THE STYLISTIC PLACEMENT OF WAR REQUIEM
IN BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S ŒUVRE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Nikola Dale Strader, B.M., M.M.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1996

Dissertation Committee:
Charles M. Atkinson, Co-adviser
Lora G. Dobos, Co-adviser
Sebastian Knowles
C. Patrick Woliver

Approved by

Co-adviser
School of Music
ABSTRACT

Benjamin Britten's War Requiem (1962) has been viewed by several scholars (e.g., Peter Evans, Michael Kennedy, and Arnold Whittall) as a culmination of sorts, a compositional and stylistic high point after which his later works would be composed and heard in new ways. Britten's stunning and effective handling of the opposition of two languages, the skillful juxtaposition of Wilfred Owen's war poems with the texts of the Requiem Mass, and the deft coordination of three soloists, two choirs, and two orchestras were tributes to his compositional genius. Under the circumstances, it was almost inevitable that War Requiem would be regarded as a turning point; whether it was at the same time a culmination is one of the questions that this dissertation addresses.

To determine where War Requiem stands within Britten's stylistic development, several characteristics of his style (e.g., specific textual themes, extensive motivic recall and development, variation forms, semitonal and tritonal relationships, and non-serial manipulation of twelve-tone aggregates) have been identified in works spanning his entire career. The stylistic portrait thus produced has
been as a framework within which an analysis of the texts, text-music relationships, and other musical characteristics present in War Requiem could be conducted.

Comparison of the traits of War Requiem with the larger picture of Britten's style reveals that War Requiem cannot be considered a culminating point or "watershed." Instead, it is a highly impressive, emotionally-charged masterpiece that falls squarely within a stylistic development that continually sought new ways of synthesizing musical techniques from a variety of sources with lifelong personal ideals and convictions.
To Mom and Dad
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my dissertation committee: my advisers, Drs. Charles Atkinson and Lora Gingerich Dobos, for their suggestions and encouragement; Dr. Sebastian Knowles, for his assistance with Wilfred Owen’s poetry; and Dr. Patrick Woliver for giving me the opportunity to talk about War Requiem with his class.

Thanks also to Dr. Paul Banks, Librarian, and Miss Helen Risdon at The Britten-Pears Library in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, England, without whose assistance I could not have looked at several of Britten’s manuscripts and letters, and to The Ohio State University for the Graduate Student Alumni Research Award that allowed me to visit the Britten-Pears Library. Sincere thanks also go to Drs. Mervyn Cooke and Philip Rupprecht, both of whom gave me access to their own research, and to Mr. John Rathbone, Hon. Archivist, Coventry Cathedral, for his assistance with letters written to Benjamin Britten on behalf of the Coventry Cathedral Arts Committee.

Finally, to my parents, Calvin and Emmadale, thank you for all your love and support, and to my twin sister, Rocki,
I can hardly believe we wrote our dissertations at the same time.

Permission to reprint excerpts from the following works by Benjamin Britten has been provided by arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner:


**Cantata Academica; Carmen Basiliense.** [Op. 62].

**Cantata Misericordium.** [Op. 69]. Text by Patrick Wilkinson.

**Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac.** Op. 51. Text from The Chester Miracle Play.

**A Ceremony of Carols.** [Op. 28].

**The Holy Sonnets of John Donne,** "Death, be not proud." Op. 35.

**A Midsummer Night’s Dream.** Op. 64. Opera in three acts. Libretto adapted from William Shakespeare by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears.


**Serenade for tenor solo, horn and strings.** Op. 31.

**Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo.** Op. 22.

**Symphony for Cello and Orchestra.** Op. 68.


**War Requiem.** Op. 66. Words from the *Missa pro Defunctis* and the poems of Wilfred Owen.

Excerpts from the following works by Britten are reproduced by kind permission of Faber Music Ltd.:


Excerpts from A Boy was Born, Op. 3, are reproduced by the permission of Oxford University Press:

© 1934 Oxford University Press
Revised version © 1958 by the Oxford University Press
Reproduced by permission of the publisher

For the excerpt from Balinese Ceremonial Music, "Taboeh Teloe" by Colin McPhee, permission has been granted from G. Schirmer:

Copyright © 1940 (Renewed) by Associated Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI)
International copyright secured. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted by Permission

The extract from Britten’s letter to Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau is © The Britten-Pears Foundation. This extract is quoted by kind permission of the Britten-Pears Foundation, and may not be further reproduced without written permission.
VITA

February 3, 1965 ............... Born - Parkersburg, West Virginia

1987 .......................... B.M., summa cum laude, University Honors Scholar, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia

1989 .......................... M.M., Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

1989-1990 ...................... University Fellow, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1990-1994 ...................... Graduate Teaching Associate, School of Music, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1995 .......................... Lecturer, The Ohio State University, Mansfield, Ohio

1995-1996 ...................... Graduate Research Associate, College of Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Music

Studies in: Music History and Literature
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BRITTEN’S STYLE</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. WAR REQUIEM: TEXTS</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requiem Aeternam</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dies Irae</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offertorium</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctus</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnus Dei</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libera Me</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. WAR REQUIEM: TEXT-MUSIC RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requiem Aeternam</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dies Irae</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offertorium</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctus</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnus Dei</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libera Me</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. WAR REQUIEM: MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td><strong>The Turn of the Screw</strong>, theme</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td><strong>The Turn of the Screw</strong>, tonal scheme</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td><strong>The Turn of the Screw</strong>, Act II, Scene 9, 131.1-131.8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td><strong>A Boy was Born</strong>, &quot;Theme&quot;</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td><strong>A Boy was Born</strong>, &quot;Variation I&quot;</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td><strong>Peter Grimes</strong>, &quot;Passacaglia,&quot; ground bass and theme</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td><strong>Albert Herring</strong>, &quot;Threnody,&quot; Act III, 51.1-51.9</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Cello Symphony, Fourth Movement, &quot;Passacaglia,&quot; 63.1-65.1</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td><strong>The Holy Sonnets of John Donne</strong>, &quot;Death, be not proud,&quot; mm. 1-12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td><strong>Missa Brevis</strong>, &quot;Agnus Dei,&quot; mm. 1-6</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>Serenade for tenor, horn and strings, &quot;Dirge,&quot; beginning-15.1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12</td>
<td><strong>Peter Grimes</strong>, Act II, Scene 1, 17.4</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13</td>
<td><strong>The Turn of the Screw</strong>, &quot;catalyst&quot; theme</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14</td>
<td><strong>The Turn of the Screw</strong>, Act II, Scene 1, 21.1-21.4</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15</td>
<td><strong>The Turn of the Screw</strong>, Quint</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.16</td>
<td><strong>The Turn of the Screw</strong>, Mrs. Grose</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>Cantata Misericordium, passage of time, mm. 1-4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>Cantata Misericordium, &quot;misericordium,&quot; mm. 7-10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>Cantata Misericordium, &quot;Beati&quot; chords, mm. 5-6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>Cantata Misericordium, Traveller, 7.7-8.3</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>Cantata Misericordium, Good Samaritan, 23.1-23.7</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>Cantata Misericordium, Good Samaritan, 29.6-29.12</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>Cantata Misericordium, final chorus, 33.1-33.4</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo, Sonnet XXX, mm. 1-12</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>Peter Grimes, Act I, 19.8-20.15</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act II, opening chords</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>Owen Wingrave, Prelude, opening chords</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>Cantata Academica, &quot;Tema Seriale&quot;</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>Balinese Ceremonial Music, &quot;Taboeh Teloe&quot;</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>Peter Grimes, Act II, Scene 1, &quot;Sunday Morning,&quot; 3.8-3.10</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>selisir</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>A Ceremony of Carols, &quot;This little babe,&quot; mm. 36-43</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>Curlew River (heterophony), 79.1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>Albert Herring, ensemble recitative Act II, Scene 1, 23.19</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>Owen Wingrave, Act II, Scene 1 &quot;peace&quot; aria, 246.1-247.1</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xii
Figure

4.1 Offertorium, "Parable," 77.6-77.13 .................. 107
4.2 Agnus Dei, 97.9-98.3 ................................ 109
4.3 Requiem aeternam, form .............................. 110
4.4 Requiem aeternam, "Anthem," 9.6-10.4 .............. 113
4.5 Requiem aeternam, "Anthem," 12.1-12.7 ............ 113
4.6 Requiem aeternam, 3.1-3.4 ........................... 114
4.7 Requiem aeternam, "Anthem," 13.1-13.6 ............ 114
4.8 Dies Irae, form ....................................... 115
4.9 Dies Irae, "battlefield" motives, 
beginning-17.1 ........................................... 116
4.11 Dies Irae, 31.1-31.10 ................................. 119
4.12 Dies Irae, "The Next War," 34.9-35.5 ............. 120
4.13 Dies Irae, 44.1-44.14 ................................. 123
4.14 Dies Irae, 45.1 ....................................... 124
4.15 Dies Irae, 49.1 ....................................... 124
4.16 Dies Irae, 56.7 ....................................... 126
4.17 Dies Irae, 57.1 ....................................... 126
4.18 Dies Irae, 57.7-58.1 ................................ 126
4.19 Dies Irae, 58.3-59.1 ................................ 127
4.20 Offertorium, form .................................... 127
4.21 Offertorium, 64.2-64.5 .............................. 129
4.22 Canticle II, mm. 30-33 ............................... 129
4.23 Offertorium, 69.3-70.6 .............................. 131
4.24 Canticle II, mm. 20-37 ............................... 132
4.25 Offertorium, 71.1-71.3 .............................. 133
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.26 Canticle II, mm. 73-74</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.27 Offertorium, 72.1-72.3</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.28 Canticle II, mm. 229-231</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.29 Offertorium, 74.1-74.2</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.30 Canticle II, mm. 248-249</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.31 Offertorium, 74.5</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.32 Canticle II, m. 253</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.33 Offertorium, 75.1</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.34 Canticle II, m. 254</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.35 Offertorium, 77.6-77.9</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.36 Canticle II, &quot;Envoi,&quot; mm. 269-271</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.37 Sanctus, form</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.38 Sanctus, 93.3-93.6</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.39 Sanctus, 96.11-end</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.40 Agnus Dei, form</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.41 Agnus Dei, 100.2-end</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.42 Libera Me, form</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.43 Libera Me, mm. 8-12</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.44 Libera Me, 112.1-113.5</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.45 Libera Me, &quot;Strange Meeting,&quot; 118.1-118.2</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.46 Libera Me, &quot;Strange Meeting,&quot; 120.1-120.3</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.47 Libera Me, &quot;Strange Meeting,&quot; 120.4-122.1</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.48 Libera Me, &quot; Strange Meeting,&quot; 122.8-122.9</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.49 Libera Me, &quot;Strange Meeting,&quot; 124.1-124.7</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.50 Libera Me, &quot;Strange Meeting,&quot; 126.5-126.7</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Requiem aeternam, mm. 1-6, bells and chorus</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Requiem aeternam, mm. 1-4, orchestra</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Octatonic scale in orchestra</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Requiem aeternam, pitch collections, first orchestral passage (mm. 1-4)</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Requiem aeternam, pitch collections, final orchestral passage (mm. 11-12)</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Requiem aeternam, &quot;Te decet hymnus,&quot; 3.1-3.8</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Requiem aeternam, &quot;Te decet hymnus,&quot; Root movement of organ triads</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8 Requiem aeternam, &quot;Te decet hymnus,&quot; 4.10-6.8</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9 Requiem aeternam, &quot;Anthem,&quot; 9.1-9.3</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10 Requiem aeternam, &quot;Anthem,&quot; 9.1-11.6</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.11 Requiem aeternam, &quot;Anthem,&quot; 13.1-14.8</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.12 Requiem aeternam, &quot;Anthem,&quot; 15.1-15.9</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.13 Requiem aeternam, Kyrie, 16.2-end</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.14 Dies Irae, leading into &quot;Pie Jesu,&quot; 59.6-60.4</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.15 Sanctus, opening 84.2</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.16 Sanctus, &quot;The End,&quot; 96.12-end</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.17 Agnus Dei, mm. 1-2</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.18 Agnus Dei, mm. 10-11</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>Agnus Dei, mm. 3-10 (woodwinds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>Agnus Dei, key scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>Agnus Dei, 97.6-97.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>Agnus Dei, 98.6-98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>Agnus Dei, &quot;Dona nobis pacem,&quot; 100.5-end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>Libera Me, &quot;Strange Meeting,&quot; 120.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>Libera Me, 135.2-135.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>Libera Me, 137.1-end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>Dies Irae, &quot;battlefield&quot; motives, mm. 1-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>Dies Irae, &quot;Bugles sang,&quot; 27.1-27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>Dies Irae, 28.1-30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>Dies Irae, 31.1-31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>Dies Irae, 40.1-44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>Offertorium, mm. 1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>Canticle II, m. 253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>Offertorium, &quot;Parable,&quot; 74.5-75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>Offertorium, 64.2-64.11 (first fugue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>Offertorium, 79.4-79.10 (second fugue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>Sanctus, &quot;Hosanna,&quot; 87.1-87.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>Sanctus, &quot;Benedictus,&quot; 89.1-89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>saih gender wayang (on A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>Libera Me, &quot;Let us sleep now,&quot; 127.1-128.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The idea of the W.R. did come off.... I hope it'll make people think abit.\(^1\)

Within two years of its premiere in 1962, Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* had established itself as a staple of the twentieth-century choral repertoire, with at least four performances in Great Britain (including its premiere during the festivities surrounding the dedication of the new Coventry Cathedral), over a dozen foreign performances, and the sale of over a quarter of a million recordings. Now, with the fiftieth-anniversary commemorations of World War II, *War Requiem* continues to hold its own through numerous performances throughout the world and the availability of at least half a dozen different recordings. Despite its popularity over the thirty years since its premiere, however, *War Requiem* has not been the subject of as much scholarly investigation as have other works, such as the

---

\(^1\)Britten, in a letter to his sister Barbara, quoted *sic* in Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), 410.
operas. Moreover, the critical views of the work that do exist have been less diverse than those of Britten's compositions in other genres. This is perhaps understandable, given the nature of War Requiem itself.

War Requiem occupies a unique position in Britten's oeuvre. Inasmuch as it is his largest choral/orchestral work (in all aspects: performing medium, formal structure, texts, performing time), it is not surprising that many observers of Britten's music, such as Peter Evans, Anthony Milner, Michael Kennedy, and Arnold Whittall,² have viewed this work as a culmination of sorts, a compositional and stylistic high point after which his later works would be composed and heard in new ways. Britten's stunning and effective handling of the opposition of two languages (Latin and English), the apparent incompatibility of the liturgy and the war poems, and the coordination of three soloists, two choirs, and two orchestras was a tribute to his compositional genius. Under the circumstances, it was almost inevitable that War Requiem would be regarded as a turning point; whether it was at the same time a culmination will be one of the questions that this dissertation attempts to answer.

