THE ADAGIO OF MAHLER’S NINTH SYMPHONY: A SCHENKERIAN ANALYSIS
AND EXAMINATION OF THE FAREWELL STORY

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Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, since its premier in 1912, has sparked much debate about its programmatic meaning. This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of the Adagio and an examination of the controversy of the farewell story. In the process of the analysis I have compared my findings to some of the important authors in Mahler’s field such as Vera Micznik, Henry-Louis de La Grange, and Christopher Orlo Lewis. Some of the conclusions are that a closer investigation of the music is necessary and that the programmatic reading of the farewell story can be appropriate.
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INTRODUCTION

On the night of February 24, 1901, Mahler suffered a “sudden and violent haemorrhage.” Dr. Julius Hochenegg, upon seeing Mahler’s condition, said that “had he come an hour later, it would have been too late.” The next morning, Mahler made the following comments to Natalie Bauer-Lechner, the violist and his long-time companion:

You know, last night I nearly passed away. When I saw the faces of the two doctors (Singer and Hochenegg), I thought my last hour had come. While they were putting in the tube, which was frightfully painful but quick, they kept checking my pulse and my heart. Fortunately it was solidly installed in my breast and determined not to give up so soon…. While I was hovering on the border between life and death, I wondered whether it would not be better to have done with it at once, since everyone must come to that in the end. Besides, the prospect of dying did not frighten me in the least, provided my affairs are in order, and to return to life seemed almost a nuisance.¹

It can be difficult to know the full effect of such a traumatic event in one's life. For Mahler, this near-death experience seems to have greatly influenced the music he wrote that following summer—the Rückert-Lieder, Kindertotenlieder, and, most notable for this thesis, the first three movements of his Fifth Symphony, which convey a disturbing quality of death and despair. The lieder are particularly pessimistic songs which, considering their lyrical content, is completely understandable. Perhaps Mahler’s creative output at the time was a means of coping with his near-death experience; a way to come to terms with his own mortality. His outlook on life had certainly changed after 1901 and it is plausible to suggest that Mahler decided to start a family in the hope of moving on with his life and putting the incident behind him. Did he ever truly recover from this incident? He received another terrible blow when in 1907 he was diagnosed with an untreatable heart condition. Whatever assumptions we may make, it is impossible to gauge his emotional resilience. More often than not Mahler seemed to be in high spirits in his letters to friends and his wife, Alma. Perhaps the letters were an attempt to mask his concerns

about his health, particularly since Alma was dealing with psychological issues of her own. It is equally plausible that Mahler may have found peace and stoically accepted whatever his fate might be, taking comfort in his belief of the afterlife. Regardless, the final decade of Mahler's life was an eventful one, full of many triumphs and much turmoil.

The Fifth Symphony, a work whose narrative is focused on the same theme of death, proceeds from despair to ultimate triumph. In Mahler’s treatment of this topos the funeral march in C-sharp minor is gloriously overcome in the Scherzo in D major, which follows the second movement in A minor. It is important to note that Mahler did not complete the symphony until the summer after his marriage to Alma in March 1902. The chronology of the completion of the symphony is significant since the fourth movement, the Adagietto in F major, is thought to be a love song for Alma. Not only does Mahler defeat death in this symphony, but he also proclaims his love for his new wife who was pregnant with their first child.

The circumstances of Mahler’s life, however, took a turn for the worse in the summer of 1907 with the death of Mahler’s eldest daughter, Anna, who died from diphtheria. This tragic event was compounded when, a few days later, Mahler was diagnosed with an incurable heart condition. Doctors insisted that Mahler dramatically alter his lifestyle. Exercise of any kind was severely restricted, even the number of steps he was allowed to take in a given day. Additionally, in 1907, Mahler resigned from the Vienna Opera, in part because of ill health, and because of a host of scandals and hostile scrutiny from his critics. Ignoring his doctors recommendations to eliminate any unnecessary exertion, Mahler accepted conducting engagements in 1908 at the Metropolitan Opera and later at the New York Philharmonic. The events of 1907-08 led up to
and encompassed the composition of his last completed orchestral work, the Ninth Symphony, and no doubt influenced its genesis.²

The trials described above provide the context for understanding the Ninth Symphony and must be carefully considered in a critical assessment of the work, but not to the neglect of the music itself. Scholarly analysis of the symphony is a resource that has often been diminished in significance and, in some cases, perhaps, completely overlooked. The tonal plan and its implications cannot be understood solely from biographical details of the composer’s life. The extra-musical associations with the origin of the symphony are insufficient as an explanation for the complex and far ranging implications of the symphony’s inner workings.

The so-called “farewell story” behind the Ninth, and its validity, has caused much debate. What exactly is the “farewell story” of the Ninth? Essentially, it is the proposal that Mahler, innately aware of his own mortality, decided to encode a farewell into his Ninth Symphony; the symphony that was to be his last completed work—a swansong. Mahler never revealed the program or meaning of this symphony. And surely he did not expect it to be his last completed piece, since he began working on a tenth. His mental state and mood can only be gleaned, it would seem, from his personal letters and comments at the time. But what of the music? Can the notes themselves divulge more meaning and disclose this secret farewell? My analysis attempts to derive the “farewell” semantic from an in-depth study of the music of the Ninth’s Finale, a movement that has undoubtedly been the origin of such programmatic readings. Apart from my own interpretation, I examine other analyses of the Ninth Symphony, including some that oppose the “farewell story” altogether.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In David B. Greene’s book, *Mahler, Consciousness and Temporality*, the author discusses the two main motives of the Adagio: the “Lebewohl” (F – E-flat – D-flat) and “tragic fanfare” (C – C-flat – B-flat). He argues that “All through the Finale, the tragic fanfare has protested against the finality of death and has bitterly rejected the ‘Lebewohl’ hymn’s acceptance of death and its peace in the face of final separation.” Though he recognizes the life and death struggles inherent in the music, he questions the validity of a farewell story:

In a sense, the Ninth is Mahler’s culminating statement of a new temporality and a new consciousness, combining the awareness of death and the ordinary temporality of the Fifth with the transfiguration of the Third and the Eighth, exposing and transcending the differences.

But only in a sense. The listener who becomes committed to Mahler’s vision in the Third or the Eighth may well find that in the Ninth Mahler has not superceded but rather has lost faith with his own vision. And Mahler wrote enough of his Tenth Symphony, and it is coherent enough and its coherence is new enough to make us hesitant about attributing any sort of finality to the Ninth.

Constantin Floros seems more open to a programmatic reading of a farewell in *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*. In response to the many critics who have viewed the Ninth in such a way, he states:

All in all, we must remember that Mahler himself inspired these reactions to the work. We must not lose sight of the fact that the first edition of the score, published in 1912 before the first performance, was consulted by many reviewers and contained numerous hermeneutic indications in the first movement that suggested specific content…. Beside this, the score draft contains most revealing autograph exclamations clearly showing that Mahler associated remembrances of the past and thoughts of farewell with this piece.

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4 Ibid., 291.
5 Ibid., 299-300.
7 Ibid., 275.
He concludes his hermeneutic reading of the Ninth by stating, “With the ethereal ending of the Ninth Symphony, Mahler once again testified to his faith in the continuation of life after death.”

Stephen E. Hefling, in “The Ninth Symphony,” touches on the significance of the D major duality within the Adagio and also notes many of Mahler's self-quotations within the Ninth. Heffling seems to favor a more autobiographical reading of the Ninth, stating that “…if not morbidly obsessed by death in 1909, Mahler was nevertheless aware of its relentless approach.”

Julian Johnson, in his article “The Status of the Subject in Mahler’s Ninth Symphony,” rejects a programmatic interpretation of the symphony insisting that “…the task is to deconstruct the popular notion that music such as this narrates the adventures of some musical protagonist.” It is clear from later statements that Johnson appreciates the oppositional musical nature of the Finale, most especially the unexpected pairing of tonal areas and that “…the whole movement addresses the difficulty of making an ending.” He later expands upon this by noting:

One of the defining paradoxes of this symphony is that while it is obsessed with gestures of closure, its principal structural moments are most often characterized by avoidance of closure. The finale’s intense desire to close, coupled with simultaneous erosion of the musical possibility of closure, represents a watershed in the structure of the subject [topos] as articulated in Western music.

The works reviewed in this brief survey summarize major issues in the debate concerning the meaning behind the enigmatic Finale of Mahler’s last completed symphonic work. What follows is a review of recent literature which focuses on three specific areas of research. Vera Micznik challenges the privileged status of programmatic interpretations, as does Henry-Louis

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8 Ibid., 295.
10 Ibid., 468.
12 Ibid., 114.
13 Ibid., 114.
de La Grange who offers alternative ways of understanding the music. The in-depth analysis of the symphony by Christopher Orlo Lewis delves into the topic of duality and tonal coherence. I shall return to Lewis’s examination of the Finale following my analysis of the Adagio’s putative rondo form.

