

## Featured Essay

### Mahler's Saints: Medieval Devotional Figures and Their Transformation in Mahler's Symphonies

by Salvatore Calomino

Er sagte auch, es trage die Gesichtszüge der heiligen Ursula ... Und als ich ihn fragte, ob er über die Heilige etwas wisse und ihre Legende kenne, sagte er: "Nein; sonst wäre ich gewiß nicht imstande und in der Stimmung gewesen, mir ein so bestimmtes und herrliches Bild von ihr zu machen."

["He also said that it bore the features of St Ursula ... And when I asked him whether he knew anything about the saint and was familiar with her legend, he answered: 'No; otherwise I should never have been able, or been in the mood, to paint such a clear and splendid picture of her in my imagination.'"]<sup>1</sup>

When asked by Natalie Bauer-Lechner during a conversation on his Fourth Symphony in Summer 1900, if he were familiar with the legend of St. Ursula, Gustav Mahler responded – as noted above – with what might be considered indifference to the devotional legends attached traditionally to *vitae* of this saint. Indeed, Bauer-Lechner's reminiscences indicate further that Mahler's own conception of the saint was guided, in his words, by personal association and by creative imagination. The legend of St. Ursula and the 11,000 virgins is indeed cited in the fourth movement of the symphony in which Mahler set the *Wunderhorn* song "Das himmlische Leben" as a textual base.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, associations with the figure of Ursula led the composer to call on specific images of the saint in his elaboration on the third movement, or *Andante*, in which he sensed the ambivalent effect of both laughter and tears: "Es geht eine göttlich heitere und tief traurige Melodie durch das Ganze, daß ihr dabei nur lachen und weinen werdet' ... Einmal nannte er das *Andante* auch das Lächeln der heiligen Ursula und sagte, daß ihm dabei aus der Kindheit das mit tiefer Traurigkeit und wie durch Tränen lachende Antlitz seiner Mutter vorschwebte, die auch unendlich gelitten, aber alles immer liebend aufgelöst und vergeben habe." ["A divinely serene, yet profoundly sad melody runs through it, that can only have you laughing and crying at the same time' ... Another time, he called the *Andante* 'das Lächeln der heiligen Ursula' ['St Ursula's smile'], and said that in it his mother's

face, recalled from childhood, had hovered before his mind's eye: sad and yet laughing, as if through tears. For she, too, had suffered endlessly, but had always resolved everything in love and forgiveness."]<sup>3</sup> Interpretations of the Fourth Symphony have confirmed the significance of "Das himmlische Leben" for the preceding three movements as well as Mahler's successful incorporation of motifs from the song-finale to achieve "a level of integration without parallel in his earlier music."<sup>4</sup> In addition to such compositional integration, it is noteworthy in the above quotes that Mahler drew on a saint's image – and his own specific associations with that devotional persona – in order to comment on the intended effect of an earlier, instrumental movement. It is clear from recollections of the composer's statements that such associations formed a significant aesthetic outlet for the emotions that he saw embodied in the *vita* or martyrdom of an individual saint. Given this personal point of reference, which was transformed by Mahler through compositional inspiration, we may ask after the relevance and depiction of other saints or devotional figures throughout the composer's oeuvre.

The text of "Das himmlische Leben" contains, to be sure, the most plentiful incidence of saints to be found in Mahler's orchestral works, yet we may reckon with examples of additional saints or divine spirits in both his symphonic and lyric output. Among those to be considered in the present essay the roster of saints cited in the Fourth Symphony includes, in addition to Ursula and her co-martyrs, Peter (twice), John the Baptist, Luke, Martha, and Cäcilia. Important as well for our topic is Mahler's setting in his Third Symphony of the *Wunderhorn* song "Es sungen drei Engel," both for its evocation of St. Peter and for the declarative angels of the title.<sup>5</sup> A direct treatment of a sainted character is noted in the song "Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt," also based on a text from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, in this case Mahler's only individual lyrical composition which contains a central, hagiographic figure.<sup>6</sup> In subsequent conversations on St. Anthony, and his alleged, trying experiences while preaching, Mahler compared the saint's difficulties to his own frustrations as a conductor who must work without attention or recognition from his audience.<sup>7</sup> Embodiments of both saint and angel as spiritual forces are registered in different movements of Mahler's Second Symphony. The angelic figure surfaces in Mahler's setting of the *Wunderhorn* poem "Urlicht" in the fourth movement of the Symphony. Here, in the first of two successive movements with a textual base in the Second Symphony, the lyrical "I" strives toward reunion with the divinity and heaven. As a response to this wish, an "Engelein" ("angel") attempts to dissuade the human spirit from its longing to return to an original state of blessedness. Finally, in the third movement of the same work – the Scherzo of the Second Symphony marked "In ruhig fließender

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Killian, ed. *Gustav Mahler in den Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner. Mit Anmerkungen und Erklärungen von Knud Martner. Revidierte und erweiterte Ausgabe.* (Hamburg: Karl Dieter Wagner, 1984), p. 163; Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections of Gustav Mahler.* Trans. Dika Newlin, ed. Peter Franklin. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Band IV: Symphonie Nr. 4, in vier Sätzen für großes Orchester und Sopran-Solo. Partitur*, ed. Erwin Ratz (Wien: Universal Edition, 1963); for the most extensive critical study on Mahler's Fourth Symphony, including fundamental bibliographical information, see James L. Zychowicz, *Mahler's Fourth Symphony*, Studies in Musical Genesis and Structure (2000; Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); a useful summary of the legend of Ursula may be consulted in Hiltgart L. Keller, *Reclams Lexikon der Heiligen und biblischen Gestalten: Legende und Darstellung in der bildenden Kunst*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), pp. 556-59; representative texts of "Ursula and the 11,000 virgins" include the redaction in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), vol. II, "The Eleven Thousand Virgins," pp. 256-60; further, a translation of the *Passio* of St. Ursula, in a late redaction from ca. 1100, in Mary-Ann Stouck, ed. *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures: IV (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1999), pp. 518-33; both texts here cited highlight either as a heading or part of the text the concept of Ursula's numerous companion martyrs.

<sup>3</sup> Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, p. 163; Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, pp. 152-53; this conversation on associations with St. Ursula is also discussed in the section on Mahler's Fourth Symphony in Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Mahler: A Biography, Vol. I* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 581-82.

<sup>4</sup> Zychowicz, *Mahler's Fourth Symphony*, pp. 18-25, here p. 19; see also Donald Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler, The Wunderhorn Years: Chronicles and Commentaries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), p. 311; Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, pp. 197-98; Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, pp. 177-78.

<sup>5</sup> Zychowicz, *Mahler's Fourth Symphony*, pp. 40-53; Peter Franklin, *Mahler: Symphonie No. 3*, Cambridge Music Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 68-71; Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler, The Wunderhorn Years*, pp. 129-32; de La Grange, *Mahler, Vol. I*, pp. 376-77.

<sup>6</sup> On Mahler's songs see most recently James L. Zychowicz, "The Lieder of Mahler and Richard Strauss," in James Parsons, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 245-72, here esp. pp. 245, 255-57.

<sup>7</sup> Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, pp. 30-31; Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, pp. 34-35.