The immediate impetus for War Requiem came from a commission for the arts festival organized for the

²See discussion below.
dedication of the new St. Michael’s Cathedral in Coventry.³

For the festivities Britten had been asked to compose a large choral work. Eric Walter White, in his book Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas, notes that

[Britten] fully realized the importance of the occasion, for it would mark not only the phoenix-like resurgence of the new Cathedral at the side of the shattered shell of the old, but also the healing of many wounds. He wanted to make some public musical statement about the criminal futility of war, and this seemed a good opportunity to do so.⁴

Humphrey Carpenter, in his recent biography on Britten, briefly traces a line of thinking on Britten’s part concerning the possible composition of a Requiem similar to War Requiem. Propositions for Requiem-like works had been brought up in 1945 after the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and again in 1948 after the death of Gandhi. At neither time did anything develop from these speculations, but, as Carpenter states, "it is evident that when the Coventry arts committee first approached Britten in October 1958, requesting a work for the new cathedral, he was to some extent able to respond with an existing scheme."⁵

The initial contact from Coventry came through John Lowe, a member of the Arts Committee at the Coventry

³The old cathedral had been bombed in 1940.


⁵Carpenter, Benjamin Britten, 403.
Cathedral, who was asked to approach Britten about composing a work for the consecration festivities. In a letter dated October 7, 1958, Lowe requested of Britten, on behalf of the Committee,

a new choral and orchestral work.... It is intended to form a special Festival Choir from the best voices of choirs in Coventry Diocese, and they will engage a professional orchestra. The new work they seek could be full length or a substantial 30/40 minutes one: its libretto could be sacred or secular since there can be concerts both in the Cathedral and in the fine big Coventry Theatre.

The committee will be very pleased if this great occasion could help to bring forth an important new work from you...."

The Chairman of the Arts Committee, S. H. Newsome, contacted Britten in December, 1958, some time after Britten had answered Lowe’s request. Newsome was "delighted to learn" that Britten was pleased to be invited to contribute to the event. Apparently Britten had already hinted at the type of work he would like to write; Newsome refers to it at the end of the letter:

I gather that your thoughts now run in the direction of a large scale choral and orchestral work of a religious type, which I feel sure will be considered appropriate by my Committee. I am, therefore writing to let you know that the Committee would like to enter into

---

"John Lowe to Benjamin Britten, letter dated 7th October 1958, held in Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh.

"Newsome knew of Britten’s response to Lowe, referring to it in his letter to Britten, but it is not known if Britten’s letter to Lowe survives. Britten made a habit of keeping all of the correspondences he received, but unfortunately, recipients of his letters did not always do the same."
definite arrangements with you for the composition of a work on these lines as soon as you are ready to do so."

Two months after Newsome’s correspondence, the Reverend Canon J. W. Poole wrote to Britten with what appears to be an official request for music for the new Cathedral:

We are already laying plans for the worship to be offered in the Cathedral. In particular we are considering how to present the Eucharist at the high altar in a way that will make it dramatic and forceful and relevant to men’s daily life. This is the point at which we look to you for your help.

What we need is a musical setting, with organ accompaniment, of the Ordinary of the Mass (in English): Kyrie, Creed, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei. We want a setting which will be at once dignified and popular, a 20th century equivalent, written in 20th century terms, of Merbecke, which a large congregation can enjoy singing together....

...[W]e very much hope you will write for us a Missa Coventriensis."

The idea of writing a Mass for Coventry by 1962 suited Britten, but no hint was made by Britten that the Mass would be a Requiem Mass. The Precentor at Coventry responded to Britten’s acceptance with notes on the text, style of setting, and size of the new building. The description of the room is particularly important, since Britten himself

---

*S. H. Newsome to Benjamin Britten, letter dated 4th December 1958, held in Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh.

*The Reverend Canon J. W. Poole to Benjamin Britten, letter dated 16 February 1959, held in Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh.

*Precentor, Coventry, to Benjamin Britten, letter dated 16 February 1960, held in Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh.
has commented that War Requiem was designed for a large acoustical space.\textsuperscript{11} He was told that

the nave of the new Cathedral has room for a congregation of 2,000 persons, all of whom can see the high altar. In the chancel there will be a choir of 12 men and 24 boys. There is no screen dividing the nave from the chancel. The organ is of 4 manuals and pedals, with 78 speaking stops. It is placed at the east end, on either side of the high altar. The building has a reverberation period of about 4 seconds.\textsuperscript{12}

It is appears from the surviving correspondence at the Britten-Pears Library that sometime between the correspondence with the Precentor in February, 1960, and with Lowe in October, Britten had decided to write for the Coventry festivities a Requiem Mass with the poems of Wilfred Owen interspersed, although the exact dimensions for the piece were not yet known. Lowe requested from Britten a brief description of the piece to be included in a press release for November 17, 1960. Lowe suggested a paragraph to Britten that describes the Requiem as a composition for "four soloists, choir and orchestra,"\textsuperscript{13} a description that shows that Britten had not actively worked on the piece enough to determine just what forces were to be employed.

\textsuperscript{11}See Benjamin Britten, On receiving the first Aspen Award (London: Faber and Faber, 1964; Faber Paperbacks, 1978), 11.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}Lowe to Britten, letter dated Oct 19th 1960, held in Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh.
This is supported by a letter of February, 1961, in which Britten had written to Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau to request his agreement to appear as the baritone soloist for the work. The letter provides details that indicate how Britten viewed the construction of the work and the extra-musical meanings he connected to it:

Coventry Cathedral, like so many wonderful buildings in Europe, was destroyed in the last war. It has now been rebuilt in a very remarkable fashion, and for the reconsecration of the new building they are holding a big Festival at the end of May and beginning of June next year [1962]. I have been asked to write a new work for what is to us all a most significant occasion. I am writing what I think will be one of my most important works. It is a full-scale Requiem Mass for chorus and orchestra (in memory of those of all nations who died in the last war), and I am interspersing the Latin text with many poems of a great English poet, Wilfred Owen, who was killed in the First World War. These magnificent poems, full of the hate of destruction, are a kind of commentary on the Mass; they are, of course, in English. These poems will be set for tenor and baritone, with an accompaniment of chamber orchestra, placed in the middle of the other forces. They will need singing with utmost beauty, intensity and sincerity.


This letter makes no mention of the soprano soloist. Carpenter believes "that the addition of this voice was entirely due to his hearing Vishnevskaya in Aldeburgh,"\footnote{Carpenter, Benjamin Britten, 403.}
June, 1961; however, according to a letter dated May 5, 1961, from John Lowe, Britten had already considered Vishnevskaya for War Requiem. Lowe had asked one Mrs. Tillett "to suggest two or three Russian Recitalists, and the first name she mentioned was the Soprano you are keen on for the Requiem."\textsuperscript{16}

According to Vishnevskaya, it was only after hearing her at the 1961 Aldeburgh Festival that Britten wanted to write for a soprano soloist in War Requiem; Britten told her that "he was particularly glad he had heard me right at that moment because he had begun to write his War Requiem and now wanted to write in a part for me." He quizzed her about the languages she had sung, and since she had never sung in English but knew Latin, it was decided that her part would be in Latin.\textsuperscript{17} This anecdote seems to indicate that as of June 1961, none of the soprano solos had been composed.\textsuperscript{18} Lowe’s letter from the month before, however, shows that Britten had indeed already contemplated, without her

\textsuperscript{16}Lowe to Britten, letter dated 5th May 1961, held at the Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh. Vishnevskaya’s account of Britten’s inclusion of her in War Requiem, from which Carpenter derived his conclusion, is somewhat misleading in light of Lowe’s letter; however, Britten may not have decided definitely on the soprano part until after he had actually heard her.

\textsuperscript{17}Carpenter, Benjamin Britten, 399-402; Vishnevskaya, Galina, 365.

\textsuperscript{18}Three of the six movements (movements two, four, and six) would be affected, requiring either entirely new settings (to replace old settings if they existed) or reworkings of extant settings to accommodate the new part.
knowledge, the possibility of having her as the soprano soloist prior to actually hearing her at Aldeburgh.

The order of composition of *War Requiem* is not known, but it is obvious from the letters that almost all of it was written between March and December 1961, although Britten had three years to work on it.\(^{19}\) By November he was sending parts to Lowe for the choirs in Coventry and shortly thereafter, Vishnevskaya and Fischer-Dieskau were also receiving music. Vishnevskaya herself states that "that winter, Britten sent me the music for my part in installments."\(^{20}\)

*War Requiem* was first performed on 30 May 1962 at the Coventry festival.\(^{21}\) Its performance had been preceded by media speculation based on inspections of the score. William Mann, music critic for London’s *The Times*, ended an article on *War Requiem* that appeared five days before the premiere with the following observations:

It is not a requiem to console the living; sometimes it does not even help the dead to sleep soundly. It can only disturb every living soul, for it denounces the barbarism more or less awake in mankind with all the

---

\(^{19}\)It is impossible to determine when Britten may have composed Pears's parts, and the sketches give no clue whatsoever to the order of composition.

\(^{20}\)Lowe asks Britten in a letter dated November 8, 1961, "About when do you hope to produce the next portion of vocal score?"; Vishnevskaya, *Galina*, 365.

\(^{21}\)The event was broadcast live over the BBC.
authenticity that a great composer can muster. There is no doubt at all ... that it is Britten’s masterpiece.\textsuperscript{22}

The emotional impact of the work is apparent in many of the reviews. Mann described it as "the most masterly and nobly imagined work that Britten has ever given us."\textsuperscript{23} Peter Schaffer wrote for \textit{Time & Tide}:

I believe it to be the most impressive and moving piece of sacred music ever to be composed in this country ... the most profound and moving thing which this most committed of geniuses has so far achieved. It makes criticism impertinent."\textsuperscript{24}

Within months after the premiere, \textit{War Requiem} was being examined from a more scholarly point of view. The first analytical essay on the work, Peter Evans’s article "Britten’s ‘War Requiem’,"\textsuperscript{25} appeared shortly after the premiere, followed quickly by short commentaries by Alec Robertson and Arnold Whittall.\textsuperscript{26} Unfortunately, since the appearance of Evans’s article, not more than a dozen articles, books, and dissertations have treated the work in


\textsuperscript{23}Quoted in Kennedy, \textit{Britten}, 79, and Carpenter, \textit{Benjamin Britten}, 408.

\textsuperscript{24}Quoted in Carpenter, \textit{Benjamin Britten}, 408.


\textsuperscript{26}Alec Robertson, "Britten’s War Requiem," \textit{The Musical Times} 103 (1962): 308-310; and Arnold Whittall, "Tonal
any significant detail, despite the acclaim the work has received.

Evans, also the author of *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, sees *War Requiem* as a stylistic culminating point, noting that while *War Requiem* recalls stylistic traits and actual material from a variety of earlier pieces, it also acts as a boundary beyond which these stylistic traits, at least temporarily, no longer seem to apply:

The *War Requiem* will continue to be noted ... as a watershed. Having set up within one frame the resources of works as contrasted as the *Sinfonia da Requiem* [1940] and *Cantata Academica* [1959], the Nocturne [1958] and the *Missa Brevis* [1959], and stylistic traits recalled from a host of earlier works, culminating in the direct appropriation of material from *Canticle II* [1952], Britten was evidently bent on consummating them, and the corollary which became evident soon afterwards was that he had in that very act exhausted, at least for the time being, their power to stimulate his invention further.²⁷

This statement, as vague as it is, has been echoed by Anthony Milner and Michael Kennedy. Milner, in "The Choral Music" in *The Britten Companion*, agrees with Evans's assessment that *War Requiem* is a "watershed" in Britten's output, particularly in that Britten "gathers together elements from all his past experience of writing operas,


choral works and songs into a wholly original synthesis.²⁸; however, Milner makes no judgment on War Requiem, as Evans and Kennedy do, in regard to an apparent change of style following the work. Michael Kennedy, in his book Britten, does view this work as an important juncture in Britten's oeuvre, paralleling Evans's assessment more closely than Milner:

The unprecedented success of the War Requiem marked a climactic in Britten's career. Never again was he to deliver such a large-scale piece of oratory. Henceforward his style was to become more severe, his utterance more intimate.²⁹

Later, he says that

He [Britten] drew upon all the resources of his art: the War Requiem is both an emotional and an artistic landmark in his development.³⁰

Arnold Whittall offers a very similar opinion on the stylistic position of War Requiem:

By ... July 1961, Britten was deeply engaged with the work which was to prove his most successful outside the theatre, and in many ways his most 'representative' in any genre. The War Requiem had long been contemplated: hence the sense of its summing-up all Britten's most essential concerns, both musical and extramusical. It is indeed a work with a wide range of reference, and some have seen it as almost too anxious to ensure


²⁹Kennedy, Britten, 79-80.

³⁰Ibid., 223.
universal appeal; for example, by means of direct parallels with Verdi. Anticipations of its music in Britten's own earlier works are also easy to spot.\textsuperscript{31}

The above quotations make much of the notion that War Requiem occupies a pivotal position in Britten's output on the basis of its reliance upon stylistic traits associated with previous works. In other words, War Requiem is viewed as a culmination of one phase of Britten's stylistic development. As one examines War Requiem more closely within the broader context of Britten's total output, however, questions about this assumption arise, including the following: What are the resources and stylistic techniques and procedures recalled from earlier works? How and where do these traits appear in War Requiem? Do these traits appear in works later than War Requiem? If War Requiem really is a "watershed," how does it relate to later pieces? What does being a "watershed" mean here? What happens in later pieces that marks War Requiem as a dividing point between the earlier works and the later ones? Can War Requiem be viewed instead as just another step (albeit an impressive one) in Britten's musical development?

Previous analyses of *War Requiem* such as those by Evans, Milner, Kennedy, Whittall, and Edward Lundergan,\(^{32}\) make a point of finding specific precursors that explain the presence of various passages in the work; these antecedents may be from Britten's own works or from the output of other "influential" composers to whose music Britten had been exposed. Most of these assertions, however, have very little supporting evidence (unless Britten specifically pointed to a particular piece or composer), especially when one considers the amount of music Britten had written prior to *War Requiem* and the amount of music he performed, conducted, and studied. This does not mean, however, that these analyses are useless; to the contrary, they provide a means for understanding the musical context in which *War Requiem* was conceived. Indeed, the various analyses of *War Requiem* present a number of stylistic traits that place the work firmly within the domain of Britten's output. *War Requiem* could not have been written without his previous experiences, but recognition of this fact is not enough to justify calling it a stylistic culmination. To determine if such a culmination exists, later works must also be examined so that stylistic developments may be recognized for Britten's output as a whole. Only then can the placement of

War Requiem in Britten’s stylistic development be appropriately assessed.