Vera Micznik and Opposition to the Farewell Narrative

Vera Micznik, in her article “The Farewell Story of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony,” takes the following stance:

Throughout this study, I substitute the “farewell meaning” assigned to the symphony with “farewell story,” because in my view, the idea of “farewell to life,” even if not fleshed out in a narrative, suggests a sequence of events or a basic structure similar to that of many stories: a main character (Mahler) lived, suffered, put all his suffering into his creativity, and knowing that he would die, imprinted the knowledge of his impending death onto his last works. But could such a story be read from the music itself? Or could it result from a set of conditions surrounding the musical work?¹⁴

She facilitates her argument with three categories of evidence: the historical and critical reception of the piece; the words of Mahler himself at the time through annotations and letters; and the music itself. I touch briefly on the first two, but the last category is most pertinent for this paper, as it is the music itself that I examine.

So what exactly does Micznik mean by substituting “farewell meaning” for “farewell story” in her article? She goes on to say, “For it is not the validity of the farewell story itself that I find problematic in statements…, but the kind of unquestioned privileged status it is given.”¹⁵ Essentially she is saying that the “farewell meaning” of the Ninth lacks credibility and should be downgraded to a “farewell story” that Mahler most likely did not intend, at least about himself, although she seems deliberately vague. However, I agree with the criterion she has provided,

¹⁵ Ibid., 145.
which is to say that it is important to look at the music, in detail, for the true meaning. There are inherent problems in relying on critical reception and documents since both may be ambiguous, though the music itself can also intrinsically share this issue.

For this reason, I have no quarrel with her arguments concerning the historical reception of the Ninth; in fact, I agree. Those who heard the premiere of the Ninth most likely had never seen a score at that point. And as Micznik points out, their reactions most probably were affected by their personal grief over the death of Mahler. Their words neither justify nor dismiss the validity of the “farewell story.”

Her second argument regarding the words of Mahler himself, while I agree for the most part, needs some clarification. Micznik quotes several letters from Mahler to his friend Bruno Walter. She notes that his mood in these writings appears to be “rather content, even ebullient….”

While I would not necessarily disagree, she seems to try to use these as examples that Mahler had no fears of impending death or perhaps not even aware of its possibility. She says, “…far from resigning to illness or death, he continued his habitual struggles with life and creation.” However, I would argue that the cause of Mahler’s mood cannot be known. He may indeed have been content and ebullient. Or he may have been hiding his true feelings for fear of alarming his friend and over-compensated the positive emotions. Regardless, I feel these letters are inadmissible evidence against the case of the “farewell story.”

Micznik also claims that Mahler’s annotations on the draft of the Ninth (such as “Leb’wol!” [sic]) are inconclusive as evidence for the case of the “farewell story,” as they were removed by Mahler from the final copy. It is a well-known fact that Mahler was against

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16 Ibid., 155.
17 Ibid., 155.
providing a program for his music. After conducting a performance of his Second Symphony in 1900, he stated:

Those who are capable of writing it [program music] are not artists. It’s a different matter when a master’s work becomes so alive and lucid that one can’t help reading some action or event into it; or when a composer tries, after the event, as I’ve always done, to explain his work to himself by some mental picture; or indeed when his message takes on a sublimity and form such that he can no longer be content with mere sound and seeks a higher means of expression by resorting to the human voice and the poetic word, as Beethoven did in his Ninth and I did in my own Symphony in C Minor. This has nothing to do with that trivial, erroneous process of giving a name to a specific happening and illustrating it programmatically step by step.¹⁸

He did not want to confuse the meaning of his music or to provoke an incorrect interpretation.

Again, in Mahler’s words,

Music must speak for itself. The most sublime and universal message it is meant to convey is contained in the words of the conclusion. The deeper meaning of a work, its message, will only emerge gradually, more often than not after the composer’s death… The most important thing is to take it as music, solely as music!¹⁹

There is even the possibility that he felt those words originally attached to the draft of the Ninth would have worried his family and friends or that they were too private and explicit.

The final category proposes the most important question for this case: how much of a narrative can be translated directly from music? Micznik explains the dilemma, “Once transliterated into words, the music does not speak in its pure voice, but, rather, through the mouthpiece of an interpreter, subject to contingencies such as prejudices, historical situation, and horizon of expectations.”²⁰ The issue is quite simple: written music does not directly correspond to precise meaning in words, unless otherwise noted by the composer. Micznik provides a narrative analysis of the piece—I focus only on the fourth movement—that is rather brief: in her reading,

¹⁸ La Grange, Gustav Mahler: Volume 2, 302.
¹⁹ Ibid, 302-303.
²⁰ Micznik, 158.
Finally, the fourth movement foregrounds evocative, nostalgic, epilogic, reflective themes through variations of a quasi-ostinato-bass chorale and a lonely monophonic tune treated in dissonant counterpoint. Moments of rarification, stasis, and fragmentation reminiscent of the first movement reappear, and, like the first movement, the final one ends in disintegration rather than in a conclusive gesture. As Julian Johnson elegantly puts it, “the finale’s intense desire to close [is] coupled with the simultaneous erosion of the musical possibility of closure.”

She goes on to say that “The main point made by this analysis is that this music, through some of the means briefly examined above, asks to be interpreted as a story. The special nature of the music invites these associations.” If that is indeed the case and Mahler’s intent, then it would seem that a story is trying to be told. But how often is that not the case for music? Is not a possible purpose of music to express an idea or story? Such a question is too broad for the topic at hand, so I will move on from it.

If Mahler did have these intentions, that is, to evoke a story, how could it be uncovered? The most reliable source, as Micznik would agree, is the music itself. However, Micznik seems content with a surface description that barely touches the actual music. She later states that “…if this analysis does not identify a more precise story told by the symphony, it is because to push further the information already drawn from the music would necessitate recourse to means outside the capabilities of music.” There is a certain naïveté in Micznik’s statement that suggests giving up before even starting. A deep, methodical understanding of the music can reveal and elucidate the structural relationships and nuances that would never disclose themselves on a surface level. The potential messages of a great work will not easily be found.

My own analysis is an attempt to discover these meanings. As I delved further into the music, I answered many questions and discovered new ones. Eventually, the picture became

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21 Ibid., 160.
22 Ibid., 160.
23 Ibid., 160.
clear. What I believe to be the key to this mystery—the significance of D-natural in the fourth movement—would have never been fleshed out had I not attempted such an analysis.

The Thoughts of Henry-Louis de La Grange

There is perhaps no one more familiar with the life and works of Mahler than Henry-Louis de La Grange, which is most evident by his exhaustive four-volume biography of the man. The fourth and final volume, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 4: A New Life Cut Short (1907-1911)*, offers a wealth of knowledge and insight into the final years of Mahler’s life and the compositional circumstances surrounding the Ninth. La Grange examines practically every analysis and interpretation of the Ninth in existence, offering commentary on many of them. But it is La Grange’s own interpretations that I am most interested in, although they are difficult to clarify.

La Grange makes known his intentions early on in his examination of the Ninth with the following statement:

This author has chosen to challenge the established wisdom according to which Mahler’s last completed work is a sequence of four “gigantic movements, each one a farewell of its own.” Perhaps some readers will now be persuaded to listen to this unique musical work as Mahler’s last and arguably greatest achievement as a composer, rather than as a message from beyond the grave.

The “established wisdom” is more specifically that Mahler intended the Ninth as a personal farewell to life (and to youth and love, though La Grange takes issue only with the farewell to life). He even briefly mentions Vera Micznik’s article which strongly opposes the “farewell

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24 La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 4*.
25 Ibid., 1387.
story.” He does not offer agreement with her stance that the farewell story is unsubstantiated, but he does not disagree, either, which leads one to believe that their thoughts are congruent.26

He then begins a systematic deconstruction and refutation of comments and analyses that paint Mahler as a man facing death. On the writings of the psychoanalyst Theodor Reik, La Grange says:

A fine portrayal of a great artist facing imminent death, but the great artist that Reik is describing has little in common with Gustav Mahler. …When Reik alludes to Mahler’s imminent death and to “the end and the terror of the end,” he should have been reminded that in 1909 death was not “standing at Mahler’s threshold” as a “certainty,” and that although Mahler had been acquainted with it since childhood, he had always faced up to it with exceptional fortitude, while always remaining energetically “future oriented” (zukunftbezogen). In the last movement of Das Lied he had mourned his beloved child and probably faced the idea of his own mortality, but his thoughts were now directed elsewhere.27

