904**

Mahler's life had undergone major changes from 1901 to 1904. He got married and had two children. "Since Mahler's art so often reflects his own life, one would expect that certain of his works of 1904 would in some way reflect his family life" (Kravitt 1978, 351). Indeed, the *Kindertotenlieder* Nos. 3 and 4, which some Mahler scholars believe were written in 1904, reflect domestic life, because the children are the main focus. Songs 1, 2, and 5 are more philosophical and deal with the inner experience, while Songs 3 and 4 are literal and deal with everyday reality. Mahler gave this joyous phase of his life "inverse artistic expression" (Kravitt 1978, 351). In such a happy summer, he completed the mournful *Kindertotenlieder* as well as the tragic Sixth Symphony. It is possible that he realized how much he had to lose. As stated earlier, we know that three

songs were composed in 1901 and two in 1904, but we do not know if Mahler had envisioned a cycle in 1901. However, Mahler was clearly thinking of a cycle when composing the two songs in 1904. Three years has passed – he was no longer a bachelor, he had had time to contemplate that a possible symbolic pattern may be elaborated by the addition of songs (Russell 1991, 55).

### 3. PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE *KINDERTOTENLIEDER*

#### 3.1. Links to Different Philosophies in the *Kindertotenlieder*

##### 3.1.1. Eastern Ideals and Mystical Qualities

It is evident that the theme of eternal renewal was a central concept to Mahler. There is evidence of Kravitt's theories and the psychoanalytical theories posed by Reik and Feder in the *Kindertotenlieder*. Kravitt believes that the concept of rebirth was the foundation of the cycle and guided Mahler's choice of symbolism. This is evidenced by Mahler's original choice of the final word *Schoß* in Song 5. Also, several musical statements from the first song appear in the last song, which will be discussed later in this thesis. Not only does this unify the cycle, it displays this mystical symbolism and the essence of the *Kindertotenlieder*. (Kravitt 1978, 345.)

Song 2 in particular displays Mahler's mystical exploration of the mysteries of existence. Kravitt believes that the central concept of the *Kindertotenlieder* is displayed in two separate couplets of the poem that portray the reality of the children's fate. The first couplet describes "That the ray was already preparing to return / To that realm

whence all rays stem” (Kravitt 1978, 344). This song reveals the children’s real fate – to be part of the process of continual regeneration. The concept of an everlasting light was central to Mahler’s thought at this time, especially after 1901; it symbolized life as eternal renewal. Kravitt concludes that these lines represent Mahler’s belief in panpsychism. “What to you in these days are only eyes / Will to you, in future nights, be only stars” (Kravitt 1978, 345). Russell agrees that the last lines of the poem are integral to its meaning: “In these last two lines are summarized the poem’s fundamental symbolic polarities, in the sequence of images *Augen ... Tagen ... Nachten ... Sterne*” (Russell 1991, 81).

The mystical quality and elements of Eastern philosophy present in the first two poems was not accidental. Rückert was an orientalist and was very much interested in Eastern philosophy and the ideas of Fechner. Revers and Zedlacher believe that in the piano version of Song 4, “...the meaning of the words is detached from the worldly sphere of human speech” (Revers and Zedlacher 2002, 176). The third stanza accurately displays how Romantic metaphysics was represented by music – a hope that is emphasized by music to the point of transcendence. Such reiterated affirmations of the link between death and birth succeed in transforming the “hopeless mourning atmosphere of the *Kindertotenlieder*” into optimism (Kravitt 1978, 346). The conclusions of *Das Lied von der Erde* and the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* are also affirmations of life, a theme that is present in much of Mahler’s work.

Mitchell believes that most of the images in the *Kindertotenlieder* are in fact double images, “functioning simultaneously on two different levels” (Mitchell 1985,



141-42). According to Kravitt, Mahler emphasized “mystical symbolic patterns” of the poems (Kravitt 1978, 345). In Kravitt’s view, songs No.s 1, 2, and 5 have the same musical and philosophical character and portray the central concept of eternal rebirth. It has been argued that Mahler’s thinking was dominated by Nietzsche. Particular kinds of symbolism – concepts of *Licht*, *Leben*, and *Lust* – make up the foundation of Nietzsche’s thinking. At least one of these concepts is found in all of Mahler’s songs and symphonies, in association with the idea of death as rebirth. For example, the redemption chorale of the Second Symphony displays Mahler’s vision of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* – “transcending good and evil and triumphing over Eternal Recurrence” (Nikkels 1989, 62). Nietzsche-allusions are also present in the *Kindertotenlieder*. Philip Barford believes that Mahler’s later songs display a combination of “recurring thematic motivation and a struggle to transcend into mystical realization” (Barford 1971, 15).

It is evident that Mahler was definitely driven by an interest in mysticism and Eastern philosophy. This was not necessarily a fleeting interest, but it was an interest that was heightened during the composition of the *Kindertotenlieder*. Mahler’s complex character, his endless search for meaning, and his existential dilemma was steered toward mysticism, and he became engrossed in it at least for a temporary period. His nearly fatal crisis, experiences with the loss of siblings, and the fact that he was ultimately a student of philosophy also contributed to this inclination. All of these factors combined provide some clarification of Mahler’s motivation for writing such a complex composition.

### 3.1.2. Hegelianism

Hegelianism refers to a philosophy developed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). This philosophy contends “the rational alone is real,” meaning that all reality can be expressed in rational terms. A facet of Hegelianism is the Doctrine of Development, which deals with the process of development applied to reality in its most abstract form. At the commencement of any study of reality is the concept of being. The following discussion will explore how the *Kindertotenlieder* is related to the ideas of Hegelianism.

Mahler’s music has a very organic character, and the *Kindertotenlieder* definitely display this quality. Mahler felt that Rückert’s poetry resonated with the philosophy of Schopenhauer, which was a great influence on Mahler in his student days. “According to Schopenhauer it is essential to ‘still the wheel of Ixion,’ the perpetual cycle of striving and dissatisfaction that brings manifestation of the individual will” (Hefling 2002, 201). Mahler transformed such feelings into his music through his use of the pentatonic scale. The result was a blurred centrality and tonal organization, investing his songs with an organic coherence. The larger structure often develops from a single motive – the pentatonic cell – “in which is contained the germ of everything that is yet to be” (Hefling 2002, 201). This is a technique that is crucial to Mahler’s late style. In fact, Kofi Agawu (1983) identified this technique in *Kindertotenlieder* No. 2. In his discussion of the melodic process of the song, Agawu concludes that the melodic structure is managed by continuous manipulation of an initial melodic cell. The result is that every following melodic statement may be linked with the initial cell. The *Kindertotenlieder* display a

technique prominent in Mahler's songs – a technique of variation and development that represents a compromise between a simple strophic setting and a through-composed setting.

In his analysis of the text and music, Agawu concluded that Song 2 is based on a musical outer form and is divided into sections he calls Introduction, Statement, Contrast, Restatement, and Coda (Agawu 1983, 82). Agawu displays the complete pitch content of *Kindertotenlieder* No. 2 as a reduction, which further shows the basis for the process of generation within the context of the larger scheme. For example, the introduction provides “a precedent for the manipulation of contours” used throughout the song. (Agawu 1983, 86-87.) Agawu also displays the process of developing variation in the first formal segment of the song. This process also occurs in the contrast and restatement sections, which suggests a strong continuity in the foreground structure – essentially a monothematic song. There is evidence of continuity between non-contiguous units, which suggests a melodic structure that is not only monothematic, but also “monoprocessive” – one idea constantly branching out into variations. (Agawu 1983, 88.) It is my opinion that Mahler utilizes a similar technique to the one described by Hefling and Agawu in the *Kindertotenlieder* cycle as a whole by establishing an idea in the first song from which everything is based, and not resolving it until the last song. In this manner, Song 2 can be considered a microcosm of the entire cycle.

There is a prominent relationship of form between the *Kindertotenlieder* and the surrounding symphonies. Mahler's songs evolved ever more symphonically into his late works – culminating in his song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde*. The relationship between symphony and song is evident not only in the forms of songs and movements,

but also in the overall frame of the work – “the idea of a first movement outlining the start of a narrative or interior drama and a finale supplying the denouement, the resolution of what has intentionally been left incomplete” (Mitchell 1999, 217). Mitchell said of the *Kindertotenlieder*:

“Who would have predicted that an outwardly ‘poetic’ sequence of songs, narrow in focus – each song in its way a meditation on mortality, on the special poignancy of the loss of children – and seemingly devoid of the possibility of ‘drama,’ of narrative progression, should in fact represent one of Mahler’s subtlest and most sophisticated treatments of both ‘frame’ and narrative.” (Mitchell 1999, 218.)

Mitchell defines the “narrative idea” as “not ending up where one has started,” which developed throughout Mahler’s symphonies into the idea of the ‘frame’ – “where the finale winds up somewhere else and also brings to a conclusion what was stated in the beginning” (Mitchell 1999, 218). James A. Winn contends that “the centrifugal energies of programmaticism in the *Kindertotenlieder* is balanced by equally powerful unifying forces” (Winn 1981, 196).

Some scholars stress the developmental character of the *Kindertotenlieder*, rather than the organic character. In the Introduction to the mini score, Hans Redlich describes the songs as having a steady emotional progression: “a pale sunrise on the morning of the death of two children (Song 1), magic of two pairs of eyes that will gaze down (Song 2), a mother entering with a candle which brings up an unbearable image of a lost child (Song 3), a beautiful day carries self-deception that it may be only a long walk the children have taken (Song 4), (combines dirge and lullaby) funeral march revives the children’s burial, storm and grief transformed into a cradle song, folk-like simplicity ends song on a note of consolation (Song 5)” (Redlich 1961, v). Also, the overall instrumental design of the cycle progresses. The cycle begins with a very sparse texture, a wind duet,

and proceeds to gain more and more instruments, until it reaches a full orchestra in Song 5. However, the second half of Song 5 is much more scaled down in both orchestration and dynamics.

Indeed, the cycle is an example of a grand development, and individual songs develop within themselves. Song 1 displays the formal structure's relationship to symphonic form – particularly sonata form, but Mahler trades the tonic-dominant relationship for that of a relationship between D minor and D major (Mitchell 1999, 218). Mahler utilized this idea frequently, but did it with parallel keys for the first time in the *Kindertotenlieder*. In Song 1, Mahler applied sonata form to strophic form – stanza one is the exposition, and stanza two is the repeat of the exposition. Stanza three is the development and stanza four is the recapitulation. Many have noted the fact that Song 1 introduces a conflict that will not be resolved until the finale. Since Song 1 resembles a sonata form, it can be considered a microcosm of the entire cycle. Even though the struggle presented in the song is left unresolved, the development within the song mirrors the development of the entire cycle. The song acts as a significant first movement in a work that can be considered a symphony. This shows Mahler's incredible artistry – to take a strophic structure and the imagery of the text and give it a “detailed musical expression” (Russell 1991, 75).

I believe that the organic quality of the *Kindertotenlieder* and the reoccurring aspect of development allow the music to display the struggle that inevitably comes along with grief. Examples of this will be displayed later on in this chapter, but here I will touch upon a few. In Song 1, Mitchell believes that the climax is at bars 59-63. The voice has just finished, and the full orchestra plays an agitated chromatic passage, which was

originally heard on *Nacht*, but now has orchestral development. According to Russell, the instability of the music, compared with the emphasis on eternal light, displays how the struggle of the mourning father is apparent in the development of the song (Russell 1991, 73).

In Song 2, as it develops, each quatrain seems to express a different aspect of the struggle of grief. Lewis points out that the first quatrain of the poem expresses a “state of present knowledge” reflecting on a time when a “source of artistic authority was understood” (Lewis 1996, 241). The second quatrain displays the failure to understand the flames that is attributed to the reflection on superficial accomplishments, which actually do provide a glimpse of truth. The third quatrain reflects on the past and the truth – “we can never remain what we are now, for that inevitably becomes what we have been, and that, as we grow and learn, what we are becomes farther and farther removed from what we are” (Lewis 1996, 241). Kofi Agawu found that the words *Strahlen*, *Leuchen*, and *Sterne* are linked to six-four chords and shifts in mode correspond to the variations in the poetic vision.

Song 4 is the most strophic because Mahler follows the structure of the poem. He utilizes this form to enhance the music, because in each of the three stanzas “similar material is presented consecutively but with variation” (Russell 1991, 92). In Mahler’s use of strophic form, he is able to bring out the similarities and differences among the stanzas. In the first stanza, the father is deluded into thinking the children are just out for a walk; they have just gone on a longer walk than usual. The second stanza follows the same basic pattern as the first, but the orchestral accompaniment is modified to match the variations in the poem. The second stanza has almost identical words, but slight changes

indicate a metaphorical meaning: “the children have indeed gone out on a journey, and will find their way to a different ‘home’, a heavenly home symbolized in the phrase *zu jenen Hohn*” (Russell 1991, 92). The third stanza creates a new atmosphere, because Mahler is trying to match the new idea in the poem – the children have merely gone out without their parents, who will one day join them. The solid figure of the sixths in the opening bars is replaced by restless eighth note figures in the cellos and clarinets. The third repetition of *Haus* reverts back to the original meaning of the parental home. The biggest change in the third stanza is in the second half, where the vocal line is extended over eleven bars, compared to seven bars in stanza one and eight bars in stanza two. In the third stanza, *ausgegangen* becomes *gegangen* – the poet seems to be reasoning with himself. The children will literally never come home again, but one day the parents will catch up with them.

The process of variation and development is also present in Song 5. Mahler’s treatment of the opening of each of the stanzas uses the same figure, but with variation. For example, “the implied upward surge of anxiety in the second stanza at *ich furchtete, sie erkranken* [is] followed by the helpless, almost throw-away mood implied by the *pianissimo* falling figure at *das sind nun eitle Gedanken*” (Russell 1991, 106). The same principle of repetition and variation characterizes the last part of each stanza. The most prominent example of variation in the entire cycle occurs in Song 5, for it is a combination of a dirge and a lullaby.

The concept of development is an integral aspect of Hegelianism. This line of thinking contends that being is not a static concept. Being is dynamic, because it passes over into nothing and then returns to the higher concept of becoming. Hegel contends that

being tends to become its opposite – nothing. Both being and nothing are united in the concept of becoming. Therefore, Hegelianism holds the concept of becoming higher than the concept of being. Becoming is the more accurate representation of reality.

In my opinion, the *Kindertotenlieder* relate to Hegelianism in this aspect. The fact that the cycle is constantly developing on both an individual and over-all level, both emotionally and musically, in an organic manner displays how important the process of development is to the understanding of the cycle. Hegelianism stresses that a fundamental process is constantly present, and indeed the process of development is ever-present in the *Kindertotenlieder*. Hegelianism contends that becoming provides the ultimate expression of thought. Humans can only obtain the complete knowledge of something when they understand how it has developed. In the discussion of grief later on in this chapter, we will see how a constant process of development was necessary in order to have an accurate portrayal of grief. The songs of the *Kindertotenlieder* represent the struggle between grief and consolation. Mahler purposely left the conflict established in Song 1 unresolved, because he knew the conflict had to be developed throughout the cycle in order for the resolution to be accurate and sufficient. He knew that the *development* of the struggle was absolutely necessary to find solace and obtain clarity. The process of development is as important to the philosophy of Hegelianism as it is to the impact of the *Kindertotenlieder*. The development of the music, of ideas expressed in one song and generated in another, and the progression and juxtaposition of emotions are integral characteristics of the *Kindertotenlieder*.