Bewegung" -- Mahler's instrumental writing echoes and expands on the music he had composed earlier for the above-mentioned song "Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt." When asked by Bauer-Lechner on the process by which the song's musical essence was transformed into the expansive symphonic movement, Mahler commented on the indefinable, driven aspect of inspiration in composing the music.<sup>8</sup> In yet another contemporary discussion on that very Scherzo, he described the creative impulse in similar terms, here using directly the religious concept of a mystical experience.<sup>9</sup> Mahler's remarks to Bauer-Lechner at this stage of his work on the Second Symphony indicate an urge to compose associated with an uplifting, inspirational force; the evocation of sainted and divine figures in texts of the symphonies from this period suggests further, even when transformed at an ironic distance, a decided upward movement of the soul.

From Mahler's various poetic sources it is clear that saints and heavenly spirits are named or cited only in texts that derive from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* -- whether the settings chosen for these texts be symphonic or lyric. Such figures of spiritual importance do not surface in Mahler's settings of vocal texts from other poetic sources, e.g. the lyrics of Friedrich Rückert.<sup>10</sup> An exception to Mahler's exclusive use of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* for figures of holiness is, of course, his adaptation in the Eighth Symphony of the final scene from Goethe's *Faust, Der Tragödie zweiter Teil*.<sup>11</sup> Here an implied saintliness, or sainthood by association, affects both the anchoritic fathers and several of the female characters. Possible blessed and hagiographic correspondences to the anchorites and holy fathers include, for Pater Ecstaticus, Saint Anthony, the mystic Jan von Ruysbroeck, Saint Filippo Neri, and Saint Francis Xavier; for Pater Profundus, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux; for Pater Seraphicus, omitted by Mahler in his setting, Saint Francis of Assisi; for Dr. Marianus, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux as well as Saint Anselm of Canterbury, Saint Jerome, and Duns Scotus. In addition, early anchoritic fathers in the Thebaid included the Saints Paul of Thebes, Anthony of Egypt, and

<sup>8</sup> "Es ist ein seltsamer Vorgang! Ohne daß man anfangs weiß, wohin es führt, fühlt man sich immer weiter und weiter über die ursprüngliche Form hinaus getrieben, deren reicher Gehalt doch, wie die Pflanze im Samenkorn, unbewußt in ihr verborgen lag." in Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, p. 27 ["It's a strange process! Without knowing at first where it's leading, you find yourself pushed further and further beyond the bounds of the original form, whose potentialities lay hidden within it like the plant within the seed." in Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, p. 32].

<sup>9</sup> "Das Schaffen und die Entstehung eines Werkes sind mystisch vom Anfang bis zum Ende, da man, sich selbst unbewußt, wie durch fremde Eingebung etwas machen muß, von dem man nachher kaum begreift, wie es geworden ist." in Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, p. 26 ["The inception and creation of a work are mystical from beginning to end; unconsciously, as if in the grip of a command from outside oneself, one is compelled to create something whose origin one can scarcely comprehend afterwards." in Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, pp. 30-31].]

<sup>10</sup> On poetic sources for Mahler's songs, see Zychowicz, "Lieder of Mahler and Strauss," esp. pp. 247-61; see further Renate Hilmar-Voit, *Im Wunderhorn-Ton: Gustav Mahlers sprachliches Kompositionsmaterial bis 1900* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Texte*, ed. Albrecht Schöne (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1999), *Der Tragödie zweiter Teil*, V. Akt, "Bergschluchten, Wald, Fels," pp. 456-64; recent studies on Mahler's process of adaptation of this final scene from Goethe's *Faust II* in his Eighth Symphony include Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Vol. 3. Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion [1904-1907]* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 895-932; Christian Wildhagen, *Die 'Achte Symphonie' von Gustav Mahler: Konzeption einer universalen Symphonik* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), esp. pp. 263-75, 303-44; Salvatore Calomino, "Depiction of the Anchorites in Mahler's Eighth Symphony," *Naturlaut* 3,4 (2005): 2-6; Eftychia Papanikolaou "The Religious Impulse in Schumann's and Mahler's Settings of Goethe's *Faust*," *Naturlaut* 4,2 (2005): 11-15.

Onouphrios.<sup>12</sup> Reflexes for the female characters, or group of penitent women, in the final scene adapted from Goethe include figures in the gospels of Luke and John for the Magna Peccatrix and Mulier Samaritana respectively; the legendary penitence of St. Mary the Egyptian, Maria Aegyptiaca, concludes the group and establishes a geographic connection to the anchoritic fathers.<sup>13</sup> The various blessed and penitent figures contribute to a concluding structure through which angels, acting as intermediaries, transport the remains of Faust heavenward. In this symphonic apotheosis, or "universale Symphonik" as recently termed, devotional figures -- saintly fathers and blessed penitents alternating with angels -- form a vertical frame culminating in a final view of the Mater Gloriosa.<sup>14</sup>

The association of saints and angels, or the angelic, speaks for a further consideration of figures imbued with exalted spirituality in Mahler's chosen texts. Here it is useful to isolate both theological differences and similarities. On the one hand, angels are in their essence to be reckoned as ethereal beings, having been granted their supernatural status already when created by the divinity. By contrast, saints are credited with achieving an exalted level of spirituality after having surpassed a transitional human existence.<sup>15</sup> Significant points of similarity should, however, here be stressed as well. Both saints and angels can be supplicated, or prayed to, for protection or assistance, just as either figure may be associated with specific attributes. Some archangels, just as saints, are venerated on a specific feast day and are, likewise, invested with properties of intervention.<sup>16</sup> For the texts set by Mahler, especially in the symphonies, saints -- or sainted beings -- and angels appear interwoven in their roles and will be given parallel consideration in this discussion.

As an example of such confluence of spiritual types, the text of "Das himmlische Leben" in the Fourth Symphony yields a synthesis of particular note. The lyrical voice experiencing "die himmlischen Freuden" ["heavenly joys"] at the start of the text declares further in the opening stanza, "Wir führen ein englisches Leben." ["We are leading an angelic existence"] Not only is this angelic life associated

<sup>12</sup> Further considerations on hagiographic relations for the anchoritic fathers may be consulted in Goethe, *Faust: Der Tragödie erster und zweiter Teil*, ed. Erich Trunz. (München: C.H. Beck, 1972), pp. 626-31; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Kommentare*, ed. Albrecht Schöne (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1999), "Erläuterungen," *Der Tragödie zweiter Teil*, pp. 796-805; Calomino, "Depiction of the Anchorites," pp. 3-6; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Walter Arndt, ed. Cyrus Hamlin (New York/London: Norton, 2001), pp. 485-87.

<sup>13</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Trunz, pp. 634-35; Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Schöne, pp. 806-09; Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Hamlin, pp. 487-89.

<sup>14</sup> See Wildhagen, *Die 'Achte Symphonie' von Gustav Mahler*, 201-33, 268-75; Calomino, "Depiction of the Anchorites," pp. 4-6.

<sup>15</sup> For useful definitions of sainthood and devotional types, see esp. the introductory chapters in Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Saints: From Mary and St. Francis of Assisi to John XXIII and Mother Teresa* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001), pp. 1-54; see further, Michael Walsh, ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints. Concise Edition, Revised and Updated* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991); Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. pp. 1-39; see further individual links at "Saints and Angels." Web Page. <http://www.catholic.org/saints/> and "Angels." Web Page. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01476d.htm>>, both last accessed on 27 October 2006.