Various aspects of War Requiem have attracted the attention of scholars. For example, Britten’s use of the tritone has been discussed by Hans-Günther Bauer, Whittall, and Lundergan,\(^3\) and the instrumentation and the textual relationships have been treated by Evans and Milner.\(^4\) Other melodic and formal features have been considered in a less thorough fashion: Gordon Page has investigated Britten’s use of melody as a unifying device,\(^5\) while Frederick Rimmer has shown some of the melodic symmetry found in the work.\(^6\) Malcolm Boyd, meanwhile, has


demonstrated the connections between War Requiem and Verdi’s Requiem. ³⁷

While examinations of individual traits can shed light on various aspects of the piece, they do little for supporting broad conclusions about the work as a whole, and they do almost nothing to support comments aimed at the work’s relationship to the composer’s entire output. None of the analyses and critical remarks about War Requiem actively incorporates a critical view of the later works to support the idea that War Requiem is a culminating point. Without the consideration of the later pieces, the conclusion offered by Evans and faithfully echoed by Milner, Kennedy, and others must be called into question.

To achieve a balanced assessment of War Requiem and its relationship to the rest of Britten’s works, several steps must be taken. The first is to analyze War Requiem from more than one perspective. This step is necessary because various passages are best analyzed within the context of different analytical frameworks, and the recognition of several compositional approaches may itself be important to Britten’s stylistic portrait. The second step is to examine selected works both before and after War Requiem to determine what stylistic traits are prominent. Works prior to War Requiem, particularly the operas, have a substantial

body of literature devoted to them, but the later works have been relatively unexplored, with the exceptions of Curlew River and Death in Venice.\textsuperscript{38} The final step is to compare the prominent style traits that can be identified throughout Britten's career with the characteristics exhibited by War Requiem itself. Only from this comparison may an adequate conclusion concerning the stylistic placement of War Requiem in Britten's oeuvre be drawn.

CHAPTER 2

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BRITTEN’S STYLE

Britten seldom discussed his compositional ability and techniques beyond an insistence that they were based as much on hard work as on pure inspiration. On at least two occasions, however, he took the opportunity to discuss some of his attitudes toward the art of composition. The first occurred in a broadcast talk, *The Composer and the Listener* (1946), in which he stated:

Obviously it is no use having a technique unless you have the ideas to use this technique; but there is, unfortunately, a tendency in many quarters today to believe that brilliance of technique is a danger rather than a help. This is sheer nonsense. There has never been a composer worth his salt who has not had supreme technique. I’ll go further than that and say that in the work of your supreme artist you can’t separate inspiration from technique. I’d like anyone to tell me where Mozart’s inspiration ends and technique begins.¹

Almost twenty years later, in his speech "On receiving the first Aspen Award" (1964), he described in

---

¹ Quoted in White, *Life and Operas*, 108.
detail some of the techniques and inspirations in his own music:

I certainly write music for human beings--directly and deliberately. I consider their voices, the range, the power, the subtlety, and the colour potentialities of them. I consider the instruments they play--their most expressive and suitable individual sonorities.... I also take note of the human circumstances of music, of its environment and conventions; for instance, I try to write dramatically effective music for the theatre--I certainly don't think opera is better for not being effective on the stage.... And then the best music to listen to in a great Gothic church is the polyphony which was written for it, and was calculated for its resonance: this was my approach in the War Requiem--I calculated it for a big reverberant acoustic and that is where it sounds best. I believe, you see, in occasional music, although I admit there are some occasions which can intimidate one.... On the other hand almost every piece I have ever written has been composed with a certain occasion in mind, and usually for definite performers, and certainly always human ones.

...When I am asked to compose a work for an occasion, great or small, I want to know in some detail the conditions of the place where it will be performed, the size and acoustics, what instruments or singers will be available and suitable, the kind of people who will hear it, and what language they will understand--and even sometimes the age of the listeners and performers. ... The text of my War Requiem was perfectly in place in Coventry Cathedral--the Owen poems in the vernacular, and the words of the Requiem Mass familiar to everyone--but it would have been pointless in Cairo or Peking.

During the act of composition one is continually referring back to the conditions of performance...the acoustics and the forces available, the techniques of the instruments and the voices--such questions occupy one's attention continuously, and certainly affect the stuff of the music, and in my experience are not only a restriction, but a challenge, an inspiration. Music does not exist in a vacuum, it does not exist until it is performed, and performance imposes condition.... I prefer to study the conditions of performance and shape my music to them.²

²Britten, On receiving the first Aspen Award, 10-13.
The "shape" of Britten's music has fascinated a number of scholars since the premiere of Peter Grimes. Scholars such as Donald Mitchell, Hans Keller, Peter Evans, Arnold Whittall, Philip Brett, Philip Reed, and Mervyn Cooke, among others, have examined Britten's operas and other works in conjunction with numerous letters, conversations, pictures, sketches, scores, and recordings, gleaning from these a variety of personal and musical details that enhance our understanding of Britten. From these writers, several characteristics can be identified in Britten's music: textual themes, such as the individual against society, loss of innocence, pacifism, Christian precepts, and sleep; large-scale variation forms; non-serial manipulation of

---

twelve-tone aggregates; semitonal and tritonal oppositions; motivic development; and Far-Eastern elements, such as the distinct use of percussion, rhythmic and metric freedom, and stratification.

Although Britten composed a substantial number of instrumental works (including film music), he is known mainly as a composer of vocal music. He produced fifteen operas, vocal works for singers such as Peter Pears, Kathleen Ferrier, Janet Baker, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and Galina Vishnevskaya, and a number of choral works. The vast majority of these pieces are in English, including all of the operas, but he also set texts in Latin, French, Italian, German, and Russian. Regardless of the language, Britten's settings show a remarkable sensitivity to meaning, declamation, and structure. As Eric Walter White points out, Britten "was sensitive to the relationship of words and music. He ... was capable of assessing the different values of the syllable, the word, and the idea behind the word, and knew how to give them a musical gravity of their own."

Britten himself has commented on the importance of text organization. In an article for the Observer (5 June 1960), he stated that "in writing opera, I have always found it very dangerous to start writing the music until the words

---

*White, Life and Operas, 110.*
are more or less fixed."

The same process appears to have been at work in his choral and solo vocal works as well, since Britten usually organized and edited his chosen texts to focus on a particular subject or theme. A few specific textual themes frequently recur throughout Britten’s output: the individual against society (or other corporate entity); Christian ideas; pacifism; loss of innocence; and sleep/night.

The concept of the individual against society is especially noticeable in the operas Peter Grimes (1945), Albert Herring (1947), and Owen Wingrave (1970). Each of these operas casts the struggle in a slightly different light, but it is significant that in Peter Grimes and Owen Wingrave the title character dies; even Albert in Albert Herring appears to die, although he suddenly reappears after his recovery from his bout with the lemonade. The differences in Britten’s treatments of the theme should be pointed out: In Peter Grimes, Peter, because of his self-pride, fails to "fit in" to the Borough’s expectations for its citizens, and after the death of his new apprentice, he commits suicide by sinking his boat. Owen Wingrave is an example of the individual fighting against familial expectations, Owen standing firmly in opposition to the family tradition of military service until he is accused of

---

"Quoted in "The Composer’s Dream," in The Britten Companion, 177."
cowardice. Only in this personal attack does Owen make himself vulnerable; in trying to prove himself, he dies mysteriously in the haunted room of the family mansion. In neither of these operas does the persecuted individual overcome the pressures and expectations forced upon the main characters by the social entities that surround them. Only in *Albert Herring* does the individual achieve a victory of sorts. Although Albert seems to have succumbed to the humiliation of being crowned "May King" and thus to the expectations of Lady Billows's committee and his mother, his "death" and return after his episode with the rum-spiked lemonade bring him out of the world in which he had been ruled by others into a new awareness of what he himself can do. With these three operas, spanning a time frame from 1945 to 1970, Britten examined one basic theme from a variety of viewpoints and reworked it within the context of the three stories that were themselves chosen and edited to highlight this theme.

As a theme, "loss of innocence" can be linked to some degree with the idea of the individual against society. *Peter Grimes*, *Albert Herring*, and *Owen Wingrave* all involve individuals who are associated with ideals considerably different from those of their associates and who suffer often dire consequences when forced (either by others or by their own actions) to discard those ideals. The most notable illustration of the theme of lost innocence,
however, is *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), which, as Britten has interpreted Henry James's story, revolves primarily around the theme of lost innocence in children. Britten reinforces this interpretation by having the two ghosts (Peter Quint and Miss Jessel) repeat the line "The ceremony of innocence is drowned," a line not from James's story but from a poem by W. B. Yeats. From this point on, a growing struggle ensues between Quint and the Governess, the end result of which is the ultimate loss of innocence, the death of the boy Miles.

The two themes thus far described, the individual against society and loss of innocence, are perhaps the furthest removed from a consideration of *War Requiem*, although hints of these themes can certainly be found in the juxtaposition of Owen's poems and the institutional liturgy of the Mass, as well as in the use of the boys' choir to produce an ethereal counter to the full chorus and the three soloists. The three remaining themes, pacifism, Christian ideals, and sleep/night, are more relevant, however.

Pacifism has often been cited as an underlying theme in Britten's works, mainly because Britten himself was a conscientious objector during World War II; however, it is not as prevalent a theme as one might expect. Outside of *War Requiem*, the works usually associated with this theme

---

"*The Turn of the Screw*, Act II, Scene 1, "Colloquy and Soliloquy."

24
are Ballad of Heroes (1939), Voices for Today (1965), and Owen Wingrave. Ballad of Heroes, a memorial to British soldiers who died in the Spanish Civil War, is a setting of texts by W. H. Auden and Randall Swingler that are fairly explicit in their message.\footnote{Mervyn Cooke, compact disc booklet to Rattle Conducts Britten, British Composers series (EMI CDCB 54270), 5.} Owen Wingrave can rightfully be described as a further pacifist statement by Britten, since it revolves around Owen’s rejection of military life (and thus war) in favor of peace.\footnote{"For a discussion of Owen Wingrave in light of Britten’s pacifist beliefs, see John Evans, "Owen Wingrave: A Case for Pacifism," in The Britten Companion, 227-237.} Voices for Today, written for the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations, continues the pacifist theme with its series of adages and exhortations for peace compiled from a variety of sources.\footnote{Other works associated with Britten’s pacifism include Pacifist March (1937) and Advance Democracy (1938). The Cantata Misericordium (1963), which immediately followed War Requiem and was written for the centenary of the International Red Cross, is often described as a pacifist work, its primary focus being a belief in humanity’s capacity for compassion.}

Throughout his life, Britten wrote music that incorporated a Christian point of view and revealed his strong familiarity with Biblical stories and church rites. A Hymn to the Virgin (1930), A Boy Was Born (1933; rev. 1958), Te Deum in C major (1934), Rejoice in the Lamb (1943), Festival Te Deum (1944), Saint Nicolas (1948), A Wedding Anthem (1949), Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac
(1952), *Hymn to St. Peter* (1955), *Noye's Fludde* (1957), *Missa Brevis* (1959), *Jubilate Deo* (1961), *Psalm 150* (1962), *A Hymn of St. Columba* (1962), *The Burning Fiery Furnace* (1966), and *The Prodigal Son* (1968) are several of the works that show Britten's involvement with church-oriented themes. Most of these works are intended for performance in a church setting; however, several of the operas also incorporate Christian ideals, music, and/or settings as integral parts of the action. The Sunday morning scene (Act II, Scene 1) in *Peter Grimes* uses an Anglican service as a prominent background to the foreground action in which Ellen discovers that all is not well with Peter's new apprentice. The service texts soon assert themselves as commentaries as Ellen realizes that Peter has failed to achieve his goal of respectability in the Borough. A different perspective on Christian ideals is presented in *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946), Britten's first chamber opera.¹⁰ It is based on a pre-Christian Roman story, but through the use of the Male and Female Chorus, the story is placed within a framework emphasizing Christ's redemptive power.¹¹ Unlike *The Rape of

¹⁰ The *Rape of Lucretia* may also be considered an example of lost innocence.

¹¹ The Christian framework has been questioned by Peter Evans and Patricia Howard. Howard, in *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (New York: Praeger, 1969), produces a convincing argument against the need for a Christian interpretation (see pp. 38 and 43), but Evans attempts to provide some justification for it (*The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 141-143).
Lucretia, Curlew River (1964) is intended for performance in a church, but like Lucretia, it takes as its foundation a non-Christian story that is reinterpreted to fit within a Christian context. Curlew River is based on the Japanese Noh play Sumidagawa, but Britten, with William Plomer as the librettist, recasts Sumidagawa into a medieval mystery play by taking advantage of elements such as an all-male cast and the spiritual transformation of the Madwoman at her sainted son's tomb.

Pacifism and Christian ideology come together in Canticle III: Still Falls the Rain (1954), subtitled "(The Raids, 1940. Night and Dawn)." The text, from Edith Sitwell's Canticle of the Rose, relies on imagery derived from Christ's Passion to illustrate the destruction wrought by the bombing of Britain during World War II, and from which Britain recovered. Canticle III in a sense foreshadows War Requie in that both are associated with the destruction that occurred in 1940 and the spiritual reconciliation that grew from it.

The importance of the theme of sleep and night can be seen in the variety of works that are based on it. Although not an exceptionally prevalent theme in Britten's works, it is a noticeable one, as the titles show: Serenade for tenor, horn, and strings; A Midsummer Night's Dream; Nocturne; and Nocturnal after John Dowland. All of these have been
acknowledged by Britten as consciously dealing with aspects of sleep, night, and dreams.\textsuperscript{12}

Only after Britten had settled the general organization of the text(s) to be set did he begin to work out musical details. Usually he worked from the general to the specific, often not committing notes to paper until shortly before the work was intended to be finished. Britten described his manner of writing an opera in an article about \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}:

In my experience, the shape comes first. With \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, as with other operas, I first had a general musical conception of the whole work in my mind. I conceived the work without any one note being defined. I could have described the music, but not played a note.\textsuperscript{13}

Three of Britten’s other operas, \textit{Peter Grimes}, \textit{The Turn of the Screw}, and \textit{Owen Wingrave}, along with other works as necessary, will be used to illustrate the various characteristics that arise from Britten’s manner of turning his mental "shapes" into actual pieces. Variations forms, motivic recall and development, semitonal and tritonal oppositions, non-serial manipulations of twelve-tone

\textsuperscript{12}See "Mapreading" in \textit{The Britten Companion}, 92-93, a transcript of a "conversation" between Britten and Donald Mitchell.

Other works not dealing directly with the theme of sleep/night often include a section in which sleep or night figures prominently (e.g., \textit{The Rape of Lucretia}, \textit{Spring Symphony} [1949], \textit{Billy Budd} [1951], \textit{Cantata Misericordium}, and \textit{Canticle IV: Journey of the Magi} [1971]).