### 3.1.3. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the study of the interpretation and understanding of texts. The definition of ‘text’ is extended to any objects subject to interpretation. Therefore, Hermeneutics is not only associated with text that is set to music, but also the music itself. The following discussion will relate aspects of the *Kindertotenlieder* to Hermeneutics. There are many complex factors that contribute to the unity of the cycle of the *Kindertotenlieder*. Russell concludes that Mahler consistently chose poems with a certain imagery found only in a small number of them. Mahler deliberately brought out that imagery in his musical language, and he was actually more sensitive to the text than his commentators indicated. In addition to the musical connections of the songs, the songs also are connected by their imagery “that indeed one is inseparable from the other” (Russell 1991, 113). The *Kindertotenlieder* actually have a sense of organization that has not been previously perceived by scholars. For example, Song 5 does not display imagery of light and dark, but summarizes the imagery of all the other songs.

Mahler envisioned the songs as a unified cycle, and he indicated so on the score: “These 5 songs are intended as a unified, inseparable whole, thus their continuity must be maintained (also by suppression of disturbances, such as, for example, applause at the end of only one of the songs)” (Gustav Mahler 1979, 3). Some scholars feel that Mahler avoids the monotony of the sameness of subject by the “emotional and musical contrasts of the songs, the extreme subtlety of their emotional gradations and their variations in texture and tone” (Russell 1991, 10). Yet some Mahler scholars feel that the emotional

content of the songs contrast. They are described as “by turns of emotionally stunned, wildly grief-stricken, warmly affectionate, and radiantly consolatory” (Cooke 1980, 77). It has been noted that Song 3 is a very different character than Songs 1, 2 and 5. However, Russell believes that Song 3 has the same key images of the first two songs: eyes and seeing, the radiant child’s face, the radiance of the child’s eyes, and the extinguishing of light. Also, Mahler links Song 3 with the previous one, as the opening figure resembles the pattern from the closing phrase of Song 2. Song 5 occurs in the same emotional world as the other songs, yet the poem itself evokes no images of light or dark, but the song certainly does: “... using storm and cessation (and transformation) of storm as images of psychological states in precisely the same way that the images of light and dark have been used in the preceding songs” (Mitchell 1985, 142). Whatever position one takes, that the songs compliment or contrast each other, I believe that in order to comprehend the *Kindertotenlieder*, one must have an understanding of the individual songs, the entire cycle, and the relationships between the individual songs and the entire cycle. It is apparent that the parts make up the whole. Mitchell believes that “all ... songs are independent and each creates its own distinct world.” Yet all of the songs have a common source of feeling: “pain, suffering, grief, and awareness of mortality.” (Mitchell 1999, 221-22.)

A remarkable unifying factor of the *Kindertotenlieder* is the use of “symbolic instrumentation.” Mitchell did extensive studies and analyses that show the symbolic instrumentation as a formal principle of the cycle. He displays how the orchestra was carefully calculated as “an aspect of the total form of the work” (Russell 1991, 12). The patterns of the keys of the songs are symmetrical: Song 1 (D minor → D major), Song 2

(C minor → C major), Song 3 (C minor), Song 4 (E-flat major → E-flat minor), Song 5 (D minor → D major). Song 3, despite its key relationship to Song 2, stands alone as a centerpiece (Russell 1991, 10). What Revers calls the “closed cyclic form of the *Kindertotenlieder*” is apparent in the key relationships – D minor in the framing songs, C minor for Songs 2 and 3, and E-flat major for Song 4 (Revers 2002, 177).

There are many links in the musical language of the songs. In Song 4, the return to E flat major on *Sonnenschein* is emphasized by a melisma. In Song 1, the words that symbolize light were also drawn out by a melisma. Song 5 contains quotes from Song 1. Song 5 is linked with Songs 2 and 4, because they all can be considered to have a theme of homecoming. The former structure of Song 5 is the same as Song 4 – a strophic poem in which each stanza is characterized by repetition with variation. Also, the descending figure of the storm in Song 5 echoes the final descending figure of the voice on *jenen* in Song 4. (Russell 1991, 104.) Russell believes that Song 3 plays a special role in the entire cycle: “The whole import of the third song is indeed to bear out the truth expressed in the opening quatrain of the second song: that in the child’s eyes is concentrated a terrible power over the father’s life, and that the extinction of their light means his despair” (Russell 1991, 86).

The hermeneutic circle is a process of understanding a text. It refers to the idea that the understanding of a text as a whole is established by reference to the individual parts, and the understanding of each individual part by reference to the whole. Neither the whole text nor any individual part can be understood without reference to one another, and hence, it is a circle. To my knowledge, the hermeneutic circle greatly applies to the understanding of Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder*. The definition of a song cycle is

purposefully vague so that it may apply to many different groups of songs that have some sort of connection. With the *Kindertotenlieder*, Mahler managed to expand an already broad definition, in that his songs are both connected and disconnected at the same time. The interpretations of the unity of the songs of the *Kindertotenlieder* differ. Some scholars believe that the songs compliment each other, some believe they progress, and some believe they contradict each other. In fact, they do all three. I contend that because the songs are such an accurate portrayal of the process of grief, they cannot simply progress and they cannot have one simple connection. They connect on many complex levels, their connection even lies in their differences, and their differences combine to create a whole picture. Songs of the *Kindertotenlieder* that are considered to be of a different character have links through their musical language or imagery. Of course, all of the songs have the prevailing mood of grief and display an effort to reach reconciliation. Mahler was familiar with grief, and he knew it was a complicated process – it is not a simple progression, and it is not united by a single emotion. The differences in the songs are necessary in order to display the range of emotions in the grieving process. The similarities of the songs seem to reorganize the grieving process, to hint at optimism and serve as a reminder of the ultimate goal – consolation. This indicates that the understanding of the *Kindertotenlieder* depends on an examination of the individual songs and how they relate to the cycle as a whole. This is just one of the ways in which the *Kindertotenlieder* are a complex and innovative composition. The concept of Hermeneutics will be addressed again in Chapter 4 of this thesis, which discusses the sociological implications of the *Kindertotenlieder*.

### 3.1.4. Post-Structuralism

Post-Structuralism is a broad term applied to intellectual developments in Continental Philosophy and Critical Theory originating in the 1960s. In direct contrast to Structuralism's claims of culturally independent meaning, Post-Structuralists generally view culture as integral to meaning. Post-Structuralism is difficult to define or summarize, and the question of whether or not Post-Structuralism can actually be considered a philosophical movement is highly debated. However, this thesis will relate the basic assumptions of the theory associated with Post-structuralism to aspects of the *Kindertotenlieder*.

Mahler's knowledge and love of German literature is well-known. His literary interest was necessity for him and spanned time periods and countries. However, Mahler has been criticized for his treatment of text. Some critics believed that he lacked sensitivity of poetry, and that he was merely concerned with the way a text could serve his own need for expression. Russell believes Mahler sought poems he could relate to, as every composer does. This does not mean that he reduced poetry to merely self-expression. "Indeed one of the most fascinating aspects of all lieder, Mahler's included, is precisely the ever-present tension between the poet's personality and intentions, and the composers" (Russell 1991, 21). Also, the history of the Lied has many examples of settings of second-rate poets that are first-rate songs. Lewis believes that the Romantic artist had an inherent understanding of the symbolic meaning of seemingly simple poetry

(Lewis 1996, 228). Many Mahler scholars agree that Mahler utilized texts for his own needs, but those that have done detailed studies of the songs, such as Theodor Adorno, disagree. According to Russell, that the text changes Mahler made to the *Kindertotenlieder* poems do not indicate that he lacked respect for the poems. With the exception of the poem used for Song 3, the changes he made were minimal (Russell 1991, 66).

A basic element of Mahler's song-writing was that the music always expresses more than the words can alone. "The text is really a mere indication of the deeper content which is to be fetched out of it – of the treasure which is to be raised" (Bauer-Lechner 1984, 46). Zoltan Roman thought that Mahler represented a medium between placing the poem above the music and making the melody the most important element, a balance between literature and music. "Through the infinite possibilities of variation, Mahler was able to follow and express the most delicate changes in the narrative and psychological contents of a given text" (Roman 1970, 122). Half of Mahler's songs are in variation form, and the other half use variation form principles – a sort of "musico-literary technique" (Russell 1991, 22). His attempts to uncover the deeper meaning of the poem are evident in the form of his songs – a compromise between strophic and through-composed, what Mahler called "eternal development" (Russell 1991, 24). This addresses the organic character of Mahler's music discussed earlier.

Mitchell contends that Mahler transcended the text of the *Kindertotenlieder* and thereby established new forms. For example, Song 1 displays an emotional conflict that is not resolved until Song 5. Mahler gives an emphasis to this poem that was not there before – placing emphasis on the "gladdening light of the world" (Russell 1991, 74). The

poem itself does not express “the triumph of faith over doubt – it takes the music to do that. The last two couplets seem to only express *belief* in the eternal light. In the poem, the grieving father’s doubt is subject to interpretation. In the song, it is unmistakable and displayed mostly in Mahler’s treatment of the last couplet. The emotional content of the song erupts in the third couplet, which makes the third couplet much more relevant and haunting than Rückert originally did. About Song 3, Kravitt states: “Though the pitiful real-life subject of these poems tends, in Rückert’s treatment, to be maudlin, in Mahler’s, it is muscular and certainly in the closing phrases of the third song of nearly crushing emotional power” (Kravitt 1978, 353). According to Russell, Mahler invested the poem used for Song 5 with much more character and clout than what was originally there. Mahler possibly chose the poem for Song 5, because he knew the cycle would need a “climax and release.” The poem really has little character – the storm is merely an observation, but Mahler gives the storm a crucial role and a psychological significance. Mahler also gives the song character by his treatment of the last stanza. (Russell 1991, 102.)

Primarily, Post-Structuralists believe that the concept of ‘self’ is not a singular and unified entity. Rather, an individual is made up of many conflicting strains and has access to many different outlets for knowledge. In order to comprehend a text, the reader must understand how the work is related to his or her own personal concept of self. Therefore, self-perception is necessary for interpretation. Secondly, the meaning that the author intends is not as important as the meaning that the reader perceives. Post-Structuralism contends that a text can have more than one meaning or purpose. The meaning of a text can change in relation to certain variables. Post-Structuralism rejects

the idea that there is a consistent structure to texts, specifically the theory of binary opposition. Post-Structuralists advocate deconstruction, which claims that the meanings of texts and concepts constantly shift.<sup>19</sup> The only way to properly understand these meanings is to deconstruct the assumptions and knowledge systems that produce the illusion of singular meaning.

Mahler has been accused of “usurping” his texts and of utilizing too much self-projection in his texts. I believe that Mahler made specific and original interpretations of the *Kindertotenlieder* poems, and this indicates a Post-structuralist line of thinking. It is evident in Mahler’s treatment of the poems, and his selection of the poems that he saw a very specific purpose, connection, and ultimate conclusion in them. He saw in them things that others, even other composers, would not see. Many scholars have noted Mahler’s extraordinary feat in his selection of the poems for the *Kindertotenlieder* – the fact that he waded through over 400 poems and chose five that he knew, through his music, would accurately portray the loss of a child. Russell contends that he saw in them a common imagery, which Mahler somehow knew he could transform into a musical representation of the struggles of grief leading to a final resolution. Mahler did not choose the poems that were the most suitable to set to music. Instead, he chose poems that he saw his ultimate vision in. It is evident that Mahler made more out of the poems than was originally there. The poem used for Song 5 is simply describing a storm, but Mahler made it the culmination of the entire cycle – he made a relatively simple poem the ultimate resolution for the incredibly complex struggle between grief and consolation established throughout the cycle. Whether or not Mahler is guilty of usurping texts or too

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<sup>19</sup> On deconstruction see Stefaniya 2005.



much self-projection is debatable. Some sense of self-projection is necessary for any composer to set a poem.

In my interpretation, for the composition of the *Kindertotenlieder*, it was Mahler's self-projection that made it such a remarkable and expressive representation of grief. Even though Mahler had not suffered the loss of a child at the time, he had suffered the loss of many siblings, and he experienced his parents' reaction to it. Mahler projected those experiences onto his selection of the poems. Mahler definitely applied his own interpretation to Rückert's poems, not out of a lack of respect for Rückert, but because he could only represent his own experiences and interpretations of grief, not someone else's. We must not forget that Mahler was a composer enveloped in the Romantic idiom, a composer that had an insatiable desire for self-expression. The combination of devices that Mahler used in the *Kindertotenlieder* that are distinct to him – the mystical references, the focus on light and dark imagery, the accurate portrayal of grief by someone who was very familiar with it – culminated in a remarkably expressive and touching composition. Some degree of self-projection was absolutely necessary in this case in order to provide an authentic representation of the subject.

### **3.1.5. Aesthetic Realism**

Aesthetic Realism is the philosophy founded by the American poet and critic Eli Siegel in 1941. It is important to note that while many of Siegel's ideas have merit, Aesthetic

Realism has been criticized on many levels. This line of thinking is concerned with aesthetics, the concept of opposites, poetry, and how individuals view the world. This section of this thesis will relate the *Kindertotenlieder* to aspects of Aesthetic Realism.

Russell believes that images of light and dark were a constant factor in Mahler's work – its presence in *Kindertotenlieder* is not new, just elaborated. Mahler's tendency toward light and dark could be due to his religious and philosophical readings. A recent study shows how much Mahler's inclination to light imagery may be due to reading of Nietzsche, particularly *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.<sup>20</sup> There is also reason to believe that this inclination came from Mahler's experiences – the youthful Mahler is the wayfarer, wounded by love; the older Mahler struggles with his own mortality, suffering with darkness in *Das Lied von der Erde*. Mahler associates light with salvation and eternal life in his Second Symphony. "Urlicht," the contralto solo of the fourth movement, and the chorus in the finale based on Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's (1724-1803) ode *Auferstehung* have the same eternal light imagery. In the Third Symphony, the fourth movement is Nietzsche's *Midnight Song*, followed by a finale with the song "Es sungen drei Engel einen süßen Gesang" from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, which depicts the joys of heaven and has a very bright accompaniment. The fourth symphony has a similar depiction of heaven in the song "Das himmlische Leben" for soprano solo. Therefore, in scanning the *Kindertotenlieder*, Mahler noticed poems with such imagery and poems that identified salvation with eternal light.