He even calls Leonard Bernstein’s lecture on Mahler’s Ninth “sadly pessimistic” and “contradicted by too many letters and documents… to be taken seriously.”28 It would appear, as shown by his comments, that La Grange rejects the notion that Mahler intended the Ninth as a farewell to life. Yet, despite this, his descriptions of the piece, particularly the first and last movements, could be considered contradictory, since La Grange himself suggests that this piece evokes notions of farewell:

Besides the peaceful and sorrowful resignation that characterized Das Lied von der Erde, and which is to be found in the Ninth Symphony too—particularly in the first and fourth movements—Mahler also seems to have rediscovered the passion, anguish, phantoms, and funereal visions that are so much a part of his earlier works. These haunting shadows that seemed finally exorcized in the Eighth and Das Lied, reappear in the Ninth, especially in the opening Andante and the Rondo. Hence, in the first movement it is indeed the shadow of death that is omnipresent, embodied mainly by the asymmetrical and obsessive rhythm of the first two bars. …Lastly, in the Finale, and especially in its Coda, Mahler also goes further than he has ever gone in expressing contemplative stillness and quiet acceptance of fate.29

26 Ibid., 1396.
27 Ibid., 1396-1397.
28 Ibid., 1395.
29 Ibid., 1394.
He has almost the exact same description of the first movement as Berg, who said "The whole movement is based on the presentiment of death." La Grange says of Berg’s invented program that it is "convincing—but only in part."\(^{30}\)

Whether or not this is an exact contradiction of La Grange's original intent is debatable. He certainly agrees that a program of death and farewell can easily be heard from the music, but he never goes so far as to connect those interpretations to Mahler’s own life. If it is not for Mahler, then to whom or what can the farewell relate?

He states that “the mood of the coda of the Ninth is one of appeased farewell: to Putzi surely, and possibly to Alma as well.” He goes on to say that Mahler “…had lost many of his illusions about [Alma], but he could still hearken back to their happy times together, and to those blissful moments when he had felt utterly at peace amidst nature, and utterly fulfilled in his music-making.”\(^{31}\) In support of this view, he mentions earlier that “Ritter’s comment in Prague in September 1908 clearly shows that Mahler was already conscious of Alma’s disaffection at this time, several months before she betrayed him with Gropius.”\(^{32}\) Therefore, it is possible that Mahler was affected enough by this "disaffection" to use as inspiration for the Ninth.

Could the "shadow of death" refer to the death of their love? In an earlier chapter, La Grange says that "Although Mahler took with him to the grave the secret of his remorse, his fears, and his frustrations with regard to Alma, Ritter's account proves that as early as 1908 Mahler had intimations of the gulf that separated himself from his wife and of the disintegration of their marriage.”\(^{33}\)

It does seem feasible considering the chronological information La Grange provides that

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\(^{30}\) Ibid., 1395.  
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 1451.  
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 1400.  
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 231.
the central narrative in the fourth movement of the Ninth concerns both “deception” and “farewell.” This hypothesis receives support from the music itself, which constantly evokes “deception” in different dimensions. Consider, for example, m. 3, beats 2 and 3 (ex. 3) at the very outset when the dominant of D-flat resolves deceptively to A major, enharmonically bVI—rather than the tonic. The alternative relationships between D-flat as tonic and C-sharp as leading tone to D-natural could possibly further expand upon this same idea as well. Much like Mahler and Alma’s relationship, things are not always what they seem in the Adagio.

Further support for La Grange’s suggestion can be found in Stuart Feder’s article “Before Alma: Gustav Mahler and ‘Das Ewig-Weibliche,’” which discusses Mahler’s relationships with women before Alma. After briefly examining his tendency towards depression, Feder offers insight on Mahler’s first adolescent relationship:

…his response to Josephine’s apparently immature lack of involvement began to yield to something different with Johanna and subsequent lovers: this was Mahler’s own penchant for sensing the slightest coolness or indifference, or even the momentary lapse of a lover’s being as passionately involved with him as he was with her. Deeply pained by such circumstances, Mahler demanded certainty in love. Flaws in such a relationship, which threatened yet another loss, elicited a profound pessimism about the future, plus the potential for depression.

One can assume then that Mahler was always very aware of how Alma reciprocated his love. He may have been aware of emotional distance, affecting his mood and quite possibly influencing his music.

The distress of love lost may have indeed been the source of resignation and farewell in the Ninth. Mahler loved Alma deeply and the thought of losing her was certainly a fear of his—a fear that became reality in the summer of 1910. But was his fear great enough the year prior during the composition of the Ninth? Was this a farewell to Alma and their love?

35 Ibid., 89.
ANALYSIS

Form

Before delving into the details, it would be best to see an overview of the form of the piece as my analysis shows it. The standard formal interpretation of the Finale of the Ninth is generally a *five-part rondo*; however, I have opted to examine the movement as *strophic variation*, underpinned by a large-scale interruption. The reasons for my decision will be discussed later in the analysis.

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Figure 1: Formal Overview of the Adagio of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony.

The Turn-Motif

One of the most notable characteristics of the Finale is the turn-motif (ex. 1). It appears in a variety of ways—sometimes the turn is comprised entirely of half-steps, at other times whole-steps are substituted. The initial rhythm is four thirty-second-notes, but as early as the fourth measure it is augmented to sixteenth-notes. In m. 5 it is augmented to eighth-notes and even
transformed into quintuplets later in the piece. A figure that so saturates the musical fabric must have great significance and it would be worthwhile to explore its implications. To understand this motive, one must first consider its origins in Wagner’s music. While at the Vienna Opera Mahler conducted many of Wagner's operas and was intimately familiar with his music. In particular, Mahler supposedly knew the score of Parsifal by heart. One leitmotiv, which first appears in the Prelude, is referred to as Suffering 2 by F. E. Kirby (ex. 2). This passage obviously contains the same turn-motif. But, in addition to the turn, there is a striking resemblance to the descending figure in the introductory bars of the Ninth’s Finale. Until the final notes of each descent, both share the same intervallic relationships (compare examples 1 and 2). The striking similarities could even suggest that Mahler is quoting Wagner in the opening bars. If this is indeed true, then perhaps more can be learned about the meaning of the turn-motif from what is already known about Wagner's use of it in Parsifal. Kirby states that:

Since Suffering 2 consists essentially of a cadence in B-flat (obscured by passing harmonies), and since cadences generally impart the sense of a resolution, it could seem that this theme... carries a sense of resolution, which could point to Christ and his redemptive powers and the redemption that comes at the end of the work.37

And previously he mentions, "...Suffering 2 [represents] just punishment for improper conduct."38 Is La Grange's assertion that Mahler already suspected Alma of infidelity while composing the Ninth justified by this interpretation? Did Mahler see Alma as Kundry? Did he believe that he could ultimately redeem her as Parsifal redeemed both Kundry and Amfortas? Or did Mahler see himself as an Amfortas awaiting his own redeemer? The possibilities are intriguing.

37 Ibid., 191.
38 Ibid., 190.
If the descent and cadence of Suffering 2 found in Wagner's *Parsifal* is about redemption, then the turn-motif that leads to it could represent the suffering that must precede it. Kirby, on suffering in *Parsifal*, states:

Most—almost all, in fact—of the characters in *Parsifal* suffer. Amfortas is perhaps central here, but also Parsifal suffers the consequences of his improper behavior in act 1, Gurnemanz for the decline of the Grail community since Amfortas’s wounding, Kundry for her sin against Jesus, Klingsor for his frustrations with the Grail community, and so on.\(^{39}\)

From Kirby’s point of view it would seem as though Mahler is obsessing on pain, since the turn-motif never ceases throughout the movement. However, we must bear in mind that there certainly are moments in the music—moments that are greatly saturated with the turn-motif—that would be hard to identify with pain and suffering. Measure 126, for example, is the most triumphant point in the piece. Of course, the triumph eventually fades into quiet submission. It seems that the turn-motif, like most factors involved with the Finale, is full of meaning that cannot be contained within a single interpretation.

**Introduction and Original Presentation**

I would like to direct the reader to follow along the analysis with Appendix A, my Schenkerian graph juxtaposed upon the 1912 arrangement for piano for four hands by J.V.v. Wöss.\(^{40}\) The fourth movement begins with a definitive unison A-flat in the violins (ex. 1). Considering the key, D-flat major, one might suspect that this would imply the dominant. That notion, however, is complicated by the C-flat that occurs on the downbeat of m. 2. In one interpretation, this C-flat could be heard as the minor third above A-flat and thus not a dominant. On the other hand, the C-flat could be rationalized as an embellishment, i.e., an upper

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39 Ibid., 188.
neighbor to the B-double-flat, which is, in turn, the upper-neighbor to A-flat. That C-flat is followed by a deliberate descent to B-double-flat, A-flat, G-flat and finally to F at the beginning of m. 3. The first two measures are significant as indicative of the kind of multiple implications evoked by the rest of the piece in many ways. Firstly, these notes can potentially evoke different harmonizations. As mentioned, one could easily hear a dominant function, depending on the interpretation of the C-flat. Furthermore, the melodic line descends to G-flat which could be interpreted as the 7th as it resolves downward to F. Conversely, heard in the context of the previous movement, which is in A minor, the initial group of notes might be construed as representing the dominant in that key—enharmonically G-sharp, B, A, G-sharp, and F-sharp (with an implied E). Another possibility is that these notes simply foreshadow the modal mixture (D-flat minor vs. D-flat major) that occurs later in the piece. All three of these interpretations are activated. Indeed, the uncertainty and doubt created by these few notes recur throughout this movement in a variety of ways. Also in the introduction, Mahler dwells upon the turn-motif—previously heard in the third movement—which completely saturates the fourth movement. Clearly, in the initial two-measure gesture, every note is already ripe with meaning and possibilities.