<sup>16</sup> See for instance traditional references to the archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael for 29 September (during the liturgical year) and to Guardian Angels for 2 October (during the liturgical year) in McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, pp. 395-96, 401; further Rosa Giorgi, *Angels and Demons in Art*, ed. Stefano Zuffi, trans. Rosanna M. Giammanco Frongia (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2005).

with the child-like innocence of the lyrical “we,” but also the celestial spirits act together with and share duties as companions to the saints enumerated in the song’s roster or collection. The provision and preparation of sustenance is assigned to male and female saints, just as angels are credited with baking bread to accompany the wine [“Die Englein, die backen das Brot” (“Angels bake the bread”)] In the final division and topic of the song – a description of music in the heavenly sphere – the joy of this transformed life is celebrated and performed by both saint and angel. Saint Ursula and the accompanying virgins appreciate the music variously, while Cecilia and her cohort are characterized as musicians of this elevated court [“Hofmusikanten”]. As concluded by Zychowicz, “This kind of heaven does not lack for music, since the saints themselves provide it.”<sup>17</sup> The final lines of the text detail a joyful appreciation of the heavenly music, in which the voices of sainted participation are referred to conclusively as “angelic” [“die englischen Stimmen”]. This ultimate gesture reinforces a symbiosis of divine types, of saint and angel, tied to all aspects of special existence within “Das himmlische Leben.”

Since many of the songs in the voluminous collection edited and published by Brentano and Arnim under the title *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*<sup>18</sup> deal with or feature the characters of saints and related spiritual figures, we should ask after Mahler’s potential motivations for choosing the poems that he used as individual song-texts in the symphonies or in other contexts. While it may not be possible to isolate specific reasons, we can trace predominant or recurring themes throughout the poems used in the symphonies of the *Wunderhorn* group.<sup>19</sup> For instance, a consistent movement upward is associated with yearning toward a more desirable life, or with return to a previous state of sanctity. Already in the text of “Ulrich” in the Second Symphony we can appreciate the human suffering of an individual who would prefer to exist in heaven, or as formulated, in the company of God. A positive sense of determination to reach this blessedness concludes the poetic text. Such longing is transformed by the time of the Fourth Symphony into a state of perfection, as the upward salvation has indeed been achieved. The musical voices celebrating heavenly existence, as noted earlier, can thus revel in sainted and angelic company. A further recurring theme, which may also be applied to later work by Mahler, is one of forgiveness. The transgressions of man, extended as well to the figure of Saint Peter, cry out in search of forgiveness in the song “Es sungen drei Engel” as set in the Third Symphony. Here the sins of Peter are announced as forgiven, yet mankind’s sinful nature reaches toward a model of remission. Reassurance is then given by Christ that belief and love of God are sufficient to redirect the individual toward ultimate heavenly joy. Again, that bliss -- or “Seeligkeit,” as emphasized at the close of “Es sungen drei Engel” -- is established as a given already at the start of the text set later as the conclusion to the Fourth Symphony, “Das himmlische Leben.” As a summary we may project a thematic complex of salvation, of movement upward toward heavenly bliss, as well as the clear possibility of forgiveness. This devotional complex resonates structurally and thematically once again in Mahler’s Eighth Symphony: here the immortal remains of Faust are transported upward by a group of angels through the mountain gorges dedicated to the ascetic penitence of the blessed anchorites. Since the latter figures have decided hagiographic associations, it is clear that Mahler later returned to the juncture of forgiveness and salvation through the medium of saints and spiritual figures. Although such parallels to the Eighth Symphony signal a departure from our examination of the *Wunderhorn* texts and their specific use by Mahler, those points of both interest and thematic similarity suggest an extended trajectory of religious motifs surfacing in later symphonic compositions as well. In

much the same vein, Zychowicz has discussed the predominance and recurrence of the “Ewigkeit” motif in Mahler’s Second, Fourth, and Eighth Symphonies in the composer’s attempt “to depict the life to come” and his “programmatic depiction of Faust’s entry into heaven.”<sup>20</sup>

Aside from a passing reference to Saint Urgel in the libretto of *Die drei Pintos*, Mahler’s remaining interest in hagiographic legend receives comment by Bauer-Lechner in the figure of Saint Elisabeth. Liszt’s oratorio based on the vita of this saint preoccupied Mahler for its dramatic potential. According to Bauer-Lechner’s memoirs, Mahler stated that the oratorio was heard to best effect when given a staged performance, since the music – despite its appeal – would otherwise drift into the realm of the atmospheric.<sup>21</sup> The legend of Saint Elisabeth fits well into Mahler’s comparable choice of text featuring devotional characters. All are the object of prayer or associations with individuals designated as innocent or filled with the desire for remission of guilt. The goal of this child-like state may be achieved or maintained through the veneration of saints and other figures imbued with spiritual gifts. In that sense, the individual saints chosen are indicative of an ecstatic rather than dogmatic Catholicism: in the type of devotion here intended, prayer is often directed toward a theological mystery or particular grace associated with a holy entity.

Although the incidence of blessed figures in the *Wunderhorn* poems may give rise to even further speculation concerning their particular selection, of greater significance for our topic is Mahler’s actual treatment or creative use of the texts he chose. The poetry is, of course, not simply set unchanged to music: Mahler’s adaptations in each instance demonstrate an individual voice, in effect, absorbing the text into his composition and reinvigorating the devotional lives or scenes represented. Some texts are combined with poems of provenance other than the *Wunderhorn* collections. In both the Second and Third Symphonies “Ulrich” and “Es sungen drei Engel” are transformed not only by the music in their designated movements, but also because preceding or succeeding movements draw on essentially different texts as their base. The effect of this juncture as a poetic and musical result can be argued for either vocal movement, that is, either Mahler’s setting of the *Wunderhorn* text or his treatment of the accompanying poem from a different source. In addition to such considerations of symbiosis within a work, some texts set by Mahler are noticeably shortened. Mahler’s version of “Das himmlische Leben,” cited for its numerous hagiographic characters, indeed drops one significant figure and introduces distinctive repetition elsewhere for emphasis. Finally, the possibility of deletion or change introduced into a seemingly canonical work, here the adaptation of *Faust II* in Mahler’s Eighth Symphony, leads further to questions of textual authority informed by a distinct musical language. In the balance of this essay we shall examine the devotional figures in several of these texts as filtered through Mahler’s compositional voice and further determine how these have indeed become Mahler’s saints.

The types of saints featured in poetry set by Mahler, and various attributes associated with the *vitae* of these figures, give one indication of Mahler’s interest in devotional theology. At the same time, we should ask if these figures are best seen in terms of comparison or whether a conspicuous progression could lead to a more thorough understanding. For instance, Saint Peter as a dominant image figures in the vocal texts used in both the Third and Fourth Symphonies. Yet the characteristics of Saint Peter emphasized in both texts differ sufficiently, such that a comparison could yield the possibility of two distinct depictions. Since Mahler himself spoke of the Symphonies One through Four as a “self-contained tetralogy,” the expectations of

<sup>17</sup> Zychowicz, *Mahler’s Fourth Symphony*, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> Achim von Arnim und Clemens Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte deutsche Lieder*, 3 vols., ed. Heinz Rölleke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987); all further references to individual songs from the collection will be to this edition.