The poems of the *Kindertotenlieder* touched on Mahler's transitioning view of life. Lamplight or candle light represent the children's deaths – the lamp or candle being suddenly extinguished. The radiance of the children's eyes is described as dark flames.

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<sup>20</sup> See Nikkels 1989 as well as Russell 1991, 65.

Sunlight or the sun is portrayed not as strong as the power of night and insufficient to console the grieving father (Russell 1991, 53). The children are characterized as the sun and the moon, which no longer reappear for him on a familiar cycle. In Song 1, Rückert juxtaposes the symbols of darkness, light, and death with sunrise, life, and eternal light and therefore summons ideas of the literal meaning of the poem. Mahler grasps these symbols and transforms them into remarkable music. He portrays the symbol of the sunrise in the first line with a descending vocal line. His vocal line portraying night ascends. Therefore, Mahler portrays the opposites as being musically the reverse of each other. Song 4 differs from the others in that it depicts sunshine or day, as opposed to night.

Many scholars believe that the poem “Nun will die Sonn’ so hell aufgeh’n,” which Mahler chose for Song 1, was written the morning after the death of a child. Kravitt believes that it “contrasts Rückert’s deep grief with the unconcerned world about him, a world he soon must join” (Kravitt 1978, 341). Kravitt emphasizes the fact that Mahler changed one word of the poem. In line 3, *Das Unglück geschah auch mir allein*, (The grief was also mine alone), Mahler replaced *auch* (also) with *nur* (only), making the line: “the grief was only mine alone.”

“To the German Rückert, the death of his children from scarlet fever struck him individually (“allein”) – but in the 1830s, death from that disease was of communal (“auch mir”) concern. To Mahler, the perpetually alienated, plagued by the dream of the Wandering Jew, the grief was “only” his; he suffered “alone.” The crisis of February 24 was “only” his; the next morning he observed how the world went on unconcerned” (Kravitt 1978, 342).

The image of the sunrise in Song 1 is interesting – human misfortune is displayed against a natural, unchanging event. This is characteristic of the art song and the relationship between sunshine and pain is a characteristic of Mahler’s songs (Revers 2002, 177). The

role of the sun is negative – “it rises indifferent to the human disaster which has occurred in the night” (Russell 1991, 53). Lewis believes, Song 2 has many levels of poetic meaning that display the Romantic ideal. He shows that the literal sense of the poem is a “framework for symbolic reference to the Romantic dilemma of the artist estranged from society” (Lewis 1996, 244). Russell points out that in the section of the *Kindertotenlieder* poems from which Song 2 was taken, *Krankheit und Tod*, there is an extreme absorption in Rückert’s own feelings. He is irritated by others who try to console him, and he neglects his wife’s feelings – she “is only a faint presence” (Russell 1991, 42). Kravitt suggests that Mahler was drawn to the mood of withdrawal and world weariness in Rückert’s poems, especially in 1901, after his brush with death. A less persuasive argument by Reinhard Gerlach concerning Mahler’s attraction to Rückert suggests that Mahler was “aware of his problematic position as an epigone, a derivative late-comer in the wake of Beethoven and Wagner, found himself mirrored in the epigone of Rückert” (Russell 1991, 26).

A fundamental teaching of Aesthetic Realism is that beauty in art is defined by the unity of opposites. The world, art, and self all combine to form a totality of opposites, and each element explains the other. Aesthetic Realism is concerned with the quality of poetry. Siegel contends that good poetry is both logical and passionate. I believe that the *Kindertotenlieder* display the unity of opposites promoted by Aesthetic Realism by its combination, juxtaposition, and opposition of darkness and light in a countless number of ways. In my opinion, Mahler emphasized the light and dark imagery in his chosen poems, and utilized the dramatic effect of the concept of opposites to shape his complex and innovative interpretation of a difficult subject. Aesthetic Realism also proposes that the

world is the unity of freedom and order, and a good poem depicts the world. A good quality poem evolves in an organic manner – it is a single entity with many factors that serve each other. There are many examples of the organic qualities of the *Kindertotenlieder*. I believe that in his transformation of the poems, Mahler applied an organic quality to them that adheres to this principle of Aesthetic Realism. Russell contends that the technique Mahler used was “a combination of variation and development ... this technique allows for a successful ‘organic fusion’ in *Kindertotenlieder* ... music which evolves naturally in itself, while at the same time expresses step-by-step the meaning of the words being sung” (Russell 1991, 24).

A primary teaching of Aesthetic Realism is that every individual essentially desires to like the world in a sincere and precise manner. However, there is another desire opposing this – the desire to have contempt for the world and what is in it, for that makes one feel more important. The third primary principle is that the will for contempt causes unhappiness or even insanity. Aesthetic Realism contends that one’s attitude to the world governs how he or she sees things. It is evident that both Mahler and Rückert had feelings of world-weariness and world-negation. Contempt for the world played a part in the themes underlying Rückert’s poems and Mahler’s attraction to them. Certainly, Mahler was very concerned with his place in the world, and struggled with the Romantic dilemma of creating an art that satisfied his needs for expression and could also be well received by the public. Yet Aesthetic Realism contends that world-negation is merely an attempt to make one feel more important, and it is not a desirable state of mind, but rather something that should be overcome. While I cannot say whether or not Mahler and Rückert overcame such feelings, I believe that the grieving father portrayed in the

*Kindertotenlieder* did defeat his feelings of world-negation. The unconcerned world, and the sense of bereavement that is his alone, is emphasized in the first song. In order to reach the consolation so effectively expressed in Song 5, those feelings must be overcome. In his representation of the poems, Mahler portrays the conquering of such feelings as a part of the grieving process.

### **3.2. The Search for Meaning and an Outlet for Grief and Comfort**

#### **3.2.1. The Search for Meaning**

Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* accurately display the ultimate search for meaning in many different ways. Lewis believes that one symbol often portrayed in Romantic song is that of estrangement – the wanderer represents artistic escape, the process of art which in turn represents the process of life. This is especially true for the *Kindertotenlieder*. The wanderer is wrapped up in a search for meaning, greatly affected by the incoherence of experience. The Romantic identity represents the complexity of an existential duality. The dilemma goes beyond the artist and actually addresses the fundamental questions of human existence (Lewis 1996, 229). Mahler's poetry and music is autobiographical in an extraordinary way. Its goal is to define self and life. His professional life made family life difficult. This is represented in his constant effort to merge the drama of the symphony

with the lyricism of the song (Lewis 1996, 218). The later symphonies also display the same polarity, without the songs. *Das Lied von der Erde* (1907-08) transcends darkness and doubt, and ends with a radiant vision of eternity.

“In all of his works, over and over again, Mahler undertook the struggle from the toils of mortality into a vision of immortality and a struggle from the darkness of ignorance into the illumination of knowledge, composing was indeed itself a means of exploring the mystic complexities of the human condition” (Russell 1991, 62).

### 3.2.2. Grief

Grief is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is usually associated with the emotions, but it also has physical, cognitive, behavioral, social and philosophical ramifications. Most individuals at one time or another will experience loss. The terms grief and bereavement are often used interchangeably, however bereavement often refers to the state of loss, and grief to the reaction to loss. Scholars have begun to account for the fact that the response to loss varies from person to person. The conventional view of grief was that people move through an orderly and predictable series of stages. Researchers such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and others have proposed stages of grief often referred to as the “grief cycle.” (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2005, 7.) The stages are identified as denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. However, recently researchers have come to realize that a wide variety of responses to loss are possible. These responses are

There is a plethora of examples of the struggle between grief and consolation in the musical language, imagery, as well as similarities and differences of the songs of the *Kindertotenlieder*. In the opening of Song 1, the oboe and solo horn play a “bleak counterpoint,” which is unlike any conventional opening (Russell 1991, 69). It establishes a lament and the linear, contrapuntal style of the entire cycle.



Example 1: Contrapuntal opening of Song 1

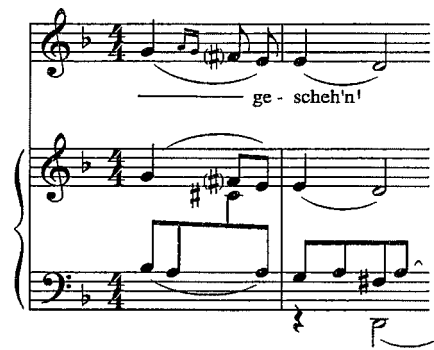
The second vocal line brings a new timbre, because the woodwinds are replaced by muted lower strings and rhythmic figures on the harp. “The voice now sings of its misfortune to a rising line, but rising by semitones, as if with great effort ...” (Russell 1991, 70).



Example 2: Ascending vocal line of Song 1



The cadence on *Nacht gescheh'n!* occurs three times in the song – also on *Scheinet allgemein* and *Freudenlicht der Welt!*, as if attempting to bring the parent back on course, on the road to consolation. The reoccurring cadence provides allusions of optimism, because it is a perfect authentic cadence in the key of D major, highlighting the relative major of D minor.



Example 3: Reoccurring cadence of Song 1

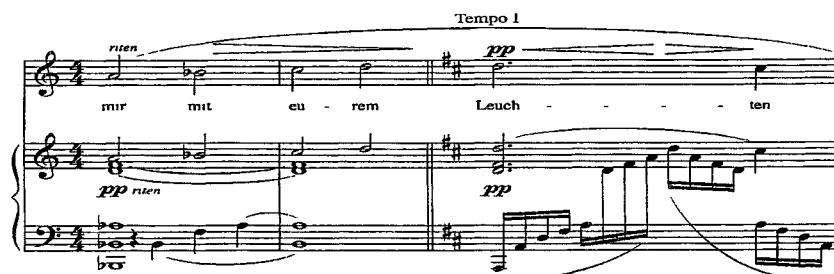
Then there is a brief rest, as if darkness had indeed been replaced by light. Yet this is only an illusion that is quickly discarded, because then the music becomes unsteady – it only hinted at a symbol of light. Mahler does this on purpose, according to Mitchell. Mahler purposefully saturates his source of imagery, otherwise the symbolism in Song 5 would fall short. After the “lightening” of D minor to D major (Mitchell’s word), the repetition of *dem Freudenlicht der Welt!* in the final bars reverts back to minor. The cadences display a lack of resolution, and the harp entrance on *Welt!* does not add a final tonic. “Thus the conflict of emotions in the poem, expressed throughout the dichotomy of darkness and light, remains unresolved – and indeed it is only via emotional experience of the cycle as a whole that a resolution will be reached” (Russell 1991, 75).

In Song 2, just before the end of the first half, a strong C major tonality is established on *Strahlen*, and the voice drops a minor sixth (see example 6). The music seems to be moving towards a resolution in C major, but that is avoided. What Agawu identified as the “central motif” provides an introduction to the next section. The voice enters with a repetition of the central motif.



Example 4: Central motif of Song 2

The kettledrum increases the tension, and there is a lingering D on *leuchen*. This is an intensely warm moment: on the cadential six-four D major chord are “sweeping semiquaver [sixteenth-note] harp arpeggios,” light orchestral effects, “a sudden great warm effulgence of light,” and Mahler directs the singer to sing warmly (Russell 1991, 81). Mitchell believes that this radiant D major moment symbolizes the target of heaven that is not reached until the end of the cycle (Mitchell 1985, 97).



Example 5: D major moment of Song 2

We find a definite emphasis on the words *Strahlen*, *Leuchten*, and *Sterne* – the words that are the most obvious references to light in a dark environment. The harmony surrounding each of these words is a cadential six-four chord, approached by a German augmented sixth chord and underlined by a harp arpeggio (Agawu 1983, 83) (see examples 5 and 6).



Example 6: German augmented sixth chord of Song 2

There are only four six-four chords in the song; they provide continuity in a song that is otherwise tonally ambiguous (Agawu 1983, 84). The cadential six-four chord provides a strong sense of tonal progression, and Mahler uses it to emphasize more optimistic parts of the poem. In this song, the goal of eternal light is not within reach, it is merely implied by the inferences of optimism. Bleak words are contrasted by the orchestra – almost “as if in celestial denial” (Russell 1991, 81).

In Song 3, a climactic passage occurs in the second half of the first stanza. It is a harmonic departure from C minor, but the key is restored on *Tochterlein*.

The musical score for Example 7 shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a *poco ritard* marking. The lyrics are: "[her-] ein wie sonst, mein Tochterlein". The piano accompaniment also starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The score concludes with a *Wie zu Anfang* marking, a piano (*pp*) dynamic, and a *quasi pizz* marking. The key signature changes from C minor to C major at the end.

Example 7: Harmonic departure of Song 3

The dominant feature of this passage is the lack of pauses. It contradicts the first half of the first stanza, which has orchestra interludes. The seven lines flow without pause, which represents a grand discharge of emotions. The second stanza follows the same pattern as the first. The harmony develops in the same manner and the vocal line follows the same melodic and rhythmic course. However, differences in the instrumental parts are presented. The strings supply rich harmonies, and the violas play at a high pitch that add color and intensity. In the second stanza, the climactic passage is more intense than the first. The biggest change is that *erlosch'ner Freudenschein* is repeated, spread out over seven notes, with crescendos on the last syllable.

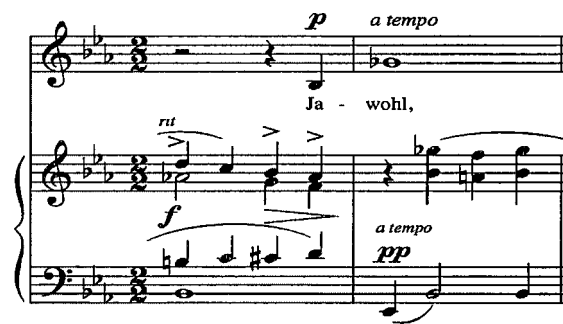


Example 8: Text emphasis of Song 3

This word is given great emphasis – “his daughter *is* indeed his *Freudenschein*” (Russell 1991, 90). This also reflects the earlier images in the cycle. At the end of Songs 1 and 2, we saw that the eternal light was not yet within reach. This song also ends in a sense of unresolved grief. A calm mood is presented, when the cor anglais and bassoon resume contrapuntal figures, but Mary Dargie points out that it is “only the calm of suppressed tension” (Dargie 1981, 320). The pizzicato bass picks up, then breaks off – the mother’s footsteps have halted. This reluctance of acceptance is actually the theme of the next song, which begin to bring us closer to light and relief. In Song 3, the tonality is very secure, compared to Song 2. The key of C minor is never in question. Song 3 is in the realm of memory, and the music has suspensions and chromaticisms similar to the main motive of Song 2. However, enveloping into a world of memories cannot ease the pain of the present. This is portrayed in the final lines, which begins on a high F and descends two octaves in eight measures. The song ends on a dominant, which is rare for Mahler. “It is a way of implying that the grief given vent in the song remains unresolved, that the reality of the father’s loss has not yet been accepted” (Russell 1991, 90).

