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Introduction

A Long View of the Fourth Symphony

A Prolonged Genesis

A most remarkable—and often remarked upon—aspect of Bruckner’s compositional work was his commitment to revision. Many of his symphonies exist in two or even three versions.¹ The Fourth represents the most extreme case: he worked and reworked this symphony more extensively, more persistently, and more profoundly than any of his other symphonies. From its initial composition in 1874 through its publication in 1889, his work on the Fourth spanned some fifteen years, during which the first two movements were thoroughly recomposed, the third movement entirely replaced, and the Finale fundamentally transformed. In the end, he produced three complete versions of the Fourth along with a fourth version of the Finale (see Table 1.1). Seen as a whole, the history of the work presents an extraordinary picture of a composer pursuing a compositional vision with extraordinary persistence and perspicacity. This process of revision and reinvention covered a period of tremendous compositional development and musical achievement. When Bruckner initially composed the Fourth, he was still making his way as a symphonic composer, having achieved only two public performances of his symphonies. By the time the Fourth was finally published, Bruckner was well on the way to becoming, as Hermann Levi soon declared, “by far the most important composer of symphonies since Beethoven.”²

The broad outlines of the creative development of the Fourth are generally well known. Bruckner composed the first version during the year 1874. He began it almost immediately after the first version of the Third was completed, and it was followed closely by the composition of the Fifth. Bruckner’s growing reservations about the initial version of the Fourth soon led him to reinvent the symphony radically; between January and September 1878 he composed a new version of the work. Yet soon Bruckner began to rethink again, and starting in late 1879 he again recomposed the Finale, transforming it into a fundamentally

¹ The First and Eighth Symphonies exist in two distinct versions, the Third and Fourth in three; the Second underwent a series of revisions that produced several substantial variants.

² Levi, letter to Simon Leo Reinisch, dean of the University of Vienna, 24 June 1891, *Briefe* 2: 145.

Table 1.1 The Versions of the Fourth Symphony

First Version composed 1874, revised 1875–1876

1. Allegro 2. Andante, quasi allegretto 3. Sehr schnell; Trio. Im gleichen Tempo
4. [Allegro]

Second Version composed 1878–1880, performed and revised 1881

1. Bewegt, nicht zu schnell 2. Andante, quasi Allegretto 3. Scherzo: Bewegt; Trio. Nicht zu schnell, keinesfalls schleppend 4a. Finale (“Volksfest”): Allegro moderato (set aside in 1879)

4b. Finale. Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell (composed in 1880)

Third Version created 1887, performed and revised 1888, published 1889

1. Ruhig bewegt (nur nicht schnell) 2. Andante 3. Scherzo. Bewegt; Trio. Gemächlich
4. Finale. Mäßig bewegt

Note that as a rule throughout this book, the versions will be identified as the first, second, and third versions, not by date.

new creation, darker, more expansive and dramatic. This new Finale was largely completed by June 1880. In late October of that year the first three movements were rehearsed by the Vienna Conservatory orchestra and on 20 February 1881 the Vienna Philharmonic finally premiered the symphony. This concert is well documented; in addition to Bruckner's composition score, we have the conductor's score as well as a nearly complete set of orchestral parts. These materials reveal that Bruckner made significant revisions to the Finale before and after the performance. In 1888 the Fourth was performed for a second time in Vienna, again by the Philharmonic. By this time the symphony had been revised yet again, and it was finally published in this version in the following year.

All three versions of the work have long been available in printed editions. These were published in reverse order: the third version appeared in print in 1889, but the others not until long after Bruckner's death, the second in 1936 and the first version only in 1975.

Nevertheless, important phases of the compositional development of the Fourth remain largely undocumented. A long-established tradition regards the completion of the second version in 1880 as essentially the end of its legitimate compositional history. Aside from a few largely superficial changes Bruckner made in 1886 to a copy of the score of the second version, which were adopted by Leopold Nowak in his edition of that version (published in 1953), later phases of the history of the Fourth have been largely ignored. This meant that serious study of the version of the symphony prepared in 1888 was neglected for many

decades. Other long-standing lacunae in the understanding of the work's history have involved the revisions Bruckner made to the first version in 1876 and formal modifications he made to the Finale around the time of the 1881 performance.

Lack of critical attention to these developments has precluded full understanding of the Fourth, its evolution, and its music. In part, this is because all the necessary primary research has only recently been completed as part of the preparation of new critical editions of all the versions of the work. The materials involved in the revisions made in 1876 and 1880–1881 had not previously been fully studied. Similarly, while the relevant materials from the creation of the third version are not completely preserved, the significant body of them that does exist enables a much fuller and more astute account of that version than has traditionally been offered.