<sup>19</sup> Further projections of thematic groupings for the songs may be found in Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler, The Wunderhorn Years*, pp. 127-48; Zychowicz, “Lieder of Mahler and Strauss,” esp. pp. 247-61; Hilmar-Voit, *Im Wunderhorn-Ton*, p. 55ff.

<sup>20</sup> Zychowicz, *Mahler’s Fourth Symphony*, pp. 25-27; on the theme of “Ewigkeit,” see further James L. Zychowicz, “Gustav Mahler’s Motives and Motivation in his “Resurrection” Symphony: The Apotheosis of Hans Rott,” in *For the Love of Music: Festschrift in Honor of Theodore Front on his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. Darwin F. Scott (Lucca: Antiqua, 2002), pp. 137-63.

<sup>21</sup> Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, p. 201; Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, pp. 181-82; see also de La Grange, *Mahler, Vol. I*, pp. 602-03.

variability and synthesis are built into such a concept.<sup>22</sup> In his discussions with Bauer-Lechner Mahler emphasized this ideal and the importance of the Fourth Symphony as not only an end-point, but also as an integral part of a larger synthesis and as a summation of what had come before.<sup>23</sup> Given that our focus remains the presence and significance of blessed figures in vocal texts set by Mahler, the segment of his tetralogy comprising Symphonies Two through Four will provide appropriate evidence from the orchestral works. Since the final setting in this group of poems from the *Wunderhorn* collection, "Das himmlische Leben" in the Fourth Symphony, concludes distinctively with a dual evocation of heavenly music related to two individual saints, we may consider the ultimate significance of this setting and its themes for Mahler's preoccupation with sainthood and salvation.

As an introduction to the roster of saints and their activities in "Das himmlische Leben," the child-like declaration of heavenly joy ("die himmlischen Freuden") sets a dominant tone. Although the devotional figures presented, both male and female, are variously associated in the Christian liturgy and popular devotional imagination with suffering and martyrdom, they have become here attached to a life "full of peace" as part of a "child's paradise."<sup>24</sup> Mahler emphasized this joy and innocence further in his change of the poem's title from "Der Himmel hängt voll Geigen" ["The world through rose-colored glasses"] to the more directly descriptive "Das himmlische Leben."<sup>25</sup> Once the avowedly child-like movements of joy associated with the angelic are enumerated in the opening ("tanzen," "hüpfen," "sitzen" ["dance," "skip," "sit"]), the description of saints begins. Of note in the balance of the poetic voice and the devotional figures described is the predominant lyrical "we." Although a single soprano voice, in Mahler's setting, performs the song, the voice sings for a plural population enjoying heavenly bliss. The voice is thus representative of the "we," associated with children, and reminiscent of the Holy Innocents and all those welcomed into the joy of heavenly existence.<sup>26</sup> Previous suffering has been transcended or, where possible, replaced with a more joyous image or association. Hence the voice of "we" can now proclaim innocence and bliss, while under the watchful eye of Saint Peter, traditional keeper of the keys to heaven.<sup>27</sup> In that sense, "Das himmlische Leben" here represents a domicile where earlier examples of pain are ameliorated into a happy or neutral depiction. In the list of saints or Biblical figures that continues, Peter enjoys an appropriate first position, signaling apostolic primacy as well. He is followed in the poem first by other male figures, here associated in various theological

manners with sacrifice. In this segment of the poem's enumeration John the Baptist and Luke appear in first and last position surrounding the named *Metzger*, or "butcher," Herodes and the *wir*, or "we" again from the introductory verses. John, as named, may be identified as John the Baptist, who is accorded various feast days throughout the liturgical year in keeping with his birth and martyrdom.<sup>28</sup> John's main iconographic attribute is the lamb, associated with Christ and sacrifice (text in "Das himmlische Leben": "Johannes das Lämmlein auslasst" ["John lets go the little lamb"]). According to the gospel of John the Evangelist (John 1:29), John the Baptist declared upon seeing Christ, "Behold the Lamb of God," and has thus been featured with the corresponding symbol. At the other end of this list of male figures Luke is portrayed as slaying the ox, again a theological interpretation imbued with the concept of sacrifice.<sup>29</sup> (text in "Das himmlische Leben": "Sankt Lukas den Ochsen tät schlachten" ["Saint Luke is slaughtering the ox"]). Luke, the collaborator of Paul the Apostle, is author of the third gospel as well as the Acts of the Apostles. He is traditionally depicted with an ox, a symbol derived from 1) the opening of his gospel detailing the sacrifice of Zechariah, or 2) the Temple sacrifice related in his gospel together with the Nativity. After mention of the figure of Herod, the evocation of the lyrical "we" is now associated with sacrifice ("Wir führen ein liebliches Lämmlein zu Tod" ["We are leading a dear young lamb to death"]). On the one hand, the textual proximity of the children to Herod again recalls the story of the Holy Innocents and their slaughter in the wake of Christ's birth. At the same time, they may be taken in a more expanded Christian context as beings who have lived an earthly existence and indeed been exposed to sin, before they have achieved the blessed forgiveness of heavenly life.

The latter part of "Das himmlische Leben" draws on the *vitae* of several female saints, at least one of which has shown significant modification over time. After the assignment of culinary duties to Saint Martha, the topic is transformed to heavenly music in the last dozen verses or so of the song. The 11,000 virgins, companions and martyrs together with Saint Ursula, feel inspired to dance, just as the saint herself is depicted as caught up in laughter. Associations of Ursula with a brave reaction in the face of suffering and in the company of so many attendants derive from early attempts to codify her *vita*.<sup>30</sup> Ursula's alleged biography, linked to Köln after the discovery there in the eighth century of relics thought to be those of numerous young martyred women, identifies her as the daughter of a fourth- or fifth-century British ruler. Although her father was Christian, Ursula was espoused to the son of a pagan king. She consented to the marriage only on the condition that she be allowed first to make a pilgrimage to Rome with her handmaidens. During the same time her future husband Aetherius, it was hoped, would receive instruction in the Christian faith and consent to baptism. Ursula set out for Rome with ten noble handmaidens, each of these – including Ursula – accompanied by 1000 virgin attendants. At the first stop on her journey, in Köln, Ursula experienced an angelic vision: her future martyrdom, together with that of her companions, was prophesied.<sup>31</sup> Saint Ursula was generally

<sup>22</sup> Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, p. 164; Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, p. 154; Zychowicz, *Mahler's Fourth Symphony*, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, pp. 162-64; Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, pp. 152-54.

<sup>24</sup> Zychowicz, *Mahler's Fourth Symphony*, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> The original poem, "Der Himmel hängt voll Geigen," described as a Bavarian folk-song, appeared in vol. I of Arnim/Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, # 1304, pp. 275-77.

<sup>26</sup> The Holy Innocents, whose feast day is observed in the Roman Church on 28 December, were put to death at the order of King Herod, when the Magi failed to return to his court with accurate information on the birthplace of the Messiah; on their significance, gospel accounts, and feast day, see esp. McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, pp. 522-23; Walsh, ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints. Concise Edition*, p. 454; Rosa Giorgi, *Saints in Art*, ed. Stefano Zuffi, trans. Thomas Michael Hartmann (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), pp. 167-68; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. I, pp. 56-59.