Song 4 has a much warmer feel than the others, because it has images of daylight and sunshine. However, this does not mean that the grief portrayed in the previous songs

has been resolved – this song displays aspiration, but not fulfillment. Opening material returns at bar 19, signifying what Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht identified as *bewegte Ruhe* [moving stillness]. According to Eggebrecht, it “implies a state of emotion-filled calm, as if everything were all right” (Eggebrecht 1982, 235ff). Nevertheless, the singer’s phrase ends inconclusively, and the phrase is left to the orchestra to resolve. At bar 23, there is a strong indication toward a resolution in E-flat major because the harmony surrounds the dominant of E-flat major, but the voice enters and begins the second stanza with an unexpected G-flat.



Example 9: Unresolved moment of Song 4

This results in what Dargie calls “a brief period of suspended animation amid the onward rush of events” (Dargie 1981, 322). Mahler goes beyond the final expression of *Der Tag ist schon* and repeats *aufjenen Hoh’n*, which allows the voice to have “passionate rising phrases” previously heard only in the orchestra. Now the voice can expose what has been implied. An E-flat major cadence finally occurs at bar 69, yet the postlude still has hints of uneasiness. Eggebrecht believes that this indicates that the singer’s triumphant expression does not lead to an actual resolution – “the liberating thought in Mahler’s

setting reveals its lack of foundation, it collapses; the song returns to its beginnings” (Eggebrecht 1982, 246).

Mitchell believes that Song 4 shows a belief that the sun still shines in the distance, and each stanza dispels anticipation of the bright day that is on the horizon. On the other hand, there is an underlying feeling of unfulfilled yearning throughout the song, characterized in the poet’s assertion of a future reunion with his children remaining just that – an assertion. The inner tension is unresolved, and Mahler implies this in his musical phrasing, harmony, and shifts in tonality. “In conveying this tension, Mahler is faithfully following Rückert, whose poem is characterized by precisely this doubting-hoping ambivalence” (Russell 1991, 92). In the *Kindertotenlieder* No. 4, the “past, present, and future become an indissoluble unit that is paradigmatic of the process of mourning” (Revers 2002, 176). The individual comes to terms with the loss through a combination of memories, the present situation of the parents who remain behind, and the hope for a future reunion.

In Song 5, the storm represents all of the feelings of grief and despair that have gone unresolved – “it acts as an outlet for the cycle’s unresolved conflicts, and thus as a catharsis of them” (Russell 1991, 111). Throughout the song, the storm rages in the orchestra, and the dynamic level is reduced at the beginning at each stanza to allow the voice to come through. Yet the storm returns with greater force each time. No orchestra interlude is present between the first two stanzas, but a six-bar interlude appears between stanza two and three, and an eight-bar interlude appears between stanzas three and four. Since the storm is stronger each time, so is the singer’s outcry. At the end of stanza three,

the storm reaches a thundering climax, and the full orchestra participates, including kettledrum and gong. Almost all the orchestra parts have *fortissimo* dynamics.

Stetig steigend.

The musical score is for the climax of Song 5, featuring a full orchestra and vocal soloists. The tempo is marked "Stetig steigend." (Continuously increasing). The score is in 2/4 time and shows a crescendo. The instruments listed on the left are: KI Fl, Fl, Ob, B-Hr, Cl, B-Cl, Fg, C-Fg, Hr, Hfe, Pk, Gl, Tarn, I, VI, II, Vla, Sgst, Vell, and C-B. The vocal soloists are I, VI, II, and Vell. The score includes various dynamics such as *ff*, *f*, *p*, and *sf*, and articulations like *pizz*, *arco*, and *sfz*. The vocal soloists have lyrics in German: "In die-ten", "Wet-ter in die-ten", and "Dämpfer ab".

Example 10: Climax of Song 5



From bar 73, the marking is *stetig steigend* [continuously increasing]. Beginning at bar 98, the rocking accompaniment figures of the lullaby appear, and the key changes to major at bar 99. Now, after all the implications that light will overcome dark, we see it happening. I believe that this is evidence that the *Kindertotenlieder* are truly cyclic, and that Song 5 is also a microcosm of the entire cycle. The end of the storm brings acceptance and tranquility, more so than is implied in the poem. “The sense of potent, deep and final peace expressed in Mahler’s last stanza reveals that with this resolution not only the song, but the cycle too has reached an end” (Russell 1991, 103). The final section is a lullaby, in which the children are resting in eternal peace – it is a total contrast. The surging dynamics have changed to *pianissimo*, and what were once forceful woodwinds is now a delicate combination of muted strings and celesta. There is no chromaticism or agitated rhythms. The rocking accompaniment of the celesta and the strings has a lyrical and diatonic melody. A mood of light and radiance penetrates this section from the beginning. (Russell 1991, 109.) The grieving parent has finally obtained tranquility. At bar 133, the sought-after D major cadence appears. The intrusion of the lullaby establishes acceptance – what was left an open question has been answered. In the epilogue, the solo horn reaffirms the goal of the entire piece: a clear D major (Mitchell 1999, 220). The music dissolves and dies, because there is nothing left that needs to be said.

Research has shown that many who worked with the bereaved found stage models of grieving to be too simplistic and that an examination of the processes, dynamics, and common experiences of grief would be more beneficial and applicable. The psychiatrist

John Bowlby identified ebb and flow of process such as Shock and Numbness, Yearning and Searching, Disorganization and Despair, and Reorganization (Bowlby 1980, 85). In Mahler's songs in general, the accompaniment is made up of constantly "shifting planes of color, the vocal line is interrupted with orchestral interludes, the form is made up of a pattern of associated images ... When the voice is silent, the orchestra explores its soul" (Barford 1971, 18). Mahler's orchestration of *Kindertotenlieder* aims specifically "at the delineation of structure, striving for the greatest possible clarity" (Russell 1991, 65). In Song 1, Mahler accommodates for the dichotomy of imagery, because for every couplet there is an alternation of woodwind accompaniment and string accompaniment "...these contrasts of sonority reflecting the fundamental contrasts in the poem between grief and consolation" (Russell 1991, 69). It is evident that Mahler simply display a progression from sadness to solace in the *Kindertotenlieder*. Throughout the entire cycle, and within individual songs, there is a discourse; an ebb and flow of emotions, very similar to the ebb and flow of emotions associated with the grieving process. It is as if the music is reasoning with itself, trying to find answers, and no matter how much it is discouraged, it is persistent in its search for resolution.

In Song 2, a representation of ambiguity and unity exists. The song contains several different tonal regions, variations in tempo, and time signature changes. The ambiguous tonal shifting is important to Mahler's interpretation of the poem. Unity is provided by the "central musical motif," which opens the orchestral introduction. Agawu states that there is yet another level of meaning displayed in the interplay between major and minor triads on C. The sections of minor tonality seem to provide a frame for the major tonalities, but do not control them. This frame and the larger tonal structure are

essentially static. Therefore, two levels of significance are established: the background minor mode suggesting the emotions of the father and the major mode which corresponds to the occasional optimism that accompanies the tragic condition. (Agawu 1983, 84.) In Song 3, the only song that stays in one key, alternate orchestras provide a discourse and bring out the emotion. This helps to build an emotional tension that dissolves in a climax. The first half of each stanza is a contrapuntal dialogue between the winds and the pizzicato lower strings. Song 1 also had alternate orchestras that bring out the emotional contrasts (Mitchell 1985, 139).

Many scholars have noted the tension that is prominent in Song 4. The first bar of establishes a different environment than each previous songs. From the very beginning we “are aware of the ambivalence, the tensions, which will permeate the song” (Russell 1991, 92). Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht’s detailed analysis of Song 4 breaks down the orchestral prelude into four emotions that are fundamental to the song’s meaning (Eggebrecht 1982, 235ff). Few would discern such specific connotations in the first five bars, but there is no mistaking the feelings of restlessness and ambivalence in the first measures. The agitation presented at the beginning dominates the song. The irregular phrases, shifting time signatures, and especially the unpredictable changes in harmony also contribute to this feeling. In Song 4, there is an alternation between voice and orchestra. At the end of stanza one, the voice drops out and the orchestra takes over, and at the end of stanza two, the voice drops out later and the orchestra takes over less. In the third stanza the voice does not drop out at all, but asserts itself with an extended concluding phrase of the orchestra – “the singer’s song is at last made complete” (Russell 1991, 97). In Song 5, Russell identifies a surging, then falling pattern in the third stanza.

The mystical lines portray accurately the emotional transition of the words “with their swift passage from the anxiety to hopelessness” (Russell 1991, 106). I contend that these aspects of the *Kindertotenlieder* represent a discourse inside of a progression – much like the accurate portrayal of grief that researchers have come to agree on.

In the yearning and searching stage of grief, the bereaved tries to locate the lost person. Of course, their search is in vain. This process has also been referred to as ‘pining’ (Bowlby 1980, 87). It is common for the grieving person to feel or believe that they actually saw the deceased for a moment, or to otherwise sense their presence. This stage of grief often signifies that the bereaved is beginning to accept the loss. Song 3 can be thought to represent the pining stage, because the poem describes the mourning father seeing a vision of his daughter in the doorway. It is interesting that the pining stage has been identified as a sign that the bereaved is coming to terms with the reality of the loss, and that pining is represented in the middle song, the plateau, of the cycle. There is a distinction between normal grief and complicated grief. Normal grief encompasses at least two of Kübler-Ross’ five stages of grief, though not necessarily in any order. Complicated grief goes through the stages in a random order and includes stages in addition to those identified by Kübler-Ross. To my knowledge, Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder* definitely portray the process of complicated grief. The examples portraying the struggle of the grieving process abound, among the individual songs as well as the whole cycle. The charts in the appendix are a graphic representation of these examples.

In all cases of the death of a child, parents find the grief overwhelming. Such a loss can lead to a lifelong grieving process, for the parent will never overcome the loss,

but can learn to understand and adapt their life accordingly. Parents are often plagued by feelings of guilt, often projected on themselves. They have trouble coping with the abrupt ending of the dependent nature of the relationship. The loss of a parent, grandparent, or sibling can be very troubling in childhood, and children react differently to loss depending on their age. Mahler was able to portray the grieving process so accurately in the *Kindertotenlieder*, because he was very familiar with the concept of grief after experiencing the loss of eight siblings, including his beloved brother Ernst. Some believe that the inclusion of the lullaby in the second half of Song 5 is over-simplistic – it is a resolution that is too convenient. I believe that the lullaby is a sufficient and suitable resolution, because it represents what has been sought after in the entire cycle – certainty. “Initially, in the final song, the imagined tempestuous nature and the self’s confused state correspond ... Yet finally the self is removed to a bright sound world distanced from all peril.” The first three stanzas are characterized by a jagged descending melody, with the performance direction “with restless anguished expression.” When the lullaby starts, the voice becomes song-like and despair is replaced by the comfort of certainty – “Certainty of a home beyond time and space.” (Revers 2002, 179.) In my opinion, certainty provides the sense of comfort that the grieving father has been seeking throughout the entire cycle.

The lullaby is also effective, because it comes at exactly the right time – after the grieving parent has run through the gauntlet of emotions, reprised memories of the children, recalled their deaths, and endured the storm that summarized and incorporated all of these experiences; finally he is ready for solace. Mahler knew that the resolution did not depend on a progression that culminated in a big finish. He knew that the conclusion depended on the state of acceptance that can only come after experiencing the

cycle of emotions portrayed in the *Kindertotenlieder*. This is displayed in the key relationships of the songs. Mitchell points out that the tonal organization of the cycle is concentric, rather than progressive. The songs “explore a fairly narrow sequence of tonalities,” rather than progress. When it returns to the tonic minor in the last section of Song 5, it “conducts an exercise in pacification, in conciliation, by turning to the tonic major” (Mitchell 1985, 76). Song 5 is the ultimate resolution to unresolved conflicts in Song 1. This portrays acceptance, rather than denial, of the suffering and proves that the collection of five *Kindertotenlieder* is cyclic. Mahler knew that the loss of a child was something that can never be fully resolved, and he portrays this in the epilogue.

“Although the final song suggests a transcendent and comforting world of tranquility and heavenly peace, the musical structure of the epilogue makes clear the shadow of pain and loss that marks every measure of the *Kindertotenlieder* cycle” (Revers 2002, 183). We are not released from pain and suffering, but return to it. This is a sense of dissolving, succumbing to the grief, instead of fighting it. The fact that the grieving parent has obtained a sense of certainty that the children have gone to a better place allows him to accept their fate and the reality of the tragic loss. Therefore, the final resolution is a statement of certainty and acceptance.

## 4. SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE *KINDERTOTENLIEDER*

### 4.1. The Romantic Artist and Audience

Romantic composers were unique members of society. They were consistently placed in the unusual situation of seeking approval from the very society from which they felt estranged. Their life revolved around their art, but they could not make a living by their art alone. Mahler was no exception to this predicament. The Romantic ideal encompassed both philosophy and art, and Romantic composers were faced with the duty combining reason with feelings. A compromise between their artistic endeavors and domestic needs often proved to be difficult. This dilemma is displayed in the songs of the Romantic period. (Lewis 1996, 228.)

Mahler was “concerned with finding symbolic and metaphoric language to evoke the practical and philosophic ramifications of the Romantic dilemma, of the condition of being an artist. Life and death, light and dark, speech and silence, are all symbols of creative energy and impotence since, for the Romantic artist, reality was not what he reported but what he created” (Lewis 1996, 230).

In the context of the Lied, the expressivity and interpretation of the song largely depended on the performer. At the turn of the century in Central Europe, cultural journalism flourished. This had a great impact on musical culture and the reception of the

arts. Many newspapers and periodicals devoted major resources to music reviews (Painter 2002, 267). Reviews of Mahler's German critics give valuable insight to his reputation, the varying opinions on his art, and the impact of his Lieder. Reviews of Lieder often focused on the performer and the reaction of the audience. "In effect, the orchestral Lied became a way to distinguish the sincere from the superficial symphony audience" (Painter 2003, 92). The reception of Mahler's symphonies and his Lieder differed greatly, which referenced the musical environment of the early twentieth century. The popularity of the Lied depended on a focus on absolute music and a rejection of cultivated musical ideas. The appreciation of Lieder was based on its expressivity and, essentially, its rejection of pure musical values (Painter 2003, 90).

"At this moment in music history, when orchestral color took on a novel but contested importance, aural impressions from concert listening became essential to the interpretation of a composition. The reviews of Mahler's contemporaries range in their judgments from ebullient praise to scathing criticism. Always, however, they give insight into his compositions as well as suggest ways of listening that have been lost to history" (Painter 2002, 267).