Measure 3 introduces the harmonic progression that Christopher Lewis has deemed the "motto progression." I have labeled it the original presentation of the theme, from which each strophe that follows is based upon (ex. 5a). The characteristic of this progression, which also occurs in the previous two movements, is a leap down in the bass followed by an upward half-step. The main motive of the theme, a (Appendix A, m. 3), is a third descent on scale degrees \( \hat{3} \rightarrow \hat{2} \rightarrow 1 \) (F – E-flat – D-flat, in this case). Here the progression is, in D-flat major, I-V\(^7\)-bVI-I\(^6\)-IV and

\[ \text{Christopher Orlo Lewis, } Tonal Coherence in Mahler’s Ninth Symphony (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984), 103. \]
shall be referred to as motto progression 1. The progression of V\(^7\) to bVI (which is written enharmonically as A major rather than B-double-flat)\(^{42}\) is a deceptive motion, which is another significant attribute of this movement. As we shall see, deception is very important in this piece as a whole and occurs quite frequently. The next chord in the progression, which I label I\(^6\), also exhibits duality. In addition to being a I chord, it could also be considered a V\(^7\)/VI which resolves deceptively to bVI/VI (or IV in D-flat). Considering the characteristics of the motto progression, this idea works well. However, if viewed as a I chord, there is something quite fascinating to be noted. On the fourth beat both the major and minor third of D-flat are present—F in the double bass and second cellos and F-flat in the first cellos. Here is the perfect encapsulation of the inherent struggle throughout this piece, suggesting D-flat major and its parallel minor simultaneously. Both interpretations of this chord are valid and offer many insights. Choosing one over the other simply depends on which notes fall into the category of non-harmonic tones—a decision that one has to make constantly in this movement. An argument to strengthen the latter is the possibility of a voice exchange. The upper voice moves from F to D-flat while the bass moves from D-flat to F. In this case the chord would clearly be a I rather than a V\(^7\)/VI (ex. 5a).

Then in m. 4 there appears to be a brief moment of cadence as the first violins play a standard descending line to D-flat. That cadence is short lived as the melody surges again with a rising motion in m. 5 from E-flat, through F, to G-flat, and finally to A-flat in m. 6. In the bass is the second motive, \(b\) (Appendix A, m. 5), which is another descent marked by \(\hat{3}-b\hat{3}-2\) (C – C-flat – B-flat, in this case). The first chord of m. 7, at first glance, appears to be a VI chord with B-flat

\(^{42}\) The 1912 piano arrangement—which I have used for my graph as well as my musical examples—has several enharmonic respellings, such as m. 3, beat 3, the A major chord is respelled as B-double-flat major, as shown in Appendix A. I would encourage the reader to consult the original orchestral score to avoid such enharmonic respellings that could possibly dilute the meaning originally intended by Mahler.
in the upper voice. However, that B-flat is merely an upper-neighbor to the A-flat, which resolves in the next chord on the second beat. Therefore, this is actually a I chord—another case of duality. Measure 7 also brings back the "motto progression," yet it is slightly altered this time as it dips a half-step lower in register and shall be referred to as motto progression 2 (ex. 5b). Rather than landing on IV, this time the motto progression pushes the harmony into new territory, implying what might appear to be a temporary tonicization of F major, though the true focus lies elsewhere (ex. 3).

The dominant of F major resolves unusually to A major (with an appoggiatura B in the upper voice) in m. 9. The return of an A major sonority implies that the tonal focus from the latter half of m. 7 to m. 9 is in fact A major (ex. 3). The second half of m. 9 produces a dissonant IV chord with unusual enharmonic spellings (F-sharp, B-flat, C-sharp, G). The F-sharp and C-sharp, enharmonically G-flat and D-flat, are perhaps written for better voice-leading since the previous section was focused on A major. The other possibility is that Mahler is foreshadowing the importance these notes have in other keys, particularly that of D major, which will be later discussed. The G, which sounds very dissonantly against the other notes, is an accented appoggiatura that resolves to A-flat in the next measure. Measure 10 prolongs the dominant and leads to an implied cadence in m. 11 with a single D-flat in the first violins. The violins are then joined by a solo bassoon that plays an ascending scalar pattern in the parallel minor (ex. 4)—material which is revisited later in m. 28. In m. 13 the unsettling quiet is interrupted by a vehement return of the full string section with the b motive now in the upper voice. Measures 13-16 prolong A-flat with a temporary tonicization (ex. 6).
First Strophe

In m. 17, the beginning of the first strophe, the motto progression returns with identical harmony as in m. 3. With that comparison, it seems logical to equate the prolongation of A-flat in mm. 13-16 with the introductory bars that likewise prolonged A-flat. Measure 19 at first begins as had m. 5, keeping the same movement in the upper voice of E-flat, through F, to G-flat. However, this time the harmony changes and the upper voice lands on G-flat (enharmonically F-sharp) in D major, which acts as a Neapolitan chord in this case (ex. 7). From here the dominant is essentially prolonged to m. 22. Measure 23 introduces a descending pattern that is registerally displaced into higher octaves every two notes (ex. 8)—a device which is used again later in the piece. The underlying harmony is V6/bII-bII6 to V in m. 24. The dominant chord in m. 24 is interesting in that it has no 5th until the last beat, but rather than an E-flat it is an E-double-flat (enharmonically D-natural) in the second violins. The third-progression for this particular cadence in m. 25 then is 3-b2-1.

In mm. 25-27 there are several significant occurrences to note, as the harmony can be interpreted many ways (ex. 9). Since the cadence on I occurs on m. 25, the next couple of measures can be seen as a prolongation of the tonic. Indeed D-flat major lasts until the middle of m. 26, where the harmony changes to what can best be described as VII6/5/bVI. That harmony persists until the end of m. 27, though it is inverted to VII6/3/bVI, and resolves to a single A in the first violins in m. 29. The first thing to notice is how D-natural begins to sneak into the harmony and ultimately corrupts it. As noted, the cadence consisted of a b2 (E-double-flat) rather than the standard 2. Then in m. 25, at the last moment, the first violins leap to D as an anticipation to the next measure. In m. 26 the D is sustained creating a V9/IV—though it does not resolve to a IV. Finally, in m. 27, the bass leaps up to D while the first violins once again
play D, though for only one beat. The more pronounced D-natural is in the harmony, the more the key begins to stray from D-flat, ultimately leading to a motion towards A. Another curious aspect is how the bass leaps to a different note each measure: D-flat to A-flat=G-sharp in m. 25, D-flat to C-flat=B-natural in m. 26, and F to D-natural in m. 27. Excluding D-flat, which is from the cadence in m. 25, these notes form the VII⁰⁷/bVI harmony; it appears to be an unfolding of that harmony, which I believe is linked to the E-natural in the second violins (a possible root for a V9/bVI). Finally, the notes of the VII⁰⁷/bVI harmony, A-flat (G-sharp), C-flat (B), D, and F, can be tied to the introductory bars. Those notes, of course, center around A-flat, its leap to C-flat, and its eventual goal in m. 3 to F. The only note that is missing is D, which is perhaps why it gradually crept into the texture of mm. 25-27—it is the missing element to change not only the tonal direction of the piece, but the overall character.

Looking back over the previous section, there have been many hints at D, each more prominent than the last. The introductory bars offered different possibilities for the implied harmony, one of which was a dominant of A—not only tied to the previous movement, but also to the first movement as its dominant. That correlation seems somewhat justified in m. 3 when on beat 3 there is in fact an A major harmony. Then from mm. 7-9 there is a more prolonged emphasis on A major. In m. 19 is the first occurrence of a D major chord as a Neapolitan. Again in m. 23 it returns with V⁶/bII-bII⁶. Finally, at the moment of cadence, D begins to take over, slowly corrupting the harmony and forcing it in a new direction.