Myths about Bruckner Versions

Deeper reasons also helped to sustain these research gaps for too long. Myths about Bruckner's methods of composition and revision are pervasive—indeed, often cherished—and these have inflected, and frankly distorted, approaches taken by many in the past. Consequently, a historically grounded, factually accurate, and psychologically sound understanding of the Fourth Symphony is impossible without first letting go of many inherited beliefs and legends about Bruckner's personality, his social situation, and common ideas about the ways in which his symphonies were published. These have helped engender a sensibility in which reverence for Bruckner's music and a pitying regard for the composer's persona combine to stifle critical sensibilities and blunt factual curiosity. This orientation toward Bruckner and his works, at once solicitous and faintly condescending, finds root in the tradition of regarding the composer as a character out of step with his time, unsuited to the society in which he lived, at odds with his culture. This image may have originated in part with Bruckner himself, who, as Andrea Harrandt has shown, did occasionally depict himself in these terms, at times as a tactic to win sympathy, at others as an emotional response during bouts of self-pity.³ Soon Bruckner's advocates adopted the image of him as a misunderstood genius, initially as a ploy to gain support for him but increasingly as an interpretive tool, culminating in the notion that Bruckner's symphonic oeuvre was in effect a sort of "erratic block" (a geological term for a large boulder left randomly by a retreating glacier without care for its placement) dropped into

³ Andrea Harrandt, "Realität und Subjektivität bei Bruckner an Beispielen aus seiner Biographie," in *Kunst und Wahrheit. Bruckner-Symposion Linz 2004*, ed. Theophil Antonicek, Andreas Lindner, and Klaus Petermayr (Linz, 2008), pp. 57–67.

the musical world “without any connection with its own environment,” as Franz Schalk put it.⁴

The sense that Bruckner was an innocent soul beset by an uncomprehending and often hostile environment in Vienna was given an extreme formulation in his “official” posthumous biography written by August Göllerich and Max Auer, who described Bruckner’s career in Vienna as that of a “cross-bearer of mankind, walking towards the place that destiny had determined for him to be the ‘Purgatorio’” where he underwent a “unique martyrdom, no less than Beethoven’s.”⁵ As Christa Brüstle has shown, tales of Bruckner’s life as a *via dolorosa*, seem to exert an irrational, fixating attraction for certain sensibilities.⁶ Adherence to this view tends to inspire a desire to rescue Bruckner’s legacy or posthumously redeem his suffering in some way. Later appropriations of the image of Bruckner as an outsider, vulnerable, perhaps even helpless, against antagonistic outside forces have ranged from its dissemination in often sentimental guises in the surprisingly numerous novelistic accounts of his life published in the first half of the twentieth century, through the crass instrumentalization of this image by the Nazi movement, to a host of patronizing ideas about Bruckner’s creative methods.

In actuality, while hardly easy and not free from setbacks and frustration, Bruckner’s career was not primarily one of woe and tribulation. As a significant body of modern scholarship has made clear, he was highly successful in many ways during the nearly three decades he lived in Vienna. During this time he composed ten magnificent, ambitious symphonies, and he published six of them as well as a Quintet for Strings, a Te Deum, and numerous sacred and secular choral works. Several of his symphonies, including the Fourth, were performed with increasing frequency in numerous European cities as well as in the United States with varying degrees of acclaim but growing appreciation. He was also a popular, successful teacher at both the university and the conservatory, held the post of Imperial Court Organist for more than two decades, became financially secure and was awarded an honorary doctorate as well as the Order of Franz

⁴ Franz Schalk, *Briefe und Betrachtungen*, ed. Lili Schalk (Vienna, 1935), pp. 78–79.

⁵ August Göllerich and Max Auer, *Anton Bruckner Ein Lebens- und Schaffensbild*, volume 4, part 1 (Regensburg, 1936), p. 19. Late in his life Bruckner designated Göllerich as his “authorized biographer”—as he mentioned in his letter to Göllerich dated 11 May 1891 (*Briefe* 2:136). Göllerich worked on the project until the end of his life but left the work far from complete at his death in 1923. Max Auer, who had completed a biography of Bruckner of his own in that year, then took on the task of completing what Göllerich had started. The result was a sprawling publication of four volumes in nine parts that appeared between 1922 and 1937. These books, which remain an essential resource for scholars, contain a great deal of valuable primary information, contemporary reports, and first-hand reminiscences, yet they are strictly limited by their evident biases, hagiographic perspective, lack of critical awareness, and at times maudlin tone.

⁶ See Christa Brüstle, “The Musical Image of Bruckner,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner*, ed. John Williamson (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 244–260.

Joseph. Given his personal and professional origins as a provincial organist and church musician, he can be regarded as a “social climber” of a sort, as Manfred Wagner has argued.⁷ He cannot reasonably be styled as a rural naïf or a fool—as has been implied too often by both antagonists and, oddly enough, proponents eager to come to his defense. Bruckner was a complicated person, no doubt, but whatever else he may have been, he was a professional as well as an intellectual musician, and—at least until his very final years—firmly in command of his career and his creative output.