The Viennese critic Julius Korngold believed that Mahler successfully combined the elements of melody and expression. He stated: "Mahler ist betonter Melodiker," by which he meant, that he "hält nach wie vor die formale Liedstruktur fest," which in Schumann's words, Korngold continued, was "die Wahrheit des Ausdrucks."<sup>21</sup> Melodicism was an important factor in the appreciation of the Lied. Even the most sophisticated critics, who usually focused on technical aspects, favored simplicity in Lieder. The *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* stated: "Die souveräne Beherrschung der Technik trägt wesentlich dazu bei, daß Mahler jetzt, wenn seine Tongebilde noch so kompliziert

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<sup>21</sup> The German quotes from Painter 2003 here translated by Nico Schüler. "Mahler is an emphatic composer of melodies," by which he meant that he "continues to use the formal Lied structure," which, in Schumann's words, Korngold continued, "was the truth of the expression." From Julius Korngold's article "Neue Orchester – und Liedmusik" in *Neue Freie Presse*, Feb.3, 1905; quoted in Painter, 2003, 96



sind, geradezu als einfach erscheint. Darin liegt der Erfolg, nicht die Stärke seiner Lieder.”<sup>22</sup> It became increasingly difficult to trace the development of the melody and its division between orchestra and voice. “Aber [die Melodik] tritt *sinnfällig* in Erscheinung und gewinnt daher sofort auch den ungeübten Hörer.”<sup>23</sup> This response was well justified, because the *Kindertotenlieder* especially appeal to the senses through their display of the past, the realm of memory, and a reconciled tragedy, rather than a direct experience (Painter 2003, 98).

Another significant factor in the appreciation of Lieder concerned how the music affected the listener on a physical level – it raised their level of consciousness. “Quite apart from the sensuous pleasure offered by the color of timbre or the thrill of virtuosity, the lied bought a whole-body pleasure often characterized through tropes of breathing” (Painter 2003, 98). The tropes were an essential aspect of music listening around 1800. This concept in listening behavior materialized due to the more specialized programs that were created for Lieder. Metaphors of breathing were common in the reception of orchestral versions of Mahler’s songs. One critic noted: “Ich schätze aber seine Lieder, die doch eigentlich viel mehr Natürlichkeit atmen als seine Instrumentalwerke, höher ein.”<sup>24</sup> Egon von Komorzynski stated: “Die atemlose, man kann wohl sagen, andächtige Spannung der Hörschaft, die Tränen, deren sich niemand schämte – das ist ein Triumph, mehr wert als das ohrenbetäubende Klatschen, das nun einmal als

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<sup>22</sup> “The competent mastery of technique contributes considerably to Mahler’s appearance as simple – now, that his tone creations are so complex. That is the source of the success, not the strength of his songs.” From the article “Gustav Mahler als Liedkomponist” in *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, Jan.31, 1905; quoted in Painter, 2003, 97.

<sup>23</sup> “But [the melodic design] appears *sensuously* and, therefore, wins over even the untrained listener.” From “Gustav Mahler als Liedkomponist,” quoted in Painter, 2003, 98.

<sup>24</sup> “But I value his Lieder much higher, which, in a sense, breathe much more naturalness than his instrumental works.” From *Anzeiger*, Mainz, Dec. 21, 1911; quoted in Painter, 2003, 98.

Beifallsbekundung üblich ist.”<sup>25</sup> Ernst Decsey wrote: “und doch hielt man wieder ergriffen den Atem an bei den Kindertotenliedern oder bei dem aus tiefen Harfentönen ruhenden ‘Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen.’”<sup>26</sup>

Mahler’s songs represent two traditions: the German art song and the German folk song. His desire to combine the two was actually a barrier to public acceptance of his songs (Lewis 1996, 218). Lieder were culturally valuable because of their folk influence. Many people believed that folk songs were therapeutic. Georg Göhler said of Mahler’s Lieder: “Es ist fast notwendig, da in der modernen Lyrik so wenig wirkliche Gefühlsechtheit und–reinheit zu finden ist, da die Zerfaserung des Gefühls in kleine Stimmungen nicht Mahlers Sache war, dass er [...] seine Zuflucht zum Volksliede nahm.”<sup>27</sup> The folk influence offered a sense of validity to Mahler’s work. In early performances of the *Kindertotenlieder* the audience seemed to respond better to the folk-like songs.

Mahler’s reputation took a dramatic turn in 1905, largely due to the warm reception of his songs. He went from “the despised conductor who subjected audiences to his own music to the celebrated composer, who suffered at the hands of biased music critics” (Painter 2001, 89). Mahler’s contemporaries believed that his Lieder brought him the deserved recognition that was lacking from his symphonies. Mahler’s “attitude

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<sup>25</sup> “The breathless, one can arguably say, devout tension of the audience, the tears, of which nobody was ashamed – that is a triumph, worth more than the ear-battering applause that happens to be customary as a sign of approval.” From Egon von Komorzynski’s article “Gustav Mahlers neue Lieder,” in *Neue Musik-Zeitung* 26, 1905, p. 227; quoted in Painter, 2003, 91.

<sup>26</sup> “and still, one would, deeply moved, hold one’s breath for the *Kindertotenlieder* or for the dormant – as the character of low harp sounds – ‘Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen.’” From Ernst Decsey’s article “Das 41. Tonkünstlerfest des Allgemeinen Deutschen Musikvereins,” in *Die Musik* 4, 1905, pp. 135–37, quoted in Painter, 2003, 93.

<sup>27</sup> “It is almost necessary – since in modern poetry one can find so little authenticity and pureness of feelings and since the dissecting of the feeling into small sentiments was not his forte – that he [...] took refuge in the folk song.” Georg Göhler, “Gustav Mahlers Lieder,” in *Die Musik* 10, 1911; quoted in Painter, 2003, 95.

toward his place in the world as an artist was affected by the public perception, first performances, and publication of his songs” (Lewis 196, 220). The *Kindertotenlieder* in particular are credited with silencing Mahler’s enemies. Paul Hiller said that it had a “rühmliche Einfachheit” [praiseworthy simplicity] and “die wünschenswerte Stimmungstiefe” [the desirable low point of mood]. Hiller believed the *Kindertotenlieder* represented the “Zug ins Edle und Poetische” [the draft into the noble and poetic].<sup>28</sup> The Berlin critic Paul Bekker stated: “Zu wenig ist Mahlers Schaffen als Liederkomponist bisher erkannt und gewürdigt – und doch hat er uns gerade auf diesem Gebiete Schöpfungen gegeben, welche sein produktives Vermögen von der inhaltreichsten, ausgiebigsten Seite zeigen.”<sup>29</sup>

Though Mahler’s Lieder did gain popularity, ultimately his oeuvre was characterized by the symphonic aesthetic. The noble quality of the symphony and its accessibility supported the new inclination of art music – rather than the “Romantic genius who composed in isolation” (Painter 2003, 101). The *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* article on Mahler stated, “die Lieder von vorgestern sind nicht mehr Emanationen eines ringenden Geistes, sondern seelische Impressionen eines durch das Fegefeuer Gegangenen, zu herber Grösse herangereiften, in seinem Denken und Empfinden abgeklärten Meisters.”<sup>30</sup> Mengelberg argued that some of Mahler’s songs are “zu Sinfoniesätzen geweitet, andere wieder erscheinen in ihrer Urgestalt als Sinfonieteile.”

<sup>28</sup> Paul Hiller in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 71, 1904, p. 852 and in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 73, 1906, pp. 124-25 and in *Die Musik* 5, 1906, p. 203; quoted in Painter, 2003, 89-90.

<sup>29</sup> “Too little has Mahler’s work as a Lied composer been discovered and recognized – and still, he specifically gave us, in this area, creations that show his productive ability from the most comprehensive and copious side.” Paul Bekker in *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* 34, 1907, pp. 141-44; quoted in Painter, 2003, 89.

<sup>30</sup> “The Lieder from the day before yesterday are not emanations of a struggling mind, but mental impressions of someone who has gone through purgatory, who achieved austere greatness, and who became a worldly-wise master in his thinking and feeling.” From “Gustav Mahler als Liedkomponist,” quoted in Painter, 2003, 101

This combination of symphonist and lyricist meant “eine wahre grosse Volkskunst.”<sup>31</sup> The concept of a marriage between the aesthetics of the symphony and the Lied was difficult for some critics to accept. Paul Bekker: “Mahler thereby unwillingly betrays wie seine symphonischen Werke nur künstliche, durch eminente Geisteskraft hochgeschraubte Steigerungen sind, deren gedehnte Formen er nicht mehr mit Eigenen auszufüllen vermochte!”<sup>32</sup> In Mahler’s culture, music had the responsibility of adopting the ideology of the state, and many critics have noted his goal to create an authentic German voice. Some of Mahler’s contemporaries considered Mahler to be the only composer who was preserving the genre of the symphony. However, some critics and contemporaries considered his methods to be radical. “Mahler therefore became the locus of a contemporary debate over the value of tradition and the promise of innovation, a debate that had broad implications for the connections between music and society, politics, and culture” (Painter 272). Mahler’s music caused deliberation about the status of the symphony, the understanding of the musical public, and German culture in general.

#### 4.2. Reception of the *Kindertotenlieder*

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<sup>31</sup> “Mengelberg argued that some of Mahler’s songs are “expanded as symphonic movements, [and] others again appear in their original form [Urgestalt] as parts of symphonies.” This combination of symphonist and lyricist meant that [it is] “a true, great folk art.” Wilhelm Mengelberg in *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 2, 1921, p 14, quoted in Painter, 2001, 100

<sup>32</sup> “Mahler thereby unwillingly betrays how his symphonic works are just artistic augmentations that are forced up through eminent mental power and of which the elongated forms he was unable to fill with something personal.” Paul Bekker in *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung*, Feb 22, 1907, p.144; quoted in Painter, 2001, 101-102

The premiere of the *Kindertotenlieder* was on January 29, 1905. It was in Vienna at the *Kleiner Musiksaal*, a small hall also known as the *Brahmssaal*, of the *Musikverein*. The concert was called ‘*Lieder-Abend mit Orchester*.’ The singers were Anton Moser (baritone), Fritz Schrödter (tenor), and Friedrich A. Weidemann (baritone). The concert featured the Vienna Philharmonic and was conducted by Mahler. The program contained only Mahler songs, and the Rückert settings of ‘*Ich bin der Welt*’ and ‘*Um Mitternacht*’ ended the concert. Mahler had an original concept for this concert – an evening of songs in an intimate venue with the orchestra replacing the piano. The premiere was successful and made Mahler known as a composer, rather than just a conductor, in Vienna. (Mitchell 1999, 226.)

A scholar to write on the *Kindertotenlieder* the year of the first performance stated: “Mahler’s songs were conceived specifically from the point of view of orchestra potentialities, emphasizing that the *Kindertotenlieder* must be studied from the orchestral score, Mahler’s own piano version giving an inadequate notion of the work’s richness.”<sup>33</sup> At the first performance, the orchestra “made history” by displaying an influential medium – no previous work for small orchestra compared to *Kindertotenlieder*. At the turn of the century, the tendency towards Romantic expansion subsided, and the chamber orchestra became a popular outlet for Romantic expression (Russell 1991, 15).

Although the audiences were pleased with the *Kindertotenlieder*, some critics were less enthused. The *Grazer Tagespost* called the *Kindertotenlieder* a “miniature domestic tragedy.” “In terms of their craftsmanship, each of these songs is a phenomenon unto itself, and there is no other orchestra that sounds like Mahler’s chamber orchestra.”

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<sup>33</sup> Arnold Schering, “Gustav Mahler als Liederkomponist,” 1905; cited in Russell, 1991, 65.

The article also noted the “inwardness” of Mahler’s songs.<sup>34</sup> However, the author of this article found fault with Mahler’s instrumentation.

“The mere fact that Mahler has chosen such touchingly beautiful poems as the poetic basis for his songs would speak volumes for him and for the musician in him. But once again, we have the same fussy instrumentation, which is no doubt a pleasure to listen to, but which seems so ‘studied’ and affected, often contradicting the naïve and popular melodies that Mahler uses.”<sup>35</sup>

Another main concern surrounding the reception of Lieder was the contrast between the public medium of the orchestra and the private medium of the song. Commenting on the *Kindertotenlieder*, Robert Hirschfeld stated: “Mahler’s ‘Methode, einer lyrischen Empfindung von außen beizukommen,’ entailed that Lieder are inserted into ‘glänzend und wundersam zart instrumentierte Orchesterstücke.’”<sup>36</sup> Some critics felt that there were moments when the orchestral colors did not blend well, and that the thematic material displayed by the voice and the instruments did not match. Der Reichsbote reported: “Messchaert sang die wundervoll, stimmungsvollen, tiefempfundenen Kindertotenlieder mit höchster Künstlerschaft,” and also, “Orchesterpart zu indiscret.”<sup>37</sup>

Mahler created the songs of the *Kindertotenlieder* for a specific acoustic space – they represent his signature form of vocal chamber music. Mahler indicated in letters to Strauss that he wanted the *Kindertotenlieder* performed in small venues only, preferably

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<sup>34</sup> From an unsigned article in the *Grazer Tagespost* No. 161, June 11, 1905; quoted in Mitchell 1999, 228.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> “Mahler’s ‘method of achieving a lyric sensation from the outside’ entailed that Lieder are inserted into ‘bright and wondrous, delicately instrumentated orchestra pieces.’” From Robert Hirschfeld’s article “Musik Chronik,” in *Osterreichische Rundschau* 3, 1905, p. 179; quoted in Painter 2003, 100.

<sup>37</sup> The Reichsbote [daily newspaper] reported: “Messchaert sang the wonderful, atmospheric, deeply felt *Kindertotenlieder* with highest artistry,” and also, “the orchestra part [was] too indiscreet.” Robert Hirschfeld in *Der Reichsbote*, Oct. 4, 1911; quoted in Painter 2003, 100.

at matinee performances.<sup>38</sup> It was the general consensus that a large, symphonic hall was not conducive to the aesthetic understanding of Lieder. Expressivity did not suit a large public forum, and the orchestral Lied was not considered to have the potential that the symphony did to create an image. Lieder were supposed to be a temporal experience, and listeners became very concerned with the vocal line. Mahler's contemporaries believed that the incompatibility between venue and scoring was the main aesthetic problem of his songs (Painter 2003, 99). "The intimacy of Rückert's poetry was at odds with the loud choir of instruments, as if extremely 'mimosenhaft'" (over-sensitive) Korngold argued.<sup>39</sup> Yet, some respected the orchestral section of Mahler's Lieder for not having the bold Romantic sound and the full orchestra, "nor the highly refined and individualistic timbres of the *Fin de siècle*" (Painter 2003, 99). Therefore, the orchestra was supposed to function like a piano. Some critics believed that the expressivity of the *Kindertotenlieder* was only applicable to the piano. Paul Bekker, who did not favor the combination of the aesthetics of the symphony and the Lied, noted the depth of feeling at a performance of the piano version of *Kindertotenlieder*, with Mahler at the piano. "Eingebungen von ergreifend schlichter Innigkeit ... jene Sentimentalität ist volkstümlich echt – wenn sie auch künstlerisch seicht und minderwertig erscheint."<sup>40</sup> Bekker stated, the *Kindertotenlieder* poems "bedingen einen intimen Rahmen, einen kleinen Raum, die nur zart angedeutete Klavier-, nicht die grausig realisterende Orchesterbegleitung." These songs "sind Schöpfungen, die schon durch die Orchesterbegleitung das Streben nach

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<sup>38</sup> From an unsigned article in the *Grazer Tagespost* No. 161, June 11, 1905; quoted in Mitchell 1999, 230.