In m. 28 the character of the music completely changes. The dense counterpoint is replaced by a sparse texture which is exaggerated by the vast range between the sounding instruments. The key has changed to four sharps, which would seem to imply the parallel minor, C-sharp. The first violins sound the only note; a high A which acts as a resolution from the
previous G-sharp (VII⁰⁷/bVI). They are then joined by the cellos and bassoons, which recall the material from mm. 11-12. The violins descend to G-sharp in m. 29 while the cellos and bassoons continue the material from m. 11-12. These first two measures illustrate perfectly the inherent problems of analysis in this supposedly C-sharp minor section. Similarly to many of the chords in the first section, the harmony in this section of music offers a duality. Measures 28-29, if analyzed in C-sharp minor—which the key signature seems to suggest—would be a VI chord moving to I. This progression is viable, but perhaps something else is going on. The A in the violins could be interpreted as an upper-neighbor to the G-sharp, simplifying both measures as a I chord. However, the A is especially prominent considering its range, its solo character, and that it was preceded by a G-sharp, which naturally wants to resolve to A. Considering the motion in mm. 24-27, which gradually brought D to the foreground, then perhaps mm. 28-29 can be seen as a dominant in D major (m. 29 could possibly be a V/V considering beat one). I submit that this section can be analyzed in both C-sharp minor and D major simultaneously (ex. 10a).

This section of music was particularly difficult when I first made my graph. Deciding what notes were more important structurally was a challenging task. For the most part, my graph shows D major as the prominent key. I came to this decision ultimately because the harmony implied—which is often ambiguous at best—is most linear in D major. The first four bars show a motion to D. Measures 28-30 are an expansion of the V chord via a voice exchange through the V/V (D: V⁶-V/V-V⁶/⁴). The second half of m. 30 is essentially a dominant chord with a sixth above the A (F-sharp), acting similarly to a cadential 6/4, which resolves to a full dominant in m. 31. The third-progression is completed in either m. 31 by means of an implied D in the upper voice or in m. 32 when the D is actually sounded. That D is then prolonged until the end of m. 33. In mm. 34-35 the cellos once again repeat the material from mm. 11-12. Similarly to mm.
28-29, the harmony here can be interpreted as a dominant in D major or a prolongation of a tonic in C-sharp minor. Measure 36 clearly shows a temporary move to E major. Assuming mm. 34-35 are a prolongation of the dominant in D major, the key progression is D-A-E (ex. 10b). Ascending fifths could be significant as they are moving further away from the home key. However, as the relative major to C-sharp minor, E major relates well to both keys.

After this brief movement to E major, the music returns to the D-natural/C-sharp duality. Measure 40 offers an interesting moment of duality when the cellos land on the low E-sharp. The only other sounding note is a C-sharp which means this can be heard as a I in the original key, a dominant of F-sharp, or perhaps an augmented dominant in D major, with the A being implied. That implication is strengthened when an A appears in m. 41 in the first violins (ex. 10c). There is even a voice exchange prolonging the dominant (upper voice: A to C-sharp, lower voice: C-sharp to A). Another voice exchange occurs between the end of m. 42 and 43 (upper voice: D to G-sharp, lower voice: G-sharp to D). This voice exchange begins the closing material of this section, which emphasizes a motion from the D-natural in m. 43 to the C-natural in m. 48 (ex. 10d). It is possible to reinterpret this chord as an augmented sixth chord, though a non-traditional one (D, F, C=B-sharp). With this in mind, there is a large-scale chromatic-voice exchange between the D (lower voice) and F-sharp (upper voice) in m. 43 to the F-natural (lower voice) and D (upper voice) in m. 48. This augmented sixth then resolves to the tonic in D-flat major that resumes in m. 49. There is, however, another reading that I prefer over the augmented-sixth interpretation. The harmony of m. 48 can also be interpreted in F major as I-V7, in which the dominant resolves deceptively to bVI (I in D-flat major), similarly to the dominant in the previous measure. The root motion then would be, from m. 48, E to F, C to D-flat, which
recalls the "motto progression." This particular reading seems to have greater motivic significance.

Second and Third Strophes

Measure 49 begins the second strophe which once again heralds the return of motto progression 1. Though it is the beginning of a section, it has more in common with the material from mm. 17-21 than that of m. 3, particularly with the move to a strong bII chord in m. 51—similarly to m. 19. However, starting in m. 53 the music begins to deviate from that original progression by reaching another motto progression earlier, though, this time the shape of the progression has been changed. Rather than a leap followed by an upward half-step, the bass-line is an ascending step-wise line, moving from D-flat to F-sharp (ex. 11). The actual harmony is slightly altered as well. The third chord, rather than an A major chord, has been replaced by an E dominant 6/4 which then resolves to a full E dominant. The last beat changes the chord to a fully diminished 7th when the bass moves up to F and then resolves to the F-sharp in the next measure. This is an interesting mutation of the motto progression in that it seems to incorporate both versions as it drops to E, but continues up to F to resolve to a IV chord. This type of alteration to the progression is a trend that develops more and more each time the motto progression returns in the music. The harmony is altered—sometimes only slightly—and pushed into new directions; its grasp ever reaching further. Another example of this occurs in m. 54 with the introduction of a French diminished-third chord (the inverted augmented-sixth). This chord is interesting in that it consists of two tri-tones, which could be alluding to the themes of pain and suffering. It resolves naturally to a dominant chord and in m. 56 and a new type of progression begins, which is the third strophe.
The progression is fairly simple and does not show up anywhere else in the piece. This particular strophe is unique in that it does not use the motto progression, but does maintain the motivic qualities. After repeating once, the dominant at the end moves deceptively to an F major chord and for that one measure, m. 60, the music is temporarily in F major. Measure 61 then moves to E major and measure 63 lands on D major. The motion of these three measures then becomes fairly obvious with the F in m. 60 moving through the E in m. 61 to the D in m. 63 (ex. 12). Measure 63 is the major point of focus with a large emphasis on the D dominant 7th chord juxtaposed with the motive from the introductory bars, C-flat – B-double-flat – A-flat – G-flat. Once again Mahler has reinterpreted previous material with new harmony. Perhaps even more intriguing is that this chord is realized as a dominant German augmented-sixth chord which resolves to D-flat major in m. 64. It almost goes without saying how perfectly this plays into the D-natural/D-flat duality that this entire movement emphasizes.

Fourth Strophe

Measure 64 begins the fourth strophe. As expected, the motto progression is pushed further in a shorter amount of time than previous versions. Rather than beginning with motto progression 1, he jumps right to motto progression 2. In m. 65 he advances again by introducing the Neapolitan (D major) earlier than before (ex. 13). In the previous progressions, such as at m. 17, the Neapolitan was not reached until the third measure, but here it is already present in the second. The music moves almost typically, with some of the harmony altered, towards another motto progression 2 in m. 68. The same advances are made yet again and in the second measure, m. 69, the Neapolitan is reached with the greatest emphasis thus far. At this point the music seems to break free and the Neapolitan is reinterpreted as a dominant in G major. The music,
with new rhythmic energy, bursts open and shifts into a new direction. The energy builds up to m. 72 where the harmony becomes frantic, almost chaotic, with the same motivic material from m. 23 (ex. 14). Measure 23 was used to set up the first major cadence that took place in m. 25. At first glance, it appears that m. 72 is doing exactly the same thing, except in a different key and with vastly different harmony. There is a major difference, however, in the resolution. The final chord of m. 72 is an A dominant 7th, which one would most likely expect to move to D major. But, almost ironically, it resolves to a D-flat major chord and at that exact moment the music has a drastic change in character. Since this point in the music is one of the most important analytically, it is best to take an even closer look at what exactly is going on here.

From mm. 63-69 there is a strong emphasis on the D major chord. In m. 63 it is a dominant German augmented-sixth chord that resolves to D-flat. In m. 65 it acts more like a Neapolitan in D-flat major as it moves to A-flat major. Finally, in m. 69, a strong D dominant 7th chord is reached and at first one might think that it would resolve similarly as it did in m. 63. But of course it does not and instead acts as the dominant in G major. G major is an interesting key to reach as it is a tri-tone away from D-flat, but I believe G major itself is not the final goal here. In my analysis I see G major as IV in D major, which sets up the dominant A in m. 72. It seems as though D major is attempting to take over as the superior key—a coup d'etat, so to speak—and move the harmony in its direction. Something very similar happened in mm. 25-27. D-natural began to show up in the harmony, eventually corrupting it and having a major influence on the harmony in the following section. But, all of this occurred after the major cadence in m. 25. At the current point in the music this is all before the cadence is reached (a strategic mistake by D major, perhaps). Just as D major sets up its cadence with an A dominant at the end of m. 72, it is
trumped and instead D-flat major once again takes hold. For this reason I do not call this motion a cadence, but rather a suppression.

