

Musical Ambiguity as Poetic Reflection:

Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*, No. 1, "*Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n!*"

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Introduction

Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* (1904) is arguably one of the most tragic song cycles ever composed. Its poetic construction began in 1834 when Friedrich Rückert wrote over four hundred poems mourning the deaths of his children, Ernst and Louise. Rückert's poetry undoubtedly intrigued Mahler because of his own experiences with grief as a child. Mahler lost many siblings at a young age, but the death of his younger brother, also named Ernst, was particularly difficult; Ernst died at age twelve, when Gustav was only fourteen years old. Perhaps prompted by this memory, Mahler chose five of Rückert's texts and fashioned them into orchestral songs between the years 1901 and 1904¹. The combination of Rückert's and Mahler's traumatic experiences gave birth to an intensely emotional and introspective artwork.

The first song of the cycle, "*Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgehn!*" opens with the persona's reaction to the coming dawn following the death of his child during the night.²

*Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n,
Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht gescheh'n!*

*Now will the sun so brightly rise,
As if no misfortune happened in the night!*

*Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein;
Die Sonne sie scheint allgemein!*

*The misfortune happened to me alone;
The sun shines on everyone!*

*Du musst nicht die Nacht in dir verschräncken,
Musst sie ins ew'ge Licht versenken!*

*You must not enclose the night within yourself,
You must sink it in eternal light!*

*Ein Lämplein verlosch in meinem Zelt!
Heil! Heil sei dem Freudenlicht der Welt!*

*A little lamp went out in my tent,
Hail! Hail to the joyous light of the world!*³

¹ Because Mahler neglected to date the original manuscripts, scholars are uncertain of the exact year that each movement of was composed. It is widely accepted that the first song was completed in 1901 (Russell 12).

² To distinguish between the poet and the composer, and the voice of the protagonist that they have created in the cycle, this study will refer to the latter as "the persona" after Edward T. Cone's "poetic-musical persona" (57).

³ This translation of Rückert's text is by Lois Phillips (392). Any modifications are the present author's.

The sunrise evokes mixed emotions within the persona; it exposes the isolated nature of his mourning, yet it offers him hope, because the rest of his world remains intact. The persona uses the passing night as a metaphor for his grief, implying a desire to recover from his tragedy. He concludes the poem by hailing the rising sun, juxtaposing it with a “little lamp” that represents his dear deceased child⁴.

The poem does not reveal whether or not the persona successfully escapes his sorrow, but its tone appears to be optimistic. The persona acknowledges the importance of recovering from his grief, and he underplays the magnitude of his bereavement. His words suggest that the sun’s radiance will be enough to drown out his sorrow. However, the persona’s acceptance of his loss and desire to move on seem premature. The intuitive reader is left with the sense that the persona’s attempts to console himself are insufficient to overcome the permanence of his loss. In fact, his apparent confidence is superficial—an attempt to conceal or downplay his underlying grief.

This study will demonstrate how Mahler expresses the deep psychological conflict that pervades Rückert’s text in his setting of “*Nun will die Sonn’ so hell aufgehn!*” through musical ambiguity and hidden repetition. Mahler uses unconventional orchestral textures to depict the persona’s suffering and employs frequent modal shifting to represent the persona’s emotional instability. His use of chromatic voice-leading in both the orchestra and the vocal line portrays the persona’s psychological struggle and facilitates a background aberration that reflects the futility of the persona’s struggle. Additionally, Mahler uses hidden repetition to depict the persona’s inescapable anguish and underlying obsession with his loss.

⁴ Phillips translates “*ein Lamplein*” as “little lamp” (392), but the suffix “*-lein*” may connote endearment in addition to magnitude.

Textural Ambiguity

Mahler begins the setting with a sparse orchestral introduction: a duet between horn and oboe (mm. 1–4), shown in Example 1.

Example 1:

Instead of the lush, Romantic introduction that one might expect to find at the opening of a late 19th century orchestral work, this passage is more reminiscent of a Baroque ritornello in both sound and function. The two instrumental lines are written primarily in first-species counterpoint, moving in contrary motion and parallel sixths. While this texture is barren in the context of a Romantic work, Mahler's counterpoint is bleak even by Baroque standards.⁵ Mahler uses parallel sixths to create consonance on the strong beats as one might expect, but uses perfect fourths on beat three to resolve the outlined diminished harmonies (mm. 1–2). He then flouts the rules of voice-leading by introducing texturally isolated parallel octaves (mm. 2–3). This opening texture is brought to a close as the oboe climbs to the primary tone (A, $\hat{5}$), forming an open fifth with the lower horn line (m. 4).