\textsuperscript{13}Britten, "The Composer’s Dream," 178.
aggregates, and integration of Far-Eastern elements are the primary traits present in his style as a whole.

Of the three main works under consideration, *The Turn of the Screw*, generally considered to be the most tightly organized opera Britten wrote, especially exemplifies the care with which Britten handled the shaping of a work, both before and during the actual notation of it. In an interview with Donald Mitchell, Britten pointed out that originally the opera was to be in a "normal three-act form," but then he and librettist Myfanwy Piper "discovered that what we were really planning was something in a certain number of scenes which must follow very closely. And I was then looking for an idea which could be varied through these scenes which then would turn out to be a series of variations. Because really the story could be rather fancifully described as a theme with variations."\(^{14}\)

*The Turn of the Screw* is constructed as a theme with fifteen variations, the theme and each variation paired with a scene from Henry James's short story. The theme itself is a twelve-tone aggregate (see Figure 2.1) with strong tonal tendencies because of its characteristic fourths and fifths.

\(^{14}\)"Mapreading," 91.
Figure 2.1: The Turn of the Screw, theme

Each variation-scene pair emphasizes a tonal center; the sixteen "tonics" that result (see Figure 2.2) can be organized in a manner that further adds to the opera's tight organization. The drama unfolding between the Governess

Figure 2.2: The Turn of the Screw, tonal scheme

---

15Benjamin Britten, The Turn of the Screw. Libretto by Myfanwy Piper. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.


17Ibid.
and the ghost Peter Quint as they struggle for control over Miles is reinforced by a basic semitonal conflict (A/Ab) that is revealed between the beginnings, midpoints, and ends of the tonal schemes for each act (see Figure 2.2) and which is made explicit in the bitonal aspects of the last scene (see Figure 2.3) as the two adult figures each try to sway Miles before he finally capitulates to the Governess's questions and dies.

---

Figure 2.3: The Turn of the Screw, Act II, Scene 8, 131.1-131.8

---

1° Benjamin Britten, The Turn of the Screw. Libretto by Myfanwy Piper. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
A number of variation forms, including theme and variations, passacaglia, and ground bass (ostinato) can be found throughout Britten’s works. The theme-and-variations form appears as early as 1933 in *A Boy was Born* (rev. 1958), a collection of seven Christmas carols set as choral variations based on the opening four-note motive (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5). The best-known set of variations by

![Musical notation](image)

**Figure 2.4: A Boy was Born, "Theme"**

---

1⁹ Benjamin Britten, *A Boy was Born*. By kind permission of Oxford University Press.
Figure 2.5: A Boy was Born, "Variation I"

Britten is perhaps The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra (1946), a didactic piece based on a theme from Purcell’s music for Abdelazar, or, The Moor’s Revenge. Three passacaglias from works spanning his output show another approach to the variation principle. Peter Grimes, Albert Herring, and the Symphony for Cello and Orchestra (1963) all incorporate this form, although to different ends. In Peter Grimes the Passacaglia (Interlude IV) introduces the audience to Peter’s hut (see Figure 2.6), to which several of the men of the Borough are making their way. The

---

Ibid.
"Threnody" in *Albert Herring*, however, is an ensemble piece in which each of the nine characters in turn laments the loss of Albert against the unchanging five-measure pattern of the other participants (see Figure 2.7). The Passacaglia of the Cello Symphony constitutes the fourth movement of the work. The 26-measure ground is introduced by the cello while the theme (also 26 measures) is stated by the trumpet (see Figure 2.8); six variations ensue that thoroughly involve the orchestra before the piece ends in a coda.

---

concentrating on the soloist.²² Britten tends to identify his passacaglias in some fashion, usually by attaching the label, as he does in Peter Grimes and the Cello Symphony. However, ground basses appear in other works, including a five-measure ground bass in "Death, be not proud" from The Holy Sonnets of John Donne (1946) (see Figure 2.9) and a one-measure ground bass pattern in the Agnus Dei movement of the Missa Brevis (1959) (see Figure 2.10).

For Britten, variation is a type of thematic development that can be combined with other techniques. An example of this kind of combination is the "Dirge" of the Serenade for tenor, horn, and strings (1944), a setting in which a six-measure ostinato is placed in the voice, while a fugato in the strings and horn develops underneath it (see Figure 2.11). This treatment of fugue, combining it with another structural device, foreshadows the combination of fugue with variations only two years later in The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra.

²²P. Evans, Music of Benjamin Britten, 322-323.
Figure 2.7: Albert Herring, "Threnody," Act III, 51.1–51.9

\[23\] Benjamin Britten, Albert Herring. Libretto by Eric Crozier. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
Figure 2.8: Cello Symphony, Fourth Movement, "Passacaglia," 63.1-65.1

24 Benjamin Britten, Symphony for Cello and Orchestra. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
Figure 2.9: The Holy Sonnets of John Donne, "Death, be not proud," mm. 1-12²⁵

²⁵Benjamin Britten, The Holy Sonnets of John Donne. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
Figure 2.10: Missa Brevis, "Agnus Dei," mm. 1-6

26Benjamin Britten, Missa Brevis. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
Figure 2.11: Serenade for tenor, horn and strings, "Dirge," beginning-15.1.

Variations and motivic development often appear together in Britten’s compositions, with a significant motive serving as either the unit to be varied, as in the choral variations of A Boy was Born (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5 above), or the ostinato over which a new theme is varied, as in Peter Grimes. In Peter Grimes, one of the primary motives associated with Grimes is his outburst "God have mercy upon me!" introduced in Act II, Scene 1 (see Figure 2.12), the moment when Grimes realizes his failure.

---

27 Benjamin Britten, Serenade for tenor, horn and strings. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
This motive, which is immediately taken up and distorted by the people of the Borough who witnessed Grimes striking Ellen, becomes the ground-bass figure for the passacaglia (Interlude IV) that follows the scene (see Figure 2.6 above). The theme that is introduced in the solo viola and subjected to nine variations is usually understood to represent the new apprentice, who is mute throughout the opera. As Eric Walter White points out, this interlude "reflects the agony that is undermining Peter's mind," hence the use of this particular motive as the basis of the passacaglia.

28Benjamin Britten, Peter Grimes. Words by Montagu Slater. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.

Pairing of motivic development and variations continues in *The Turn of the Screw*, but here the "Screw" theme provides much of the material not only for each variation, but also for each scene. Each variation foreshadows the following scene's developments. As Patricia Howard shows, "the Screw theme ... influence[s] the shape of the majorities of the melodies which appear in the scenes, and it continues to generate much of the harmony," as it does in the variations. She further shows that, because most of the thematic material in the scenes is related to the "Screw" theme, "the technique of associating specific themes with certain characters... is used not to identify and individualise characters but to draw connexions between them, and to imply relationships which could not be articulated verbally without losing the intrinsic ambiguity of the story."  

One example of the interrelationship of the "Screw" theme with the characters will suffice here. Howard identifies the first derivation from the "Screw" theme as the "catalyst" theme (see Figure 2.13), which is based on an inversion of the first four notes of the "Screw" theme. The "catalyst" theme is associated initially with

---

30 Patricia Howard, "Benjamin Britten's 'The Turn of the Screw': the music. II. Structures: an overall view," in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, 81-82.
the Governess and her questioning arrival at Bly, but at the beginning of Act II the two ghosts use the theme for their statement "The ceremony of innocence is drowned" (see Figure 2.14). The opening of the "catalyst" theme also serves as

---

Figure 2.14: The Turn of the Screw, Act II, Scene 1, 21.1-21.4

---

31 Benjamin Britten, The Turn of the Screw. Libretto by Myfanwy Piper. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.

32 Ibid.
the source for thematic material associated with Quint and Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper (see Figures 2.15 and 2.16).³³

![Musical notation for Quint]

Figure 2.15: The Turn of the Screw, Quint³⁴

![Musical notation for Mrs. Grose]

Figure 2.16: The Turn of the Screw, Mrs. Grose³⁵

A later work, the Cantata Misericordium, provides an example of an intensely motivic work in which variation forms are not used. The Cantata is a dramatic retelling of the Good Samaritan parable framed by an introduction and coda. Two related themes create a large-scale structure,

³³ Howard, "Structures," 82-86.

³⁴ Benjamin Britten, The Turn of the Screw. Libretto by Myfanwy Piper. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.

³⁵ Ibid.
the first representing the passage of time (see Figure 2.17), the other representing mercy ("misericordium") (see Figure 2.18). The step up/third down motion within the "misericordium" theme is present and manipulated both

![Figure 2.17: Cantata Misericordium, passage of time, mm. 1-4](image)

![Figure 2.18: Cantata misericordium, "misericordium," mm. 7-10](image)

---


37Ibid.
vertically and horizontally in the "Beati" chords (see Figure 2.19), and later appears in retrograde and retrograde inversion to symbolize the Traveller's fear (see Figure 2.20).

Figure 2.19: Cantata Misericordium, "Beati" chords, mm. 5-6

Figure 2.20: Cantata Misericordium, Traveller, 7.7-8.3

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
The entire "misericordium" theme is sung by the Samaritan as he acknowledges the fallen Traveller near him, while a modified version of the theme reappears just before the Samaritan bids the Traveller to sleep (see Figures 2.21 and 2.22). The "misericordium" theme reappears once more in the chorus to make clear the moral at the end of the work (see Figure 2.23).

Figure 2.21: Cantata Misericordium, Good Samaritan, 23.1-23.7

Figure 2.22: Cantata Misericordium, Good Samaritan, 29.6-29.12

\[40\] Ibid.

\[41\] Ibid.
Figure 2.23: Cantata Misericordium, final chorus, 33.1-33.4

The semitonal opposition that works on such a large scale and within which the "Screw" theme of The Turn of the Screw "turns" is present in other works. Billy Budd, like The Turn of the Screw, employs a large-scale semitonal conflict, this time between B minor and Bb major; Bb major, the key associated with Billy as an agent of salvation,

\footnote{Ibid.}
triumphs over B minor.\textsuperscript{43} On a much smaller scale, the setting of "Sonnet XXX" in \textit{Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo} (1940) uses semitonally related harmonies (G/F#) to embody textual oppositions: "With your lovely eyes I see a sweet light that yet with my blind ones I cannot see..." (see Figure 2.24).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure224.png}
\caption{\textit{Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo}, "Sonnet XXX," mm. 1-12\textsuperscript{44}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{43}Mervyn Cooke points out other semitonal conflicts in \textit{Billy Budd} and examines them closely: see "Britten's 'prophetic song': tonal symbolism in \textit{Billy Budd}," in \textit{Benjamin Britten: \textit{Billy Budd}}, 85-110.

\textsuperscript{44}Benjamin Britten, \textit{Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo}. By arrangement with Boosey \& Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
In the same manner that the semitone functions as a source of large-scale key conflict, so does the tritone. *Peter Grimes* in particular is organized around a tritonal opposition, in this case, A and Eb. As Anthony Payne shows, *Peter Grimes* "embodies incompatibility, for the opera’s dramatic movement is generated by tonal progressions which swing back and forth between two great poles of A and E flat, keys at opposite ends of the tonal spectrum, to symbolise the impossibility of co-existence for Grimes and the Borough."\(^4\) Although all three acts of *Peter Grimes* are based on the tritonal opposition, a brief synopsis of the tonal motion in the first act will suffice. The opening of the first act is firmly established in A major as the people of the Borough work outside. The mood is shattered with Grimes’s entry on Eb (see Figure 2.25), and an immediate sense of conflict arises when no one is willing to help. The tension decreases when Balstrode and Keene assist him, and the key moves to G minor. The scene continues through keys other than A and Eb (including D minor and B minor), but with the storm of the second scene, Eb minor is established, thereby completing the tritonal motion from A that began the act.

Figure 2.25: Peter Grimes, Act I, 19.8–20.15**

**Benjamin Britten, Peter Grimes. Words by Montagu Slater. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
Figure 2.25 (continued)

Allegro (d. 120)

Everyone sang working.

Hill

Give us a hand!

Allegro (d. 120)

PETER (Off)

Gb.

str. f marc. G.B.

No one will help him.

Haul the boat!

G.B.

legato

Haul it yourself... Grimes!
Britten’s interest in the non-serial aspects of twelve-tone rows begins with *The Turn of the Screw*. Donald Mitchell’s list of works continues with *Cantata Academica* (1959), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1960), *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake* (1965), *Owen Wingrave* (1970), and *Death in Venice* (1973).47 Britten usually has some sort of dramatic reason for using a twelve-tone aggregate. Wilfrid Mellers suggests that in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* the use of "the twelve chromatic semitones suggests that sleep forms a cosmos encompassing all aspects of our being"; the chords at the beginning of Act II, encompassing all twelve tones as well as the entire orchestra (see Figure 2.26), are a vertical

![Figure 2.26: A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act II, opening chords](image)

47Donald Mitchell, "What do we know about Britten now?" in *The Britten Companion*, 26.

representation of the fairies’ lullaby to Tytania at the end of Act I and symbolize Tytania’s sleep as Act II begins. For The Turn of the Screw, "the twelve-note series that opens [it] is instrumentally varied in the interludes that represent the tightening 'turns' within the Governess's mind."^4 For Owen Wingrave, the symbolism is more obvious; as Peter Evans points out, the "three clangorous chords by piano, harp and elaborate percussion" that form the primary statement of the twelve-tone aggregate "become a symbol, of war and of the Wingraves' fanatical devotion to it..."^5 (see Figure 2.27). For the Cantata Academica, however, the

![Sheet Music]

Figure 2.27: Owen Wingrave, Prelude, opening chords^5¹

twelve-tone row ("Tema Seriale"--see Figure 2.28) is strictly for academic purposes, although the row may act as


^5 P. Evans, Music of Benjamin Britten, 505.

^5¹ Benjamin Britten, Owen Wingrave. Libretto by Myfanwy Piper. Reproduced by kind permission of Faber Music, Ltd.

54
a symbol of the "equity" to which the text refers: "With equity in teaching and learning is united friendliness towards strangers: may they come from all quarters of the globe." Britten also uses the row as a means for determining the pitch on which each subsequent entrance of the following fugue begins.

Figure 2.28: Cantata Academica, "Tema Seriale"\textsuperscript{52}

Britten's first known experience with music from the Far East occurred after he had met Colin McPhee during his [Britten's] stay in the United States from 1939 to 1942.