<sup>39</sup> From Korngold's article "Neue Orchester-und Liedmusik;" quoted in Painter 2001, 99.

<sup>40</sup> "Inspirations of touching, simple intimacy [ardency] ... such sentimentality is folksy true – even when it appears artistically shallow and inferior." Paul Bekker in *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung*, Feb. 22, 1907, p. 144; quoted in Painter, 2003, 101.

grösseren Wirkungsdimensionen erkennen lassen. Aber für Mahlers Entwicklung ist der Trieb ins Große, Monumentale verhängnisvoll geworden.”<sup>41</sup>

The idea of *Gestaltung* (organization) became associated with the reception of the Lied in unconventional ways. Egon Lustgarten stated: “In der Entwicklung der Mahlerschen Lyrik macht sich neben immer größerer Vertiefung und Verinnerlichung des Ausdruckes auch ein zunehmendes Streben zur linearen Zeichnung geltend. [...] In den Liedern aus letzter Zeit und in den Kindertotenliedern erreicht Mahler eine Steigerung des Ausdruckes eben durch ein oft geradezu asketisches ‘Aussparen’ der Konturen.”<sup>42</sup>

The most suitable program for the intimate experience of the Lied was the *Liederabende*, or entire programs consisting of works by a single composer were also appropriate. The programming of the *Kindertotenlieder* greatly affected its reception. When orchestral versions of songs were programmed with Mahler’s symphonies, it commanded an intimate response from the audience. However, the *Kindertotenlieder* were not well received when they were programmed with the Second Symphony. One critic complained of the “monotonous effect” of the *Kindertotenlieder* in comparison to the colorful inner movements of the symphony. “Eine Frauenstimme hätte diese Monotonie, die selbst in der an sich hier ja so selbstverständlichen einfachen

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<sup>41</sup> The *Kindertotenlieder* poems “require an intimate framework, a small room, an only delicately adumbrated piano accompaniment, not the gruesomely realizing orchestra accompaniment” These songs are “creations, which are bespeaking – already through the orchestra accompaniment – the quest for greater dimensions of impression. But for Mahler’s development, the drive for greatness and for the monumental became calamitous” Paul Bekker in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Oct. 12, 1911; quoted in Painter 2003, 102.

<sup>42</sup> “In the development of the Mahler lyrics, a growing strive for linear design becomes apparent, besides a greater and greater absorption and internalization of expression. [...] In the most recent Lieders and in the *Kindertotenlieder*, Mahler reaches a heightening of expression specifically through an almost ascetic omitting of contours.” From Egon Lustgarten’s article “Mahlers lyrisches Schaffen” in *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 2, 1920, pp. 271-272; quoted in Painter 2003, 100.



Instrumentation schon allein durch die in mehreren Nummern gleichmäßig lamentierende Oboe zum Ausdruck kommt, sicher gemildert.”<sup>43</sup> Some felt that compared to the Second Symphony, which is full of transitions, the “stable topic” of the *Kindertotenlieder* can sound monotonous. Though the final song has an apparent transition, the “subtle differences” between the other songs were lost (Painter 2003, 101). The Berlin critic Erich Urban stated: “1-4 ermüdeten entweder durch ihre Schilderung Grau in Grau oder frappten durch ihr ungeniertes Kokettieren mit der Oper. Kein besonders warmer Beifall.”<sup>44</sup> The orchestration in the Lieder was not favored by critics in other settings as well. Decsey stated in a review of the *Kindertotenlieder* at the Graz festival, “Man war fasziniert, vielleicht auch abestossen.”<sup>45</sup> His main criticism was with the chamber orchestration. This review was most definitely affected by the “overblown programming” of that particular concert in Graz (Painter 2003, 101).

By contrast, the *Kindertotenlieder* had a successful reception when programmed with Strauss’ *Sinfonia domestica* in Köln. The subtle transitions of the symphony highlighted the narrative quality of the *Kindertotenlieder*. “First in the third songs the tears overcome, still more in the fourth, where the tragedy transforms completely to pain; the fifth has a masterly little painting in the orchestra, and the ending, ‘*Sie ruh’n wie in der Mutter Haus*’ has a totally wonderful effect.”<sup>46</sup> However, it is important to note that

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<sup>43</sup> “A woman’s voice would have alleviated this monotony, which itself, in this inherently here so naturally simple instrumentation, is already expressed in the – throughout several numbers consistently – lamenting oboe.” From *Die Zeit am Montag*, Oct. 2, 1911; quoted in Painter 2003, 97.

<sup>44</sup> “1-4 were tiresome either through her depiction [of] gray in gray [so so; bland] or astonished through her cavalier flirting with the opera [operatic flirting]. Not particularly warm applause.” Erich Urban in *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*, 13 Oct. 1911; quoted in Painter 2003, 97.

<sup>45</sup> “One was fascinated, maybe even disgusted.” Decsey, *Tonkünstlerfest*, p. 136; quoted in Painter 2003, 101.

<sup>46</sup> From the article “Sechstes Gürzenich-Konzert in Köln am 9. Januar 1906” in *Stadt-Anzeiger*, Jan. 10, 1906; quoted in Painter 2003, 97.

this programming displayed the songs in a domestic environment: “Andererseits ist nicht zu leugnen, daß fünf Lieder über ein ähnliches Thema schließlich eine gewisse Eintönigkeit hervobringen müssen, und uns persönlich ist doch der übermütige Mahler lieber als der zahme.”<sup>47</sup>

A discussion of Rückert’s reputation involves many contrasting details. Rückert enjoyed great popularity during his lifetime. He was well-known, and composers such as Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms set his poems. He wrote poetry prolifically until the end of his life, but the bulk remained unpublished. Ultimately, he felt “neglected by the literary world” (Russell 1991, 29). Rückert’s impact on poetry of the nineteenth century is evident in the peak of public interest in him between 1895 and 1900. In this context of Rückert’s popularity, Mahler’s attraction to him is not so unusual. Yet publication of Rückert’s poetry was nil, and academic interest in him declined. It is evident that many Mahler scholars did not understand Mahler’s attraction to such a “minor poet.” There seems to be many contradictions in the analysis and representation of Rückert’s reputation. Russell believes that this is due to the fact that Rückert’s talent as a translator disadvantaged him as a lyric poet. He wrote a great amount, and his poetry lacks concentration. He could have very well been a victim of what Goethe called *Epigonentum* – a situation where a lot has been written in a certain language, during a specific time, depicting the human condition that is emulated “by outstanding talents.” The content for that period becomes exhausted and so does the language, “so that any middling talent can conveniently make use of the existing expressions as given phrases” (Goethe 1949, 267).

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<sup>47</sup> “On the other hand, it is not to deny that five Lieder on a similar theme would eventually produce a certain monotony, and we personally like the wanton [high-spirited] Mahler better than the calm one.” From “Sechstes Gürzenich-Konzert in Köln am 9. Januar 1906,” quoted in Painter, 2003, 97

Also, Rückert kept to himself and was very withdrawn and private. He was a Romantic who wrote in the Romantic idiom. Some feel that he could also be classified as belonging to the *Biedermeierzeit* – “characterized by the self-absorbed domesticity and sentimentality typical of that period” (Russell 1991, 32). Rückert’s *Kindertotenlieder* was not intended to be published, and in fact were not published during his life. The topic was common among nineteenth century poetry, not just because child mortality was common, but because the child was a “central ideal of Romanticized and *Biedermeier* thought, and childhood was mythologized into a poetic stage of life” (Revers and Zedlacher 2002, 175).

#### **4.3. The *Kindertotenlieder*’s Effect on Audiences**

The death of children was unfortunately a familiar aspect of European domestic life in the nineteenth century. However, its commonality did not make it any less tragic. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, about half of all deaths were below the age of five. Mahler was no stranger to the death of children – he experienced the deaths of eight out of fourteen siblings. After the turn of the century there was a decline in child mortality, due to advances in science and an overall improvement in living conditions. Up until the mid-nineteenth century, parents considered the loss of a child a part of life. After 1900, parents responded to child mortality with great sorrow, as opposed to “Christian resignation or near indifference” (Revers and Zedlacher 2002, 173). The

*Kindertotenlieder* represent the transition of the attitude surrounding child mortality from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. It is also a remarkable response to poetry from the nineteenth century. “No matter how familiar the emotional culture conveyed by the *Kindertotenlieder*, this work and the Rückert poetry it sets represent ways of thinking and experiencing whose intensity are emblematic of the nineteenth century” (Revers and Zedlacher 2002, 174). Revers believes that this sociological aspect affected Mahler’s choice of texts, their sequence, and musical aspects such as tonality, phrase structure, and voice distribution in each song. The psychological and historical background particularly affected the cyclical structure of the *Kindertotenlieder*.

The *Kindertotenlieder* continued to have an effect on the community in the twentieth century. *Dark Elegies* is a ballet choreographed by Antony Tudor in 1937, based on the *Kindertotenlieder*. It was considered to be a successful “psychological ballet.” Judith Chazin-Bennahum proposed that *Dark Elegies* was Tudor’s response to the raid on Guernica (during the Spanish Civil War), in which all of the children were killed. In the ballet, natural movements represent real people in real situations. An idea of community that gives individuals relief is created. In an atmosphere of gloom, each solo dancer has a specific “agonized response.” Tudor achieved the “exaltation of suffering” in many ways. (Chazin-Bennahum 1990, 137-138.) The choreography displays the emotional and rhythmic context of the music. In parts, it follows the form of the music, but at times it ignores it altogether, which creates a pattern of counterpoint to the music.<sup>48</sup> At times, the dancers pause altogether, which emphasizes the “delicate and complex”

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<sup>48</sup> From Peggy von Paagh’s article “Working with Antony Tudor” in *Dance Research*, Summer 1984, pp 57-58; cited in Chazin-Bennahum 1990, 139.

combinations and the “chaotic frenzied” use of space. “These special patterns constantly remind us of their personal and repressed inner turmoil that is ready to burst out, even distinctively, if unleashed” (Chazin-Bennahum 1990, 140). Like the music in the cycle, the ballet concludes with an established sense of resolution. Tudor resolves the fury in the last song with acceptance and resignation – “an ecstasy that comes out of tragedy.”<sup>49</sup> In Song 5, “all twelve dancers come together, having completed their cathartic ceremony, and having achieved a sense of equanimity” (Chazin-Bennahum 1990, 139). *Dark Elegies* attempts to “decipher deep communicational responses to death, with their communities sharing overflowing emotions to experiences that on a rational level cannot be understood” (Chazin-Bennahum 1990, 136).

I believe that these two factors demonstrate the effect that the *Kindertotenlieder* had on society. The composition was obviously an appropriate and fitting response to a communal concern of the nineteenth century. It was a concern that affected most families – it was not specific to certain segments of society. Always an accurate representation of the Romantic ideal, Mahler felt compelled to address this communal concern with music. Mahler did not necessarily strive to demonstrate such ideals, it was a desire that was embedded within him, because he was truly an artist of his time. We know that he felt compelled to write the *Kindertotenlieder*, and his need to portray the Romantic idiom must have been part of this obligation that he felt. The fact that the ballet *Dark Elegies* was inspired by the *Kindertotenlieder* and that it emphasizes a communal response to the death of children displays how effective the *Kindertotenlieder* was. Tudor felt that Mahler’s music encompassed what he wanted to represent as a response to the deaths of many children, and he manifested this response in a ballet. The choreography

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<sup>49</sup> Peggy von Praagh, interviewed by Margaret Dale, Oct 1978; quoted in Chazin-Bennahum 1990, 138

displays the reaction of the community and the impact that such tragedies had on the community. The ballet also displays how the community is an important factor in the reconciliation that comes at the end of the song cycle. Tudor emphasized the conciliation in the same manner that Mahler did, which also indicates that Mahler's vision and intention of the *Kindertotenlieder* was an accurate representation of a communal concern.

Karen Painter believed that the focus on Lieder shifted away from aesthetic values. This was due to the "insistence on a sealed hermeneutic process, with emotion shared from a composer to performer to listener, served as a disciplining mechanism to ensure the proper listening behavior" (Painter 2003, 91). The favorable reception of Mahler's Lieder was essentially a hermeneutic process, in which the performer recreated the composer's emotions, which were then absorbed by the audience. This is actually what hindered the acceptance of Mahler's symphonies as absolute music without programmatic factors. Critics had a hard time distinguishing thematic material, rich orchestration, and the dramatic transformation of music into emotions. "The subjectivity of the aesthetic experience ... disappeared when expressivity became music's sole function" (Painter 2001, 102). Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) stressed the importance of the interpreter in the process of interpretation. He felt that the interpreters' comprehension was a necessary stage to understanding. Understanding did not simply come from reading the text, but involved knowledge of the historical context of the text and the psychology of the author. In my interpretation, this is another way in which the *Kindertotenlieder* are associated with the process of Hermeneutics.

Schleiermacher's view of interpretation focuses on the context of the "text" and the "self-projection" of the author. The favorable reception of the *Kindertotenlieder*, and of Mahler's songs in general, were due to the fact that the audience was not only reacting to the music, but also to the portrayal of societal concerns and the intentions of the composer. Since the *Kindertotenlieder* was such an accurate representation of the impact of child mortality, and child mortality was a communal concern at the time it was premiered, the audience could not help but be affected by the music. Also, the audience could not escape the representation of Mahler's beliefs that were embedded in the musical language, his choice of poems and his treatment of the subject. For example, Egon von Komorzynski believes that "Mahler's *Empfindungskunst*" was at its highest in *Kindertotenlieder* No. 4. It was a listening experience that summoned a close connection to the composer, as described in simple terms in many of the biographies of the nineteenth century. Komorzynski concluded his review: "Aber weit mehr: er hat uns sein Herz geöffnet und uns gezeigt, welch einen Schatz an edelster Empfindung es birgt! Dank sei ihm und Bewunderung!"<sup>50</sup> In addition to this, the *Kindertotenlieder* were a very accurate representation of the Romantic period. In this manner, it was an extremely effective song cycle – not only did it accurately portray the time period, but it was very suitable for the new listening behavior that had developed involving hermeneutics. To my knowledge, the Romantic audience was imminently prepared to absorb this remarkably expressive and complex composition, so the hermeneutic process that was necessary to completely comprehend it was a natural occurrence.