<sup>27</sup> McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, pp. 261-64; Walsh, ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints. Concise Edition*, pp. 197-99; Giorgi, *Saints in Art*, pp. 297-310; Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Haskell Lectures on History of Religions, N.S., No. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), here esp. pp. 87-88; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. I, pp. 340-50.

<sup>28</sup> McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, pp. 256-57, 353-54; Walsh, ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints. Concise Edition*, p. 454; Giorgi, *Saints in Art*, pp. 188-96; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. I, pp. 328-36, vol. II, pp. 132-40.

<sup>29</sup> McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, pp. 428-29; Walsh, ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints. Concise Edition*, p. 342; Giorgi, *Saints in Art*, pp. 234-35; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. II, pp. 247-54.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to sources on St. Ursula given above, see further McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, p. 89; Giorgi, *Saints in Art*, pp. 355-59; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. II, pp. 256-60; additional information and useful data may also be consulted at the web page <http://www.catholic-forum.com/saintS/saintu01.htm>, last accessed on 27 October 2006.

<sup>31</sup> According to varying extant sources, Ursula indeed journeyed further to Rome and impressed the reputed Pope Cyriacus to the degree that he resolved to resign his office and return with her to Köln. When Ursula and her companions, in the company of Cyriacus, arrived in

depicted wearing a large cape in the pose of protecting her handmaidens. Already here several elements typical in the iconographic representation of Ursula's significance can be understood for their potential in the popular imagination. Ursula's protective gesture and stoic resolve in the face of pain are indeed related to the concept of a sheltering and positive spirit, much as Mahler had confessed to Bauer-Lechner his personal conception of Ursula's significance. The revelation delivered to Ursula through the medium of an angel, also at times shown in pictorial representation, ties her further in the conclusion to "Das himmlische Leben" to those angelic voices performing the music. Twice in this segment of the poem the ethereal, heavenly nature of music is related, the second instance in praise of Saint Cecilia and her companions. These are directly credited with production of a music without parallel, one having an effect on all the denizens of heaven. The association of Saint Cecilia with music and her designation as the patron saint of musicians, poets, and singers developed only gradually through the medieval period.<sup>32</sup> Various accounts of Cecilia's life, starting with an early sixth-century *Passio Sanctae Caeciliae*, followed much later by the revisions of Jacobus de Voragine in his *Legenda aurea*, associate her with the city of Rome and with a refusal to sacrifice to the pagan gods.<sup>33</sup> Early medieval stories of Cecilia's life relate her betrothal to the young patrician Valerian, and to the turning-point which took place on their wedding day. After the ceremony Cecilia revealed to her husband that her virginity was protected by an angel of God; further, if Valerian truly believed and was baptized, he would be able to see the angel. Once this took place, Tiburtius, brother of the bridegroom, converted as well. Both young men respected Cecilia's wishes and became active in tending to the needs of other Christians. They were themselves martyred upon discovery of their conversion, Cecilia being left to confront persecution with the support of Pope Urban. Upon repeated questioning by the Roman prefect Almachius, Cecilia was condemned to be suffocated or burned in her bath at home. Miracles prevented harm to her mortal body, so that decapitation was next ordered. Cecilia remained alive after two blows to the head, the final stroke causing death only after the maiden could make provisions for dispensing her property to Christians. From this brief description we may note similarities to the vita of Ursula: the association with a benevolent angel, consistent resolve in the face of adversity, and recurrent suffering represented by the symbol of martyrdom. Yet the graphic depiction of Cecilia's execution did not remain a predominant image. Starting at least in the early fourteenth century Cecilia is shown with a musical instrument, or in some fashion associated with musical performance.<sup>34</sup> The earliest biographies of Cecilia had indeed stressed a connection to music at her wedding feast: while instruments were playing, the maiden sang in her heart to God and asked for protection ("*cantantibus organis*"). This element gradually came to overshadow other more detailed aspects of the saint's martyrdom, so that later medieval iconography of Cecilia emphasized primarily her relation via music to the divinity. The connection of both female saints -- Ursula and Cecilia -- to the heavenly music is underlined by Mahler in his adaptation of the text. The two verses "Kein Musik ist ja nicht auf Erden, / Die unsrer verglichen kann werden" ["There is no music on earth, / which can be compared with ours"] preceded originally in the

Köln, the city was under siege by the Huns. The 11,000 were slain, Ursula being the last to suffer martyrdom after allegedly refusing to yield her person to Attila

<sup>32</sup> On Cecilia's relation to music, see most recently Henry Ansgar Kelly, "How Cecilia Came to be a Saint and Patron (Matron?) of Music," in *The Echo of Music: Essays in Honor of Maie Louise Göllner*, ed. Blair Sullivan (Warren, MI: Harmony Park Press, 2004), pp. 3-18.

<sup>33</sup> McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, pp. 471-72, in which both the early legend and later transfer of her remains is outlined; Walsh, ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints. Concise Edition*, p. 387-88; Giorgi, *Saints in Art*, pp. 83-84; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. II, pp. 318-23; additional and expansive information may be found at the web site <http://www.catholic-forum.com/SAINTS/ce001788.htm> The site was last accessed on 28 October 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Giorgi, *Saints in Art*, pp. 83-84, and Kelly, "How Cecilia Came to be a Saint and Patron (Matron?) of Music," esp. pp. 14-17.

version of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* only the evocation of Saint Ursula and her companions.<sup>35</sup> Mahler repeats the two verses after the laughter of Ursula and as a prelude to the mention of Cecilia and her musicians. In this way, he reinforces the earlier statement of the lyrical "we" together with both joy and the importance of music. The word "unsrer" is uttered not once, but twice in Mahler's conclusion, hence allowing the culmination of musical performance to remain also within the symbolic purview of Saint Cecilia. The positive associations of the innocent life with joy, music, and with the select attributes of two well-known saints conclude Mahler's adapted text.

Whereas female devotional figures are taken over by Mahler with one significant expansive change, the *Wunderhorn* text contains a male saint deleted by the composer. Mahler chose to excise two lines dealing with the fish available for the heavenly feast, as well as the following two lines in which the death of Saint Lawrence was described ("Sanct Lorenz hat müssen / Sein Leben einbüßen" ["Saint Lawrence had to forfeit his life"]). Although the transformations of emphasis in the *vitae* of Cecilia and Ursula do not exclude the concept of their martyrdom, descriptions of their death are not the only, or main, elements associated with their stories. In the case of Lawrence, who was a deacon of Pope Sixtus II in the third century, the manner of death and apocryphal tales of this execution remain strongly attached to the saint's legend and his iconography.<sup>36</sup> He was allegedly roasted on a gridiron over an open flame; when he had suffered sufficiently on one side, he asked his tormentors to turn him over so that he might be cooked properly on the other as well. Lawrence is traditionally shown beside or holding his gridiron, and iconography has thus retained the horrific elements of his torture. The summary statement on Lawrence omitted by Mahler indicates a forced sacrifice in which the instrument of martyrdom predominates. Despite the composure and devotion of the saint, he is still remembered and depicted most for the method of his death. Since the lyrical "we" of the opening verses have been shown to enjoy the heavenly life -- and to have transcended possible earlier associations with slaughter or sacrifice -- we can appreciate Mahler's deletion of the saint whose memory would call forth such direct images of suffering. By contrast, those saints retained by Mahler in the final strophe revel in music and joy without direct reference to death.