\textsuperscript{52}Benjamin Britten, Cantata Academica; Carmen Basiliense. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
McPhee had spent about eight years in Bali, during which time he had studied the native music and transcribed several pieces; as a result, he had become a leading authority in the Western world on the music of Bali. Britten became acquainted with McPhee’s Balinese Ceremonial Music, a transcription for two pianos of three Balinese pieces, when he assisted McPhee in recording it. As a gift, McPhee gave Britten a copy of the transcription with an inscription written in it: "To Ben--hoping he will find something in this music, after all. Colin April 1940."\(^5^3\)

He had indeed found something in the music, although most of the Far-Eastern influences apparent in Britten’s music can be traced to his firsthand experience with Balinese gamelan music in 1956. It is possible, however, to recognize gamelan influences in works composed prior to 1956, which implies that Britten acquired his knowledge of this music from his acquaintance with McPhee.\(^5^4\)

A number of Balinese musical elements can be found in Britten’s music, such as stratification, colotomic structures, scales based on selisir and saih gender wayang (the two prominent Balinese tuning systems), and


heterophony. All of these traits have been modified by Britten to fit in with Western pitch organizations, textural techniques, and formal structures.

Stratification is the separation of sound into discrete layers according to register and timbre, each layer having its own rhythmic and melodic identity as well. The type of Balinese gamelan music that impressed Britten during his visit is known as gamelan gong kebyar. Kebyar music, as Cooke describes it, "is intricately organized by a method of polyphonic stratification in which melodic and rhythmic activity increase towards the upper part of the gamelan's five-octave register. At the lowest pitch level the vertical gongs provide a slow-moving scheme of regular punctuation, which may be termed the 'colotomic structure' of a composition."

McPhee emphasizes the punctuating quality of the gongs in his introductory remarks to the transcription of "Taboeh Teloe" in Balinese Ceremonial Music: "The fact that these three notes [representing the gongs] often sound dissonant with the melody must be

---

"For an extensive discussion of these traits, see Mervyn Cooke, "Oriental Influences."

"Ibid., 17. "Colotomic structure" is defined by The New Harvard Dictionary of Music, ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), as a type of "musical structure ... in which gongs or similar instruments in hierarchical sets are sounded to mark the beginnings and endings of successive sections, each characterized by recurrent melodic and rhythmic patterns."
ignored, for the gongs aim not to harmonize but to punctuate the melody.\(^5^7\)

Britten’s experience with McPhee’s *Balinese Ceremonial Music* evinces itself in the opening of Act II, Scene 1 ("Sunday Morning") of *Peter Grimes*. David Matthews has pointed out that at the time Britten was composing *Peter Grimes*, he was involved with Clifford Curzon in a performance of McPhee’s transcriptions at London’s Wigmore Hall. Britten played the Piano II part, which contains the low gong chords. In a comparison of that part with the score of *Peter Grimes*, the nearly identical spacing and pitch content of the long chords shows that the transcription is the source of the sonorities (see Figures 2.29 and 2.30).\(^5^9\)

---

\(^5^7\) Colin McPhee, introductory notes to *Balinese Ceremonial Music*, "Taboeh Teloe" (New York: G. Schirmer, 1940); also quoted by Cooke in "Britten and Bali," 309.


58
Figure 2.29: Balinese Ceremonial Music, "Taboeh Teloe"

*Colin McPhee, Balinese Ceremonial Music. Reproduced by kind permission of G. Schirmer, Inc.
Figure 2.30: Peter Grimes, Act II, Scene 1, "Sunday Morning," 3.6-3.10

Benjamin Britten, Peter Grimes. Words by Montagu Slater. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
Cooke shows that the figurations in the strings and brass, as well as the long "gong" notes prior to and including the opening of the scene, can be traced to Balinese Ceremonial Music (see Figure 2.30 above). In addition to the textural and rhythmic similarities, Britten also uses a pitch collection for the strings and brass that is based on selisir, a five-note scalic pattern based on a common Balinese tuning system (see Figure 2.31). Other

![Figure 2.31: selisir](image)

works prior to the Balinese visit also incorporate melodies and harmonies based on selisir, including Les Illuminations (1939), Canadian Carnival (1939), The Rape of Lucretia, and A Charm of Lullabies (1947).²

After the tour, Balinese influences become even more prevalent and noticeable. The Prince of the Pagodas (1956), A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Curlew River, The Burning Fiery Furnace, The Prodigal Son, and Death in Venice are the works most often cited as showing Britten’s growing stylistic synthesis of Far-Eastern elements with Western

---

¹Britten modifies the pitch collection by using C instead of C#.

characteristics. Heterophony, stratification, and reproduction of gamelan sonorities are of particular interest in these works.

Heterophony in Britten's works is presaged by two aspects of his style: his intense interest in canonic procedures and his growing rhythmic freedom. Canons are common in Britten's output; an especially notable example is "This little babe" from A Ceremony of Carols (1942) (see Figure 2.32), an extremely close canon that remarkably

Figure 2.32: A Ceremony of Carols, "This little babe," mm. 36-43

*Benjamin Britten, A Ceremony of Carols. By arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.
approximates the sound of heterophony as Britten develops the technique in works such as Curlew River (see Figure 2.33). The ensemble recitatives in the second act of Albert Herring (see Figure 2.34) are among the earliest examples of rhythmic non-alignment in his output. With Curlew River (1964) and the invention of the "curlew sign" (⌒), which indicates that the specified note is to be held only until the other performers reach the proper place and allows for a wide range of rhythmic displacement, Britten acknowledged the degree of rhythmic freedom he was willing to relinquish to the performers.

Stratification of performance forces, an important aspect of War Requiem, is an important quality of the "Sunday Morning" scene (see Figure 2.30 above) in Peter Grimes. Britten adds dramatic significance to the stratification by dividing the forces for the scene between the chorus and organ (church background) and Ellen and the orchestra (foreground action). This takes the stratification principle one step beyond the Balinese practice that is the source of this part of the score, although the stratification by register typical of gamelan music is present as well.
Figure 2.33: Curlew River (heterophony), 79.1*4

*4Benjamin Britten, Curlew River. Libretto by William Plomer. Reproduced by kind permission of Faber Music, Ltd.
**Figure 2.34: Albert Herring, ensemble recitative, Act II, Scene 1, 23.19**

Heterophony, stratification, and the evocation of gamelan sonorities are all brought to bear in Owen Wingrave (see Figure 2.35) to accompany Owen in the "peace" aria he sings after being disinherited. Britten clearly invokes the

---

unusual sound at this point to underscore Owen's hard-won inner peace, thus creating a new sound-world for Owen that corresponds to the new situation in which he finds himself.

Figure 2.35: Owen Wingrave, Act II, Scene 1, "peace" aria, 246.1–247.1

*66* Benjamin Britten, Owen Wingrave. Libretto by Myfanwy Piper. Reproduced by kind permission of Faber Music, Ltd.
The general style characteristics isolated and outlined above reveal the breadth of compositional skill Britten possessed and developed throughout his life. All of these characteristics are present in War Requiem, but as the above discussion shows, Britten does not depart from his stylistic path after fulfilling his commitment to the Coventry Cathedral. A line of stylistic development can indeed be traced from before his success with Peter Grimes through his last opera, Death in Venice. The changes in his sound that are perceived in the works after War Requiem grow primarily from the increased activity surrounding the synthesis of Far Eastern elements and Western traits as he continued working on Curlew River; however, evidence of this synthesis is present even in War Requiem.
CHAPTER 3

WAR REQUIEM: TEXTS

War Requiem manifests a textual organization that goes beyond that of an abbreviated Requiem Mass with war poems interpolated into it. Britten deliberately chooses to insert the English poems in order to produce not only a troped Mass that can be performed in a church, but also a commentary on conflict and reconciliation appropriate for the specific occasion of the reconsecration of the Coventry Cathedral.

The texts Britten chose for War Requiem come from the Latin Missa pro defunctis (Requiem) and nine poems by Wilfred Owen, a 25-year-old English poet-soldier who was killed in action one week before the armistice of World War I. From the Requiem Mass, Britten took the Introit, Kyrie, Dies Irae, Offertorium, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei, combining the Introit and the Kyrie for the first movement. The Libera Me, the final movement of War Requiem, is the responsory for the ceremony of Absolution, originally sung while the coffin is aspersed with holy water and censed after the Mass. Britten also included in the final movement
of War Requiem the antiphon "In Paradisum," which is usually sung as the coffin is taken out of the church for burial. Like other composers of Requiems, such as Mozart, Berlioz, and Verdi, Britten omitted the Gradual and the Tract, but unlike his predecessors, he also dropped the Communion. This omission appears to stem from the text of its verse, "Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis," which is also found as the opening antiphon of the Introit and at the conclusion of the Absolution.¹ Since the Absolution normally follows the Communion almost immediately, the inclusion of the Communion in War Requiem would have caused the final movement to seem anticlimactic.

All of the English texts by Owen that Britten interpolated into the Requiem Mass carry religious overtones (some more explicit than others), a quality that appears to have had considerable influence on Britten’s ultimate decisions concerning texts.² From the collection of Owen’s

¹The same text is used as the response for the Gradual. This probably led composers to omit the Gradual, just as it apparently led Britten to omit the Communion as well. The common text is noted by Alec Robertson, Requiem: Music for Mourning and Consolation (New York: Praeger, 1968), 14, 23.

²"Arms and the Boy," a poem with few religious references and a high concentration on weapons, was considered by Britten but rejected in favor of "At a Calvary near the Ancre" in the fifth movement. Knowledge of the possibility of its use comes from a separate manuscript of texts Britten kept for the pieces on which he worked (available for study on microfilm at the Britten-Pears Library). "Arms and the Boy" and "At a Calvary near the Ancre" are both indicated for inclusion in the Agnus Dei movement with the word "or" written between them. Like all the poems used in War Requiem, both poems are marked with an
poems edited by Edmund Blunden, Britten chose the following nine poems: "Anthem for Doomed Youth," "Bugles Sang," "The Next War," "Sonnet on Seeing a Piece of Our Artillery Brought into Action," "Futility," "The Parable of the Old Men and the Young," "The End," "At a Calvary near the Ancre," and "Strange Meeting."^{3} Owen’s writings also provided Britten with the inscription found on the score’s title page. These words come from the preface Owen was preparing for the collection of war poems that he would have published after returning home from France, had he lived:

My subject is War, and the pity of War.  
The Poetry is in the pity...  
All a Poet can do today is warn.^{4}

Britten did not always set Owen’s poems in their original forms, slightly altering the texts as necessary to suit the purpose at hand. The changes were usually achieved through omission or repetition, but never through the use of text that was not original to either the Requiem or the poems themselves. Omitted sections include the traditional

^{"X" in the margin of his edition of Owen’s poems (see note below). After the poems were copied into the text manuscript, however, Britten apparently decided on "Calvary," and so crossed out "Arms and the Boy" and drew an arrow from "Calvary" to the Agnus Dei text.}

^{Britten’s source for Owen’s poems was the 1955 reprint of the collection edited by Edmund Blunden, first printed in 1931 (The Poems of Wilfred Owen, edited with a memoir and notes by Edmund Blunden [London: Chatto and Windus, 1931]).}

^{Britten, War Requiem, title page. The entire Preface is available in Blunden, Collected Poems, 40-41.}
repetitions of each phrase of the Kyrie, the eleventh and fourteenth stanzas of the Dies Irae, the last six lines of "Bugles sang," eight lines of "Sonnet," and eleven lines of "Strange Meeting." Repeated or reprised texts include the first two stanzas of the Dies Irae and the opening lines of the Libera Me. Individual words are occasionally repeated in several of the English texts. "Strange Meeting" offers yet a different alteration—a combination of omission, as mentioned above, and the insertion of text from alternate readings provided in Blunden’s edition. Britten’s reading of each of the texts will be discussed below.

Britten’s use of the English poems, as pointed out by Anthony Milner,⁵ may be compared to the medieval process of troping, the addition of newly composed text and music to an existing chant in order to embellish or comment upon it. To develop the premise of conflict and reconciliation underlying War Requiem, Britten inserted each of Owen’s poems, in whole or in part, at a point in the liturgical text where the commentary would be most shockingly appropriate, each poem being allied with the Latin text immediately preceding it. Table I outlines the relative placements of the Latin and English texts:

---

⁵Milner, "Choral Music," 339.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requiem</th>
<th>Owen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Requiem aeternam...</td>
<td>(1) What passing bells...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te decet hymnus...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrie eleison...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Dies irae...</td>
<td>(2) Bugles sang...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liber scriptus...</td>
<td>(3) Out there...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recordare Jesu pie...</td>
<td>(4) Be slowly lifted up...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confutatis maledictis...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacrimosa dies illa...</td>
<td>(5) Move him into the sun...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pie Jesu...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Domine Jesu Christe...</td>
<td>(6) So Abram rose...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostias et preces tibi...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quam olim Abrahae...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Sanctus...</td>
<td>(7) After the blast of lightning...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Agnus dei...</td>
<td>(8) One ever hangs...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnus dei...</td>
<td>Near Golgotha...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnus dei...</td>
<td>The scribes...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnus dei...</td>
<td>[Dona nobis pacem]*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Libera me...</td>
<td>(9) It seemed that out of battle I escaped...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In paradisum...</td>
<td>Let us sleep now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requiescant in pace, Amen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Although this text is not from Owen's poem, it is grouped here because the tenor soloist sings it.*
As the table shows, the fifth movement is the only movement that begins with the English text. It is also the only movement in which the Latin text appears to be troping the English, rather than the other way around. In addition, Britten takes the liberty of affixing the words "Dona nobis pacem" (the ending of the Agnus Dei in all Masses except the Requiem) to the poem sung by the tenor. This is the only time in the entire work where a male soloist sings any Latin.\footnote{The Dies Irae must be mentioned, though, because Britten uses a similar technique here as well. He repeats the first three lines of the final quatrains ("Lacrimosa...") to comment on the questions posed at the end of "Futility." See the discussion of the Dies Irae later in this chapter.}

The relation of an English poem to its Latin surroundings is often not immediately apparent, becoming more so in retrospect or when the musical setting provides a clue. However, a close reading of the texts alone reveals a number of connections between the Latin and English texts as one begins to interpret the possible meanings of each, both alone and in context. Once one has established possible interpretations of the texts, Britten's musical choices for the settings of the texts become clearer.\footnote{The significance of this addition will be discussed later.}
REQUIEM AETERNAM

The first movement of *War Requiem*, "Requiem aeternam," includes the entire Introit text, Owen’s "Anthem for Doomed Youth," and the Kyrie. The texts will be discussed in order of appearance.

The Introit text consists of two psalm verses framed by an antiphon:

Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion; et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem; exaudi orationem meam, ad te omnis caro veniet.
Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.

[Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. To you a hymn is sung, O God in Zion, and to you a vow shall be fulfilled in Jerusalem. Hear my prayer, for to you all flesh shall come. Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.]