⁵ Mahler's contrapuntal emphasis of perfect intervals in this passage has been called "the emancipation of the fourth and fifth" (Redlich 153).

Peter Russell remarks that the sparse texture of the introduction establishes the contrapuntal framework governing the entire song (69); more importantly, it depicts the lonely, introspective nature of the persona's mourning. The antiquated compositional style conjures up liturgical images—perhaps relating the persona's torment to asceticism or a penitential rite. Also, the vacant sounds of the frequent perfect intervals may reflect the persona's emptiness and the hollowness of his grief. In mm. 2–3, Mahler's intentional breaking of fundamental contrapuntal rules may even suggest the persona's resignation to his grief. It is as if his spirit has been broken by the agony of his affliction, so that he has become apathetic toward social (read musical) expectations.

As mentioned above, this passage acts much like a ritornello.⁶ Mahler organizes the eight lines of text into four strophes, and precedes each with part or all of the opening material. Consequently, this passage appears four times—once in a highly varied form to accommodate strophic modification. In this way, Mahler reins in the emotional outbursts that occur during each verse, always returning to the basic nature of the persona's agony—a lonely, internal torment—as depicted by the opening texture.

A timbral anomaly further illuminates the persona's suffering in mm. 43–47, shown in Example 2. Here, the texture consists of three layers: flute/glockenspiel (transferred to clarinet), horn, and bassoon.

⁶ Edward Bass describes the use of a ritornello and its dramatic implications in his analysis of *Kindertotenlieder*, No. 5, “*in diesem Wetter*,” (Bass 211).

Example 2:

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is for vocal line (V.) and the bottom staff is for Horns (Hn.). The vocal line starts with a fermata over a note, then a melodic line with notes marked with a sharp sign. The Horns staff has notes with '10' written below them, indicating a delay. A dashed line connects the vocal line to the Horns staff, showing the melodic material being transferred. A box with '45' is above the vocal line. A '5' with a hat is above the first measure, and an 'N.' is above the last measure. A 'ii' is at the bottom right.

This passage marks the beginning of the third strophe; it is preceded by a variation of the ritornello material from mm. 1–4. The melodic material of the first vocal entrance appears in m. 43 as expected, but it is not found in the vocal line. Instead, Mahler gives the primary melodic material to the horns.

The omission of the vocal line creates a deviation from the normative expectations for strophic form and marks this passage for semantic interpretation.⁷ Aurally, this omission creates the effect of a performance mistake, causing the listener to suspect that the soloist has missed an entrance. An oppositional meaning (after Hatten) can be derived from this perceived error: if a timely entrance reflects clarity of thought and attentiveness, then a delayed entrance connotes disorientation and distraction. A poetic rationale can thus be associated with this textural anomaly. It is as if the persona has become so preoccupied with his internal struggle that he is

⁷ The concept of “markedness” and its subsequent interpretation is central to *Musical Meaning in Beethoven* (Hatten 2004).

no longer concerned with the propriety of his outward expression. In this way, Mahler further emphasizes the persona's intense, inner suffering.

Mahler emphasizes the persona's disorientation by employing a kind of registral inversion. As mentioned previously, the primary melodic material is heard as the lowest voice in Example 2⁸. A countermelody is heard above the horn line, moving in parallel tenths, and a pedal point (the neighboring figure, C-sharp to D) sounds above both of these lines. These three lines have been registrally inverted with regard to their function: the pedal point is the highest voice, the primary line is the lowest voice, and the secondary line is found above the melody. This inverted texture further illustrates the persona's disorientation, caused by his internal torment. Together, the omission of the vocal line and the registral inversion of the orchestral lines create an anomalous texture, which anticipates the especially introspective text of the third strophe—the only strophe that is written in second person.