A suppression is different from an interruption in that an interruption (\(\hat{2}-\hat{2}\)) causes a break in the Urlinie, while a suppression exists within the Urlinie. One might also confuse a suppression with an interpolation, but the music contained in an interpolation can be removed and the structure of the piece will not be altered. That is not the case with a suppression which has structural significance—such as an intentional disruption of the harmony to convey a narrative—and its removal would confuse the meaning of the music. The ensuing battle of the next section resolves this suppression and ultimately decides which key is victorious.

Suppression Area and Continuation of the Fourth Strophe

After the suppressed cadence, the music changes character rather drastically. The bombastic nature of the previous bars of music does not even seem to fit with what follows. With D major currently averted, D-flat calmly prolongs with a simple, albeit embellished, repeating I-V-I motion. In m. 88 the key changes once again to four sharps as it had in m. 28. The similarities do not end there. Since this piece is, on the surface, a five-part rondo, it only makes sense that this section of music would be motivically and harmonically similar to the music in mm. 28-48. Likewise, it offers a duality of tonal interpretations; a juxtaposition of C-sharp minor and D major (ex. 15). Though, in this instance, the music seems to be less transparent and more emphatic of D major. For example, in m. 89, the English horn begins a melody that leaps from E to A over a C-sharp to E arpeggio in the lower registers. This is easily identified as a V in D major. But if one is not convinced of this harmony, in the next bar the English horn moves to a G-natural, which sounds against a C-sharp. The tri-tone is undeniable and the ear is immediately
drawn to hear a dominant 7th in D major. Of course, D major is not reached until m. 92 which gives the ear some time to adjust and perhaps lose the strong suggestion of D major. Likewise, the cadence to D is clouded by sparse texture and ambiguous harmony. Measures 94-100 change the duality which now meanders between D major and G major (ex. 16a and 16b). Perhaps this is an allusion to mm. 69-71 where the music dramatically changed to G major and eventually caused the music to take a drastic new direction.

In m. 101 the direction is changed again. A solitary C-sharp sounds, leaving much room for interpretation. Is this a V in D major or perhaps a I in C-sharp minor? Either choice seems appropriate, but it is quite clear that that C-sharp begins a step-wise linear descent, in the oboe, to the D in m. 107 (ex. 17). At this point the music surges back to life with motive b (A-sharp – A-natural – G-sharp), ending the suppression, and crescendoing to fortissimo. This sounds, to the ear, like a major return, perhaps to the final section of music. However, it has not reached that point yet; it is, though, the continuation of the fourth strophe. The Neapolitan chord in m. 107 mutates into a IV which is prolonged to m. 116 as a minor IV6 (ex. 18a, 18b, and 18c). Measure 117 is incredibly dense harmonically and rhythmically, but the most important part occurs on the and of beat four in which the harmony is a German augmented-sixth chord (V7 in D major). This one chord is the culmination of the previous 45 measures and I will explain why.

This section of music really began around m. 69 when the D major chord (then a German augmented-sixth dominant in D-flat) was reinterpreted as a dominant in G major. That G major was actually a IV in D major which led up the cadence in m. 72 with A major on beat four. However, that cadence was suppressed with a D-flat major chord in m. 73. D major was sustained through the C-sharp minor section, even bringing back the key of G major temporarily. D was finally picked back up again in m. 107 as both a I in D major and a bII in D-flat major.
Both lead to the chord at the end of m. 117. There is also a rather large chromatic voice exchange between the F-sharp in the bass and A-sharp in the upper voice of m. 110 to the A-natural in the bass and F-double-sharp in the upper voice of m. 117, last beat. This voice exchange also highlights an expansion of motive $b$ from the A-sharp ($\flat 3$) in the upper voice in m. 110, to the A-natural in the bass in m. 117 ($\flat b3$), and finally to the A-flat ($\flat 2$) in the bass in m. 118.

The A dominant chord from before the suppressed cadence is thus picked back up in m. 117; however, it is now reinterpreted as a German augmented-sixth chord in D-flat major. The German augmented-sixth chord then resolves to a big dominant in m. 118. In m. 119 occurs the structural interruption on $\flat 2$, which is the point of division between the antecedent and consequent. The next few measures mark the final return of the introductory motive of the descent from C-flat to G-flat in a rather unusual rhythm (ex. 18d). The descent lands on F in m. 126 and thus begins the consequent of the piece.

Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Strophes

The fifth strophe begins and the music is the most triumphant yet, completely saturated with the turn-motif. At the end of m. 127 the music modulates to A major briefly, with a fairly clear progression (ex. 19a). It returns once again to D-flat major in m. 129, in which the harmony arrives on an augmented dominant. The dominant resolves naturally to D-flat major in m. 130 and once again heralds the motto progression—the sixth strophe. In this instance it is a variation of motto progression 1 with a step-wise bass line. One bar after the motto progression the music modulates to A, just as in m. 127 (ex. 19b). The progression is similar, but in m. 133 it lands on a B-flat major chord, which is best interpreted as a Neapolitan in the key of A. Given the importance of the Neapolitan in the key of D-flat major, the D major chord, this does not seem
unusual at all. Likewise to the Neapolitan in D-flat major, it resolves irregularly to I (A major), though in this case it is an A dominant 7th. The A dominant, as well, resolves irregularly to D-flat major, which is the same progression that occurred at the suppressed cadence in mm. 72-73. Here again the dominant of D major moves to D-flat major instead (ex. 19c). Therefore, this is a mini-suppression between mm. 134-137, at which point there is an interruption on 2, albeit on a lower hierarchical level.

Mahler returns to motto progression 2 in m. 138—the seventh and final strophe. The progression advances towards A, but it is not as obvious this time. There is a German augmented-sixth chord in m. 140, which would best fit in the key of A or D major, depending on the resolution. However, it moves to neither of those keys and instead resolves irregularly to an F major chord and the music modulates briefly to that key (ex. 20). F major acts as a prolongation of the 3 in D-flat major as well as recall the use of the motto progression as seen in m. 48. Beginning in F, the motto progression continues on into D-flat major, but rather than ending with a dip down to F or E-natural, it stops on F-sharp in the bass on a IV chord in m. 143. The second half of that measure lands on the first of two important chords, which I call “crisis” chords. The first one is best interpreted as a vii6/5/V. The second, which occurs on the second half of m. 144 is a IIø7 (ex. 21). Both of these chords are emphasized agogically with two beats instead of one beat, which is the duration of the surrounding chords. They are also accented dynamically and are very dissonant, to the point where it is almost impossible to identify their function. These two chords also mark a turning point in the music. From this moment on the dynamics slowly decrease, the tempo lulls slower and slower, and the instrumentation and harmony become increasingly fragmented. There is also not another strophic entry past this point and indeed these “crisis” chords mark the beginning of the coda.
Coda

The second crisis chord resolves to a dominant in m. 145, which meanders on for most of the remaining measures. It does, however, move to an A major chord (the German augmented-sixth) starting in m. 153 and slowly unfolds into the full chord in m. 155 (ex. 22). The harmony then returns back to the dominant in m. 160. At the end of m. 166 there is a very interesting chord. The notes are E-double-flat, G-flat, A-natural, and C-natural, which enharmonically spells a D dominant 7th (ex. 23). That particular chord has played a major role throughout this piece, but it had usually been spelled with a D-natural. However, this time an E-double-flat is used, which almost inevitably must resolve to a D-flat. Previously with the D major chord, the D had other possibilities: the possibility to ascend. It seems as though D has finally resigned to its fate and will struggle no more.

The remaining measures slowly switch between the tonic, dominant, and sub-dominant. The upper voice retains 3, moving once to 2 in m. 177, but never reaches 1. One could consider this as an interruption on the same level as the one found in m. 119, a sort of mirror between the antecedent and consequent. The final chord ends with a 3, as though to suggest that this progression will continue indefinitely, never reaching a conclusion (ex. 24). It will simply go on and on into eternity.

A Comparison with the Analysis of Christopher Lewis

Christopher Lewis’ *Tonal Coherence in Mahler’s Ninth Symphony* is a landmark analysis of this piece. It has provided ideas about the overall meaning of the music and a few tools for my own analysis, such as the “motto progression.” However, there are a number of significant differences between his and my own reading of the last movement.
The first difference concerns his interpretation of the C-sharp minor sections, which he refers to as episodes. He states, “It is in keeping with its recapitulatory nature that the Finale is without extended tonal contrast; all sections of the simple five-part rondo have D-flat as principal tonic, with refrains invoking the major, and episodes the minor mode, and the D-flat/D-natural displacements serve instead as the chief element of tonal tension.” Although he does mention the tonal importance of D-natural, he does not assign it *structural* importance. Let us begin with the first episode, mm. 28-48.