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<sup>50</sup> "But much more: he had opened his heart to us and shown us what treasure of finest feeling [sensation] it holds! Thanks to him and admiration!" From Komorzynski's article "Gustav Mahlers neue Lieder;" quoted in Painter 2003, 90

## CONCLUSION

It is important to note that any philosophical implications based on Mahler's work should be collective, rather than based on a single thinker. Whatever influences Mahler had on his thinking, he made them his own. All of the influences he had combined to form a broad display of ideals – not a definite philosophy. I do not mean to imply that Mahler advocated Hegelianism or that the thoughts he expressed in the *Kindertotenlieder* were a precursor of Post-Structuralism. I contend that this composition has characteristics that pertain to such philosophies, indicating that the *Kindertotenlieder* were full of complexities, and their underlying elements transcend many lines of thinking and levels of meaning. We have seen that the *Kindertotenlieder* have many examples of Eastern ideals and Mystical qualities. There is an underlying, yet prominent organic quality of the music that stresses the process of development in the way that the philosophy of Hegelianism does. The process of the hermeneutic circle greatly applies to the cycle, because each song and their relationship to each other need to be understood in order to comprehend the entire cycle, especially its conclusion. The *Kindertotenlieder* is saturated with light and dark imagery, and in this manner it utilizes the concept of the unity of opposites promoted by Aesthetic Realism. The *Kindertotenlieder* go beyond their time and relate to the future, because they represent the true nature of suffering and the endless search for meaning. The fact that it relates to different philosophies, some that were not



even solidified during Mahler's lifetime, indicates how deep and forward-looking this composition was. It is only fitting that a composition taking on such a subject matter is so complicated. Mahler's *oeuvre* in general is an indication of his inability to be anything other than complex. He only wrote symphonies and songs, and the relationship between his symphonies and songs is well-documented. Mahler's output was constantly evolving; his works transitioned, but also overlapped. The *Kindertotenlieder* is a representation of Mahler's work overall – constantly developing and utilizing quotes, and referencing other works.

There were many dichotomies present in Mahler's life: songs versus symphonies; his life as a Romantic artist versus his life as a husband and father; the massive orchestra versus the chamber orchestra; absolute music versus program music; the Romantic artist's dilemma of feeling versus reason. Mahler was used to complexities in his life, and the *Kindertotenlieder* were an extension of his life. The symbolism, juxtaposition of optimism and despair, and constant development of the grieving process were not really a deliberate choice, but a reaction to his existence. Mahler is guilty of self-projection in the poems of the *Kindertotenlieder* that he chose, because it was necessary in order for him to create what he felt compelled to create. Post-Structuralism asserts that self-projection is a necessary part of interpretation. Unlike Rückert, Mahler had not suffered the loss of a child at the time, and he had to draw on his own experiences with the loss of siblings. Mahler's choice of poems was deliberate in that it was a desire for expression that was embedded within him. He utilized his beliefs, the kinship he felt with Rückert, and his needs as a creative artist to create the *Kindertotenlieder*.

Mahler was a composer who was “wrapped up” in the Romantic ideal, a true representation of his setting. We know this about Mahler, so we require some sort of autobiographical explanation for his motivation for writing a piece. The explanation for his motivation for writing the *Kindertotenlieder*, like Mahler, is very complex and encompasses several factors. Ultimately it is autobiographical – it is clear that Mahler had a need, not just a desire, but an obligation to write these songs. This need was a result of his need to express himself – to express his experiences with grief; his intense interest in Rückert; panpsychism; the philosophies of Fechner, Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Lotze, and Nietzsche; his self exploration after a near death experience; and his response to becoming a husband and a father – all of this served as a catalyst for a remarkable form of self-expression that materialized in the *Kindertotenlieder*. Yet another factor that motivated Mahler was his need to address a communal concern. The cycle definitely represents the societal concern of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The *Kindertotenlieder* made such an impact on audiences, because the Romantic audiences were able to fully comprehend it. They were well-equipped for the necessary hermeneutic process, because they understood the context of the poetry, and they were able to fully absorb Mahler’s personal expressions. The audiences, most of whom that had been affected by child mortality, must have been satisfied and moved by the sense of consolation portrayed at the end of the cycle.

Some reviews of the *Kindertotenlieder* stated that it was a simple composition. Simplicity may have been a favorable characteristic of Lieder at the time, and the *Kindertotenlieder* may have been well-received, but it is in no way simple. In my opinion, if audiences responded to the ‘simplicity’ of the *Kindertotenlieder*, they were

merely responding to a first-hearing. To uncover all of the complexities of the cycle requires analysis and exploration; it definitely requires more than one hearing. I certainly agree that the songs have an impact upon the first-hearing because of their prominent expressivity, innovative orchestration, and tragic beauty. However, we have seen how the orchestration is complex and full of musical language that reflects the symbolism. We have seen how the cycle goes through the gauntlet of emotions, so that it is an accurate representation of the grieving process. We have seen how factors, both musical and extramusical, relate to different philosophies. And we have seen the impact this composition had sociologically. This was not a simple composition. In order to uncover the complexities of the cycle, one must build upon that initial experience of it.

Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* are enhanced by extramusical elements that represent various aspects of grief, such as despair, anger, hope, reasoning, guilt, and struggling. This gives it a sort of disjunct quality, but ultimately, the composition is held together by the unyielding goal of consolation and the prevailing mood of sorrow. Some scholars believe that Mahler's Lieder do not transform in the manner of his symphonies and do not encourage a stability of emotion like traditional Lieder. The songs of the *Kindertotenlieder* are progressive, conflicting, and stable. While they do not progress in the traditional manner, there are many subtle developments and juxtapositions. They all contain transitions to and from despair and hope, and overall they have the overwhelming mood of despair. Therefore, the songs display both transition and stability. Ultimately they display a juxtaposition of feelings, and the cycle displays a cyclical progression, rather than a linear one. Part of the impact of the *Kindertotenlieder* is that they portray past, present, and future. The memories represented in the songs help to display the

grieving process of the father and brings us closer to acceptance. The songs express the feelings of the bereaved parent at that moment. Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* are a constant attempt at reconciliation highlighted with moments of anger and despair. The composition is an accurate representation of the complicated grieving process.

My conclusions shed light on the main research areas of the *Kindertotenlieder*. To my knowledge, Mahler was not so much motivated to write the *Kindertotenlieder* as he was compelled. The subject of the death of children would have been challenging for many composers, but Mahler saw in the subject a novel outlet for expression. The question of the cycle's unity and the chronology of the songs are related. To say that songs 1, 2, and 5 are of a different character than songs 3 and 4 is true, but it relies on a division of the cycle. Again, both answers are correct. The songs are disconnected and connected – disconnected in the juxtaposition of moods, but connected in the overall mood of despair and the goal of reaching consolation. Mahler's late works were complex by default, because they were the culmination of his brilliance, what he toiled to express, and what was within him that drove his artistic genius. Mahler is one of the most complex artists of all time, and with the *Kindertotenlieder* he created a truly remarkable composition – one that accurately expressed a human reaction to tragedy, explored various levels of philosophy, and with almost every measure displays superb artistry.

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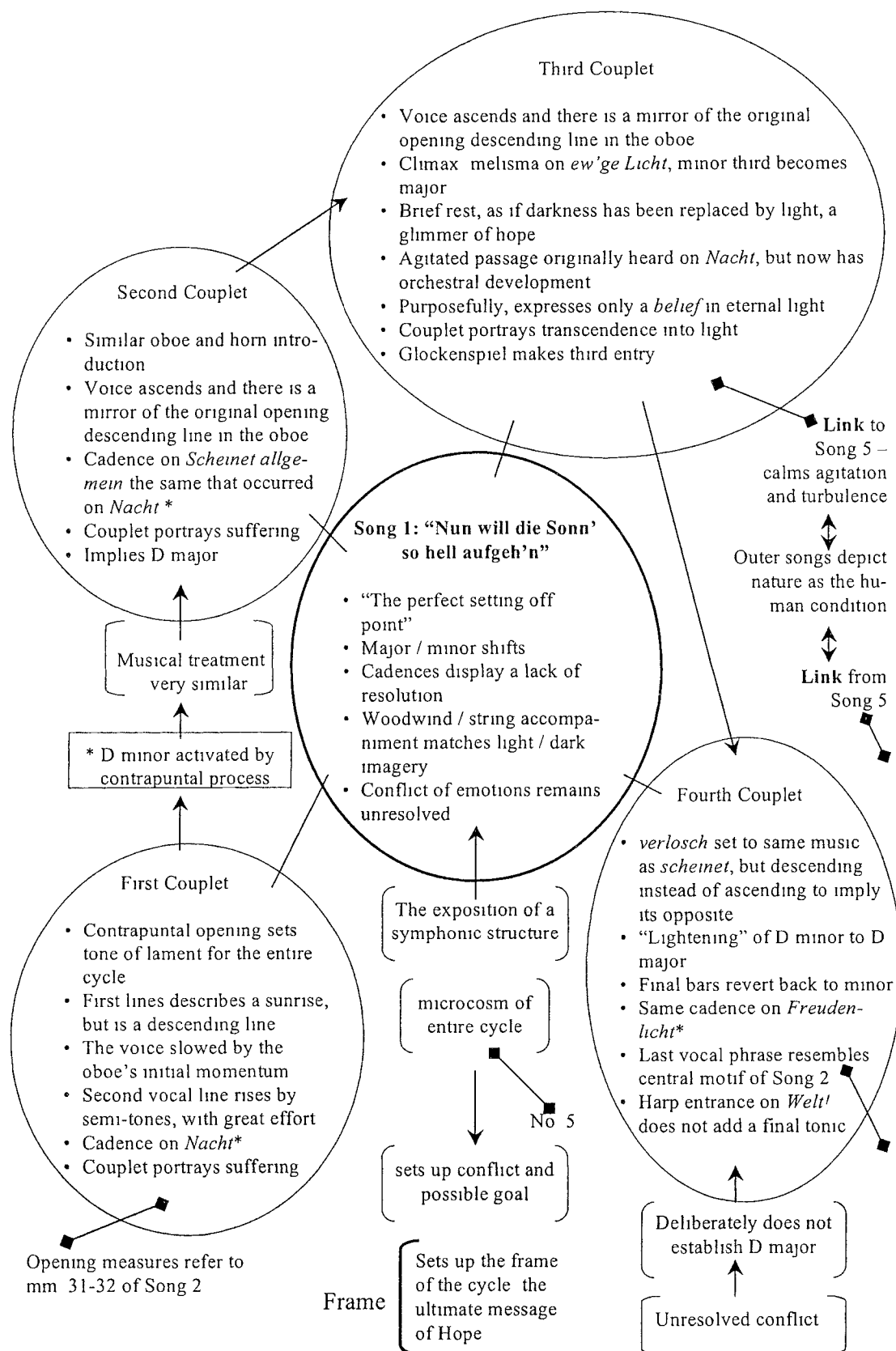
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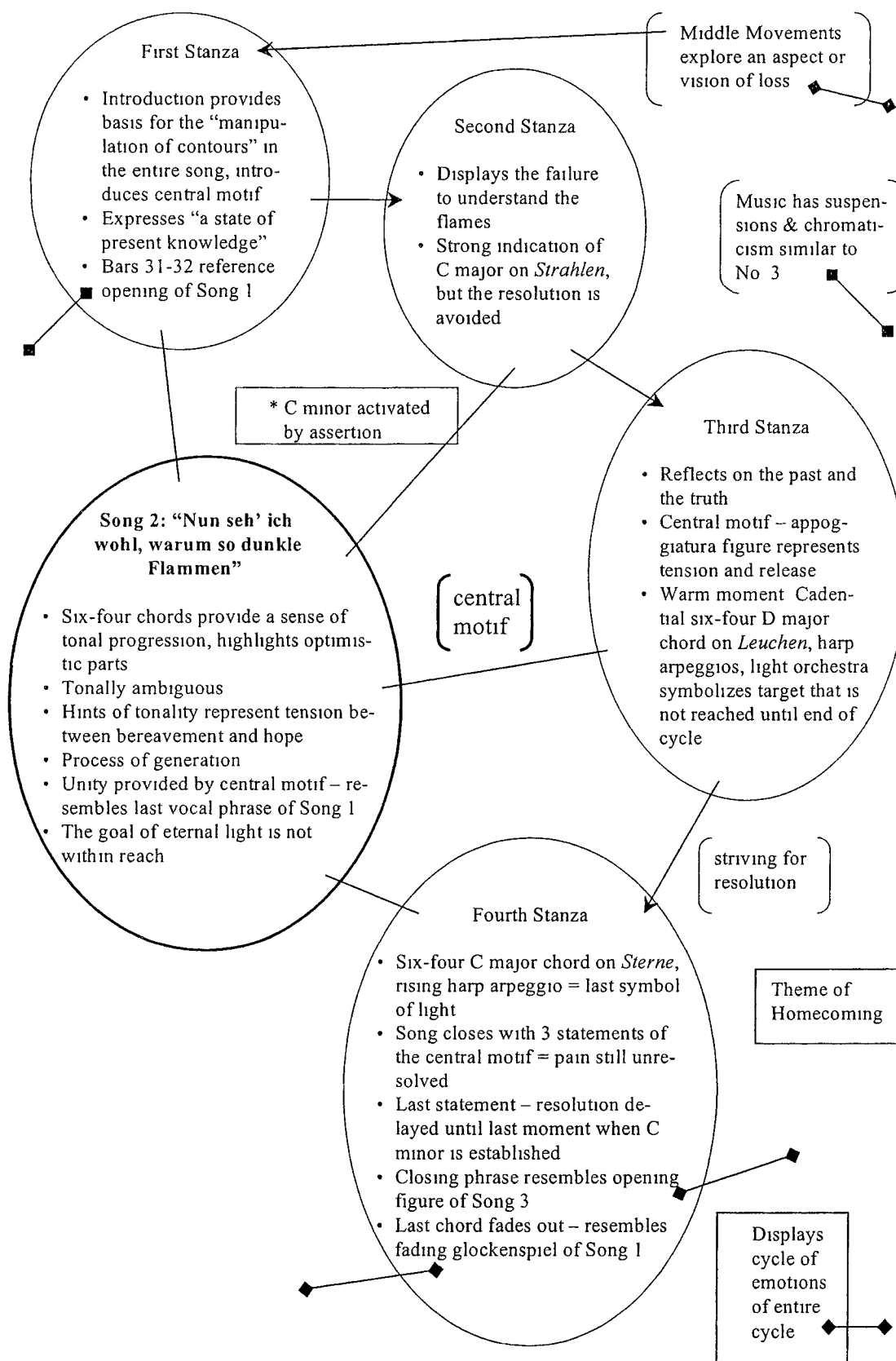
## APPENDIX