Mahler's setting of lines corresponding to individual blessed figures in "Das himmlische Leben" can be seen as an attempt at giving structure to the heavenly life. After the lyrical "we" describes its carefree, angelic existence and happy, skipping movements, Saint Peter is first described as watching ("Sankt Peter im Himmel sieht zu!" ["Saint Peter in heaven is looking on!"]). At this point in the score [Mvt. 4, Rehearsal #2], the tempo designation changes suddenly ("Plötzlich zurückhaltend" ["(tempo) suddenly retardando"]) as Saint Peter in his managerial capacity of the life in heaven observes its participants. This same gesture is used by Mahler here in two additional descriptions of domestic, heavenly activity. At the inclusion of angels as independent figures in the enterprise of heaven, they receive the task of baking bread to accompany the wine served without cost. ("Die Englein, die backen das Brot"). Their task [Mvt. 4, Rehearsal #6] is given the marking "wieder zurückhaltend," once more calling for a noticeable diminution in tempo. The final example of such a shift related to the domestic routine of heavenly life is applied to Saint Martha, proclaimed the main cook after a significant enumeration of foodstuffs: "Sankt Martha die Köchin muss sein." ["Saint Martha will have to be the cook"]. Here the marking of tempo [Mvt. 4, Rehearsal #10] as "wieder plötzlich zurückhaltend" ("again suddenly ritardando") is underlined further by Mahler's direction for repetition of the line. The depiction of the heavenly world is thus indicated through participation of blessed types with articulated points of emphasis. The fact that these roles and figures have their own structure and sets of rules is

<sup>35</sup> Arnim/Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, vol. I, # I 304, pp. 275-77.

<sup>36</sup> Details of the following may be consulted at see McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, pp. 322-23; Walsh, ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints. Concise Edition*, pp. 245-46; Giorgi, *Saints in Art*, pp. 219-22; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. II, pp. 63-74.

mirrored, at least in Mahler's conception, in the music accompanying the narration of mundane activities.

A further structural assessment should consider references to activity as well as to performance at either end of "Das himmlische Leben." As an indication of the strong correspondence between the lyrical "we" and the music delineated at the close of the text, several compositional gestures link the early and later voices. The declaration of an evocative heavenly bliss is emphasized from the start by a great melisma on the word "himmlisch" [Mvt. 4, Rehearsal #1], sung by the lyrical "we" in the opening line "Wir genießen die himmlischen Freuden." ["We are reveling in the joys of heavenly existence"]. The life of those celestial residents is an ideal of peacefulness, tempered by motion and music. At the return of the same expressive voice declaring participation toward the close of the text, an association with pertinent blessed figures is underlined by the musical setting. Now the saint's name "Ursula" is to be sung with the type of expressive melisma noted already for the introductory word "himmlisch" [here Mvt. 4, Rehearsal #13]. Further, the companions of Cecilia, designated specifically as her "Verwandten," are accorded a similar musical emphasis by which the singer is directed to enunciate the appellation with a noticeable and distended slur [Mvt. 4, Rehearsal #14]. These gestures serve then to bind the introductory, nominal inhabitants, who sing of their joy, with the illustrious representatives of salvation and pain transcended. Finally, we should recall the repetition of derivatives based on the word "Engel," accentuating the relation of saint and angelic figure. In the final identification of music with angelic voices ["Die englischen Stimmen"], a return to the lyrical "we" of the opening is guaranteed through the power of inspired music. Those who lead an angelic life ["Wir führen ein englisches Leben"] are tied to that music ["unsrer" ("our")] associated with perceived angelic voices of the close. It is, of course, fitting that such voices binding the saints, angels, and "wir" of the inhabitants should end cyclically with the joy, or "Freuden," that was proclaimed in the first verse of the text [first verse: "Wir genießen die himmlischen Freuden;" final verse: "Daß alles für Freuden erwacht"].

From a theological perspective the depiction of devotional figures in *Wunderhorn* texts set by Mahler as part of his Second and Third Symphonies represents a preparation toward the state of blessedness declared in "Das himmlische Leben" of the Fourth. In both the earlier works characteristic images of angelic figures appear, the *Wunderhorn* text of the Third Symphony featuring even more prominently an alternate portrayal of the penitent and forgiven Saint Peter. Already in the song-text "Urlicht," in the Second Symphony the struggle to attain admission to a previous existence, perceived as ideal, results in the encounter with a spiritual figure of authority. Here the human essence grapples with pain and a seemingly insurmountable struggle while pinning its hopes on a path toward heaven. The symbiosis of this song in the Second Symphony with its parallel text on resurrection and salvation ["Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n wirst du" ("Rise again, indeed you will rise again")] extends to the latter movement a possibility of transcendence and a sense of hope that persists from the shorter *Wunderhorn* piece.<sup>37</sup> In much the same way, the two texts set by Mahler in the Third Symphony act as mutual complements in order to show as a focal point man's inherent nature -- both sinful and suffering, as well as penitent and hopeful. For the example of the Third Symphony a shorter text by Nietzsche with its questions and warning to mankind, "O Mensch! Gib Acht!" ["O Man! Take Heed!"] is answered again by spiritual figures appearing in the following *Wunderhorn* text. In keeping with the concept of a tetralogy and the established sense of gradual progression seen for those symphonies incorporating texts from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, a tentative spirit, yet one marked by determination, colors the voice seeking salvation in the Second Symphony's "Urlicht." This first utterance toward salvation in the symphonies under consideration appears here in a text of which Mahler did not change the title from its earlier publication in the *Wunderhorn* collection.<sup>38</sup> In the Third and Fourth symphonies, both incorporating song-texts from that very source, Mahler fashioned a revised title for the songs derived either from a verse in the text or

based on the content of each poem. Since he did not in the case of "Urlicht" alter the title -- and further made no substantive changes in the text -- we may assume that both corresponded to the content and tone that he wished to see expressed. "Urlicht" then signifies a primeval light, both as potential return to an original state of blessedness and a beginning in the process of human transformation and salvation. In this song the angel does not, however, act as a means of help, but rather thwarts the efforts of the lyrical "I" to regain heavenly status or residence. This adversative function of the spiritual figure may be taken as analogous to the medieval tradition of an angelic figure guarding the entrance to Paradise after the fall of humankind. It is further presumed in this tradition that only at the Last Judgement will such a custodian relax its authority, when the entrance to heaven is again open to those deserving of admission.<sup>39</sup> Despite the attempt by an "Engelein" ["angel", "angelic spirit"] to block the path toward heaven, the "I" maintains its resolve and shows optimism in finding that titular light again; now the source and reappearance of that light is expressly identified with God.