The antiphon text is taken from 2 Esdras 2:34-35 (4 Esdras in the Latin Vulgate Bible), where the prophet Ezra is addressing the Gentiles: "Therefore I say to you, O nations that hear and understand, ‘Wait for your shepherd; he will give you everlasting rest...Be ready for the rewards of the kingdom, because perpetual light will shine on you forevermore.’" The psalm verses are from the beginning of

---

*New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). See also the discussion of the Plainsong Requiem Mass in Robertson, Requiem, 11-24.*
Psalm 65 [64]: "Praise is due to you, O God in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed, O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come."⁹ The emphasis on the rewards of rest and light in the antiphon and the praising of God in the verses is succinctly brought forward in the opening text of the Mass for the Dead. These differences in focus between the two sections of the Introit suggest a reason for the vastly opposing treatments Britten applies to the Introit.¹⁰

The main impetus behind "Anthem for Doomed Youth," the first of Owen’s poems in War Requiem, comes from the aural and visual imagery derived from traditional religious and social mourning rituals, but mixed with descriptions of war sounds:

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them from prayers or bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
The pallor of girls’ brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of silent minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.¹¹


¹⁰See the discussion below of the music for the Introit.

¹¹All of the poems quoted here come from Blunden’s edition of Owen’s poetry (see note above). This version of
Owen uses a number of images from Anglican funeral traditions: "Passing-bells" announced the death of a parishioner, usually tolling the age of the deceased; choirs were a part of any church service; bugle calls, similar to the playing of "Taps" at American military funerals, were common at the end of burial services; candles were (are) a part of church services; flowers were usually placed in or on the grave; and a house with blinds drawn was a visible sign to the community of a family in mourning.

Many of these religious references are easily identified with the Requiem liturgy and justify Britten's inclusion of "Anthem for Doomed Youth" in War Requiem, although to solidify the combination of the Introit with "Anthem," Britten created two musical links: the bells accompanying the Latin setting (suggested by the opening words of the poem) and the deliberate recall of the setting of the psalm verses for the last six lines of "Anthem." Even without these musical reinforcements, however, "Anthem for Doomed Youth," particularly its first four lines, is sufficiently shocking within the context of the Introit to point out the fact that Britten has a not-so-hidden agenda for this Requiem. The identification of dying young

"Anthem for Doomed Youth" uses the word "silent" in the penultimate line rather than "patient," which is the accepted word in the editions by C. Day Lewis (The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen [New York: New Directions, 1963]) and Jon Stallworthy (The Poems of Wilfred Owen [London: The Hogarth Press, 1985]).
soldiers (the "doomed youth" of the poem’s title) with cattle is a reference on Owen’s part to the wholesale slaughter of soldiers on entrenched battlefields, where the only sounds accompanying death were guns, rifles, and bombs, not choirs and bells. The unexpected juxtaposition of religious—particularly funereal—and wartime images in "Anthem for Doomed Youth" provided Britten with a poem well suited for inclusion in the first movement of a work such as War Requiem. Both Owen’s poem and Britten’s setting challenge the adequacy of the funeral rite when faced with the horrors of war and introduce the theme of conflict that occurs in the clash of the peaceful Latin funeral liturgy with the disturbing English war poetry.

The Kyrie is appended to the end of the first movement in the manner of a coda, but its presence is more than just a quiet ending to the movement. Britten’s decision to use the Kyrie text (without the traditional second and third repetitions of each phrase) was a conscious choice made after discarding a sketch of the end of "Anthem for Doomed Youth," which set a repeated "Amen" to the chord progression that now accompanies the Kyrie. The textual change is significant: The finality of the Amen’s "so be it" has given way to the prayerful commentary of the Kyrie’s "Lord have mercy," leaving open to the remainder of the work the manner in which the conflict is to be developed and resolved.
DIES IRAE

Not all of Owen's poems can be conveniently connected to the liturgical texts through common images as found in the first movement. In light of the emerging theme of conflict introduced with "Anthem for Doomed Youth," however, the four poems interpolated into the second movement, the Dies Irae, may not be as difficult to correlate with their Latin surroundings as may first appear. "Bugles sang," the first Owen text to appear in this movement, shares the musical imagery of the third stanza of the Dies Irae in a manner considerably more direct than that found in the first movement, as Britten takes advantage of the opportunity for word-painting. Unlike "Bugles sang," however, the other three poems in this movement, "The Next War," "Sonnet: On Seeing a Piece of Our Heavy Artillery Brought into Action," and "Futility," are not so obvious in their connections.

The Dies Irae is a thirteenth-century poem that may have been inspired by the Libera Me, which includes a verse that begins with the text "Dies irae, dies illa." The Dies Irae contains seventeen three-line stanzas and five additional lines that appear to have been added at a later time.¹² For the purposes of this study, the four lines beginning with "Lacrimosa" will be considered as the

¹²See p. 80 for the beginning of the Dies Irae text.
eighteenth stanza, and the text of the "Pie Jesu" will serve as an additional concluding line.\textsuperscript{13}

Britten takes considerable liberties with all of the texts in this movement. In his treatment of the Dies Irae, he eliminates the eleventh and fourteenth stanzas and brings back the first two stanzas between the seventeenth and eighteenth stanzas. Of the poems, "Bugles sang" is reduced to its first seven lines, "Sonnet" is cut to six lines, and "Futility" is intermixed with the final stanza of the Latin text, bringing about a considerable amount of repetition; only "The Next War" remains relatively intact.

To understand the possible motivations behind Britten's editing, as well as to see the relationships of the poems to the liturgical text, the following discussion will be organized according to the sectional divisions created by the poems' interruptions of the Dies Irae text (see Table 1 above). There are five sections: each of the first four sections ends with an English poem, while the fifth section, acting as a coda, sets the final line of the sequence.

The first section comprises the first four stanzas, followed by the first seven lines (underlined) of "Bugles sang":\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13}For a more detailed discussion of the Dies Irae text and its sources, see Robertson, \textit{Requiem}, 15-20.

\textsuperscript{14}Britten omitted the last six lines of the poem, apparently because the first and fourth of these lines are incomplete in Blunden's edition. The fifth line was
Dies irae, dies illa, 
Solvet saeculum in favilla: 
Teste David cum Sibylla.
Quantus tremor est futurus, 
Quando Judex est venturus, 
Cuncta stricte discussurus!
Tuba mirum spargens sonum 
Per sepulchra regionum 
Coget omnes ante thronum.
Mors stupebit et natura, 
Cum resurget creatura, 
Judicanti responsura.

This day, this day of wrath 
Shall consume the world in ashes, 
As foretold by David and the Sibyl.
What trembling there shall be 
When the judge shall come 
To weigh everything strictly.
The trumpet, scattering its awful sound 
Across the graves of all lands 
Summons all before the throne.
Death and nature shall be stunned 
When mankind arises 
To render account before the judge.

Bugles sang, saddening the evening air, 
And bugles answered, sorrowful to hear.

Voices of boys were by the river-side. 
Sleep mothered them; and left the twilight sad. 
The shadow of the morrow weighed on men.

Voices of old despondency resigned, 
Bowed by the shadow of the morrow, slept.

[ ] dying tone 
Of receding voices that will not return. 
The wailing of the high far-travelling shells 
And the deep cursing of the provoking [ ].

The monstrous anger of our taciturn guns. 
The majesty of the insults of their mouths.

incorporated with changes by Owen into the final version of "Anthem."

This fragment is generally accepted as a preliminary draft of "Anthem for Doomed Youth" (see Stallworthy, Poems, 179). Britten’s use of the fragment here serves as a convenient cyclic element between the first and second movements. Britten further highlights this relationship through the motivic material found in the horn part of the first movement at reh. 12 (see Figures 4.5 and 4.9 below).
The obvious connection between the first four stanzas of the Dies Irae and the portion of "Bugles sang" set by Britten is the trumpet imagery, with "bugles" acting as a reference back to the line "Tuba mirum sparges sonum."\textsuperscript{15} The repetition of the phrase "Bugles sang" between stanzas reinforces the importance of this connection. On the surface, there appears to be little else beyond the trumpet imagery that supports the pairing of these two texts, although, as it is set by Britten, the apocalypse of the Dies Irae is reflected in the fragment’s weighty "shadow of the morrow." In light of the sense of conflict that was introduced in the first movement, however, Britten continues the theme of conflict by using "Bugles sang" as a link back to "Anthem for Doomed Youth," while at the same time contrasting the fragment’s elegiac grief with the woeful despair of the prophecy of the Dies Irae.

The second section of the movement continues with the next four stanzas of the Dies Irae, followed by "The Next War":

\textsuperscript{15}It should be noted, however, that the equation of "tuba" and bugles is not universal—German composers usually translate "tuba" to "posaune" (trombone), as is found in Mozart’s \textit{Requiem}. 
Liber scriptus proferetur,  The written book shall be brought
In quo totum continetur,  In which all is contained
Unde mundus judicetur.  Whereby the world shall be judged.

Judex ergo cum sedebit  When the judge takes his seat
Quidquid latet, apparebit:  All that is hidden shall appear:
Nil inultum remanebit.  Nothing will remain unavenged.

Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?  What shall I, a wretch, say then?
Quem patronum rogaturus,  To which protector shall I appeal
Cum vix justus sit securus?  When even the just man is barely safe?

Rex tremendae majestatis,  King of awful majesty,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,  who freely savest those worthy
Salva me, fons pietatis.  of salvation,
Save me, fount of pity.

Out there, we’ve walked quite friendly up to Death;
Sat down and eaten with him, cool and bland,—
Pardoned his spilling mess-tins in our hand.
We’ve sniffed the green thick odour of his breath,—
Our eyes wept, but our courage didn’t writhe.
He’s spat at us with bullets and he’s coughed Shrapnel. We chorussed when he sang aloft:
We whistled while he shaved us with his scythe.

Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!
We laughed at him, we leagued with him, old chum.
No soldier’s paid to kick against his powers.
We laughed, knowing that better men would come,
And greater wars; when each proud fighter brags
He wars on Death—for Life; not men—for flags.

Again, Britten creates an incongruity between the Dies Irae text and Owen’s poem. "The Next War" is the most graphic of the nine poems Britten chose for War Requiem,
Owen providing poetic descriptions of battlefield attacks by gas ("green thick odour of his breath"), guns ("spat at us with bullets"), and bombs ("he’s coughed Shrapnel"),

82
followed by the laughing dismissal that "Death was never enemy of ours!" Despite these images, Owen described "The Next War" with the "motives" of "Cheerfulness and Description and Reflection."\(^1\)\(^6\) All of these adjectives are appropriate to the poem; however, the poem takes on an air of ironic fearlessness toward death, as its "gallows humor" contrasts markedly with the fear and despair of the preceding Dies Irae text.

The next five stanzas of the Dies Irae incorporate a change in attitude, moving from fear and despair to pity and supplication. The change is effected in part by a change in the personage being addressed: Jesus the Savior rather than the Judge and King is now the focus of the prayer. Britten has focussed the Latin poem to some extent by eliminating stanzas 11 and 14, apparently because of the judgmental imagery:

\begin{align*}
\text{Recordare Jesu pie,} & \quad \text{Remember, gentle Jesus,} \\
\text{Quod sum causa tuae viae:} & \quad \text{That I am the reason for Thy time on earth,} \\
\text{Ne me perdas illa die.} & \quad \text{Do not cast me out on that day.} \\
\text{Quarens me, sedisti lassus:} & \quad \text{Seeking me, Thou didst sink down wearily,} \\
\text{Redemisti crucem passus:} & \quad \text{Thou hast saved me by enduring the cross,} \\
\text{Tantus labor non sit cassus.} & \quad \text{Such travail must not be in vain.}
\end{align*}

\(^{16}\)Blunden, \textit{Collected Poems}, 41. Owen's descriptors are found in the "Table of Contents" he had prepared for a book of his poems that was to be published after he came home from the War.
(11) Juste judex ultionis,  
    Donum fac remissionis  
    Ante diem rationis.  

    Ingemisco, tamquam reus:  
    Culpa rubet vultus meus;  
    Supplicanti parce Deus.  

    Qui Mariam absolvisti,  
    Et latronem exaudisti,  
    Mihi quoque spem dedisti.  

(14) Preces meae non sunt  
    dignae;  
    Sed tu bonus fac benigne,  
    Ne perenni cremer igne.  

    Inter oves locum praesta,  
    Et ab haedis me sequestra,  
    Statuens in parte dextra.  

    Confutatis maledictis,  
    Flammis acribus addictis,  
    Voca me cum benedictis.  

    Oro supplex et acclinis  
    Cor contritum quasi cinis  
    Gere curam mei finis.  

    Just judge of vengeance,  
    Give the gift of remission  
    Before the day of reckoning.  

    I groan, like the sinner that  
    I am,  
    Guilt reddens my face,  
    Oh God spare the suppliant.  

    Thou, who pardoned Mary  
    And heeded the thief,  
    Has given me hope as well.  

    My prayers are not worthy,  
    But Thou, good one, kindly  
    grant  
    That I not burn in eternal  
    fire.  

    Give me a place among the  
    sheep  
    And separate me from the  
    goats,  
    Let me stand at Thy right  
    hand.  

    When the damned are cast away  
    And consigned to the searing  
    flames,  
    Call me to be with the  
    blessed.  

    Bowed down in supplication I  
    beg Thee,  
    My heart as though ground to  
    ashes:  
    Help me in my last hour.
Britten pairs this text with selected lines (underlined) of "Sonnet: On Seeing a Piece of Our Heavy Artillery Brought into Action":

Be slowly lifted up, thou long black arm,  
Great gun towering toward Heaven, about to curse;  
Sway steep against them, and for years rehearse  
Huge imprecations like a blasting charm!  
Reach at that Arrogance which needs thy harm,  
And beat it down before its sins grow worse;  
Spend our resentment, cannon,—yea, disburse  
Our gold in shapes of flame, our breaths in storm.

Yet, for men's sakes whom thy vast malison  
Must wither innocent of enmity,  
Be not withdrawn, dark arm, thy spoilure done,  
Safe to the bosom of our prosperity.  
But when thy spell be cast complete and whole,  
May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!

By shrinking "Sonnet" down to a basic sestet, Britten destroys the sonnet structure of this poem in order to focus on specific textual meanings. He has excised text that places an emphasis on the cannon itself, and has also narrowed the focus of the poem to one specific action of the cannon ("Reach at that arrogance...") and the consequences of that action ("May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!"). Britten has also given the poem a more religious interpretation. The six lines that he has chosen are those that use words often associated with a Judeo-Christian perspective: Heaven, curse, sins, God, soul. The use of the words "thou," "thy," and "thee" also casts the poem against an evangelical Anglican background.
It is not difficult to see what drew Britten to use these lines in a piece like War Requiem. The difficulty lies in understanding how the edited "Sonnet" fits in with the preceding Latin text.