Modal Ambiguity

The persona's isolated suffering is countered by the hope of transcending his grief. Peter Russell's *Light in Battle with Darkness* provides an in-depth examination of the musical representation of this poetic conflict as the primary driving force behind *Kindertotenlieder* (Russell). However, for the exclusive study of this song, it will suffice to note that the persona's dual reaction to the sunrise causes an emotional conflict, which Mahler represents with frequent modal shifts.

⁸ In the orchestral score, Mahler doubles the horn line, shown in Example 2, at the octave above, but it does not prevent the listener from hearing this line as the lowest voice (mm 43–47).

Example 3:

The image shows a musical score for Example 3, consisting of two staves: a vocal line in treble clef and an oboe line in bass clef. The score covers measures 5 to 10. A dashed line above the vocal staff indicates a melodic contour that starts high and descends. The oboe line echoes the vocal melody in a lower register. A Roman numeral 'ii' is written below the oboe line.

In Example 3, mm. 5–10 rest securely in D minor following the meandering sequence of the opening ritornello. The initial vocal entrance occurs at the structural five of m. 4—this is true for all strophes except the modified third strophe. The vocal line touches B-flat before sinking downward by diatonic step to E (mm. 5–8). The oboe summarizes the vocal melody by echoing it in diminution in m. 9, as if sympathizing with the persona’s sorrowful gesture.

The corresponding texts for the minor mode of Example 3 are “*Nun will die Sonn’ so hell aufgeh’n*” (strophe 1), “*Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein*” (strophe 2), and “*Ein Lämplein verlosch in meinem Zelt*” (strophe 4). Russell believes that the minor mode (and descending line) of this passage is a reflection of the dark poetic imagery found in the text (69). Russell’s hypothesis is generally well supported and is useful to understand *Kindertotenlieder* as a whole, but it does not consistently withstand detailed scrutiny of the text. His hypothesis fits strophe four, where the persona refers to the extinguishing of a lamp. However, the corresponding text of strophe two makes no reference to specifically light or dark imagery, and—as Russell himself admits—the corresponding text of strophe one directly contradicts this correlation, because it describes the rising sun (69).

The role of modality in this song is more accurately explained as a depiction of the emotional state of the persona. A mode/emotion correlation is equally suited for strophe four, because the “little lamp” that has been extinguished is the life of the persona’s child, which undoubtedly evokes sadness within him. Strophe two supports this correlation as well, because it contains the persona’s realization of his isolation—again, a negative emotion. This connection also brings new meaning to strophe one, where the persona announces the rising sun. When viewed in a purely textual form, the persona’s primary reaction to the sunrise is open to interpretation (“Now will the sun so brightly rise”). However, Mahler uses the minor mode to show that the persona initially greets the rising sun with disdain. He is not immediately consoled by it; rather, he must convince himself to be consoled by it.

After only seven measures of an established minor mode, a digression to the parallel major occurs (mm. 11–15).

Example 4:

The musical score for Example 4 consists of two staves: a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The vocal line begins in D minor and shifts to D major at measure 11. A dashed line above the vocal line indicates its pitch contour. A box labeled '15' is positioned above the vocal line at measure 15. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The piano accompaniment follows the vocal line. A Roman numeral 'V' is at the start and 'I' at the end of the piano part.

As shown in Example 4, the first shift from D minor to D major occurs without harmonic preparation as the vocal line moves from F-natural to F-sharp (m. 11). The F-sharp is heard again in the inner voice (m. 13), this time supporting the structural five of the vocal line. The

vocal line descends, buttressed by parallel sixths, but without clear harmonic support (mm. 14–15), and then cadences in D major (m. 15). The major mode of Example 4 is unstable when compared with the minor mode of Example 3. The predominance of the surrogate F#—especially as support for structural five—proves the efficacy of the modal shift. However, the consistently lowered scale-degree six, B-flat, exists as a remnant of D minor, weakening the major mode.

The corresponding texts for the major mode of Example 4 are “*Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht gescheh'n*” (strophe 1), “*Die Sonne sie scheint allgemein*” (strophe 2), and “*Heil! Heil sei dem Freudenlicht der Welt*” (strophe 4). In accordance with the mode/emotion correlation, each corresponding line of text describes the persona’s attempts to transcend his grief and achieve happiness. In strophe four, the persona hails the sun as a source of joy. Strophe two proclaims that the sun shines on everyone, reminding him that his world remains intact; and in strophe one, the persona remarks that the sun shines as if no tragedy has occurred, providing him with a source of constancy.