The Bruckner “Problem”?

The recognition—or more precisely, the acceptance—of these truths about Bruckner’s personality and career bear decisively on my project in this book. This is because conceptions of Bruckner’s persona and of his relationship to the social realm he inhabited have inflected how modern scholars and critics understand his compositional practices, especially those related to the revision, performance, and publication of his symphonies. To take the most salient matter, it has become traditional to assume that important features in the editions of his symphonies published during his lifetime arose from unwanted external influence and represent artistic compromises made against the composer’s better judgment. This belief gives rise to what is now commonly known as “the Bruckner Problem,” which became entrenched in the mid-twentieth century.⁸ The following statement, which is tellingly vague on the facts, taken from *The Harvard Biographical Dictionary of Music*, concisely encapsulates this view, and its presence in a well-respected, scholarly reference work published near the end of the twentieth century bespeaks the depth of the acceptance it enjoyed for many decades.

The problem of what is to be considered the definitive text of some of Bruckner’s major works has been much complicated by his letting himself be persuaded by conductors and devoted pupils, principally the brothers Josef and Franz Schalk and Ferdinand Löwe, to cut, rewrite, and reorchestrate, or to allow this to be done by them. Since it is not always clear what he actually wanted and

⁷ Manfred Wagner, “Bruckner in Wien. Ein Beitrag zur Apperzeption und Rezeption des oberösterreichischen Komponisten in der Hauptstadt der k.k. Monarchie,” in *Anton Bruckner in Wien: Eine kritische Studie seiner Persönlichkeit*, ed. Franz Grasberger, Anton Bruckner Dokumente und Studien 2 (Graz, 1980), pp. 66–71.

⁸ The key text is Deryck Cooke’s widely influential essay “The Bruckner Problem Simplified,” originally published serially in *The Musical Times* 110 (1969), later reprinted in slightly revised form as a booklet (New York, 1975) and in a posthumous collection of Cooke’s writings, *Vindication: Essays about Romantic Music* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 43–71.

what he only agreed to, arriving at a definitive text is sometimes a matter of interpretation.⁹

As any reader of program notes, CD booklets, textbooks, and commentary on the internet can attest, a broad stream of Bruckner reception still traffics eagerly, usually incautiously, in claims of this sort. But in fact, stories of an insecure composer prone to unnecessary revision whose works were subjected during his lifetime to unwanted editorial interventions that compromised his authentic musical vision depend on a mistaken understanding of Bruckner's methods of musical creation, his psychology, and the textual sources of his symphonies.

These flawed views derive ultimately from beliefs and attitudes that were advanced by the Bruckner Collected Works edition directed by Robert Haas in the 1930s and early 1940s. One of Haas's central goals—which was pursued in somewhat more moderate ways by his successor Leopold Nowak starting in the early 1950s—was to replace the allegedly corrupt editions published in the 1880s and 1890s with what were presented as Bruckner's "original versions." The influence of these efforts was great enough that a new understanding of Bruckner versions, the "old Bruckner orthodoxy" as Dermot Gault has termed it, was broadly established by the middle of the twentieth century.¹⁰ It rests on the belief that the only truly valid versions of the symphonies are those that, as one early influential advocate wrote, possess "the not-to-be-denied 'authenticity' of the scores written down by the master's own fingers."¹¹ For this reason, the versions of the symphonies preserved in the collection of unpublished manuscript scores that Bruckner bequeathed to the Imperial Court Library upon his death in 1896, supposedly in anticipation of "later times" when they could be resurrected, were commonly considered the only authentic sources of these works.¹² The versions published during the composer's lifetime are, in contrast, seen as provisional, compromised editions prepared by Bruckner's "well-meaning but misguided" friends, as they are still so often described. According to this way of thinking, it was not until the 1930s that pioneering scholars, most notably Haas, began to deduce the truth of these matters and publish editions based directly on

⁹ "Bruckner, Anton (Joseph)," in *The Harvard Biographical Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), p. 114.

¹⁰ See Dermot Gault's exposition of the "orthodox" view in his *The New Bruckner: Compositional Development and Dynamics of Revision* (Ashgate, 2010), pp. 240–245.

¹¹ Max Auer, "Der Streit um den 'echten' Bruckner (II)," *Zeitschrift für Musik* 103 (1936), pp. 1195–1196.

¹² This interpretation is no longer accepted by scholars. Paul Hawkshaw, for example, has recently concluded that "in fact the composer probably never intended his will to have a bearing on post-mortem editorial issues or to dictate the hierarchy of versions of his pieces"; see "A Bequest and a Legacy: Editing Anton Bruckner's Music in 'Later Times,'" *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 15 (2018), p. 405.

Bruckner's manuscript scores, which finally drove the old "corrupt" versions into well-deserved oblivion.