The Latin poem, as Britten has cast it at this point, is a personal appeal to Jesus Christ for salvation at the time of judgment. The supplicant begs to be spared eternal damnation and provides a reminder of the purpose of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection.

A similar emphasis on salvation and damnation is apparent in Britten’s revision of Owen’s "Sonnet." At first, a parallel can be drawn between Jesus and the cannon as agents of salvation. However, the last line of "Sonnet" ("May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!") reverses the perceived role of the cannon. The poem is no longer describing salvation but condemnation, which is specifically addressed by the author of the Dies Irae in the lines "When the damned are cast away/And consigned to the searing flames." Britten has thus skillfully edited Owen’s poem so that it addresses only the portion of the Dies Irae with which it is paired.

The climax of the entire movement follows "Sonnet" as Britten continues the Dies Irae, just as Verdi did, by repeating the first two stanzas of the Dies Irae before setting the eighteenth stanza. The recapitulation of text and associated motives highlights the "Lacrimosa" verse,
which is the crucial Latin text for this section. The "Lacrimosa" text is combined in a unique fashion with Owen's poem "Futility."

Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvet saeclum in favilla:
Teste David cum Sibylla.
Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando Judex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus!
Lacrimosa dies illa,
Qua resurgat ex favilla,
Judicandus homo reus:
Huic ergo parce Deus.

This day, this day of wrath
Shall consume the world in ashes,
As foretold by David and the Sibyl.
What trembling there shall be
When the judge shall come
To weigh everything strictly.
Oh this day full of tears
When from the ashes arises
Guilty man, to be judged:
Oh Lord, have mercy upon him.

Move him into the sun--
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields unsown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds,--
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,
Full-nerved--still warm--too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
--O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem. Amen.
[Gentle Lord Jesus, grant them rest. Amen.]

The immediate relationship of "Futility" to the "Lacrimosa" stanza is based on a key word, "clay," which is roughly equated with "favilla" (ashes); however, the union of the Latin and English texts relies on more than just a
single word. Owen’s poem allows for some integration of the two texts because of the questions posed in the last stanza. 

Prior to the appearance of "Futility," Britten sets the "Lacrimosa" stanza completely, as would be expected given his treatment of the Latin texts up to this point. Unlike the rest of the Dies Irae, however, he brings back each line of the "Lacrimosa" as a response at appropriate points during the setting of "Futility," making explicit the relationship of the two texts.

"Lacrimosa dies illa" is a quiet response to the sentiments of the first verse, but the next line, "Qua resurget ex favilla," is only the quiet beginning of the answer for the questions posed in the second verse:

Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,  
Full-nerved--still warm--too hard to stir?  
Was it for this the clay grew tall?  
Qua resurget ex favilla...[when from the ashes arise]

When the question "Was it for this the clay grew tall?" is repeated, the answer grows into a resounding judgment: "Judicandus homo reus" ("Guilty man, to be judged"). Owen’s rhetorical questions about the futility of creation in the face of destruction are made more poignant within the despair of the Dies Irae, while at the same time the woe of the Last Judgment depicted in this final stanza is made more fearsome by Owen’s questions. Britten has paired these two texts so that the emotions of each text and the contradictions that exist between them are heightened. The
conflict that has developed thus far is hardly softened as Britten uses the text "Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem. Amen" ("Gentle Lord Jesus, grant them rest. Amen") to answer the despairing question "O what made fatuous sunbeams toil/To break earth's sleep at all?"

OFFERTORIUM

The third movement, Offertorium, is a combination of the Offertory text and Owen's poem "The Parable of the Old Men and the Young," a poetic rewriting of the story of Abraham and Isaac found in Genesis 22:

Domine Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae, libera animas omnium fidelium defunctorum de poenis inferni, et de profundo lacu: libera eas de ore leonis, ne absorbeat eas tartarum, ne cadant in obscurum.

[Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory, deliver the souls of the faithful departed from the pains of hell, and the bottomless pit: deliver them from the jaw of the lion, lest hell engulf them, lest they be plunged into darkness.]

Sed signifer sanctus Michael repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam: Quam olim Abrahæ promistis, et semini ejus.

[But let the holy standard-bearer Michael lead them into the holy light, as Thou didst promise Abraham and his seed.]

Hostias et preces tibi Domine laudis offerimus; tu suscipe pro animabus illis, quorum hodie memoriam facimus: fac eas, Domine, de morte transire ad vitam. Quam olim Abrahæ promisisti et semini ejus.

[Lord, in praise we offer to Thee sacrifices and prayers, do Thou receive them for the souls of those whom we remember this day: Lord, make them pass from death to life. As Thou didst promise Abraham and his seed.]
So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife.  
And as they sojourned both of them together,  
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,  
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,  
But where the lamb for this burnt offering?  
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
And builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.  
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him. Behold,  
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.  
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,--  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

The Offertorium is an appropriate place for concentrating on Abraham and Isaac. The Offertory response "Quam olim Abrahae promisisti, et semini ejus" ("As you promised Abraham and his seed") refers to God’s promise to Abraham found in Genesis 22:17-18:

> I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.¹⁷

Abraham, following divine orders, prepared to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, but was prevented from doing so by God when it became apparent that Abraham would do as he was told. As a reward for obeying, God blessed him. The outcome of Abraham’s actions is crucial to the understanding

¹⁷NRSV.
of Owen's text and the manner in which Britten has placed that text within its liturgical surroundings.

Owen's poem "The Parable of the Old Men and the Young" is an irreverent, almost sacrilegious, reworking of the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, in which Owen causes Abram to blatantly ignore the divine intervention in order to slaughter Isaac and with him "half the seed of Europe." The poem offers a number of images that make clear the military context of the poem: "fire and iron," "a knife," "belts and straps," "parapets and trenches." The inclusion of "parapets and trenches" in particular betrays Owen's war slant. But it is Owen's replacement of the traditional ending that makes clear his view: the war was an unnecessary and avoidable slaughter of innocent people, particularly young men.19

While Britten, as a conscientious objector, may have shared Owen's view, it is the dramatic impact of Owen's reversal that Britten is highlighting in this juxtaposition of texts. The shock of Owen's text is reinforced by the numerous repetitions of the last line by the two soloists while the boys' choir, who are apparently intended to be

---

19Note the spelling of the name--this is Abraham's name before he was confirmed by God as the ancestor of God's chosen people.

19Owen's title reflects this stance as well, with Abram representing "the old men" and Isaac "the young."
heard as "half the seed of Europe," sings the Offertory verse over it.²⁰

SANCTUS

The Sanctus presents a distinct change in atmosphere after the previous three movements. The sorrowful concentration on the deceased offered by the liturgical text now gives way to the praise and glorification of God, the only text in the Requiem Mass specifically devoted to this purpose.²¹


[Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Holy. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Holy.]

The opening exclamations of the Sanctus come from Isaiah 6:3 and are proclaimed by the six-winged seraphim encountered by Isaiah in the temple: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." This text appears again in Revelation 4:8, where four six-winged creatures also proclaim the glory of God: "Holy, [\textit{\textcopyright} 2000 by the Catholic University of America Press. Reprinted with permission.]

²⁰See Figure 4.1 below.

²¹The Sanctus, included in all Masses, is generally regarded as among the oldest texts found in the Roman Catholic Mass, where it is often paired with the Benedictus text, as it is here.
holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come."^{22}

The Benedictus text, often combined with the Sanctus text, is taken directly from Matthew 21:9, which describes the shouting of the crowds who welcome Jesus to Jerusalem on what is now celebrated as Palm Sunday: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"^{23}

Knowing that part of the Sanctus text appears in the book of Revelation helps to understand Britten’s choice of "The End" for this movement. "The End" relies on the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation for its effectiveness, but, like the twist given to the Abraham story in "The Parable of the Old Men and the Young," Owen counters the Biblical text, here by questioning the resurrection of the faithful that follows the apocalypse described in Revelation.^{24} The personifications of Age and Earth bring forth Owen’s doubts by denying the possibility of the return of life as known before the war:

^{22}NRSV.
^{23}NRSV.
^{24}See particularly Rev 21:4.
After the blast of lightning from the East,
The flourish of loud clouds, the Chariot Throne;  
After the drums of Time have rolled and ceased,  
And by the bronze west long retreat is blown,

Shall life renew these bodies? Of a truth  
All death will He annul, all tears assuage?--  
Fill the void veins of Life again with youth,  
And wash, with an immortal water, Age?

When I do ask white Age he saith not so:  
"My head hangs weighed with snow."
And when I hearken to the Earth, she saith:  
"My fiery heart shrinks, aching. It is death.  
Mine ancient scars shall not be glorified,  
Nor my titanic tears, the sea, be dried."

Owen's reference to an end-time is evident in the first stanza. The questions posed by the second stanza are a direct confrontation of the Resurrection of the body that forms the basis of Christianity; the Christian reference is evident with the capitalized "He," as well as the description of baptism as "immortal water." The answers given by the personifications of Age and Earth, however, deny the Christian hope.  

Through these questions and answers, Owen gives us his denunciation of war and the hopelessness war causes.

While the first three movements contribute to an ever-increasing sense of opposition and conflict that reaches a 

---

25 Douglas Kerr views "The End," as well as "Strange Meeting" and "Futility," as a "denial of the resurrection." See discussion in his book, Wilfred Owen's Voices: Language and Community (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 134. Although Owen had doubts about Christianity, he was thoroughly familiar with its tenets, at least as seen through an evangelical Anglican point of view. This poem could be seen as an evocation of his own personal views toward Christianity.
climax in "The Parable of the Old Men and the Young," the Sanctus movement produces an anti-climax that prepares the listener for the change in mood that occurs with the Agnus Dei. The joy of the Sanctus text so contrasts the events of the previous movement that the conflict is laid aside. "The End" acknowledges the end of the conflict, but also questions the results of that conflict by confronting the concept of the resurrection that, according to Christian belief, is supposed to occur. While Owen once again brings into opposition religious beliefs and the results of war, Britten softens this opposition by putting "The End" in a position where the destructiveness can be contemplated in preparation for the reconciliation and forgiveness that can occur at the end of a conflict.

AGNUS DEI

Although called "Agnus Dei" in keeping with the overall organization of War Requiem, the main focus of this movement is Owen’s poem "At a Calvary near the Ancre," a poem very much dependent for its substance on familiarity with the teachings of Jesus and his crucifixion. This poem contrasts greatly with "The End": It lacks the apocalyptic setting and basic questioning of Christian belief, relying instead on Gospel-derived descriptions of landmarks and people to lead up to a simple yet eloquent statement that summarizes a
basic tenet of the Christian faith. Britten combines the poem with the Agnus Dei by inserting each line of the Latin text at appropriate points in the poem, further emphasizing the movement of the poem to the last two lines:

One ever hangs where shelled roads part.
In this war, He too lost a limb,
But His disciples hide apart;
And now the Soldiers bear with Him.

Agnus dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona eis requiem.
[Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant them rest.]^{26}

Near Golgotha strolls many a priest,
And in their faces there is pride
That they were flesh-marked by the Beast
By whom the gentle Christ's denied.

Agnus dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona eis requiem.

The scribes on all the people shove
And bawl allegiance to the state,

Agnus dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, ...

But they who love the greater love
Lay down their life; they do not hate.

donaeis requiem sempiternam.

Dona nobis pacem.

---

^{26}Britten's treatment of the text is similar to medieval Agnus Dei settings, where the relationship of the trope and the Agnus Dei text was constructed in this fashion.

^{27}The text of the Agnus Dei in the Requiem Mass is a modification of the original text, which comes from the Gospel of John 1:29: "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'' (NRSV)
The first of the three four-line stanzas describes a roadside crucifix commonly found in the French countryside; this particular crucifix has been damaged in battle ("he too lost a limb"), as had so many soldiers. Owen uses the image of the crucifix and the (implied) circumstances of Jesus' crucifixion to comment on war in general. The lines "But His disciples hide apart;/And now the Soldiers bear with Him" refer to the disciples' desertion of Jesus when he was arrested, tried, and nailed to the cross, and left to the company of Roman soldiers, but Owen is actually describing the abandonment of the roadside shrine to the soldiers fighting in the deserted countryside where this crucifix is located.

The second stanza is a biting description of those who support the war effort. Many clerics condoned the war effort, rallying support for it from the pulpit.²⁸ The first two lines of the third stanza continue the image of rallying support for the war effort, but the last two lines negate that image with the real moral of the poem. This poem illustrates Owen's attitudes toward the hypocritical role he perceived Christianity, as an organized state religion, to be playing in the war.

²⁸Several scholars have noted the anti-clerical tone of the poems, including Robertson, Requiem, 282; Hibberd, Owen the Poet (London: Macmillan, 1986), 104; and Kerr, Voices, 126.
Britten's combination of "At a Calvary near the Ancre" and the Agnus Dei is designed to concentrate on the theme of peace and reconciliation. By dividing up the last stanza of the poem and the last line of the Agnus Dei, Britten surrounds the English text with the Latin text to focus attention on these last two lines. For further reinforcement, Britten unexpectedly has the tenor conclude the movement with the words "Dona nobis pacem," the only Latin text uttered by either of the male soloists. This text is not normally a part of the Agnus Dei in a Requiem Mass, but it is the usual ending for the Agnus Dei in all other Masses. It seems that Britten felt it highly appropriate to add this text, in a dramatically poignant manner, in order to emphasize the pacifist message intended by War Requiem and brought out clearly by Owen's poem.

LIBERA ME

More than any other movement of War Requiem, the sixth and final movement, Libera Me, focuses on the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation. These themes are intimately associated with the Coventry Cathedral and are appropriate focal points for the conclusion of this powerful work.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Latin texts Libera Me and In Paradisum come not from the Requiem Mass
itself, but from the rituals that occur afterwards.\textsuperscript{29}

"Libera me" is the responsory for the ceremony of Absolution, a ritual in which the priest formally pronounces forgiveness of the sins of the deceased:

\begin{quote}
Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna in die illa tremenda:
quando coeli movendi sunt et terra: dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}[
 Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death in that awful day when the heavens and earth shall be shaken, when Thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.\]
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo, dum discussio venerit, atque ventura ira. (Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna)
Quando coeli movendi sunt et terra.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}[
 I am seized with fear and trembling, until the trial shall be at hand and the wrath to come. Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death. When the heavens and earth shall be shaken.\]
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Dies illa, dies irae, calamitatis et miseriae, dies magna et amara valde. (Libera me, Domine.)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}[
 That day, that day of wrath, of calamity and misery, a great day and exceeding bitter. Deliver me, O Lord.\]
\end{quote}

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis.

The antiphon "In paradisum" is a prayer of hope sung after the Absolution ceremony, during the procession of the coffin from the church to the cemetery:\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{29}See above, pp. 68-69.