The correlation between modality and emotion is useful for interpreting the persona’s reaction to individual lines of text, but it also holds larger implications. The frequency of modal shifting implies a severe emotional instability within the persona. His dual reaction to the sunrise causes him to oscillate between optimism and pessimism with each new line of text. Also, the comparative weakness of the parallel major may be interpreted as an inability to completely overcome his sorrow. Even in his most optimistic moments, he remains affected by his underlying grief. Finally, modality reflects the persona’s emotions even when there is no text being sung.

Example 5:

Example 5 shows the conclusion of the strophic material and consequently, the final descent of the piece (mm. 15–20). No text is sung during this passage until its final sounding in the fourth strophe—the significance of which will be discussed shortly. The primary melodic line in is sounded by the horn (m. 17), and, like the oboe line in Example 3 (m. 9), it provides a loose summary of the previous vocal line as it ascends to structural five, A, by diatonic step. However, in m. 18 the orchestra deviates from the previous harmonic pattern of Example 4, and, without any textual prompting, A-natural descends to F-natural, effecting a return to the minor mode. This shift is confirmed by the Neapolitan harmony of m. 19 and a cadence in D minor (m. 20).

This textually unprompted modal shift seems inconsistent with the mode/emotion correlation established in the earlier portions of the strophes: how can a change in modality be attributed to the emotions of the persona when he is silent? It could be suggested that the Sun (the only other character specifically mentioned in the poem) is represented by the orchestra, and that it provides the impetus for the shift. However, it seems unlikely that the “joyous light of the world” would be symbolized by a return to the minor mode.

Perhaps even more detrimental to the hypothesis of a direct relationship between emotion and modality is the repetition of the same text in both major and minor. As previously mentioned, this occurs only once in this piece: “*dem Freudenlicht der Welt*,” of strophe four. This text is sung during the final sounding of the passage in Example 4—in D major—and it is immediately repeated after the shift back to D minor in Example 5 at the conclusion of the song. Such opposite settings of the same text seem to disprove any relationship between poetry and music, perhaps corroborating Hans Mayer’s criticism of Mahler for his “harsh juxtaposition of text and music⁹” (Russell 19).

Edward T. Cone provides a solution to both of these problems by carefully examining the relationship between the orchestra and the persona in his book, *The Composer’s Voice* (1974). He begins by describing the persona as a triune entity, comprised of: “the vocal, the instrumental, and the (complete) musical” (Cone 17). Through a peculiar but effective analogy, he equates each component of the persona with a member of the Holy Trinity to describe its function. Cone argues that the “complete musical persona” refers to the song as a whole and functions as the Father. It “begets a Son”—the vocal persona—that speaks through the text, and produces a Holy Spirit—the accompaniment—that speaks directly to the listener without a textual medium (18). This unusual comparison demonstrates an important concept: both the instrumental and vocal elements reflect the same persona. The distinction between them is that the text of the vocal line is “incarnate” or conscious, and the accompaniment is “imaginary” or sympathetic (Cone 18). Cone describes the accompaniment as a “narrative persona:” an omniscient observer, aware of and sensitive to the environment and condition of the persona (35).

⁹ Mayer described Mahler’s “...*harten Nebeneinander von Text und Musik...*” in his essay “*Musik und Literatur*” at the Tübingen symposium on Mahler (Mayer 151).

Therefore, when the orchestra is solely responsible for a modal shift—as in Example 5, strophes one and two—the listener may interpret this shift as an *indirect* reflection of the persona’s emotions. It is as if an observer were describing the state of the persona, inferring his emotional status, and assuring the listener that the persona’s optimistic words are not entirely believable. (It is this voice that is heard in the oboe and the horn as they summarize the vocal line in Examples 3 and 5, as previously discussed).

Cone applies a similar logic to explain contradictory settings of a single text:

A solution becomes possible if we conceive the contrast between the verbal and the vocal as a symbolic parallel to the contrast between the conscious and subconscious components of the personality. [...] By ‘the subconscious’ I mean a realm of psychic experience that extends all the way from the deep repressions of the Freudian unconscious to a level just below that of fully conscious, fully articulated thought (33).