Lewis, in regards to the measures leading up to the first episode, states that they “…give a taste of D overlaid on, and resolving to D-flat.” In Appendix A, I offer an initial reading of the bass progression A-flat=G-sharp – C-flat=B – D in mm. 25-27 as an unfolding of a V7/bVI sonority, [E] - G-sharp - B - D as dominant of the B-double-flat=A major in m. 28, in which the D plays the role of the 7th (Appendix A, mm. 25-27). In this interpretation, the V7/bVI resolves, as expected, to an A major sonority in m. 28, which then functions as the dominant of D (the resolution occurs in m. 31). That D is in turn prolonged by a lower-neighbor C-sharp in m. 34—which itself is prolonged by a neighbor B-natural in mm. 36-39—and resolves back to D in m. 43. The D is prolonged once again by arpeggiation to A in m. 43 and F-sharp in m. 45. Finally, the destination of the D is reached in m. 48 with an unfolding to C-natural in the bass, resulting in an augmented-sixth sonority (an unorthodox D-natural, F-natural, and C=B-sharp sonority) which then resolves to D-flat major in m. 49. This analysis of the bass suggests that the main tonal focus of this section is D-natural, rather than D-flat. Lewis, on the other hand, ignores the significance of this prolonged D-natural by reducing the bass to a prolonged C-sharp/D-flat throughout this section of music.

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43 Lewis, 105.
44 Ibid., 108.
However, it could be argued that my own analysis overemphasizes the D-natural to support my own thesis. Therefore, I have offered two alternative interpretations of this section in Appendices B and C, which present alternative readings of the bass.

The first (Appendix B) shows the D-natural not established until m. 43, with previous D-naturals acting as Neapolitan to C-sharp/D-flat. The second (Appendix C) shows the established D-natural in m. 43 connecting with the D-natural that occurred in m. 27. Regardless of which interpretation is taken—either alternative or my original graph—all three show D-natural as structurally important in this section of music, be it as a local Neapolitan or point of departure and destination.

The second episode, which Lewis identifies as mm. 88-126, may also misrepresent the structural significance of D-natural in the bass. My own analysis (Appendix A, m. 69ff.) shows this section of music as a suppression of a cadence on D-natural, beginning in m. 73. The measures leading up to 73 emphasize D major with a move to G major in m. 70 (as IV of D) and A major on the last beat of m. 72 (the dominant of D). The motion, then, is IV to V in D major, but rather than resolving to the tonic D major the music is disrupted with D-flat major in m. 73, thus beginning the large-scale suppression. Lewis seems to imply that this D-flat is the goal and that the motion from A major (dominant of D) to D-flat is intended as a resolution. He states, “Of course a full tonicization of D would contradict the meaning of this movement… therefore, [there is] a resolution from V of D to D-flat…” and “D-flat, thus achieved, is simply prolonged by a conventional harmonic progression (mm. 73-77).”

However, I argue that D-flat is not intended as a resolution or goal, but is instead the unfolded third of the previous A major dominant (enharmonically C-sharp and lower neighbor to

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45 Ibid., 110.
46 Ibid., 111.
D-natural). Measures 73-107 are subsumed within the suppression. During this section, similar to the previous episode, D-natural is prolonged through neighbor motions with C-sharp until m. 107 with a final D major sonority. The bass then moves to F-sharp, which acts simultaneously as the third of D major and IV of D-flat. The next few measures bring the music back to where it was before the suppression; that is, a motion to A major as dominant of D-natural on the last beat of m. 117. It seems significant that the A dominant occurs on the last beat in both cases, here and immediately before the suppression began. At this point the true goal is reached when A major is reinterpreted, not as the dominant of D, but as a German-augmented-sixth chord (albeit in root position). It resolves, as expected, to the dominant of D-flat in m. 118, which is then prolonged until the return of the refrain in m. 126.

Of course, the dualistic nature of this symphony allows another interpretation of this section that is more aligned to the reading of Lewis. The D-flat in the bass of m. 73 can also be seen as the upper-fifth of F-sharp that unfolds to an F-sharp chord in m. 107 (Appendix D). This unfolding would read the D-flat/C-sharp as the main note of prolongation, as Lewis shows in his analysis of the second episode. D-natural, then, would take on the role as the upper-neighbor to C-sharp until the D sonority in m. 107. The very character of this symphony and the way it is constructed beckons such multiple interpretations, evoking a sense of surrealism.

The revelation of the suppressed cadence in my original analysis brought about my final disagreement with the reading of Lewis in regards to the form of the piece. Lewis refers to the form of the Adagio as a simple five-part rondo.\(^47\) However, the two B sections (he refers to them as episodes) do not really exist as independent entities. The first is more of a prolonged upper neighbor to D-flat, but it does have contrasting motivic qualities and a new tonal focus. The second exists on an even lower level as part of a suppressed cadence; an idea within a larger

\(^47\) Ibid., 105.
section. Since the boundaries of those sections are blurred, or in some cases do not even really exist, Lewis’s rondo interpretation is open to question. In that case, what exactly is the form?

One possible explanation of the form could be ternary, in which the suppression area serves as the B section. Of course, this interpretation is problematic because the suppression does not function as an independent section. Another possible label for the form of the piece, then, is perhaps “through-composed,” as the music is fairly continuous and non-sectional. The idea is not to create polar sections, but rather the journey of one note, D-flat, and its relationship with D-natural. Like any relationship, it evolves and changes and becomes more complex.

Ultimately I concluded that the best descriptor for the form of this piece is strophic variation, whereby the variations in their entirety can be understood to play out a large-scale antecedent-consequent structure. The antecedent consists of the original presentation in m. 3, the first strophe in m. 17, the second strophe in m. 49, the third strophe in m. 56, the fourth strophe in m. 64—prolonged by the suppression area from mm. 73-107, and finally closed by the emphatic structural interruption in m. 119. The consequent, then, is introduced by the material from mm. 120-125, functioning similarly to the original introduction, and then consists of the fifth strophe in m. 126, the sixth strophe in m. 130, the seventh strophe in m. 138, and the coda in m. 145. The antecedent-consequent form is underpinned by a large-scale interruption structure, \(^3 \cdot ^2 \cdot ^2 \cdot ^1\). Appendix A presents this interpretation through a measure-by-measure analysis of the movement. I have no doubt that Mahler intended the form to be this potentially deceptive and complex due to the nature of the narrative. It seems as though Mahler wants to direct the listener toward a rondo interpretation, but then a closer hearing reveals strophic variation form underpinned by interruption—a form that also allows for the constant development of an idea. Another important factor to consider with regard to the form is that Mahler himself did not
designate this movement a *Rondo* or *Rondo-Finale*, as in his Fifth Symphony. When the form was clearly intended to be a rondo, as in the third movement of the Ninth, he named it a *Rondo-Burleske*. 
CLOSING THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is easy to imagine the meanings of this piece. What is difficult is knowing the meaning Mahler himself intended and that may never be possible. To make the best guess, one needs to consider the events in the last decade of his life as well as what the notes themselves say. In my analysis I have argued that there are meanings tied to the keys of D and D-flat major. D major is the tonic of the first movement, D-flat of the last. The overall arch of the Ninth is this half-step descent. I have ostensibly shown that D major plays an invaluable role in the Adagio, struggling for dominance against D-flat. What could this suggest?

At a most basic level, the logical interpretation is that this descent represents “death,” while D major corresponds to “life,” which could certainly be linked to and strengthen the farewell story. However, as Vera Micznik pointed out, music alone can hardly suggest a specific narrative unless guided by words of the composer. But perhaps something can be learned from an earlier work of Mahler’s: the Fifth Symphony. La Grange, on its composition, states:

…several of the works composed in the summer of 1901… were concerned with mourning and death. Mahler’s brother-in-law, Arnold Rosé, like Bruno Walter, clearly remembered the poignant remark Mahler made just after his haemorrhage in February of that year: ‘I lost a third of my blood that night. I shall certainly recover, but the illness will still have cost ten years of my life.’ Alma states that two movements of the Fifth Symphony were completed during that summer. Since the Funeral March is so clearly linked thematically to the Allegro which follows, it seems likely that it was written in the same year, together with the Scherzo and ‘Der Tamboursg’sell’, which it so much resembles in atmosphere and even thematically. According to Natalie’s reminiscences, Mahler completed the Scherzo first. It can thus be seen as a *Dankgesang eines Genesenen* (song of thanks of one restored to health) like the third movement of Beethoven’s Fifteenth Quartet. It is one of Mahler’s most optimistic compositions, breathing happiness and *joie de vivre*.\(^{48}\)

This is significant for a few reasons. The tonal scheme of the Fifth is a funeral march in C-sharp minor which moves through the second movement in A minor to the triumphant Scherzo in D major. The Adagietto in F major, supposedly a love song for Alma, is nestled between the

\(^{48}\) La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 2*, 799-800.
Scherzo and the Rondo-Finale, both of which are in D major. The simplest, and perhaps most obvious, narrative then would be: Mahler fell ill, nearly dying, but survived and lived; he finds and marries the love of his life and looks optimistically towards the future. Considering the circumstances and chronological order of Mahler’s own life at the time, this seems reasonable and completely feasible.