Full understanding of these ideas about Bruckner editions and the attitudes that surround them depends upon an awareness of their origins. The circumstances through which they first gained prevalence and eventually near hegemony were complicated and heavily fraught.¹³ Pointed critique of the early published editions emerged and soon grew dogmatic in Nazi Germany where it developed under the sway of explicit political forces—the promotion of both Bruckner's image and his music as paragons of the Germanic spirit was a goal of Nazi cultural policy—as well as an intellectual temper that regarded itself as proudly and explicitly ideological. The narrative that developed involved the works of a "German" original being freed from "corruption" so that they could now be reborn in their rightful form in the new Reich.¹⁴ This scenario had obvious resonance with the Nazi movement, as did the mission of redeeming the works of a great "German" master—a national identification of intense political moment before and after the annexation of Austria to the Nazi Reich in 1938—from the corrupting influences visited upon his music by what one commentator pointedly called "überkultivierte Städter" (or "overcultivated urbanites")—a term that would have had clear antisemitic and völkisch resonances at that time.¹⁵

In the postwar era, understanding of the "Bruckner problem" was stripped of its darker ideological connotations, but definite traces of its counterfactual origins lingered, even as it was refashioned in terms native to the culture of liberal society, centering on the sanctity of authorial intent, the value of artistic authenticity, and devotion to what was considered "objectivity" in musical performance. This point of view emerged as predominant in the English-speaking world in the 1960s, where it was formulated less by academic musicologists than by commentators and experts writing in semi-scholarly venues; the BBC as well as *Gramophone* magazine and similar publications became leading venues for early advocates.¹⁶ The emerging consensus about the "Bruckner problem" was nonetheless adopted by scholars, as a glance at leading music history textbooks

¹³ Studies of this topic include Christa Brüstle, "Bruckner 'original': Musikphilologie und Ideologie," chapter in *Bruckner und die Nachwelt: Zur Rezeptiongeschichte des Komponisten in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1998), pp. 123–236 and Benjamin Korstvedt, "Return to the Pure Sources: The Ideology and Text-Critical Legacy of the First Bruckner *Gesamtausgabe*" in *Bruckner Studies*, ed. Paul Hawkshaw and Timothy Jackson (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 91–109.

¹⁴ The confluence of these political and musicological agendas was expressed nakedly, for example, in Fritz Skorzeny, "Anton Bruckner im Lichte deutscher Auferstehung," *Die Musik* 30 (1938), pp. 310–313.

¹⁵ The quotation is from Max Auer, "Die biographischen Tatsachen," in *Anton Bruckner: Wissenschaftliche und Künstlerische Betrachtungen zu den Originalfassungen* (Vienna, 1937), p. 10.

¹⁶ For an account of how this process unfolded, see Korstvedt, "Defining the 'Problem': The Development of Post-war Attitudes toward Bruckner Versions," *Journal of Musicological Research* 32 (2013), pp. 1–27.

of that time will show, just as it was embraced by music critics, commentators, and music lovers, as myriad LP jackets, CD booklets, and recording reviews amply demonstrate.

The "orthodox" view does respond to some textual realities: the editions published in the 1880s and 1890s do differ in significant ways from Bruckner's final manuscript texts; the posthumous edition of the Ninth (a work Bruckner left unfinished at his death) prepared by Löwe, does diverge quite fundamentally from the text of the work as the composer left it, as do the editions of the Fifth and the Sixth from 1896 and 1899, respectively; Bruckner did seek input from other musicians; and the early versions of some of his symphonies, which were brought to light by Haas and subsequently by Nowak, differ greatly from later versions and are undoubtedly valuable in their own right, as is emphatically the case with the Fourth. Yet the conclusions commonly drawn from these facts often leave historical scruples, critical misgivings, factual accuracy, and at times factual plausibility behind in a rush to dismiss what are widely believed to be the tainted editions published before the 1930s. In fact, most of these ostensibly spurious versions were performed and published in Vienna during Bruckner's lifetime with his full awareness and active participation, and virtually no reputable documentary evidence exists to indicate that Bruckner was dissatisfied, let alone indignant, about them. For this reason, absolutist positions taken by modern Bruckner editors and their followers are not only extreme but at times actually countermand Bruckner's own actions and decisions.

Escaping the Chaos

Although almost every element of the orthodox position is open to serious question, it has proven captivating to many, perhaps because its air of intrigue has its own appeal, as does the gratification of feeling that a musical and historical wrong is being rectified.¹⁷ In order to bridge the obvious difficulties caused by the lack of valid documentary support for key aspects of this view, biographical narratives emphasizing Bruckner's naiveté, vulnerability, and neurotic uncertainty have been cultivated, often buttressed with speculation, some of it quite wild, about his victimization, deception, or even coercion by his young editors. In this way, Bruckner studies can begin to teeter on the edge of what Gault has described as "intellectual chaos."¹⁸ Escaping this chaos means working from an understanding of Bruckner that sees his relations with others in their proper

¹⁷ I can well remember responding in just this way when I first read Cooke's "The Bruckner Problem Simplified" as a college student.