Therefore, the re-setting of “*dem Freudenlicht der Welt*” in minor may be interpreted as a glimpse into the persona’s subconscious. Where once the true state of the persona’s emotions was described only indirectly through the orchestra—in strophes one and two—the true subconscious is now fully exposed. Strophe four employs musical irony: the optimistic words are directly contradicted by the minor melody that carries them. Mahler reserves this poignant device to conclude the song with a stark juxtaposition of the persona’s conscious and subconscious emotions. Thus, his contradictory textual setting does not undermine the relationship between modality and emotion. Rather, it illuminates the psychological complexity of the persona’s emotions by using the music to articulate what the persona cannot.

mm. 60–62, are non-functional, borrowed freely from both the parallel major and minor.

However, when reduced to their simplest harmonic form, the middleground reveals that these two undulating voices contain several chromatic lines, which shift gradually amidst the dynamic texture¹⁰.

Example 7:

The chromatic lines shown in Example 7 reveal the “parsimonious voice-leading” that is the underlying source of harmonic motion and tension within this passage.¹¹ In the lower staff, the arpeggios have been reduced to two chromatic lines, which slide upward in thirds before converging in m. 60. The conjoined lower voice wavers between A-natural and A-flat, while the soprano voice counters the previous ascent by slipping chromatically from D to B-natural. A voice exchange occurs between the outer voices in m. 61, followed by a chromatic descent through parallel tenths (mm. 61–62). Meanwhile, the alto line neither descends nor ascends, but hovers around the tonic, touching the upper and lower neighbor tones E-flat, D-flat, and

¹⁰ This passage has been called “the actual climax” of the song (Mitchell 93).

¹¹ Richard Cohn discusses “parsimonious voice-leading,” (a central concept in neo-Riemannian theory), and briefly describes its application to non-triadic music in his article, “Introduction to neo-Riemannian Theory” (Cohn 1998).

C-natural. All of these chromatic voices are supported by the prolonged D pedal, which repeatedly asserts its tonicity.

These shifting lines are analogous to the persona's psychological struggle in several ways. Their incremental vertical motion is reminiscent of the vocal line in Examples 3 and 4, where the persona's conscious descriptions of his grief and the desire to transcend his grief are sung over descending and ascending diatonic lines respectively. In Example 7 however, the indirect persona—the orchestra—has transformed these diatonic lines into chromatic fragments and pitted them against each other in a dramatic way. It is as if the indirect persona has removed the feigned composure of the conscious persona, exposing the true psychological turmoil that results from his battle with grief. Even the functional role of these chromatic gestures as vehicles of modal shifting is congruent with this poetic analogy. Just as the chromatic lines cause rapid modal shifts in the vertical harmonies, so the persona's battle with grief causes his emotions to shift constantly from optimism to pessimism.

The accompaniment also insinuates the futility of his psychological battle. Each line that struggles upward is followed by a second descending line, negating its vertical progress. This is especially evident in the alto line, which circles the tonic D but ultimately ends exactly where it began. A zero-net gain in terms of pitch, register, and harmony also exists in the soprano and tenor lines—disregarding the voice exchange (m. 61). The soprano voice begins its chromatic descent from D₅ (m. 60), then leaps to G₅ (m. 61), before returning to D₅ once again (m. 63). The tenor line completes a similar chromatic progression beginning on A₃ (m. 59). It steps to G₃ then leaps to B₃ (m. 61) before descending back to A₃ (m. 63).

The essentially static chromatic lines suggest the futility of the persona's struggle against his sorrow. If the ascending lines symbolize his attempts to transcend his grief, then their continual negation must reflect the persona's inevitable relapse into misery. His psychological battle—relentless as it—ultimately gains him nothing.

Structural Ambiguity

Mahler further portrays the futility of the persona's struggle by using the chromatic voice-leading of the foreground and middleground to facilitate a background aberration.

Example 8:

The image shows a musical score for Example 8, consisting of two staves. The top staff features a melodic line with a dashed line above it, indicating a chromatic ascent. The bottom staff shows a bass line with chromatic descents. Harmonic analysis is provided below the staves, including Roman numerals (I, V, i, bII6, V, i) and scale degrees (5, 4, 3). A legend at the bottom right shows: 8-9-#9, 6-7-#7, 4-5-6.