Its relationship to the Ninth is now apparent. In the Fifth, death, marked by the funeral march, is represented by C-sharp minor; and victory over this death is in the key of D major. The same half-step arch of the Ninth also frames the Fifth, only inverted. A logical step would be to assume the same tonal meanings for the Ninth, but is that the case? Is the Ninth simply about life in D major moving towards death in D-flat? It is possibly more profound than that, more than a mere farewell.

Twice in the Adagio Mahler quotes from his fourth Kindertotenlieder; the first from mm. 109-111 and the second from 162-170—and above the second quote Mahler inscribed “Lebt wol! Lebt wol!” on the draft score.[49] The English translation of the text from that quote is “They’ve only gone out walking to yonder heights!” There is no doubt that Mahler is saying farewell to his daughter Maria, who died a few years prior. But I believe the entire text of that song exudes perfectly the feeling of the Ninth:

I often think they’ve only gone out!
Soon they will be back home again!
It’s a lovely day! Oh, don’t be anxious!
They’re only taking a long walk.

Of course, they’ve only gone out
And will come home now.
Oh, don’t be anxious, it’s a lovely day!
They’ve only gone out walking to yonder heights!

They’ve only gone on ahead of us,
And won’t want to come home again!
We’ll catch up with them on yonder heights in the sunshine!
It’s a lovely day on yonder heights!\(^{50}\)

These words are not a sad farewell or a defeated resignation, but rather an optimistic view of the possibilities that lie ahead, even beyond death—albeit with moments of anxious uncertainty. And this is the problem with the typical account of the farewell story: that Mahler feared death or at the very least was overwhelmed by its possibility. Mahler, aware or not of his impending death, had a particular view of the afterlife and it is this that he tried to instill in the Ninth.

La Grange, on Mahler’s belief earlier in his life, states, “The Second Symphony expressed his faith in the afterlife, with man conquering inevitable death through his own effort on earth.”\(^{51}\) But even as late as 1908 there are correspondences which detail Mahler’s pantheistic convictions in reincarnation. From one of Mahler’s more favorable critics, Richard Specht:

Nevertheless, Mahler was a complete pantheist and a wholehearted believer in the doctrine of eternal reincarnation. …I don’t know what led up to it…, but I found myself making the following stupidly superficial and frivolous remark: “That does not interest me, for by then I shall have long ago disappeared; and when I reappear I shall not know anything about my earlier life.” There was a loud resounding crash which startled everybody and made the glasses jump and jangle! [Mahler said,] “How can a man like you make such a thoughtless remark! We all come back again, the whole of life only makes sense through this certainty, and it doesn’t matter in the slightest whether in a later stage of reincarnation we remember our earlier one. What matters is not the individual

\(^{50}\) Oft denk’ ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen!
Bald werden sie wieder nach Hause gelangen!
Der Tag ist schön! O sei nicht bang!
Sie machen nur einen weiten Gang.

Jawohl, sie sind nur ausgegangen
Und werden jetzt nach Hause gelangen.
O sei nicht bang, der Tag ist schön!
Sie machen nur den Gang zu jenen Höhn!

Sie sind uns nur vorausgegangen
Und werden nicht wieder nach Haus verlangen!
Wir holen sie ein auf jenen Höhn im Sonnenschein!
Der Tag ist schön auf jenen Höhn!

\(^{51}\) La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 4*, 482.
and his memories and pleasures, but only the great upward sweep to perfection, to the purification which progresses with every incarnation.\textsuperscript{52}

Mahler hints at a notion of life beyond death in the final bars of the symphony as the upper voice is unable to reach a definitive $\hat{1}$. Instead, as my analysis has shown, the Urlinie repeats $\hat{3}-\hat{2}$, each time interrupted and never reaching $\hat{1}$, but rather ending on $\hat{3}$. The absence of a descent to $\hat{1}$ illustrates Mahler’s belief in a continuation of life through the rejection of finality. For his own life, though, it is more than a hesitation to end; it is an unwillingness to let go—of life, youth, and perhaps even Alma. Mahler wants to live and love, but he realizes that those things are ultimately beyond his control.

Another possibility is that D major represents that control. D major strives for dominance, tries to sustain, but each time is subverted by D-flat. The most significant moment of this subversion is in m. 73 when the dominant of D major moves deceptively to D-flat instead. The expectations and reality—what actually occurs—do not correlate, similarly to events in Mahler’s own life: his position at the Vienna Opera, his daughter, and Alma. The suppression in the music possibly represents for Mahler that which has not gone according to plan. However, there is a tranquility in the music of D-flat, which suppresses D major.

Therefore, in my interpretation, the Adagio is a bridge between life and death or whatever may follow. They have become inseparable, their identities indistinguishable, at least to the main character of this story. Similar to a dream-like state, one cannot decipher what is real. Mahler is simply drifting between two stages, blurring the boundaries of each, until one cannot be determined from the other. Ambiguity can be seen in not only the duality of D-natural and D-flat, but also in the formal structure through suppression, deception, and eventually disintegration. Is this an interpretation of death or what it would be like to experience it? The ebb and flow of the

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 493.
duality eventually reveals that the Finale is not about a struggle, but rather acceptance. While death is inevitable, Mahler seems to suggest that it is not the end. Perhaps the duality has inverted. What was once death is now life, but rather, in a new direction.
Example 1: Introduction and the turn-motif from Mahler's Ninth Symphony, mm. 1-3.

Example 2: Excerpt from Wagner’s *Parsifal*; Suffering 2 by F. E. Kirby.

Example 3: Implication of A major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 7-9.

Example 4: Modal mixture foreshadowing from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 11-12.
Example 5a: Motto progression 1 from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 3-4.

Db: I V7 bVI I\(^6\) IV  
(V7/VI bVI/VI)

Example 5b: Motto progression 2 from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 7-8.
Example 6: Prolongation of A-flat from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 13-16.
Example 7: Introduction of D major chord as Neapolitan from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, m. 19.

Example 8: Disjunct octave motive and b₂ from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 23-25.
Example 9: Transition to C-sharp minor section and prevalence of D-natural from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 25-28.
Example 10a: Beginning of C-sharp minor section and dual analysis in C-sharp minor and D major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 28-31.
Example 10b: Continuation of C-sharp minor section and modulation to E major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 32-36.
Example 10c: Continuation of C-sharp minor section and modulation to A major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 40-43.
Example 10d: Continuation of C-sharp minor section and modulation back to D-flat major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 44-49.
Example 11: Mutation of motto progressions 1 and 2 from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 53-56.
Example 12: F-E-D motion from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 60-64.
Example 13: Motto progression 2 followed quickly by Neapolitan from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, m. 64-65.
Example 14: Motion to G major, deceptive motion from A dominant to D-flat major, and beginning of suppression from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 69-73.
Example 15: Beginning of second C-sharp minor section and dual analysis in C-sharp minor and D major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 88-92.
Example 16a: Dual analysis in D major and G major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 94-97.
Example 16b: Dual analysis in D major and G major continued from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 98-101.
Example 17: Descent from C-sharp to D in the oboe from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 104-107.

Example 18a: End of suppression, prolongation of IV, and continuation of the 4th strophe from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 107-110.
Example 18b: Continuation of the 4th strophe from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 111-114.
Example 18c: Ending of the 4th strophe from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 115-117.
Example 18d: Transition to Consequent and introductory motive from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 122-126.
Example 19a: The 5th strophe and modulation to A major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 126-128.
Example 19b: Modulation back to A major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 129-131.
Example 19c: Modulation back to D-flat and suppressed D major cadence from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 132-134.
Example 20: Motto progression 2 followed by modulation to F major from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 138-141.
Example 21: Modulation to D-flat and the two “crises” chords from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 142-145.
Example 22: A brief return to the A major sonority from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 153-158.
Example 23: Neapolitan chord with E-double-flat rather than D-natural from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 166-167.
Example 24: The end with $\hat{3}$ in the upper voice from Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, mm. 181-185.
APPENDIX A

FULL SCHENKERIAN ANALYSIS
Antecedent

Ninth Symphony - Adagio

Original Presentation
APPENDIX B

ALTERNATE-ONE FOR FIRST C-SHARP MINOR SECTION
APPENDIX C

ALTERNATE-TWO FOR FIRST C-SHARP MINOR SECTION
APPENDIX D

ALTERNATE FOR SECOND C-SHARP MINOR SECTION
REFERENCE LIST