¹⁸ Gault, *The New Bruckner*, p. 5.

context, recognizing frankly that he did at times seek input and assistance from other trusted musicians, and relying on a sound text-critical method that builds as solidly as possible on all available documentary and musical evidence. To put it simply, this entails letting go of this orthodoxy when it conflicts with facts that contravene it rather than ignoring, dismissing, or trying to explain away inconvenient facts in order to hang on to the conventional wisdom.

Even then, however, the textual and philological issues posed by Bruckner's oeuvre—evaluating multiple versions, making sense of often intricate patterns of revision, determining the relative value of manuscript sources and printed editions, adjudicating valid concerns about authenticity—are undeniably daunting. Bruckner's repeated, at times profound revisions of some of his symphonies, including the Fourth above all, emphatically do raise questions of interpretation. But these should not be regarded as singular or out of the ordinary. While the intensity with which Bruckner pursued revision was unusual, that he revised was entirely normal; any sort of musical creation naturally involves the improvement of earlier conceptions. No good reason exists to regard his tendency to revise as neurotic or irrational. He did not revise without cause, whether in preparation for a performance or publication, as his compositional conception of a symphony evolved and matured, because of experience gained from performance, or in some cases because of the evolution of his approach to musical structure or orchestral technique. When these factors did not apply, he did not revise; for example, he felt no need to make significant revisions to the Sixth and the Seventh, two of his most elegantly conceived symphonies. His decision to rework the First before its first performance in twenty-five years—a period during which the composer had composed, performed, and published a string of grand symphonies—appears eminently reasonable, as does that to revise the Eighth after a most trusted and astute musical colleague, Hermann Levi, found the original version not only baffling but bound to fail in performance.

It is certainly true that each time one of the symphonies appeared in print in Bruckner's lifetime, the text contained some changes from the last manuscript text.¹⁹ For this reason, the editions published in the 1880s and 1890s have long been treated as suspicious if not scandalous. While the changes found in these editions must be subject to critical scrutiny they cannot be dismissed as textual contamination without good grounds. In this respect, Bruckner's symphonies

¹⁹ This group comprises the First, Second, Third (in two different editions, 1879 and 1890), Fourth, and Seventh Symphonies. The first edition of the Eighth, which appeared in 1892 and was performed that year in Bruckner's presence, seems to fall into a category of its own. It poses the thorniest text-critical quandaries of all the symphonies. Some evidence suggests that Josef Schalk and Max von Oberleithner edited the symphony during the late stages of the publication process without the composer's participation, yet Bruckner never expressed disapproval of the edition.

are remarkable not in kind but in degree. Many of the textual adjustments—notably standardization and completion of aspects of notation—appear to be normal, indeed necessary and desired, outcomes of the process of printing. This point has been made clear by work in the field of textual criticism over the last generation that has demystified the relationship of authorial intention and the processes of publication, which involves much that is essential to what Jerome McGann termed the “textual condition” of published works in the age of print.²⁰ The printed scores of the symphonies that were first published posthumously, the Sixth and the Ninth, and also that of the Fifth, which appeared shortly before Bruckner's death in 1896, do contain substantial textual interventions that were made without Bruckner's awareness, notably added and altered performance and dynamic markings in addition to some modifications to instrumentation.²¹ These editions must be approached with critical skepticism. But these cases, which have often been treated as characteristic, are not the rule but exceptions.

Likewise, the approach taken by Bruckner's twentieth-century editors, with their overriding interest in freeing Bruckner's original texts from the taint of anything “alien” and thus “inauthentic,” is not without precedent or parallel. It expressed with unusual intensity the “Urtext” sensibility that characterized, and still largely does characterize, the mainstream of classical music editing.²² In addition—and this cannot be overlooked—these new editions were promoted and embraced with uncommon fervor, both at the time of their first appearance in the 1930s and since, often by true enthusiasts and committed partisans. References to the outrages, violations, and even “crimes” supposedly committed by Bruckner's editorial assistants have a long history, reaching from the Nazi era to the social media age.²³ So on both ends—musical creation and editorial reception—we find entirely characteristic impulses manifested in unusually acute ways. Therefore, they present to us a distinct opportunity to see, understand, and critique established patterns of interpretation, not limited to Bruckner.

²⁰ Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, 1991).

²¹ The first edition of the Fifth Symphony, which appeared in April 1896, was heavily edited at the proof stage by Josef Schalk, presumably without Bruckner's approval. Interestingly though by then, the form of the Finale had already reached its infamous shortened form, as can be seen from two sets of corrected proofs, which were heavily edited in 1895 by Schalk and are now in the Music Collection of the Austrian National Library (A-Wn Mus.Hs. 29.129 and Mus.Hs. 29.130). The revision process that created this version is largely unknown and no manuscript sources seem to exist that might help elucidate how, when, and by whom the form was modified.

²² Christopher Hogwood offered some trenchant thoughts on this topic in “Urtext, que me veux-tu?” *Early Music* 41 (2013), pp. 123–127.

²³ See the discussion of the rhetoric used to promulgate the new Bruckner edition in the 1930s in Benjamin Korstvedt, “Language and Ideology in the German Reception of Bruckner's Symphonies in the 1930s,” *German Quarterly* 91 (2018), pp. 459–471.

Toward a New Understanding

For all these reasons, Bruckner's works present unusually complex text-critical questions that are not amenable to easy or even definitive solutions. This does not mean, however, that attempting to come to the best, most informed, and deeply considered answers is futile or pointless. Quite to the contrary, it should challenge us to seek them all the more assiduously. Established wisdom—about Bruckner or anything else—is by definition not permanent. The story of editorial mischief followed decades later by recovery and musical redemption at the heart of the “Bruckner orthodoxy” has proven remarkably durable. Nevertheless, I would argue, legends about the dubiousness of many of Bruckner's revisions and the inauthenticity of the scores printed in his time have persisted less because of their demonstrable truth than their “truthiness” and their emotional resonance, almost despite their implausibility. They are, in a sense, seductively vindicating, making us feel as if *we* have recognized the truth of the situation and now appreciate the artistic and even moral superiority of these “original versions.”

Seen in this way, the revolution in Bruckner reception and editing that took place with the appearance of the first Bruckner Collected Edition in the 1930s—and by extension the traditions of reception that flow from it—involved an exercise in mythmaking. This does not mean that these efforts were primarily invested in creating and promoting false beliefs (although they did do that); rather, the essential point is that they promulgated an amenable, categorical way of comprehending what is in fact a highly complex congeries of historical and textual facts that resists easy and perhaps even unequivocal explanation. But the cost of this simplification is high, as Roland Barthes recognized in his classic study of the role of mythology in modern culture:

Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History. In it, history evaporates. It is a kind of ideal servant: it prepares all things, brings them, lays them out, the master arrives, it silently disappears: all that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from.²⁴

Barthes describes precisely the limiting power of the mythical, or “orthodox,” approach to Bruckner versions. It proffers a master narrative that solves the problem even before we can begin to grapple with its actuality. It blocks us from forming a critical judgment based on actual historical evidence by enabling us to conform our observations and thoughts to what is an appealing, preformed narrative.

The established orthodoxies about the “Bruckner problem” have inevitably had pernicious effects on the understanding and appreciation of Bruckner's music. Responses to his works, both by those who admire them and those who

²⁴ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today” (1957), in *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (London, 1973), p. 151.

do not, are often tinged by beliefs about his almost compulsive need to revise, inability to achieve compositional closure, susceptibility to editorial manipulation, and the like. Moreover, this has often largely removed the comprehension of the issues posed by the versions of the symphonies from their actual history, away from the fascinating realities of performance and textuality but instead into a semi-mythical discourse about authenticity narrowly defined. Our understanding has become poorer as a result.

The purpose of this book is therefore not primarily to denounce old myths about Bruckner and the “problem” his versions pose but rather to move away from the hermeneutics of suspicion that has long held sway over the discourse and present instead an account that pays heed to the relevant facts and complex realities that lie behind them by returning Bruckner’s Fourth to its proper historical and musical contexts. The fundamental task this book sets itself is to determine as precisely as possible what Bruckner actually did do and then to recover, understand, and finally validate the logic and significance of his decisions. The inexplicable mystery of the inward processes that animates all musical composition was inevitably crucially involved in Bruckner’s creation of this symphony. Although the goal of recapturing what Stefan Zweig called “that mysterious moment of transition when the vision and intuition of a genius brings a verse or melody out of invisibility into the earthly realm” is ultimately unattainable, many facets and phases of the creation of the Fourth as a fully realized artwork are accessible to rational explication on the basis of thorough archival research, renewed textual criticism, and musical analysis.²⁵

The Case of the Fourth Symphony

The Fourth Symphony offers an outstanding case study of Bruckner’s compositional process at its most involved. The composer worked and reworked the Fourth more extensively and profoundly than any of his other symphonies, and the fifteen years this work covered span a critical juncture during which his style and approach to the symphonic genre developed substantially from the fresh inventiveness and occasional heedlessness of the first version to the sophistication of the final version. Bruckner’s dogged work in crafting the Fourth across its different versions, through performances, and finally to publication proved to be a most important proving ground for his developing vision of the symphony

²⁵ The quotation is from Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, trans. Anthea Bell (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2009), pp. 184–185. Zweig’s passion in this area led him to assemble a magnificent collection of autograph manuscripts by artists ranging from Schubert and Rilke to Walt Whitman and even Leonardo da Vinci. On his collection and its story see Harry Zohn, “Stefan Zweig as a Collector of Manuscripts,” *German Quarterly* 25 (1952), pp. 182–191 and “Stefan Zweig and the ‘Magic of Manuscripts’” on the European Studies Blog, <http://blogs.bl.uk/european/2016/11/stefan-zweig-and-the-magic-of-manuscripts.html> (accessed 11 May 2023).

during a crucial period in his career. His reworkings produced not only distinct versions but also a number of significant variants along the way, some of which represent paths not finally taken. Studying these matters critically can open a window onto several of the most salient and fascinating aspects of Bruckner's achievements as a symphonist.

Understanding the publication history of the Fourth is essential to this investigation (see Table 1.2). The composer himself saw only the final version of the Fourth into print. Gradually the earlier versions were included in modern Collected Works editions. In 1936 Haas brought out an edition of the second version of the Fourth, largely reproducing the text that was performed in 1881, which he labeled the "Originalfassung"—or "original version." Nowak, Haas's postwar successor as general editor of the Collected Works, published a slightly emended score of that version, which he labeled the "1878/80 Fassung." The second version, whether in Haas's or Nowak's edition, soon became the prevalent form in which the Fourth was known and heard. In 1975 Nowak added an edition of the first version of the Fourth and eventually one of the 1878 version of the Finale, which had been left as something of an orphan when it was removed and replaced by a new version in 1880. Finally, the third version, which had been dismissed by both Haas and Nowak, entered the Collected Edition in 2004.

This set of editions represents the three versions of the Fourth that Bruckner brought to completion, even if the completion of all but the last was to prove provisional. Yet the actual story of the work's evolution is far more intricate than a simple tripartition into first, second, and third versions suggests. Each of the versions underwent revisions and adjustments that resulted in a series of variants, and these complicate any attempt to label the versions by their year of completion. Simply identifying the three versions, along with the various states

Table 1.2 The Fourth Symphony in the Bruckner Collected Works Edition

"1874 Version" (ed. Nowak, 1975)

1. Allegro 2. Andante, quasi allegretto 3. Sehr schnell; Trio. Im gleichen Tempo
4. [Allegro moderato]

"1878/80 Version" (ed. Haas, 1936, and with variants, Nowak, 1953)

1. Bewegt, nicht zu schnell 2. Andante, quasi Allegretto 3. Scherzo: Bewegt; Trio. Nicht zu schnell, keinesfalls schleppend 4. Finale. Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell

Supplemental volume

the **"1878 Finale"** Allegro moderato (ed. Nowak, 1981)

"1888 Version" (ed. Korstvedt, 2004)

1. Ruhig bewegt (nur nicht schnell) 2. Andante 3. Scherzo. Bewegt; Trio. Gemächlich
 4. Finale. Mäßig bewegt
-

Table 1.3 Stages in the Composition of the Fourth Symphony, 1874–1890*First Version*

- original textual stage (now no longer fully recoverable) 1874
- second textual stage (new textual enrichments) 1875
- third textual stage (after metrical “regulation”) 1876
- fourth textual stage (instrumental and dynamic adjustments for performance) 1876

Second Version

- original textual stage (with “Volksfest” Finale) 1878
- second textual stage (with new Finale) 1880
- third textual stage (first performance text) 1881
- fourth textual stage (revisions made after first performance) 1881
- fifth textual stage (with revisions before giving the score to Seidl) 1886

Third Version

- original textual stage (now no longer fully recoverable) 1887
- second textual stage (with revisions to Finale coda) 1887
- third textual stage (with new, slightly revised copies of first three movements) 1887
- fourth textual stage (revisions made after first performance) 1888
- fifth textual stage (printed score) 1889
- sixth textual stage (corrected second printing) 1890

of revision they underwent, that Bruckner saw as finished at some point during his work on the symphony more accurately reflects Bruckner’s evolving conception of the work (see Table 1.3).

The existence of distinct versions along with numerous more minor but often significant variants naturally poses a series of significant questions. Are the different versions best regarded as equally valid alternatives or as a series of steps toward the goal of a final, authoritative version of the symphony? Should we accept the established view that the symphony reached its zenith in the second version before declining under the pressure of external circumstances into outright bowdlerization by the time it appeared in print in 1889?²⁶ Or, alternately, is it possible to view the history of the symphony, as Alfred Orel argued, as a process that culminated only in the final version, which alone preserves “Bruckner’s definite intentions for posterity”?²⁷ Or perhaps we should conclude, as Peter Gülke has

²⁶ This is essentially the conclusion that Deryck Cooke advocated in “The Bruckner Problem Simplified.”