The markings for performance of the vocal text of "Urlicht" underline the anticipation of bliss coupled with determination to reach that state of eternal happiness. After lamenting the current nadir of human suffering at the start of the song, the lyrical voice experiences a wish for heavenly peace. This verse, "Je lieber möchte ich im Himmel sein" ["Oh, I should rather be in heaven"], is written with a pronounced melisma on both the first statement and its repeat, as though a vision had enhanced the proximity of the voice and heaven [Mvt. 4, Rehearsal #1-2]. Likewise, the final verse in the poem is scored by Mahler with an extended melismatic decoration on the words culminating in the repeat of "bis in das ewig selig Leben" ("toward the eternal blessed life") [Mvt. 4, Rehearsal #6]. In both cases these hopeful glances in the direction of salvation are balanced by a firm commitment of purpose. A distinct modulation in key is noted as the lyrical voice comes upon a broad path and is deflected by the angelic figure. [Mvt. 4, Rehearsal #3-4]. In response, the determination to proceed again toward a heavenly vision -- and to participate further in the struggle -- is expressed by a series of single notes [Mvt.4, Rehearsal #5-6], rather than the longer melismatic line already associated with the reward of bright eternity. This combination of spare, tenacious declamation with conclusive, decorated lines prepares the lyrical voice for its journey forward. In the Second Symphony such a path will end only with the resurrection motifs of the later complementary text. The concept that aspects of the song "Urlicht" are part of the Second Symphony as a whole as well as part of the larger complex of the tetralogy of *Wunderhorn* symphonies is evident from both Mahler's markings for performance and from themes shared across the spectrum. At the close of "Urlicht," just as at the end of the part directly preceding, Mahler indicated that the next movement should follow immediately with no hint of a pause, hence binding the text and music of the song to the earlier and subsequent parts of the work.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, a thematic bridge -- at least in terms of text -- is begun at "Urlicht" and developed through the close of the Second Symphony, into the textual settings of the Third, culminating in that depiction of heavenly life in the Fourth Symphony.<sup>41</sup> The final verse of "Urlicht" indeed evokes themes of eternal and blessed life ("ewig," "selig") to describe the promised, forthcoming existence or afterlife. The "rapt hymn-like setting" pointing brightly toward this goal, as Deryck Cooke referred to the "Urlicht," is then a prefiguration of

<sup>39</sup> Numerous examples on both adversative and custodial aspects may be consulted at Rosa Giorgi, *Angels and Demons in Art*, 18-27, 202-29, etc.

<sup>40</sup> During the first Vienna performance of his Second Symphony, conducted by Mahler in April 1899, the enthusiastic response after the "Urlicht" movement occasioned its unprecedented repetition. As reported by de La Grange, "the *Urlicht* was so loudly applauded that Mahler decided to encore it in order to respect his own indications concerning the uninterrupted performance of the last two movements," de La Grange, *Mahler*, Vol. I, p. 506.

<sup>41</sup> On this point see also Zychowicz, *Mahler's Fourth Symphony*, pp. 35-38.

<sup>37</sup> Further perspectives at Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler, The Wunderhorn Years*, pp. 183-87; de La Grange, *Mahler*, Vol. I, pp. 376-78.

<sup>38</sup> Arnim/Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, vol. II, # II 11a, p. 18.

resurrection and the joy still to come.<sup>42</sup> These themes – eternity, the blessed state, and the “Freude” associated with both – are taken up again in the Third Symphony and ultimately reached in “Das himmlische Leben.” In this sense, “Urlicht” functions as a “precedent,” to use Mitchell’s characterization, on those levels described within and beyond the Second Symphony.<sup>43</sup> The angel encountered must also be considered in the role of a devotional figure and as part of a divine plan: since the time has not yet arrived, at this point, for the life of eternity, the angel must seek to prevent entrance to heaven. The promise of that life is then sealed in the final movement of the Second Symphony with the text ending “Zu Gott wird es dich tragen” [“It will lead you to God”].

Devotional figures in the *Wunderhorn* text of the Third Symphony show a further progression toward “Das himmlische Leben” of the Fourth.<sup>44</sup> By changing the title of the *Wunderhorn* poem, “Armer Kinder Bettlerlied,” to “Es sungen drei Engel” Mahler immediately calls attention to the heavenly figures depicted as vocalizing just after the start of the song.<sup>45</sup> Their proclamation that Saint Peter has been deemed free from sin functions as a demonstration of hope to the imperfections of humankind. In addition to Mahler’s alteration of the title, he makes slight modifications in the poetic line. At either end of the song the resounding syllables, “Bimm, bamm,” are sung chorally as though enveloping the religious scene. Aside from this addition, Mahler extends the short verse 2 by adding an adverbial “selig”: “Mit Freuden es selig in dem Himmel klang” [“With joy the news resounded blissfully throughout heaven”] Mvt. 5, Rehearsal # 1]. Just as the chorus gives a symmetrical stamp to the text at beginning and end, this interpolation of blessedness, or bliss, early in the song corresponds to the previously existing repetition of “selig” and “Seligkeit” shortly before its close [“selige Stadt” (“blessed city”), “allen zur Seligkeit” (“for the blessedness of all”), Mvt. 5, Rehearsal # 8-10]. The promise through devotional figures of what could be achieved in the Second Symphony is reinforced by this emphatic declaration of the angels in the movement “Es sungen drei Engel” of the Third. Aside from these changes relating to devotional figures and topics, Mahler’s rendering of the text follows, for the most part, the version from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Here we should ask after the pairing of this song in the Third Symphony with the preceding vocal movement based on a poem by Nietzsche from *Also sprach Zarathustra*.<sup>46</sup> The solemn tone of the latter setting contrasts markedly, as Franklin notes in his analysis, with the celebratory children’s chorus ushering in and recurring later in the succeeding *Wunderhorn* movement.<sup>47</sup> Mahler himself commented on reactions to this contrast when discussing the Third Symphony as a whole with Bauer-Lechner.<sup>48</sup> Indeed these very different points of departure serve as a means to illustrate segments of a whole or to offer an attempt at showing the complete range of human emotions and endeavors. Thus the woe (“Weh”) and joy (“Lust”) of the fourth movement are, to refer to Franklin’s summary, “here presented as elemental modes of human experience before being musically personified (as supplicant and responding angels) in the reconciling fifth movement and then explored to the full in the concluding

Adagio.”<sup>49</sup> If we consider these varying modes within the tetralogy of symphonies, the progression and struggle of emotions finds its resolution appropriately in “Das himmlische Leben.” A glimmer of hope perceived in “Urlicht,” despite attempts to discourage the lyrical voice, sustains the human persona into an eventual new life. In the same manner, the unfathomable woe of “O Mensch! Gib Acht!” is balanced – in its own movement – by the concept of joy (“Lust”) as well as the manifold possibilities of Christian forgiveness in the following *Wunderhorn* movement. The model of Saint Peter in this song illustrates facets of humanity in a devotional figure who has sinned yet attained forgiveness. All New Testament accounts detail Peter’s denial of Christ, as had been foretold before solitary prayers began in Gethsemane as part of the Passion. Further, in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke the realization that he has denied Christ causes Peter to weep. [Matthew, 26: 75; Mark, 14: 72; Luke, 22:62; John, 18: 27]. The extension of such attributes of Peter – the pangs of repentance for sin as well as the physical evidence of tears – and their transfer to a persona sung by the alto voice in “Es sungen drei Engel” emphasize the human associations of the saint for this song.<sup>50</sup> In the Third Symphony Saint Peter is then still encountered on the plane of one who has happily atoned for wrongdoing but who has not yet achieved the status of a celestial denizen.<sup>51</sup> The textual repetition of “die himmlische Freud(e)” as a goal in the final strophe of “Es sungen drei Engel” has been shown to announce Peter’s subsequent elevation to that same status in “Das himmlische Leben” of the Fourth Symphony. On this topic Zychowicz has pointed to the textual link of “himmlische Freud” in both songs as clear evidence of a thematic bond between the symphonies. Further, Zychowicz’s analysis demonstrates that musical quotations from the earlier composed “Das himmlische Leben” formed a significant influence on Mahler’s final conception of “Es sungen drei Engel” in the Third Symphony.<sup>52</sup> This link shared between the works prepares for Saint Peter’s continued depiction as a blessed figure and shows that his ultimate position in the heavenly milieu of the Fourth Symphony is, to be sure, prefigured in the Third. At the same time, Peter’s forgiveness establishes a strong relation to those earlier song-movements, in both the Second and Third Symphonies, with individuals seeking to atone yet still wandering in search of a path toward salvation.