The final descent is shown in mm. 70–82 of Example 8. The music of this passage is identical to Example 5 (mm. 15–20), because Mahler does not make any melodic or harmonic adjustments to distinguish the final descent from the closing material at the end of each strophe. (As previously mentioned, Mahler adds the vocal line to the final descent in the fourth strophe, but the addition is purely textural; the melodic line remains unchanged).

The descent initially follows a typical progression: structural five is prolonged over the tonic, before moving to structural four, supported by a predominant Neapolitan chord. However, the melody unfolds to E-flat (m. 80), then steps to the tonic pitch as a cadential six-four is introduced. Chromatic voice-leading in the middle voices provides upward harmonic motion (m. 81), thwarting the typical downward pull of the cadential six-four. The lower chromatic voices guide the melody up to structural three, where it rests on the final cadence in D minor. The result of this unconventional voice-leading is an incomplete *Urlinie*. Perhaps Schenker himself would criticize such an unconventional *Ursatz*, and declare Mahler to be a lesser composer because of it. However, this anomalous musical device can also be attributed to Mahler's interpretation of the poetry and his willingness to express it by transcending conventional barriers.

The denial of a complete structural descent confirms the futility of the persona's psychological struggle and reflects his failure to reconcile his loss. The ascending chromatic lines of the inner voices climb upward, portraying the persona's final attempt to escape his grief and achieve transcendence. This time, a descending line does not counter them, but they are still unable to drive the vocal line to its harmonic goal: F-sharp. The inner voices' failure to achieve a cadence in the parallel major reflects the inability of persona's psychological struggle to produce happiness. (Ultimately, the emotional/modal instability of this piece is decided in the favor of pessimism/minor.)

The failed chromatic ascent is also responsible for the lack of structural closure. Had chromatic voice-leading not been employed, the natural downward pull of the cadential six-four would have resulted in a supported $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ melodic descent. Instead, the chromatic voice-leading causes the melodic tension to remain unresolved at the conclusion of the song. This non-

resolution plausibly reflects the persona's inability to accept his loss. (At the risk of overindulging the analogy, one could infer that had the persona mourned his child's death instead of struggling against his grief, he would have experienced psychological closure.) Thus the modal, contrapuntal, textual, and structural anomalies of this song culminate in the final passage to demonstrate the psychological outcome of the persona.

Hidden Repetition

In addition to the aforementioned devices, Mahler emphasizes the persona's underlying obsession with his loss by permeating each structural level with an expressive motive: a half-step neighboring figure (NN). This motive can be found continually in the foreground of the accompaniment, but the importance of this motive is most clearly demonstrated in the vocal line. (A complete graphic analysis has been included as an appendix to this study to fully demonstrate the use of this motive at each structural level).

Example 9 shows the opening statement of the vocal line in m. 5, which contains two occurrences of the bracketed NN motive. The NN motive's frequency and prominent position within the opening phrase indicates its significance.

Example 9:



The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody consists of the following notes: G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half). The lyrics are: Nun will die Sonn' so hell auf- geh'n. Two brackets are placed above the staff. The first bracket spans from the first G4 to the first E4, with a small box containing the number '6' above it. The second bracket spans from the second E4 to the second D4.

The NN motive is also found in the vocal line of Example 10 (mm. 11–15). This passage occurs in D major, but—as discussed earlier—the B-flat is maintained, allowing the NN motive to occur in a prominent position within the line. Also, its occurrence in D major demonstrates its pervasive quality, irrespective of mode/emotion.

Example 10:

als sei___kein Un-glück, kein Un-glück___ die___ Nacht_____ge - seh'n!

The registral climax of the vocal line, shown in Example 11, also occurs in the third strophe. The vocal line approaches and leaves the E-flat by step creating the NN figure (D–E-flat–D) at the vocal apex, further emphasizing its importance.

Example 11:

ins ew' - - - - ge Licht___

This motive can also be found throughout the middleground level of this piece, both in larger diatonic prolongations and in the chromatic voice-leading of the third strophe. Example 12 shows a diatonic prolongation of ii framed by prologations of I and V. Melodically, this creates an expanded NN figure (F–E–F).

Example 12:

Musical score for Example 12. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. A dashed line with a circled 5 is positioned above the top staff. Roman numerals I, ii, and V₄ are written below the staves. A bracket spans the top staff from the first measure to the end. A dashed line connects notes between the two staves.