²⁷ See Alfred Orel, “Ein Bruckner-Fund (Die Endfassung der IV. Symphony),” *Schweizerische Musikzeitung* 88 (1949), p. 324.

more recently suggested, that the compositional history of the Fourth entailed so much revision that it is fated to remain a “work in progress” permanently?²⁸

In fact, no simple answer is tenable. Each version was deemed final by Bruckner when he completed it, and each of them has its own distinctive musical values, which merit true appreciation. While we certainly can learn a great deal about Bruckner’s evolving symphonic vision by exploring these versions as a series, judging the various versions primarily in terms of authentic versus inauthentic or originality versus compromise, as has become traditional, simply cannot do justice to the reality and the fullness of Bruckner’s compositional achievements, for it was through painstaking care, continual clarification, and devoted pursuit of the most effective presentation of his musical conceptions that he achieved his greatest success. During much of its development, the Fourth was a “work-in-progress”; it evolved both in detail and in basic concept during the years Bruckner revisited it. The work’s ongoing compositional development was shaped both by Bruckner’s evolving ideas about symphonic form and style and in response to external factors, notably material, social realities that tended to crystallize around performances. Thus, in the end, Bruckner’s entire project in creating the Fourth makes most sense when seen as a whole, especially when it is recognized that substantial evidence indicates that he regarded each revision as an improvement that served his overriding goal of creating the best version possible of this symphony.

When Bruckner initially conceived the Fourth, his symphonies had had only two public performances, the First in 1868 and the Second in 1873. With the Fourth, he was determined to succeed in breaking into the concert repertoire. Indeed, he was keenly interested in producing a symphony that was, as he stated on several occasions, “comprehensible” to an audience and able to make “its effect” in performance. The salience of Bruckner’s determination to create a work that would succeed as a *public work*—through both performance and publication—should not be underestimated. Starting with its initial composition in 1874 and continuing to its publication in 1889, Bruckner oriented his work on the Fourth toward this goal. He made a vigorous effort in 1876 to secure a performance of the first version. When these plans fell through, he reworked the symphony radically between 1878 and 1880, motivated initially by the realization that the first version was, as he said, “impractical” as a performance text. The creation of the resulting second version culminated in the first performance of the Fourth in February 1881, which entailed final adjustments and revisions both before and after the concert. He twice submitted a score of this version to publishers in the mid-1880s; both times it met with rejection. Only in 1887 did

²⁸ Peter Gülke, “‘Neu instrumentiert u zusammengezogen’: wo und welche ist Bruckners Vierte Symphonie?,” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 66 (2009), p. 351. This article first appeared in the previous issue of *Archiv* on pages 209–217 but due to a production error p. 210 appeared twice and p. 215 not at all. Therefore, all references to this article are to the second corrected printing.

he find a willing publisher, but before the symphony appeared in print, Bruckner prepared a revised version that was clearly designed to present the work in a practical and effective performing text. These efforts led to another successful performance and finally the publication of the symphony. The sustained success the Fourth has had with audiences around the world since that time was won in no small part by dint of Bruckner's remarkable, perhaps even unparalleled, compositional persistence.

Because the creation of the Fourth was prolonged and at times intermittent, this book presents a *long* view of its compositional history, understood not as a series of isolated episodes but as a single extended, albeit intermittent, process. It begins with the origination of the work in 1874 during a period for Bruckner of great compositional invention and creative vigor. This was followed by a process of adjustment and revision that continued often quite intensively during the next two years. The story continues with Bruckner's recomposition of the symphony from 1878 through 1880, when the now well-known second version emerged. This is the point at which conventional accounts of the Fourth's development cease, but it is certainly not where Bruckner ended the story. He withdrew the second version in late 1886 or early in 1887 and replaced it with a third and final version, which was premiered in 1888.

The latter stages of the compositional process, which were focused on bringing the work not simply to completion but to a successful engagement with its public, are both fascinating and distinctly challenging to traditional assumptions, precisely because crucial work was not carried out primarily through the medium of a purely autograph manuscript and involved substantial collaboration. Yet, traditions of skeptical dismissal aside, no actual evidence speaks against its authenticity; to the contrary, significant evidence indicates that this version was Bruckner's intended final text of the Fourth. The story does not simply stop there, of course; a symphony is a performance text, and therefore the ongoing history of its performance is part of its biography as well. So, the book concludes with an exploration of key aspects of how the Fourth has been understood and performed since Bruckner's time.

The indefatigability of Bruckner's pursuit of his musical vision was extraordinary. To grasp the sheer time, energy, and devotion he brought to this task, over a decade and a half, is humbling. This book bears witness to that process, striving for historical accuracy achieved with the benefit of thorough archival research and textual criticism, as well as more nuanced critical presumptions. It hopes to demonstrate that attention to the full compositional history of the Fourth can open a window onto Bruckner's symphonic imagination and, because close sustained attention to textual matters intensifies insight into the music of the symphony, can also provide an avenue to better comprehension of the musical substance of the Fourth, a renewed sense of the performance issues it entails, and in the end, a deeper grasp of the work's meaning.