Mahler’s words on his own associations with devotional figures and the effects with which he tried to imbue their portrayal brings us back to the opening comments on Saint Ursula. In his conversations with Bauer-Lechner on sainted types, or movements in his works in which they were related, Mahler reveals both sympathetic attraction and ironic distance. Those recollections of his mother’s good-natured suffering and associations with the stoical *vita* of St. Ursula exemplify a caring and purely optimistic appreciation of the saint. Yet Mahler also experienced the lives and tribulations of saints from an, at times, varied perspective. When speaking with Bauer-Lechner on the song of Saint Anthony and how the “Fischpredigt” evolved into the Scherzo movement of the Second Symphony, Mahler referred to a predominant tone of “bittersweet humor” [“süßsaurer Humor”].<sup>53</sup> As an extension of these impressions concerning Saint Anthony, he applied the same criterion during that conversation comparatively to the early song-version of “Das himmlische Leben,” which would only later become an integral segment of the Fourth Symphony. Such an expectation of

<sup>42</sup> Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 58.

<sup>43</sup> Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler, The Wunderhorn Years*, p. 178.

<sup>44</sup> Zychowicz, *Mahler’s Fourth Symphony*, pp. 38-53.

<sup>45</sup> Original text and title found at Arnim/Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, vol. III, # III 79.

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed examination of Mahler’s appreciation of Nietzsche and his setting of the poem from *Zarathustra*, see Eveline Nikkels, “O Mensch! Gib Acht!” *Friedrich Nietzsche’s Bedeutung für Gustav Mahler* (Amsterdam / Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1989), esp. pp. 73-93.

<sup>47</sup> Franklin, *Mahler: Symphonie No. 3*, p. 70.

<sup>48</sup> Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, pp. 57-58; Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>49</sup> Franklin, *Mahler: Symphonie No. 3*, p. 66.

<sup>50</sup> In his discussion of this movement Franklin marks the alto voice as that of a penitent woman, although he notes the possibility – at least for the original *Wunderhorn* poem – that the words could express sentiments and attitudes of Saint Peter; see Franklin, *Mahler: Symphonie No. 3*, p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> Questions on identity of *personae* and temporal sequence in the song-texts in Symphonies Two through Four are part of a future investigation by the present author.

<sup>52</sup> On the complex of these topics, see Zychowicz, *Mahler’s Fourth Symphony*, pp. 40-46.

<sup>53</sup> Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, p. 28; Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, p. 32.

humor – indeed alternating with other perceptions – in the tetralogy of symphonic works can be traced further in Mahler's comments on the overall structure of the Third Symphony. Here Mahler contrasted the fourth and fifth movements, those containing his settings of the vocal texts, as part of a larger diversity in the work. He lamented to Bauer-Lechner that few would understand his juxtaposition of the "deeply serious" ["tiefster Ernst"] tone of "O Mensch! Gib Acht!" with the "humor" to be found in the "subsequent Angels movement." ["der Humor... das darauffolgende Stück der 'Engel'"]<sup>54</sup> This very humor is then projected not only for the *Wunderhorn* movement containing penitential figures, but also for the remaining parts of the Third Symphony as well. From these remarks we may conclude that Mahler's appreciation of saints' lives and the models that they represented resulted in works showing both serious absorption and a creative adaptability.<sup>55</sup> Reverence for suffering indeed finds its expression in the *Wunderhorn* symphonies, yet its complement will surface repeatedly with the reflection of human foibles, forgiveness, and humor.<sup>56</sup> Significantly, Mahler's return to setting a text within the framework of a symphony would later again include types related to devotional figures and to saints: the anchorites of Part II of the Eighth Symphony observe Faust's gradual ascent toward salvation after he has passed through an admittedly multidimensional and flawed existence.<sup>57</sup>

Saints and devotional figures call forth specific associations in our conditioned understanding or appreciation of their significance. In each case, their *vitae* can be coupled with cultural traditions that were gradually attached during and after the medieval period. For Mahler these associations also existed, although his compositional process did more than simply act in response to an inherited tradition. Rather, Mahler's own conception seems to have taken precedence in his adaptation of devotional figures in both textual and musical form.

#### Selected References on Saints' Lives

Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1997)

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Michael Walsh, ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints. Concise Edition, Revised and Updated* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991)

Dom Basil Watkins, OSB, ed., *The Book of Saints: A Comprehensive Biographical Dictionary*, 7<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> Killian, ed., *Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, p. 57; Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections*, p. 60.

<sup>55</sup> Hilmar-Voit's typology of *Wunderhorn* songs set by Mahler relies primarily on thematic and topical categories. Hence, her grouping of "Das himmlische Leben," "Es sungen drei Engel," and "Ulrich" separately from "Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt" has some topical relevance, but it does not take into account Mahler's concept of humor and its evidence in his adaptations; see Hilmar-Voit, *Im Wunderhorn-Ton*, pp. 53ff.

<sup>56</sup> Franklin also notes the reference to humor within additional movements of the Third Symphony, but he does not extend this discussion to other *Wunderhorn* texts or to the symphonies in which these songs are orchestrated; see Franklin, *Mahler: Symphonie No. 3*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>57</sup> Summary statements in Calomino, "Depiction of the Anchorites in Mahler's Eighth Symphony," Wildhagen, *Die 'Achte Symphonie' von Gustav Mahler*, Papanikolaou, "The Religious Impulse in Schumann's and Mahler's Settings of Goethe's *Faust*."

## Did You Know?

### Help for Musicians from Saint Cecilia



While not liturgically sanctioned, tradition has it Saint Cecilia can intercede on behalf of musicians to assist them in performances or auditions. To request her aid, the musician is to write the name "Saint Cecilia" on a white ribbon and their own name on a yellow one, then tie both to a green candle to which two laurel leaves are stuck. The musician then lights the candle and says the following prayer:

Oh, glorious Saint Cecilia, you died loving your martyrdom, and accepted the sacrifice in order to protect your virginity. I ask you to help me in this test I am going to undertake, upon which my honor and work rely. Listen to my prayers, Saint Cecilia, and I will play music in your name. Let me venerate you always in the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Upon meeting success, the musician should bury the ribbons in a planter with pink flowers or, at least, dig them into a garden. Afterward, they should burn the laurel leaves and save the ashes in a wooden box or other, similar container, and use it to preserve the ashes from later requests.

This ritual and other, similar ones are described in *Saints: The Chosen Few* by Manuela Dunn-Mascetti (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994).



"St. Cecilia and the Angel" by Carlo Saraceni (1579-1620 AD)  
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome