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Eugene Thacker

Abstract: This essay argues for a “blackened” understanding of the Requiem Mass. Focusing on the section *Dies iræ*, the essay explores the aspects of both liturgical text and musical form that lead the Requiem to ultimately negate itself both as text and sound.

1. PREAMBLE

Music has an intimate relation to death. Existing in time, music gives testimony to the melancholy brevity of existence; music *is* in fact this ephemeral, transient quality of everything that exists. E.M. Cioran writes, “I know no other music than that of tears.”¹

At the same time, we also know that music never ceases, even when the music’s over. There is something in music that also resists time and temporality, that flails itself against the brevity of existence, its sound waves stretching out across the finitude of our hearing. Often music is composed of words, and yet the words the music expresses often transcend them, turning against the words, mutating them into something non-linguistic and yet communicable. It is no wonder music is often tied to ritual, the sacred, and the divine. But even this wanes. Music subsists in memory, often resurfacing, like a refrain, at the most unexpected moments—before again fading away into oblivion.¹ Cioran again: “Music is everything. God himself is nothing more than an acoustic hallucination.”²

But if God is an acoustic hallucination, then what of the Devil? The Devil’s music is, of course, heavy metal. Should we then say that the Devil is not the smooth veneer of an “acoustic hallucination,” but the disharmony of feedback and noise? It has

¹ E. M. Cioran, *Tears and Saints*, trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

become a truism that Satanism operates on a logic of inversion, and this has undoubtedly influenced the way we culturally view harmony and disharmony, consonance and dissonance, signal and noise. The Satanic Black Mass, for instance, inverts the Catholic Mass nearly point for point (the inverted cross, the desecration of the Host, and so on). Given the import of the motifs of divine light and divine life in the traditional Catholic Mass, it would seem that the pinnacle (or lowest point) of the Black Mass would be the inversion of divine light and divine life—an affirmation of demonic darkness and death.

If this is the case, then what does one do with the Requiem Mass (*Missa pro defunctis*), the Mass that in fact commemorates, even celebrates death? To simply invert this into a “Mass for Life” would be tantamount to affirming the traditional Mass itself. In a sense, to negate the Christian Mass is all too easy, since the motifs are laid bare in their dualism—sanctity, chastity, transcendence, light, beatitude, and the afterlife. One has simply to systematically invert them via a kind of demonic algorithm. The problem, then, is the way in which opposition itself frames both the Catholic Mass and the Black Mass—life vs. death, divine vs. demonic, form vs. chaos, harmony vs. cacophony.

However, a look at the development of Western sacred music reveals numerous elements in early and medieval Christianity that would make even the most devout attendee of the Black Mass jealous—resurrection and the living dead, cannibalism and vampirism, corporeal metamorphosis, demonic possession, and a sophisticated poetics of eschatology.

In a sense, the Requiem Mass already is an inversion of the traditional Mass, full of ambiguities, spiritual crises, and a world rendered as sorrow and despair.ⁱⁱ *The Requiem is already a Black Mass*. Ostensibly a religious rite memorializing the dead as they pass on to the afterlife, the Requiem is unique in the repertoire of Western sacred music, in that it is an extended musical meditation on death, finitude, and—as we shall see—on the horror of life itself.

The Requiem occupies a special place in the sacred music tradition in the West. As a central part of Christian ritual, the traditional Mass is dedicated to the affirmation of the divine; as a Mass for the Dead, however, the Requiem is also an evocation of a whole host of apocalyptic elements, from the images of the *Dies iræ* (Day of Wrath), to corpses turning to ash, to warnings of evil spirits and “demonic reports.” If the Requiem is a celebration, it would

appear to be a celebration of death—or, more accurately, an affirmation of the life-after-life that death signifies in the apocalyptic tradition. While Requiems were composed throughout the classical, Romantic, and modern periods, it is in the emergence of the Requiem itself as a musical form that one witnesses the basic dichotomy that defines the Requiem—a celebration of negation, the exuberance of the void, the life-affirming ritual of death.

Named after the first verse of its liturgical text, *Requiem æternam dona eis* (“Grant them eternal rest . . .”), the Requiem has been a core part of Western sacred music for centuries. Growing out of a set of disparate burial services in different regions, the Requiem was formalized as an official liturgical service during the Council of Trent (1545-1563). By 1570, when Pope Pius V issued a new edition of the Roman Missal, the Requiem text became part of the official liturgy that was to be used in all religious services. This textual standardization dictated, among other things, the order and the parts of the Requiem Mass, along with the corresponding texts.

This standardization also opened the door to a thorny issue during the period, which was how the liturgical texts were to be rendered musically. Thus the emergence of the Requiem Mass exists alongside a musical innovation that was not without some controversy—the introduction of polyphony. The gradual introduction of polyphony into sacred music not only challenged the symbolic unity of monophonic chant, but it also introduced a plurality of voices that threatened to descend into cacophony and noise, if not handled properly. If the polyphony was excessive or too complex, then the words of the text would be unintelligible, and the religious message lost among dense, shifting, clouds of sound. One of the earliest polyphonic Requiems—now lost—has been attributed to Guillaume Dufay (c.1397-1494), and an extant version by Johannes Ockeghem (c.1420-1497) was also produced around the same time. These early works demonstrate the uncertainty of the role of polyphony within the Requiem—should polyphony suggest the multitude of the voices of the dead or the voices of the not-yet-dead? Should polyphony suggest the sublimity of divine beatitude or divine power at the moment of the End Time? The choice to introduce polyphony in sacred music hints at a whole hermeneutics of the divine and demonic—for instance, polyphony in the *Dies iræ* might have a different effect than polyphony in the *Lux æterna* or Communion. While the religious controversies have waned over time, this decision—how to

musically render the music of death—has continued to be a challenging question for later examples, from Mozart’s energetic *Requiem* (1791), to Brahms’s use of German in *Ein deutsches Requiem* (1865-68), to the modern variants of the Requiem by Maurice Fauré (1887-90), Toru Takemitsu (1957), Benjamin Britten (1961-62), or Hans Werner Henze (1991-93).

The *Dies iræ* section was originally incorporated into the Requiem Mass around the 14th century, taking its title from the first line of the text, *Dies iræ! dies illa*. Around 1570, after the Council of Trent’s standardization of the Mass, the *Dies iræ* is designated as “proper,” meaning that it is among those parts of the Mass that may or may not be included, according to the context (as opposed to “ordinary” sections that are standard for every Mass, whether or not it is a Requiem). Importantly, prior to the Council of Trent, the *Dies iræ* is usually monophonic, sung as plainchant. However, as the influence of the Notre Dame school spreads across Europe, one starts to see versions of the *Dies iræ* performed in polyphony. Thus in the early 16th century, the French composer Antoine Brumel (c.1460-1512) composes a Requiem that contains what is often considered to be the first polyphonic treatment of the *Dies iræ*. Musically speaking, this is interesting because the *Dies iræ* is one of the more dramatic movements of the Requiem Mass, speaking as it does of apocalypse and the resurrected dead. The combination of this rather gothic text with the widened palette of polyphonic choral settings, results in a spectacular theatre of the apocalypse, as one finds in the bombastic, even orgiastic Requiems of Luigi Cherubini (1816), Hector Berlioz (1837), and Giuseppe Verdi (1874).³

Despite the long history of the Requiem in classical music, there is surprisingly little in the way of writing and scholarship. There are, certainly, in-depth studies of particular works by particular composers, mostly within the context of musicology. There are also numerous college-level textbooks on the history of music, in which there are sections or paragraphs on the Requiem. But the lack of reflection on the Requiem is noteworthy, considering its uniqueness both in classical music, and its relation

³ The striking images and *pathos* in the *Dies iræ* have also prompted later composers to produce stand-alone versions, as one finds in Liszt’s *Totentanz*, Saint-Saëns’ *Danse Macabre*, and Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*.

to theological ideas of life and death, order and disorder, harmony and disharmony.

This is, then, less a commentary in the strict sense, a more a prologue to one. The commentary below is simply intended to tease out some of the philosophical and theological ambiguities of the Requiem—to, in effect, “blacken” the Requiem.ⁱⁱⁱ While the text of the Requiem can certainly be read in isolation, ideally a Requiem commentary would also necessitate an awareness of how that text is rendered as musical form—especially important given the contentious status of polyphony during the early modern period. This relation between textual and musical form is also important in the context of the modern Requiem, which often departs from the traditional Mass and invents completely new forms. This is the impetus for the brief meditation that follows the commentary, which concentrates on the modern Requiem by Transylvanian composer György Ligeti.

2. COMMENTARY

The author text of the *Dies iræ* is still disputed, though many scholars agree that it is largely the work of the Italian Franciscan Thomas of Celano (c. 1200-1265), a writer who produced several hagiographies of Saint Francis of Assisi, as well as theological treatises and religious poetry. However, it is likely that Thomas drew inspiration from existing liturgical texts and hymns, including the responsory *Libera me* (which contains the verse *Dies illa, dies iræ*), as well as *Apparebit repentina dies magna Domini* (“The great day of the lord will suddenly appear”), a seventh century hymn for Advent.⁴ Thomas may have also borrowed from early Biblical writings, particularly the ‘hell-fire’ type of sermons, replete as they are with apocalyptic imagery. One in particular, a gloss by the seventh-century-BCE prophet Zephaniah, notes with dramatic urgency that “the great Day of the Lord is near . . . Even the voice of the Day of the Lord,” the Day in which “the mighty man crieth there bitterly.” With a grave solemnity that suddenly shifts into verse form, Zephaniah then pronounces the following:

⁴ Alec Robertson, *Requiem: Music of Mourning and Consolation* (London: Cassell, 1967), 15-16. Much of this historical information is indebted to Robertson’s book, as well as to Robert Chase’s *Dies iræ: A Guide to Requiem Music* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2003).

That Day is a day of wrath [*Dies iræ, dies illa*]
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of wasteness and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
A day of trumpet and alarm
Against the fenced cities,
And against the high battlements!⁵

No doubt images such as these, made all the more forceful with the refrain “A day of . . .”, gave *Dies iræ* a melodramatic touch that it still finds in the version by Thomas of Celano. Thus, while the text of the *Dies iræ* borrows from different sources, already in its genesis one can see emerging an overriding tonality of apocalyptic dread, infused with equally-horrific, juridical themes of sin, judgment, and retribution.

As a poem, the *Dies iræ* is condensed, concise, and even punchy, with each verse composed of three short lines of eight syllables, shot forth in a kind of incantatory and delirious, chant. Each line in each verse is also rhymed, reinforcing the *gravitas* of the words themselves, like a hammer (a hammer of judgment, no doubt) incessantly resounding the stark and gloomy imagery of the last days.

The text of the *Dies iræ* is reproduced below, with a late-17th century English translation, thought to be by the Catholic scholar and writer, John Austin (1613-1669).⁶

1. Dies iræ! dies illa Solvēt sæclum in favilla: Teste David cum Sibylla!	<i>Ah, come it will, that direful day Which shall the world in ashes lay As Daniel and the Sibyl say.</i>
2. Quintus tremor est futurus, Quando iudex est venturus, Cuncta stricte discussurus!	<i>How men will tremble and grow pale When Justice comes with sword and scale To weigh the faults and sort the fates of all!</i>

⁵ The translation is from *The Modern Reader's Bible*, ed. Richard Moulton (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1943), reproduced in Robertson, 16.

⁶ Both the text and translation are reproduced in Robertson, 17ff.

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| 3. Tuba, mirum spargens
sonum
Per sepulchra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum. | <i>A trumpet first shall rend the skies
And all, wherever laid, must rise
And come unto the Bar in prisoner's
guise.</i> |
| 4. Mors stupebit, et natura,
Cum resurget creatura,
Iudicanti responsura. | <i>Nature and Death amazed will
stand
To see each one rebodied, and
Brought to reply, himself, to each
demand.</i> |
| 5. Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur,
Unde mundus iudicetur. | <i>A written book lie open shall
Containing each one's charge; and
all
By those grand evidences stand or
fall.</i> |
| 6. Iudex ergo cum sedebit,
Quidquid latet, apparebit:
Nil inultum remanebit. | <i>Then the Judge seats himself and
tries;
No shifting from all-seeing eyes
Nor 'scaping, then. Who e'er deserves
it dies.</i> |
| 7. Quid sum miser tunc
dicturus?
Quem patronum rogaturus,
Cum vix iustus sit securus? | <i>O then, poor I! What shall I do?
Which friend or patron take me to,
When saints themselves are scarce
secure from woe?</i> |
| 8. Rex tremendæ maiestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
Salva me, fons pietatis. | <i>Dread King, to thee thyself run I,
Who savest the saved, without a
why,
And so mayest me, thou source of
clemency.</i> |
| 9. Recordare, Iesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuæ viæ:
Ne me perdas illa die. | <i>Think! Who did once thy pity move
And drew thee from thy throne
above?
Cast me not off, at last, thy former
love!</i> |

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| 10. Quærens me, sedisti
lassus:
Redemisti Crucem passus:
Tantus labor non sit cassus. | <i>Thou tired'st thyself in seeking me,
For my sake didst die on a tree:
Let not in vain such pains and
labour be.</i> |
| 11. Iuste iudex ultionis,
Donum fac remissionis
Ante diem rationis. | <i>True: thou art just and repayest love!
Yet acts of grace mayst deign to save
At least, before that day of reckoning
come.</i> |
| 12. Ingemisco, tamquam
reus:
Culpa rubet vultus meus:
Supplicanti parce, Deus. | <i>And I am guilty, ere thou try me:
My very looks, and blush, descry me:
But mercy, Lord, do not deny me.</i> |
| 13. Qui Mariam absolvisti,
Et latronem exaudisti,
Mihi quoque spem dedisti. | <i>Thou, who didst once a Magdalen
spare
And of a thief condemned took'st
care,
Bid'st me by these examples not
despair.</i> |
| 14. Preces meæ non sunt
dignæ:
Sed tu bonus fac benigne,
Ne perenni cremer igne. | <i>Nay, not that my prayers aught can
claim
But thou art good! Be still the same,
That wretched I burn not in
th'endless flame!</i> |
| 15. Inter oves locum præsta,
Et ab hædis me sequestra,
Statuens in parte dextra. | <i>When from the goats thou shalt
divide
They sheep, let me with thee abide,
Placed in eternal bliss on thy right
side.</i> |
| 16. Confutatis maledictis,
Flammis acribus addictis:
Voca me cum benedictis. | <i>And then, those great Assizes done,
And all the cursed i' the fire thrown,
Say: 'Come ye blessed', meaning me
for one.</i> |
| 17. Oro supplex et acclinis,
Cor contritum quasi cinis: | <i>Lord, this I beg on bended knee,
With heart contrite as ashes be:</i> |

Gere curam mei finis.	<i>That thou take care both of my end and me.</i>
18. Lacrimosa dies illa, Qua resurget ex favilla Judicandus homo reus.	<i>Alas, that day fulfilled of tears When man before his throne appears Who makes and only can appease our fears!</i>
19. Huic ergo parce, Deus: Pie Jesu Domine, Dona eis requiem. Amen.	<i>[Therefore spare them, God.] Gentle Lord Jesus Give rest to them. Amen.</i>

On an initial read, there are a number of motifs that characterize the *Dies iræ* text. There is the dramatic scene of the apocalypse, filled as it is with sound and fury, noise and mayhem. The trumpets in the third verse (*Tuba, mirum spargens sonum*) serve as a musical cue for scenes of destruction, and both the world and the self are reduced to ashes (a theme announced in the first verse, “the world in ashes lay” and repeated near the end, in the seventeenth verse, where a prayer is sent forth with a “heart contrite as ashes”).

Such scenes are also the occasion for a further motif that is brought forth with great clarity in the third and fourth verses—that of resurrection and judgment, the living dead and the “sword and scale” of God. Importantly, this drama of divine sovereignty is first announced sonically, and then elaborated in the many cries and whispers of despair that follow. In fact, one of the over-arching themes in the *Dies iræ* text as a whole is the way in which the apocalypse is predominantly a sonic event. Borrowing as it does from the apocalyptic tradition, the *Dies iræ* imputes to sound a supernatural causality. The *Dies iræ* suggests something about the Requiem Mass as a whole—the *sonic is supernatural*. This is stressed in the third verse, where the divine resounding of trumpets/horns instigates the resurrection of the dead. In a sense, the sudden intrusion of this supernatural cacophony not only signals the beginning of a ritual act (the resurrection and judgment of the dead), but it is the ritual itself, the means by which the dead are brought back to life and brought before divine judgment.

The apocalyptic sound (*tuba*; “trumpet” or “pipe,” but also more generally “noise” or “sound”) of the third verse serves several functions. It first enacts a dramatic gesture of clearing the way,

laying waste to all that is, so that the theater of the apocalypse can begin ("A trumpet first shall rend the skies"). This clearing gesture is tied to another function, which is to spread and disseminate this supernatural sound, something made clearer in a literal translation of the line *Tuba mirum spargens sonum*—"A trumpet spreading the sound of wonder." At once terrifying and wondrous, horrific and sublime, this supernatural sound spreads—like a disease—throughout the world, seeping into the cracks and fissures of graves (*Per sepulcra regionum*, "throughout the tombs of the regions"). It is this miasmatic spreading of supernatural sound that then causes, by mysterious means, the resurrection of the dead and the supernatural revitalizing of the corpse, leading to a double terror—that of a transgression of the laws of nature ("Nature and Death amazed will stand"), and that of the living dead realizing they have been brought before divine judgment (*Cum resurget creatura*, "the creature that will rise again"; the corpses that, "wherever laid, must rise," that become horrifically "rebodyed").

In these verses, supernatural sound is a *clearing*, a *spreading*, and a *rising*—a cataclysmic clearing of the world, of all that exists and lives, an inauguration of the theater of the apocalypse; a spreading of a sound both enchanting and terrifying into the depths of graves; a raising of the dead that both transgresses the laws of nature and affirms the terror of divine law.

While the opening of the *Dies iræ* is cacophony and noise, this gradually leads to a more sullen, solemn mood of despair and sorrow. The result of the supernatural sound is not just a day of wrath, but also, as verse eighteen puts it, a "day of tears" (*Lacrimosa dies illa*). As one traces the spiritual contours of the text, one of the strongest impressions of the *Dies iræ* is the way that the exterior turmoil of destruction and resurrection is gradually transmuted into an interior turmoil of despair, trembling, and misery. What begins with a third-person account of horrific events is transformed into a first-person expression of despair.

Already, in the second verse, the very expectation of the apocalypse causes all the living to "tremble and grow pale," in effect already transforming the living into the ghostly pallor of corpses. The text then makes a shift from an external description of events to an internal monologue of suffering and despair, a monologue spoken by an anonymous, spiritual subject, a subject subjected to the mystical de-subjectifying event of spiritual dereliction. In the sixth verse, the terror of sovereign divinity is

expressed in the frozen, trapped state of mortal finitude (“No shifting from all-seeing eyes”). Everything is uncertain, even divine judgment, which seems arbitrary and without reason; the poem appeals to a “Dreaded King . . . Who savest the saved, without a why.” By the seventh verse, the text wholly shifts into a penitential mode, a mode of *miser*, asking “O then, poor I! What shall I do?” Self-doubt, guilt, and dereliction follow; the end of the ninth verse declaims, “Cast me not off, at last, thy former love!” This dereliction eventually overcomes the entire being of the poem, reducing the subject to a cowering, crumbling shell made of ashes (“With heart contrite as ashes”). With the subject spiritually emptied and cast adrift, all that remains is the rest of non-being and silence, the overriding theme of the Requiem itself (*Dona eis requiem*).

While it opens with great spectacle, the *Dies iræ* is really a *song of despair*. Despair is distinct from anxiety, dread, terror, or horror. It has an affective dimension, one that has to do with a certain sense of being trapped in a dilemma, constrained by reflective thought, walled-in by contradiction.^{iv} Despair is, in a sense, the affective dimension of contradiction. For Kierkegaard, despair is primarily a condition of the subject, split between its existence and its reflective awareness of its existence. But mere self-awareness is not enough to evoke despair. For, existing in time, the self is never and can never be fully or completely self-aware. There is always tomorrow, another time, another place, another night in deep sleep. And it is uncertain whether even death would be this point of culmination where self and self-awareness would perfectly coincide. All that remains is the awareness of this uncertainty, which Kierkegaard describes as a sickness:

The despairing person is mortally ill. In a completely different sense than is the case with any illness, this sickness has attacked the most vital organs, and yet he cannot die. Death is not the end of this sickness, but death is incessantly the end. To be saved from this sickness and its torment—and the death—are precisely this inability to die.⁷

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 21.

The omnipresence of death, combined with the impossibility of experiencing it fully, is what Kierkegaard enigmatically calls “eternity.” There is a strange religious horror in Kierkegaard, as if what is to be feared is not death (in fact, death is precisely what one hopes for), but instead life.⁸ As Kierkegaard notes, “to despair is a qualification of spirit and relates to the eternal in man. But he cannot rid himself of the eternal—no, never in all eternity. He cannot throw it away once and for all, nothing is more impossible . . .”⁹ Nor does this mean that one can turn back towards a reaffirmation of life as it is, in its being haunted by eternity. “Thus to be sick *unto* death is to be unable to die, yet not as if there were hope of life; no, the hopelessness is that there is not even the ultimate hope, death.”⁹

But despair is not simply a psychological or emotional state. It is inherently relational. As Kierkegaard notes (in a subtle parody of Hegel): “Despair is the misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself.”¹⁰ The most basic philosophical relations here come into play—the relation between self and self, self and other, self and world. Common to all them is the fact of their existence, however static or dynamic, however prodigious or impoverished. Despair is a problem of existence—the problem of always being something; in effect, the problem of always being (it matters little whether it is “being with,” “being the same,” “being different,” “being for,” “being against,” or some other variant). As a philosophical problematic—and indeed as a religious one as well—despair infuses the very fabric of being, at whatever level or scale. Despair is not the problem of *what* one is, but the problem *that* one is. Beyond the dream of being-another or being-something-else there is the further dream of losing oneself, of being neither a self or an other, of negating both self and world. Despair thus speaks to the further dream of not being anything, of being-nothing (which of course entails its own dilemmas). Ultimately, despair is the problem of not being nothing.

Viewed as a song of despair, the *Dies iræ* becomes a profound example of mystical poetry. Not only does the text shift registers (from representation to presentation), but it also undergoes a kind

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

of emptying of the self that is indicative of many mystical traditions.

In the first third of the text (verses one to six), the *Dies iræ* depicts despair turned outwards, external despair. This is despair rendered objective and consonant with the very existence of the world—*eschatological despair*. Here we see descriptions of the apocalypse (verse one, five and six), the dead rising from graves (verses two and three), and the transgression of natural laws (verse four). The world itself is despair and disorder, uncertain and crumbling beneath the divine terror of a sonic event that rends the world apart at the seams.

But this takes a turn in the middle part of the text (verses seven to sixteen), where the *Dies iræ* becomes a poetic testimony of spiritual crisis. Here the *Dies iræ* is despair turned inwards, internal despair. This is the more familiar variant, despair incorporated into the modern subject, a subject perpetually in crisis—*existential despair*. The affects range from the dread of divine sovereignty (verses eight, nine and sixteen), to spiritual dereliction (verses nine and twelve), to confessions and appeals (verses ten, fourteen, fifteen), and prayers for an eroticized, spiritual union (verses nine, eleven, twelve). The crumbling external world of the first part of the text strangely disappears, and all that is left is this quivering, crumbling subject who makes desperate appeals to the divine while at the same time questioning everything, including the arbitrariness of the divine.

The final part of the *Dies iræ* text (verses seventeen to nineteen) *are both closure and a shift to a new mode*. Following the external despair of the world, and the internal despair of the self, the *Dies iræ* doesn't leave much left, for both world and self have crumbled beneath something enigmatic, arbitrary, and transgressive, some entity that the voice of the text can only call "divine." The world, governed by "Nature and Death," has been turned upside down, the graves emptied and the dead walking the Earth. The self, governed by the hierarchy of body, mind, and spirit, has likewise fractured into shards of doubt and dereliction. What remains to be done is to see this despair—of the world, of the self—followed to its logical conclusion, in which nothing is left—*ontological despair*. In verse seventeen the despair of the self reduces the subject to their knees, a humble, supplicating, hunched-over mortal coil that is ultimately reduced to ashes. Then, in verse eighteen, the text circularly returns to its descriptive voice, the

despair of the world reduced to “days of tears,” a world that has been nothing other than this despair of self and world.

The despair of self and world ultimately become the crumbling and the emptying of self and world, where nothing remains except tears and ashes. In the orthodox context of the Requiem Mass, this is the pretext for salvation and redemption. Hence the final verse, with its formal closure of prayer. But the final verse also re-states the governing theme of the Requiem Mass—“rest.” The closing prayer is that rest—eternal rest—be granted to the dead. But what is “rest”? Rest is a hovering, a stoppage, a silence, a void within everything that is. It would seem that, following the despair of self and world, and their reduction to ashes and tears, the final step would be their strange transmutation into pure nothingness. On the Day of Wrath, rest is the dual negation of self and world, despair turning inward and outward, and finally despair turning against itself, in a contemplation composed of tears and ashes.

3. MEDITATION

While the Requiem is part of the history of classical music, its form has radically changed over time.¹¹ Many modern versions of the Requiem have in some way or another attempted to “update” it in different ways, by the choice of text, language, or by the setting of current or recent events. In addition, the modern Requiem is not just for a prominent individual, but for a more pluralistic group, sometimes defined nationally and sometimes defined even more broadly. Originally a choral music, the modern Requiem includes a variety of instruments, ranging from chamber ensembles to large-scale orchestras. The form has also changed, with Requiems being re-cast as opera, jazz improvisation, or musical theater. In short, the modern Requiem is much more than the early modern Requiem, and its effects have steadily been maximalized in all these ways (setting, instrumentation, musical form). The result is that, while the modern Requiem displays an incredible amount of innovation, the Requiem idea itself has gradually become indistinguishable from any other form of musical spectacle.

One of the ideas central to the Requiem is the relation between music and death, a relation that informs both the religious content and the musical form of the Requiem. But what makes the

¹¹ The website <requiemsurvey.org> contains an exhaustive list of Requiems from the Middle Ages to the present.

Requiem interesting is the way in which both content and form fail to completely hold up. In the text of the *Dies iræ* we witness a despair that ultimately turns against itself, negating both self and world in an ambivalent–blackened–reduction to ashes and tears. Such a process would seem to necessitate at once an effusive and a subtractive approach to musical form, a contrast between the cacophony and disharmony of the world and the enigmatic silence of the emptied, ashen self.

Interestingly, this dynamic is played out in the earliest Requiem compositions. The *Requiem* (c. 1461) by the Flemish composer Johannes Ockeghem has become a canonical example of the early modern Requiem.¹² Borrowing from the Gregorian chant tradition, it intersperses brief segments of monophonic phrasing with somber, luminous, carefully controlled polyphony that one can still hear in contemporary composers. Scored for only four voices, Ockeghem's use of polyphony is noteworthy for the way that the four voices are often treated as equals, weaving in and out of each other, sometimes in unison, sometimes in counterpoint. In addition, there is great variation between five sections of the Mass—while some sections (such as the *Graduale*) the polyphony is undulating and gently flowing, other sections (such as the *Kyrie*) burst forth with a kind of somber energy, alternating between singly-sung lines and groups of two or three voices.

This type of writing for music reaches its pinnacle in the work of the Spanish composer Tomás Luis de Victoria, whose *Officium defunctorum* (1603) raises polyphony to a complex art form.¹³ Victoria too uses elements of monophonic chant, but differently than Ockeghem. With Ockeghem, monophony often flows in and out of polyphony, a phrase rendered in Gregorian chant that then effortlessly flows into a two or three part polyphonic section. In the *Introitus* Victoria uses monophonic chant almost as a lure. A part of the chorus sings, in unison, the *Requiem æternam* opening. The isolated, even solitary effect of the opening chant gives way to a vast, choral polyphony, until there is a great mass of sound—the

¹² An award-winning performance by The Clerk's Group is available on the Gaudeamus label.

¹³ There are several performances of Victoria's Requiem available. The performance by the Choir of Westminster Cathedral (on Hyperion) uses a full boys chorus to great effect. However, the recording by the renowned Tallis Scholars (on Gimmell) is equally powerful, and in many ways more detailed.

acoustic equivalent of majestically moving clouds. In the very next section, the *Kyrie*, Victoria drops the monophonic chant altogether, and the entire chorus itself emerges from silence, but this time in unison, creating this time a monophonic wall of sound.

While the Requiem has a long history of being treated polyphonically, the story with the *Dies iræ* section in particular is different. Many early modern composers omit the *Dies iræ* entirely, while others, when they include it, tend to set it as Gregorian chant. However, Antoine Brumel's *Missa pro defunctis* (c. 1510) does something different—it is generally noted as one of the first instances in which the *Dies iræ* section is set to polyphony.¹⁴ The difference is striking. Accompanied by a small ensemble of horns, the chorus begins with a rich polyphonic rendering of the opening *Dies iræ* verse. These are contraposed with other verses sung in traditional, unaccompanied Gregorian chant. For instance, after a polyphonic treatment of verse three, there is a stark and almost stand-still chant of verse four, which begins *Mors stupebit, et natura* ("Nature and Death amazed will stand"). This sort of back and forth continues throughout Brumel's *Dies iræ*. There are even short instrumental passages of the horns alone, as happens just before the despairing verse seven (*Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?*, "Oh then, poor I! What shall I do?"). The polyphony signals movement, and the movement is abruptly stopped by the somber, declamatory style of the monophonic chant. The effect is of a rhythmic complexity not found in Ockeghem or Victoria. One feels that a wash of sound envelopes the listener, only to have the ground give way to silence and solitary chant.

In each of these early modern examples of the Requiem, there is a subtractive element at play. With Ockeghem the Requiem becomes a study in structural minimalism between different voices and their combinations, their point and counterpoint, voices that emerge into the polyphony and then fade away. With Victoria all boundaries are eliminated, everything is a lush wash of sound, a kind of spectral field in which voices easily blend into each other monophonically, and then distinguish themselves polyphonically. And with Brumel the juxtaposition of monophonic chant and polyphonic chorus produces a different

¹⁴ A good performance of Brumel's *Dies iræ* is by the Heulgas Ensemble (on Sony).

type of subtraction, a somber, rhythmic polyphony of sudden presence and absence, of acoustic movement and stillness.

It is these subtractive aspects that distinguish the early Requiem from its modern cousins, the latter which frequently opt for an additive, maximalist approach, culminating in large, theatrical, epic orchestrations of musical spectacle. But not all modern Requiems belong to this additive approach. The Requiem of the Transylvanian composer György Ligeti (1923-2006) is an exception to this rule. One of the most profound and otherworldly Requiems produced in the modern era, Ligeti's *Requiem* is, at first listen, decidedly modern and avant-garde. Coming of age during the flowering of the European postwar avant-garde, Ligeti's works, with their characteristic sound clusters, rank alongside contemporaries such as Krzysztof Penderecki, Giacinto Scelsi, and Iannis Xenakis, and his influence can be seen in a generation of later composers, including Ana-Maria Avram, Iancu Dumitrescu, Julio Estrada, Gérard Grisey, Francisco Guerrero, and Tristan Murail, to name a few.¹⁵

Ligeti's fondness for abstract, dense clusters of sound characterizes his best known pieces, including *Atmosphères* (1961), *Ramifications* (1968-69) and *Lux aeterna* (1966; famously used in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*). Influenced early on by Béla Bartók and Zoltan Kodály (Ligeti studied ethnomusicology with the latter in Budapest), Ligeti's works in the 1960s began to explore the textural aspects of sound.¹⁶ By-passing the traditional musical concerns of melody, harmony, and rhythm, Ligeti began to produce works based on massive chord clusters, producing floating, dense, sound clouds.¹⁷ Ligeti has mentioned as inspiration

¹⁵ While Ligeti's music is largely identified with this aesthetic of abstract sound clusters, it is also important to note the composer's diversity, which ranges from pieces influenced by Romanian folk music, to wildly absurdist theater (e.g. his opera *The Grande Macabre* stands out in this regard), to neoclassical pieces, to electronic compositions.

¹⁶ In the 1950s, Ligeti fled his native Hungary, traveling to Cologne, Vienna, and Paris. Along the way he met Pierre Boulez, Mauricio Kagel, and Karlheinz Stockhausen (producing electronic music with the latter at the WDR). During this period he also attended the Darmstadt summer sessions, which introduced him to a range of postwar music, from electronic music and musique concrète to total serialism.

¹⁷ In 1962, Ligeti produced the work *Poème Symphonique* to illustrate this idea. An array of one hundred metronomes were set off at the same time.

the sound of a field of cicadas, or the sound of raindrops on a roof—instances in which a stochastic distribution of sounds produces a field or a texture, in Ligeti's words a "cloud of sound."¹⁸

Written between 1963 and 1965, Ligeti's *Requiem* is unique in that it incorporates musical elements both old and new.¹⁹ There are elements that identify it as a traditional Requiem in the style of Ockeghem—the decision to predominantly use the chorus, in effect going back to the early sacred music of Ockeghem, Dufay, and others. Ligeti's *Requiem* also borrows from the liturgical text of the traditional Requiem, composed of three basic parts—an *Introitus*, a *Kyrie*, and a two-part *Dies iræ* (which, interestingly, is split into the "Day of Wrath" and the "Day of Tears"). In fact, Ligeti has noted that for him the *Dies iræ* lies at the center of the Requiem, evoking for him the apocalyptic images of Bosch, Memling, and Dürer.²⁰

The *Introitus* is the emergence of sound from silence, a dim luminescence from an abyss. The chorus begins faintly, almost inaudibly, almost whispering the text against backdrop of low, almost sub-sonic orchestral wash. What is striking about the *Introitus*—and indeed about the Requiem as a whole—is the way that Ligeti extends sound. Similar to the way that individual words and syllables are drawn out in Gregorian chant, Ligeti draws out each sound so that the words spoken by the chorus are all but unintelligible. One has the sense that Ligeti has taken the first few seconds of Ockeghem's *Requiem* and extended it to ten or twenty minutes or more.

Gradually, over time, minute differences would emerge, until eventually the unison of a single sound became a field of sounds. Needless to say, the piece caused a scandal when it was first performed (though it was the '60s and the audience should have known better).

¹⁸ For more on Ligeti, see Richard Toop's *György Ligeti* (London: Phaidon, 1999) as well as Richard Steinitz's *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ There are two major recordings of Ligeti's *Requiem*, a recording for the Wergo label (Michael Gielen conducting the Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks), and a more recent recording for the Teldec label's Ligeti Project (Jonathan Nott conducting the Berlin Philharmonic with the London Voices). Both are good performances, though the Wergo recording suffers from excessive surface noise on the recording itself.

²⁰ A series of interviews with Ligeti is collected in *György Ligeti in Conversation with Peter Varnai, Josef Hausler, Claude Samuel and Himself* (New York: Da Capo, 1984).

With the *Kyrie* the funeral drama of the piece begins. Ligeti provides an example of polyphony that is so convoluted and dense that it nearly breaks apart. The chorus spreads itself forth, quivering in minute polyphonic shifts, with the orchestra bolstering the voices, adding weight or producing the sense of weightlessness. The voices of the chorus—drawn out, trembling, quivering—become unhuman, ghostly, and ghastly, their words reduced to decaying phonemes. At moments Ligeti makes polyphony so dense that it ironically becomes a kind of monophonic cloud. Ligeti has referred to this technique as “micropolyphony,” the point where the polyphony has so many voices, making so many changes, that everything becomes a dense meshwork of sound.

The *Dies iræ* starts—or intrudes, really—with drama of a different kind. The horns and screeching voices of the chorus interrupt the abstract, ghostly washes of the previous sections. Suddenly the Mass for the Dead becomes something like an absurdist, Black Comedy of the Dead. Everything is abrupt, fragmented, chaotic. This is the terrain of Bosch or Rabelais. The chorus is hysterical, delirious, contradictory (whispering loudly, singing at the extremes of the vocal register). Whereas in the previous sections the Requiem text is stretched to its breaking point, here in the *Dies iræ* it is shattered and scattered into a thousand shards. This is the Day of Wrath, but rendered satirical—a Day of Judgment ruled over by King Ubu.

The Day of Wrath part of the *Dies iræ* then gives way to the final section, the Day of Tears. The grotesque and the absurd gives way to an eerie calm, in which the orchestra slowly sounds the highest and lowest registers, a quiet hum. This then paves the way for the meditative, melancholy closing of two female vocalists accompanied by the orchestra. The Requiem begins as it ends, the shadowy din of the orchestra and voices receding back into silence.

There is a kind of black chemistry at work in Ligeti’s *Requiem*. The voices, along with the orchestra, spill out, crystallize, foam, bubble, and then evaporate again into silence. All of this is predicated on the mesmerizing incapacity of the voice to in effect contain the Requiem. In Ligeti’s *Requiem*, the voice, in making a sound, negates itself as a voice. The voice becomes decoupled from being a means of linguistic communication or personal expression; that is, the voice separates itself from speech, but also from any form of subjective expression. The voice becomes something other than a voice, and certainly something other than a speaking,

communicating voice. It becomes a sound, a texture, a field of trembling waves, the murmur and hum of silence, a cloud of sounds. This is, I would suggest, a mystical gesture, but a mysticism of the darkest order. The voice that enunciates only its downward dissipation, its own unhuman transformation: this is the core of both Ockeghem's and Ligeti's variants on the Requiem. The voices in Ligeti's *Requiem* quiver, whimper, screech, shout, and cry, and these are not simply the expression of human psychology or personal feelings. Beyond this, the voices also do everything that voices are not meant to do, resulting in a kind of choral deep time—either they enunciate in such a drawn-out, extended manner that all that remains are abstract, de-humanized phonemes, or they are shattered into so many disparate pitches and tones, all but incommunicable to anyone who should listen.

What makes Ligeti's modern take on the Requiem unique is not its avant-garde techniques—it is its premodernity. Much of the compositional effect of Ligeti's *Requiem* is already nascent in the earliest Requiems by composers such as Ockeghem, Josquin Desprez, Pierre de la Rue, and Johannes Prioris. In examples such as these, the chorus is already performing this incapacity of the voice to transcend itself, this mesmerizing failure of the voice to exit from itself and become something elemental.



Funerary scene from Carl Th. Dreyer's 1943 film *Day of Wrath*.

ⁱ *Like a refrain . . . oblivion*: The unexpected irruption and fading of music in relation to ritual, the sacred, and the divine is indexed by the harmonic *sortes* which serves as the fulcrum of Augustine's conversion: "And suddenly I heard a voice from some nearby house, a boy's voice or a girl's voice, I do not know: but it was sort of sing-song [*cum cantu dicentis*], repeated again and again, 'Take and read, take and read.' I ceased weeping and immediately began to search my mind most carefully as to whether children were accustomed to chant these words in any kind of game and I could not remember that I had ever heard any such thing." (*Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed [Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006], 8.12). The musical status of the spontaneous imperative is mysterious. The harmony occurs via repetition, yet it is spontaneous. It is recognized, yet not found in memory. Ergo: music involves the memory of what has not happened, what never happens. It occurs as an event of what is beyond event. That is its divinity, its being a manifestation of the Reality wherein nothing happens. With regard to Black Metal's ritual genealogy, the musical moment in Augustine's spectacle of conversion exposes the necessity of considering the relation between metal and divination, particularly in light of the inverse structural resonance between the Requiem Mass and the forms of divination involving the souls of the dead (necromancy). Where such divination summons the souls of the dead to speak to the interests of temporal life, the Requiem commends the souls of the dead to rest in anticipation of their final summoning to eternal life at the Day of Judgment. As the Eucharistic Mass sublimates sacrifice within the final and uniquely acceptable murder of the God-Man, the Requiem Mass sublimates necromancy within the final summoning and resurrection on the *dies irae*. A thesis of the Requiem is that God is the true necromantic diviner, the only one who really raises the dead and causes the soul to truly speak: "*Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?*" [What am I, miserable, then going to say?]

There is a profound and subtle musical affinity, then, between the Requiem Mass and the experience of conversion charted by Augustine—a very natural affinity given the parallels between the scene and Augustine's exegesis of Lazarus as figure for resurrection from the tomb of habit, prison of the fractured human will. The music of the Requiem summons and 'divines' the day of doom, playing in time the sound of the end of time in order to effect conversion before it is too late. Similarly, the significance of the song

that moves Augustine lies precisely its being a kind of magical medium between the new permanent present to which conversion is ordered and the mutable finitude of temporal events which are always coming to conclusion. The music of the refrain—"tolle lege, tolle lege"—is the *imperative of the imperative* which permits spiritual transformation. The song is the threshold between the intensity of the will which needs the future to be present (let it be now) and the peace of the will which can pass into the past (it is accomplished): "And I continued my miserable complaining: 'How long, how long shall I go on saying tomorrow and again tomorrow? Why not now, why not have an end to my uncleanness this very hour?' . . . I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant, with the very ending of the sentence, it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away" (*Confessions* 8.12). The music of conversion or personal apocalypse is the sound whereby one passes from spiritual nigredo or the hideous gnosis of hellish self-knowledge—"But You, Lord . . . turned be back towards myself, taking me from behind my own back where I had put myself all the time that I preferred not to see myself. And You set me there before my own face that I might see how vile I was, how twisted and unclean and spotted and ulcerous" (*Confessions* 8.7)—to freedom. On Augustine's conversion and the Etruscan corpse-bride torture, see Nicola Masciandaro, "*Come cosa che cada: Habit and Cataclysm, or, Exploding Plasticity,*" in *French Theory Today: An Introduction to Possible Futures*, ed. Alexander R. Galloway [New York: TPSNY, 2011], 24-3).

A question to consider is how Black Metal, inasmuch as it holds a heterodox relation to the Requiem, is also heretically bound to divination, a practice which has an a significantly vexed status in Christian ritual, being both prohibited and practiced within the church, as in the *sortes biblicae* and *sortes sanctorum* (see Pieter W. van der Horst, "*Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity,*" in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Rutgers, Horst, Havelaar, and Teugels [Leuven: Peeters, 1998], 143-74). Suggestion: Black Metal is a musical form divination without object, divination in the absence of a to-be-divined. Black Metal summons and communes with itself as an auto-immanent 'anti-divine' sacred, a pure religion of itself wherein every repetition is the original, where ritual is redeemed from all memorial function. It summons in a way that reveals there is nothing to remember, no voice from the Outside

that can speak to the present. This is in contrast to doom metal, which seems generically doomed to summoning the original Black Sabbath in the hopes that its mystical fifth member will reappear. Doom Metal, ethically apocalyptic from the start—"Oh no, no, please God help me!" (Black Sabbath, "Black Sabbath," *Black Sabbath*); "Hand of God has struck the hour" (Black Sabbath, "War Pigs," *Paranoid*)—divines a voice from beyond that will wake the world and make the dead speak. The difference between Doom Metal and Black Metal with regard to divination may be illustrated by comparing two songs by Abysmal Grief and Mayhem.



For Abysmal Grief, funereal communion offers resurrection, renewal, and experience of the mysterious "link between life and death": "We proclaim the presence of a spirit light / In relation with the living before us / Their words are subject for the study on life / Consider the Funeral as a new birth rite / A new birth rite . . . The Necromass" (Abysmal Grief, "The Necromass: Always They Answer," *Abysmal Grief* [Black Widow Records, 2007]). For Mayhem, communion is impossible, yet in a strangely actualized and forceful way wherein the truth of the dead is present in the unspeakable form of a stony, silent scream: "A face in stone . . . decayed by age / A man who has returned to tell of his damnation / Fears so deep, the mouth open wide / The dream died away before dawn of this time / Ancient times legends stories so dark / Blackened his sight now / Not even the memories are left / Back after such a long time / The stone is cold as death / But what formed its true fears / Only the wind is able to tell / Tell me - what did you see there / In the darkness - of the past / The

eyes - stares so empty / The mouth - screams so silent / Tell me - what did you see there / In the darkness - of the past" (Mayhem, "From the Dark Past," *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* [Deathlike Silence, 1994]). There is an outside, a depth to be divined, but the divination communicates nothing, nothing other than its own advancing vector of musical force in which something unsummonable is powerfully heard. With respect to the Augustinian drama of conversion, this implies that Black Metal constitutes a rigorous, *akairic* prosecution of conversion's inversion, the inside-out dilation of its most open, non-determined musically seductive moment into an endlessly original repetition that stands equally outside time's depth and beyond its end. As Andrew observes, it is this necromantic drive which makes Black Metal a truly modern—perhaps the only authentically modern—art: "Every time you open a book or listen to a song you are raising the dead. What black metal does is openly embrace this fact. There is the fetish for the rotting, the unholy, the magical, and the 'necro' because it understands that living in the modern world means living within a history that grows upon itself constantly. We are living our lives and conducting our affairs on a mountain of human corpses, and as a true art, black metal embraces this metaphor of our existence today" ("Necromancy in Black Metal, *Cosmic Dreamland*, <http://cosmicdreamland.blogspot.com/2010/11/necromancy-in-black-metal.html>). NM

ⁱⁱ *Already an inversion*: Inversion of the divine is identically internal to Christianity and Black Metal. God reveals himself in the form of a crucified human. The Church is built upon a man who denies God and is crucified upside down. According to the *Acts of Peter*, the inverted crucifixion signifies the fallen condition of human nature whose redemption requires being raised up, reversely, on the upright cross. Cf. Horde, "Invert the Inverted Cross," *Hellig Usvart* (Nuclear Blast, 1994). As the shadow of Christ's passion, Peter's crucifixion figures the killing of the incarnate divinity as God's becoming upside down for man. The cross is an icon of the upside down-ness of the created world: "I beseech you the executioners, crucify me thus, with the head downward and not otherwise: and the reason wherefore, I will tell unto them that hear. And when they had hanged him up after the manner he desired, he began again to say: Ye men unto whom it belongeth to hear, hearken to that which I shall declare unto you at this especial time as I hang here. Learn ye the mystery of all nature,

and the beginning of all things, what it was. For the first man, whose race I bear in mine appearance (or, of the race of whom I bear the likeness), fell (was borne) head downwards, and showed forth a manner of birth such as was not heretofore: for it was dead, having no motion. He, then, being pulled down—who also cast his first state down upon the earth—established this whole disposition of all things, being hanged up an image of the creation wherein he made the things of the right hand into left hand and the left hand into right hand, and changed about all the marks of their nature, so that he thought those things that were not fair to be fair, and those that were in truth evil, to be good. Concerning which the Lord saith in a mystery: Unless ye make the things of the right hand as those of the left, and those of the left as those of the right, and those that are above as those below, and those that are behind as those that are before, ye shall not have knowledge of the kingdom” (*The Acts of Peter*, trans. M. R. James [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924], ch. 37-8). Satanizing the Petrine state, the denial of God in which religion is grounded, Black Metal inverts the inversion by repeating it—an *intensive* negation that overrides the dialectical and affirms the negative beyond all opposition to the positive via essential confusion. The meaning of the Black Metal cross lies in the fact that is Christian, anti-Christian, and Satanic all at once in an permanently problematic way. Intensive negation works through confusion of opposites, via wielding the process of negation into a labyrinthine space against which counterattack is impossible. This is simultaneously Reality’s tactic with itself (in ‘creating’ universe and so forth) and the Satanic strategy—the only possible one—in the ‘war’ with God, namely, to destroy decidability as to creator and created, to advance forever in a third zone between eternal contest and permanent victory in a kind of endless crushing of Christ’s body: “Lord of destruction I summon

creation on himself, and ironically his anti-Demiurge monstrosity is the result of his life-modelling himself to be the creator, the created, and creativity all together” (Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia* [Melbourne: re.press, 2008], 191). The inverted cross of Black Metal is not a reversal of the upright Christian cross, but a *profanation* of the Petrine cross that reestablishes confusion between human and divine. It is a purer, non-dialectical manifestation of the cross as always already upside down. “*Religio* is not what unites men and gods but what ensures they remain distinct. It is not disbelief and indifference toward the divine, therefore, that stand in opposition to religion, but ‘negligence,’ that is, a behavior that is free and ‘distracted’ (that is to say, released from the *religio* of norms) before things and their use. To profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use” (Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort [New York: Zone, 2007], 75). The focus of the profanation is the moment of inversion itself, the fulcrum point that inversion reveals as immanently outside all possibility of reversal: the infinitesimal center that never entered into opposition and survives its total confusion. With regard to the cross-symbolism established in the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, this moment, identified as the nail which holds the cross together and joins human and divine nature, is identified with conversion. Peter continues: “This thought, therefore, have I declared unto you; and the figure wherein ye now see me hanging is the representation of that man that first came unto birth. Ye therefore, my beloved, and ye that hear me and that shall hear, ought to cease from your former error and return back again. For it is right to mount upon the cross of Christ, who is the word stretched out, the one and only, of whom the spirit saith: For what else is Christ, but the word, the sound of God? So that the word is the upright beam whereon I am crucified. And the sound is that which crosseth it, the nature of man. And the nail which holdeth the cross-tree unto the upright in the midst thereof is the conversion and repentance of man” (ch. 28). The intensive inversion of this non-invertible moment is the impossibility of conversion itself, the non-locatability of its infinitesimal point, which Black Metal hypostasizes into absolute needlessness around the eternal irreconcilability of word and sound. Black Metal sings the truth of an inverted word to which conversion is neither necessary or possible. It tortures the idea, the logos, and plays the sound of its scream as a revelation exceeding all hearing of it. NM

ⁱⁱⁱ The potential of the Requiem to be ‘blackened’ or positively decayed into a darker aliturgical power resides within the twisted temporality of its voice. Like a Möbius loop, the voice of the *Dies irae* hymn is a singular double composed of: 1) the living prophetic voice of the present that sings the day of wrath to come in the future tense: “Dies illa / Solvet saeculum in favilla” [that day will dissolve the world in ashes); and 2) the suppliant, penitential voice that, moved by the prophecy, is virtually ventriloquized by the voice of the to-be-

absolute and irrevocable condemnation of the world to which it speaks, the *Dies irae* hymn also wields a dark power, a kind of negative apotropaic force that *wards off life*. To this principle may be compared the use of the Requiem Mass as part of anchoritic enclosure ceremonies: “The bishop then began to perform rites which were designed to impress upon the devotee the fact that in a strict sense he was henceforth dead to the world. The office of extreme unction was performed, with the commendation of the soul, lest death should anticipate the last rites. ‘These things being done, let the grave be opened, entering which, let the recluse himself, or another in his name, sing : This shall be my rest for ever’. Dust was scattered with the words : *From dust wast thou created*, etc. Before going

celebrated a Requiem Mass for a living person with the intention of

reach for the sky” (Bathory, “Dies Irae,” *Blood Fire Death* [Black Mark Production, 1988]). NM

^{iv} *trapped . . . constrained . . . walled-in*: Despair is especially figured by *swallowing* as in 2 Corinthians 2:5, which correlates with the hellmouth. And the same word (*absorbere*) in the Vulgate text of Revelation is applied to the earth’s swallowing of the river that comes out of the dragon’s mouth (Revelation 12:16). On the day of wrath, God swallows the world. Inversely, in Svierg’s anti-Christian visions of cosmic disaster

to inspire all who look on me with terror and destation. You already feel the influence of the charm, and with every succeeding moment will feel it more . . .’” (Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance* [New York: Dutton, 1907], 134). The idea that life is influenced to destruction by a malevolent supplement or internal shadow that destroys life by doubling it upon itself is legible in the exegesis of Judas’s despair as disproportionate *extra sorrow* added by the Devil to the sorrow repentance: “Origen: ‘But when the Devil leaves any one, he

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