The chromatic voice-leading of the orchestral interlude demonstrates middleground occurrences of the NN motive prolonged over varying durations, shown in Example 13.

Example 13:

Musical score for Example 13. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. A dashed line with a circled 5 is positioned above the top staff. A bracket spans the top staff from the first measure to the end. A dashed line connects notes between the two staves.

The NN motive can also be observed in the background level, as shown in Example 14.

Example 14:

Musical score for Example 14. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. A dashed line with a circled 5 is positioned above the top staff. Roman numerals 43, 47 N., and 52 are written below the staves. A bracket spans the top staff from the first measure to the end. A dashed line connects notes between the two staves.

Although the *Urlinie* remains static throughout the majority of the piece—prolonging structural five until the final descent—it moves upward in the third strophe. In Example 14, the prolonged A (m. 43) slides to NN B-flat (m. 47) and is prolonged until the vocal line begins its chromatic ascent (m. 52), creating a background expansion of the NN motive, A–B-flat–A.

The NN motive can be regarded as an encapsulation of the chromatic voice-leading. Its chromatic nature—both ascending and descending—reflects the same struggle portrayed by the chromatic voice-leading. Also, the essentially static nature of this motive is a miniature example of the persona’s futility depicted by the larger chromatic lines.

The frequency of the NN motive’s occurrence is reflective of the persona’s obsession with grief. In his analysis of Schubert’s “*Der Tod und das Mädchen*,” which is also in D minor, Carl Schachter describes the NN motive as having “an age-old association with ideas of death, grief, and lamentation” (214). The hermeneutical implications of this motive combined with its persistence—occurring frequently, in both modes, at all structural levels—portray the persona’s preoccupation with his child’s death and his own grief. In addition to the textural, modal, contrapuntal, and structural anomalies, the NN motive reinforces the persona’s underlying obsession with his loss, despite his optimistic words.

Closing

This study has sought to demonstrate how Mahler uses musical ambiguities to reflect and interpret the text in “*Nun will die Sonn’ so hell auf geh’n!*” Unusual orchestral textures depict the introspective nature of the persona’s mourning, and reflect the persona’s disorientation. Frequent modal shifts portray the emotional instability of the persona and reveal the conflict

between the persona's conscious and subconscious emotions. Chromatic voice-leading facilitates the modal shifts and depicts the persona's struggle to transcend his grief. In the last measures of the song, chromatic voice-leading creates a background aberration, which reflects the persona's inability to reconcile his loss. Finally, a NN motive is employed through the song to further demonstrate the persona's obsession with his loss.

It is unlikely that Mahler intended for these musical devices to be viewed in the context of a comprehensive poetic analogy. Admittedly, the rigid correlations discussed in this study (e.g., mode/emotion) are not maintained throughout the entire song cycle. However the established parallels hold with remarkable consistency within this particular song, and it is equally improbable that these correlations are entirely coincidental. Mahler's own words prove his awareness of the interpretive duties of a songwriter: "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 raised¹²" (Russell 23).

In recent years, Mahler has been accused of being a "usurper" of texts, "relinquishing any kind of musical psychology¹³" (Russell 19). It is difficult to refute the first part of this accusation without a semantic argument; Mahler demonstrates a keen ability to personalize poetry, at times manipulating texts to express his interpretation. However, the second allegation is unfounded; as shown in this study, Mahler's setting of "*Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n!*" demonstrates a consistent and intuitive reflection of the text and its poetic implications.

¹² "*Der Text bildet eigentlich nur die Andeutung des tieferen Gehaltes, der herauszuholen, des Schatzes, der zu heben ist,*" (Bauer-Lechner 27).

¹³ "...*Verzicht auf irgendwelche musikalische Psychologie...*" (Mayer 152).

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Appendix: Graphic Analysis

“Nun will die Sonn’ so hell aufgeh’n!”

(Bracketed NN Motive)

Foreground

Middleground

Background

Frg.

Midg.

Bkg.

Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n!

Peter Leibensperger

75

5 4 3

I V i II₆ V

5 4 3

5-prg 4-prg

55

Sgsta

i (vi) [V⁷ of iv] \flat II₆ V (bII)

5

M
M