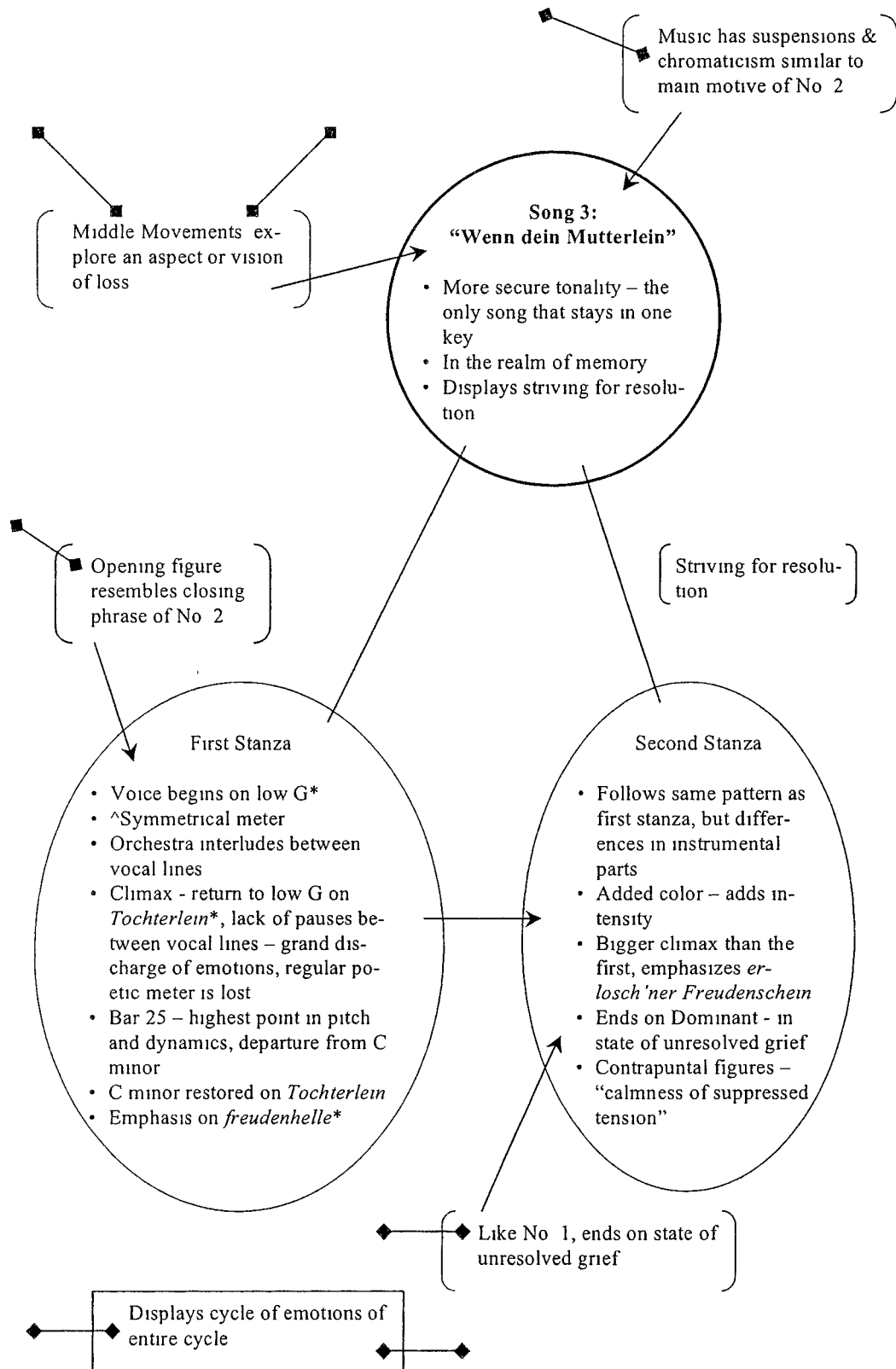
### CHARTS

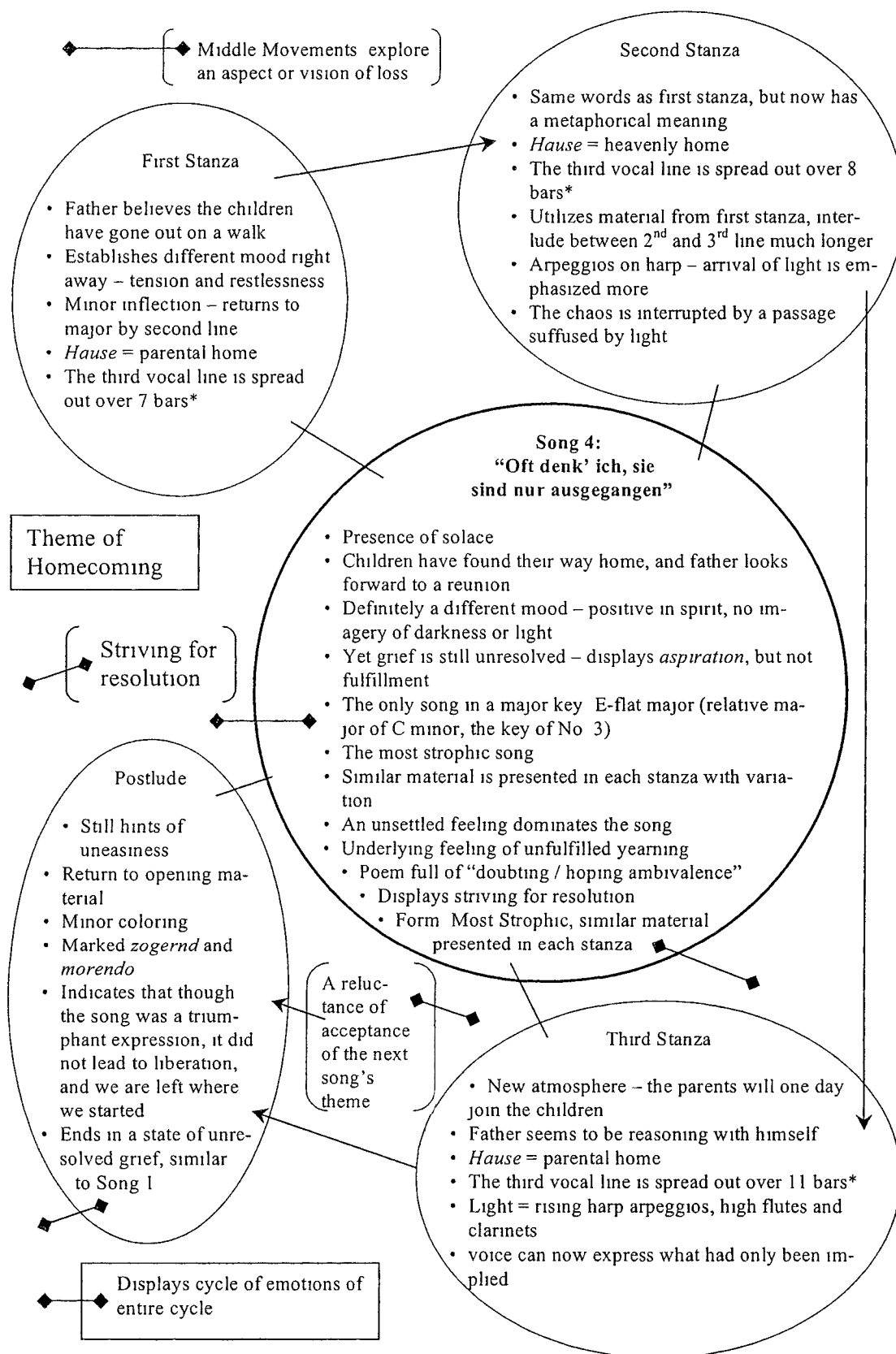
The following charts are a graphic representation of the struggle between grief and consolation portrayed in the *Kindertotenlieder*. Each song is represented, as well as the entire cycle. Material for these charts was taken from Russell 1991. Cooke (1980, 77) and Redlich (1961, v) are quoted.

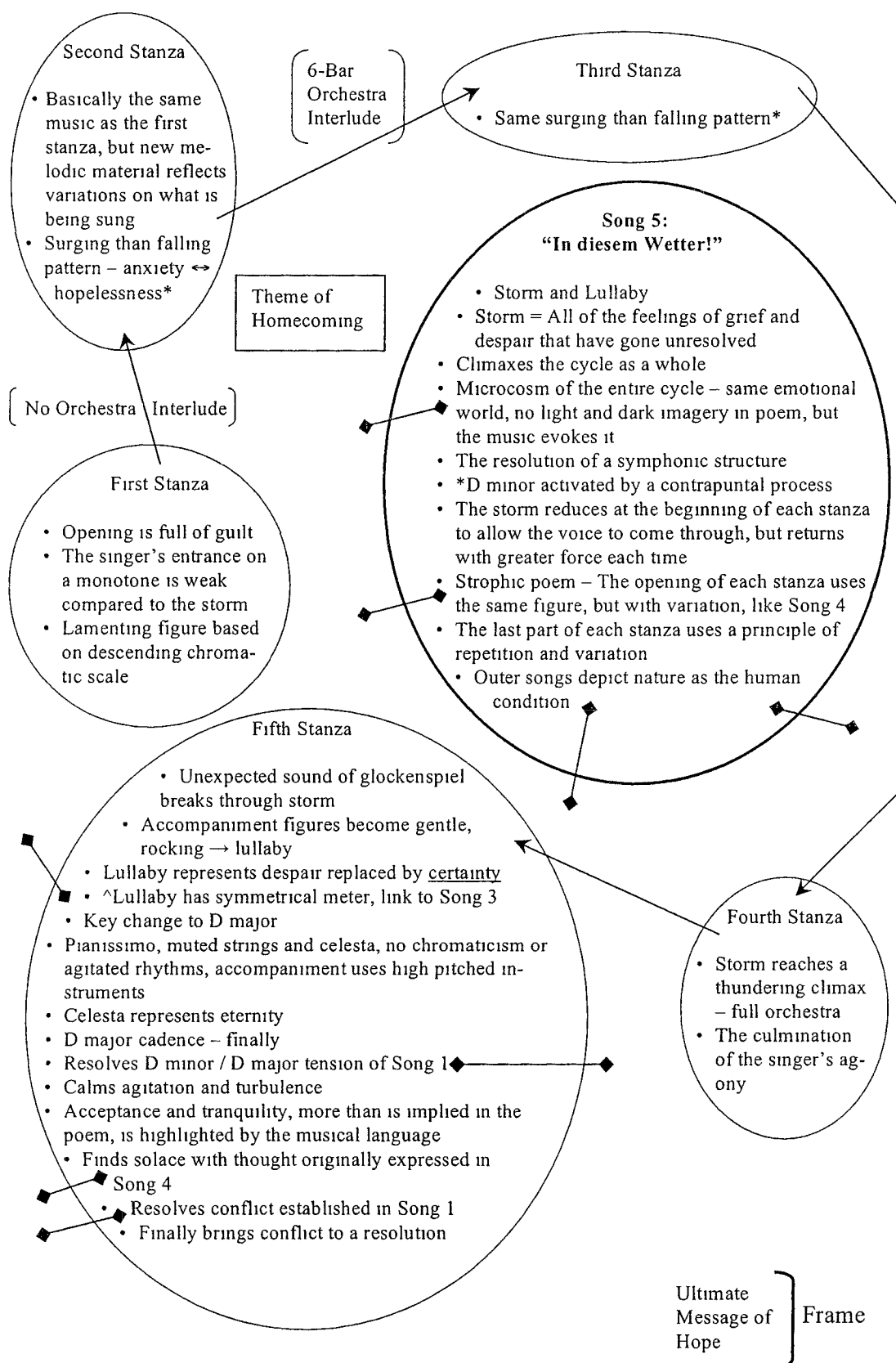












## Gustav Mahler: *Kindertotenlieder*

Contrast of songs “Emotionally stunned → wildly grief-stricken → warmly affectionate → radiantly consolatory”

### Prevailing mood of grief

Middle movements explore an aspect or vision of loss

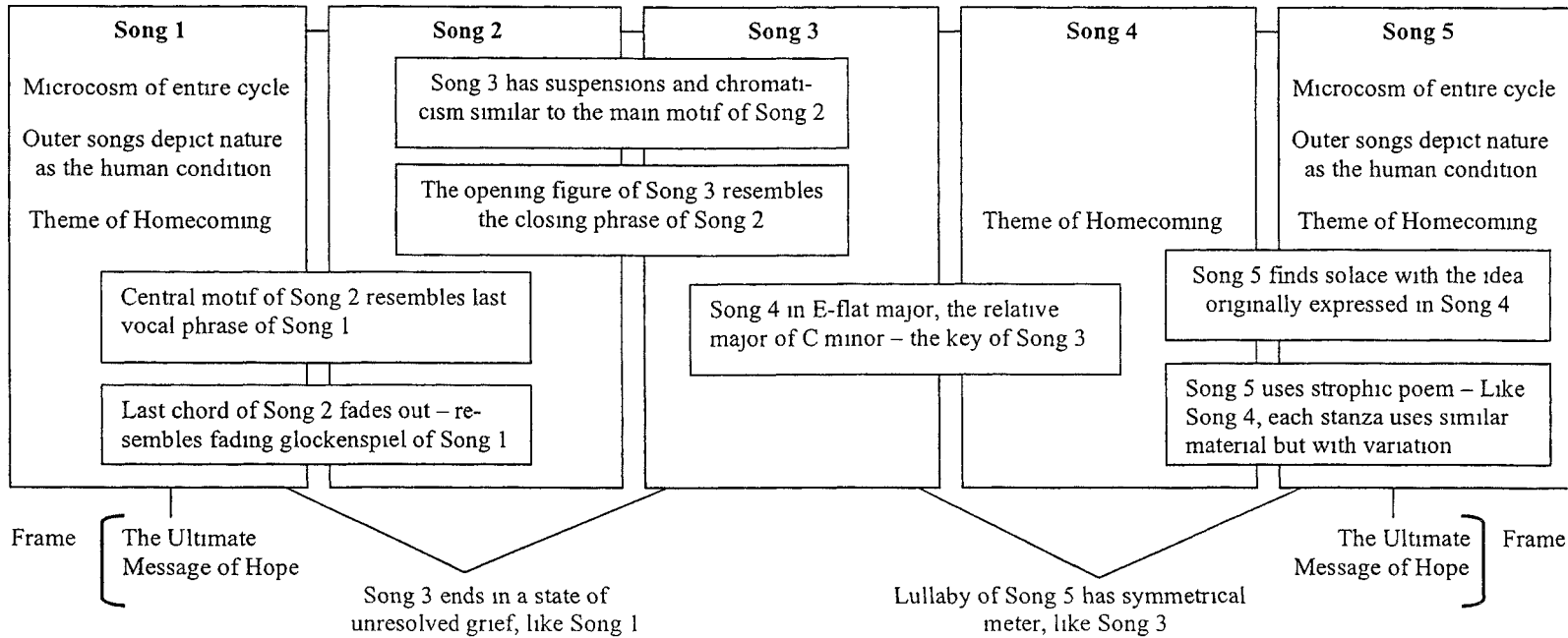
← Middle movements display the cycle of emotions →

Middle movements display a striving for resolution

Middle movements display a tension between tragedy and comfort / light and dark intensifies

Tonal organization of songs is cocentric – a narrow sequence of tonalities

Song 5 resolves D minor /  
D major tension of Song 1



Steady emotional progression of songs A pale sunrise on the morning after death → magic of two pairs of eyes → unbearable image of lost child → a beautiful day carries self-deception → storm and grief transformed into lullaby

## **VITA**

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