\textsuperscript{30}If burial is not to take place immediately, the In Paradisum is sung at the church (\textit{Liber Usualis} [1956], 1768).
[Into Paradise may the Angels lead thee: at thy coming may the Martyrs receive thee, and bring thee into the holy city Jerusalem. May the Choir of Angels receive thee and with Lazarus, once poor, may thou have eternal rest.]

Although Britten certainly had musical precedents for the inclusion of settings of the Libera Me and In Paradisum in the Requiems of Verdi (Libera me only) and Fauré, among others, the inclusion of the two texts shows Britten's understanding of Roman Catholic ritual. While the Absolution is ostensibly the granting of the forgiveness of sins by the priest, it also incorporates the attitude that "the immediate effect of the priest’s absolution [is] reconciliation with the Church, in and through which the sinner is reconciled to God."³¹ The Absolution observed after a Requiem Mass, then, becomes the final opportunity for the reconciliation of the deceased with God.

Forgiveness and reconciliation become the common threads between the Latin texts and "Strange Meeting," the longest of the nine poems set in War Requiem. Owen’s poem focuses primarily on the waste and senselessness of war, but through careful editing Britten highlights the theme of reconciliation that lies behind the question and answer of

³¹The New Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. "Penance, Sacrament of." Absolution outside of the Requiem Mass is considered a part of the Sacrament of Penance. The inclusion of Absolution in the burial service following the Requiem Mass is a tradition from medieval times, when the people believed that intercessions before burial would help the soul of the deceased on its journey to Heaven.
the two soldiers. Of the forty-four lines, Britten sets thirty-three, with two lines taken from discarded versions included in Blunden’s "Notes" at the back of the volume.\(^{32}\)

The original poem as found in Blunden’s edition is as follows, with Britten’s editing marked by parentheses (text omitted) and brackets (text inserted from Blunden’s "Notes"):  

> It seemed that out of battle I escaped  
> Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
> Through granites which titanic wars had groined.  
> Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
> Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.  
> Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared  
> With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,  
> Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.  
> (And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,  
> By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.  
> With a thousand pains that vision’s face was grained;  
> Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,)  
> And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.  
> "Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."  
> "None," said the other, "save the undone years,  
> The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,  
> Was my life also; I went hunting wild  
> After the wildest beauty in the world,  
> (Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
> But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
> And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.)  
> For by my glee might many men have laughed,  
> And of my weeping something had been left,  
> Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,  
> The pity of war, the pity war distilled.  
> Now men will go content with what we spoiled.  
> Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.  
> They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,  
> None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.

> (Courage was mine, and I had mystery,  
> Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;  
> To) [M]iss [we] the march of this retreating world  
> Into vain citadels that are not walled.  
> Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels  
> I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,

(Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  
I would have poured my spirit without stint  
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.  
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.)  
[Even from wells we sunk too deep for war,  
Even the sweetest wells that ever were.]  
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.  
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned  
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.  
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  
Let us sleep now. . . ."

As with "Bugles sang" and "Sonnet" in the second movement, Britten cuts those lines he believes are superfluous to the message he wishes to convey. Unlike his treatment of the earlier poems, however, Britten is able to add text beyond mere repetition of words and phrases because he has an authoritative source from which to draw.

Britten further stresses the theme of reconciliation through the manner in which the Latin texts and "Strange Meeting" are combined. Except for the last line ("Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis"), the Libera Me is set in its entirety prior to "Strange Meeting." Owen's poem is likewise set completely except for the final line ("Let us sleep now"), which Britten singles out in order to begin a new section that brings together all of the forces used in the work. Over the repeated "Let us sleep now," the boys' choir, soprano soloist, and full chorus sing the In Paradisum in an imitative fashion. The effect is similar to that produced in the Offertorium, where the Latin text acts as a commentary on the English. With "Strange Meeting," however, the combination of texts shows that the
two men are to be viewed not as innocent sacrifices in a cruel world but as martyrs seeking reconciliation and peace with each other and with God. The statement of the final line of the Libera Me by the boys’ choir at the moment that "Chorus Angelorum" is mentioned by the full chorus confirms the view that the men have indeed been received by God and that the conflict has been reconciled.

Britten distinguishes the last line of the Requiem Mass, "Requiescant in pace. Amen," from the remainder of the Latin section and uses it as a coda to the movement. Except for slight changes to accommodate the text, the setting is the same as that used for the Kyrie (first movement) and the Pie Jesu (second movement), bringing a sense of unity to the close of the work as the two earlier pleas for mercy have been answered.³³

³³For further discussion see Chapter 4 on text-music relationships below.
CHAPTER 4

WAR REQUIEM: TEXT–MUSIC RELATIONSHIPS

To support the organization of the texts around the theme of conflict and reconciliation, Britten chooses timbres, formal structures, and motivic materials that reflect the interactions of the texts, as well as the meaning and structure of individual words and phrases.

Britten requires an enormous performance force for War Requiem: three soloists (soprano, tenor, and baritone), full mixed chorus, boys’ choir, organ, chamber orchestra, and full orchestra.² Britten divides these forces into three distinct groups, which are separated both textually and

²The chamber orchestra, familiar from chamber operas such as The Turn of the Screw and Albert Herring, consists of the following: flute (doubling piccolo), oboe (doubling English horn), clarinet (B-flat and A), bassoon, French horn, percussion (timpani, side drum, bass drum, cymbal, and gong), harp, and string quartet with double bass. The full orchestra contains the following: three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, three clarinets (third doubling E-flat and bass clarinet), two bassoons, contrabassoon, six French horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, piano, timpani, percussion (two side drums, tenor drum, bass drum, tambourine, triangle, cymbals, castanets, whip, Chinese blocks, gong, bells [C and F#]), vibraphone, glockenspiel, and antique cymbals [C and F#]), and full string sections.
physically. The Latin texts are divided between two groups, one consisting of soprano soloist, mixed chorus, and full orchestra, the other of boys' choir and organ. The English texts are sung only by the tenor and baritone soloists, who are accompanied by the chamber orchestra. This division of forces assists Britten's interpretation of the various texts, although the "role" of each group or soloist is never explicitly described. The two male soloists are generally assumed to represent soldiers, since they sing only Owen's texts, while the boys' choir is usually seen as representing "innocence," an interpretation openly approved by Britten.² The full choir and the soprano soloist have received several designations, among them Peter Evans's description of "the mingled mourning, supplication and guilty apprehension of humanity."³ Regardless of how the groups are categorized, however, their textual and timbral differences clearly separate them.

²The structure of "Strange Meeting" appears to have given Britten the idea to use the two men for Owen's texts. For the interpretation of the boys' choir, see Robertson, "Britten's War Requiem," 309, as well as Robertson, Regiue, 269. This fits in with the perception generally accepted by Britten scholars that one of Britten's favorite textual themes concerns the concept of innocence and the loss of it.

³P. Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, 451; Michael Kennedy describes this group as "mourning humanity" (Britten, 209).
For most of War Requiem only one group at a time is heard. There are four occasions, though, where Britten combines groups, usually as a dramatic, yet musical, way of emphasizing the meaning of the text of the moment. The first occasion for combining groups comes near the end of the Dies Irae in the setting of the "Lacrimosa" stanza and the poem "Futility." The question-and-answer format of the textual interaction (described in the previous chapter) is reinforced by the two soloists who are engaged in the "dialogue" Britten creates. 

The second occasion for combining groups occurs during the Offertorium and involves the superimposition of the boys' choir and organ over the male soloists and chamber orchestra. While the two men are relating the slaughter of Isaac and "half the seed of Europe," the boys sing the Offertory verse, "Hostias et preces tibi Domine laudis offerimus" ("Lord in praise we offer to Thee sacrifices and prayers"), in a manner independent, both rhythmically and melodically, of the English setting (see Figure 4.1). The shocking effect produced by the deliberate and simultaneous utterance of such diametrically opposed thoughts, the loss of life (from human conflict) versus a promise of life (through reconciliation with God), is reinforced by the ensembles singing each text.

*See pp. 87-88.

*See previous chapter for complete text.
Figure 4.1: Offertorium, "Parable," 77.6-77.13

"Benjamin Britten, War Requiem. Words from the Missa pro defunctis and the poems of Wilfred Owen. This and all other figures from War Requiem (Requiem Aeternam, Dies Irae, Offertorium, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, and Libera Me) are by arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner."
The third place in which two or more ensembles are heard together comes in the Agnus Dei, where there is some overlapping of the tenor and the full chorus. This overlapping may appear to be a coincidence of textual and musical structures, but the impact of the overlapping is deliberate on Britten’s part. The basic musical organization of the Agnus Dei is that of a verse and refrain over an ostinato. The refrain, a line of the Agnus Dei, is sung by the chorus in conjunction with the ostinato and overlaps the ends of the first two verses and the penultimate line of the third verse according to the ostinato’s cycle (see Figure 4.2). Given the brevity of the ostinato, Britten could have delayed the chorus’s refrain to avoid the overlap, but instead he brings it into conjunction with the tenor and chamber orchestra, foreshadowing the coming together and reconciliation that occur in the last movement.

The final concurrence of ensembles comes at the end of the entire work, where all forces are brought together. As the tenor and baritone soloists repeat "Let us sleep now," the boys’ choir, soprano soloist, and full chorus enter imitatively with the In Paradisum as a response to the two men’s final wishes. Britten juxtaposes the texts in order to unite all of the ensembles for an intensely quiet climax signifying the reconciliation toward which the previous five movements have been moving.
Figure 4.2: Agnus Dei, 97.9–98.3

As may be expected from the above discussion, Britten structures each movement through both the juxtaposition of the texts and the careful separation and combination of the performing forces. In general, the structural points in each movement are fairly easy to ascertain; however, their significance as indicators of a particular formal scheme is more difficult to determine. Britten often integrates a variety of formal patterns, including ternary, binary,
variations, rondo, and strophic forms, to build larger structures that accommodate the drama of the texts. The formal diagrams that follow illustrate one interpretation of the large-scale relationships at work in each movement, and are based on a perception of the combination of textual and musical factors.

**REQUIEM AETERNAM**

The structure of the first movement can be described as that of a binary form in which the first section comprises the ternary structure of the Latin setting and the second section encompasses the two-part setting of "Anthem for Doomed Youth." The setting of the Kyrie acts as a coda (see Figure 4.3).

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
A & b & a' & B & c & b' & \text{Coda} \\
\text{Requiem} & \text{Te decet Requiem} & "Anthem" & \text{Kyrie} \\
\text{begin.} & 3.1 & 7.1 & 9.1 & 13.1 & 16.2 \\
\end{array}
\]

Figure 4.3: Requiem Aeternam, form

The Latin-English sectionalization of the text is the main delineating factor in the interpretation of the overall structure as a binary form. For the Introit, which, as a whole, constitutes the A section, Britten follows the antiphon-verse-antiphon ternary form provided by liturgical

*The structure could also be described as a modified rondo form with the final A section missing.*
use. The verse ("Te decet hymnus") is further structured in a variations form for the boys' choir in preparation for the exploitation of the boys' part in the second section of "Anthem," where Britten deliberately refers back to the boys' setting at the appropriate line." The attachment of the Kyrie as a coda to the movement is again a response to liturgical considerations, since the Kyrie immediately follows the Introit in the Mass. Britten's truncation of the text also justifies its inclusion within the existing movement.⁷

The texts also provide the impetus for several musical features in the movement. Perhaps the most noticeable musical characteristic in the Introit, as well as of War Requiem as a whole, is the prominence of the tritone F♯-C, first articulated by the chorus and bells.⁸ Although the tritone itself has no overt relationship to the text itself, the bells tolling the interval do. While these bells are first heard at the opening of the Introit, their significance is made known only with the opening line of "Anthem of Doomed Youth": "What passing-bells for these who

⁷ See discussion below.

⁸ Britten added the Kyrie sometime after the first draft of "Anthem." A discarded sketch is available at the Britten-Pears Library that shows the end of "Anthem" moving into the "Amen" setting that is now placed at the end of the second movement (see p. 77 above).

⁹ The tritone is discussed in detail in the following chapter.
die as cattle?" The pairing of the chorus with the bells is further justified in "Anthem" as Owen tells us that only choirs, "demented choirs of wailing shells," can mourn for the casualties of war.

Britten takes advantage of other opportunities for tone-painting. A variety of percussion, low-string pizzicato passages, and wind flourishes are used to illustrate the guns and "wailing shells" Owen describes in "Anthem" (see Figure 4.4) The "bugles calling...from sad shires" are portrayed by a muted horn call that foreshadows the ominous brass fanfares that begin the Dies Irae movement (see Figure 4.5: compare to Figure 4.9).

Although Britten’s highlighting of the Introit verse with the boys’ choir in contrast to the full chorus’s antiphon makes good musical sense as it stands, other factors contribute to the presence of the boys’ voices in the Introit. Just as the bells and the chorus have been justified by Owen’s poem, so too can the boys’ choir with the lines "Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes/Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes." These lines also serve as the turning point in the setting of the poem, for as Owen shifts from the battlefield to a pastoral funeral scene, Britten likewise shifts the musical setting from the strident evocations of war sounds to a reworking of the
Figure 4.4: Requiem Aeternam, "Anthem," 9.6-10.4

Figure 4.5: Requiem Aeternam, "Anthem," 12.1-12.7
boys' part that recollects the funeral setting in which the theme was first sung (see Figures 4.6 and 4.7).

Figure 4.6: Requiem Aeternam, 3.1-3.4

Figure 4.7: Requiem Aeternam, "Anthem," 13.1-13.6
DIES IRAE

The structure of the Dies Irae is a complex design built around a four-part skeleton, each part of which comprises several Latin stanzas followed by an English poem (see Figure 4.8).  

I. A
   Dies irae------------------------ Bugles sang
   (Themes Var. 1 Var. 2 Var. 3 Var. 4)
   beginning 17.1 20.1 22.1 24.1

II. B
   Liber scriptus--------------------- Out there----
   (Theme Var. 1 Var. 2)
   28.1 31.1 32.1
   (Intro. duet)

III. D
   Recordare-------------- Confutatis
   (Intro. layering--------) (layering)
   39.1 40.1 45.1 49.1
   Be slowly lifted

IV. A'
   Dies irae Lacrimosa Move him
   (Var. 5 Var. 6 Var. 7)
   52.1 54.1 56.1

Coda
Pie Jesu
60.1

Figure 4.8: Dies Irae, form

Britten again coordinates several distinct formal structures, each based on the sectionalization of the texts, to build the entire movement. Sections I and IV (see Figure 4.8 above) constitute one set of variations, the reprise of the first two stanzas prior to the "Lacrimosa" stanza  

11The Pie Jesu acts as a coda (see Figure 4.8).  
115
serving as the textual link. The second section is also a set of variations, but it is built on different thematic material. Section III is constructed on two types of layered structures, which will be described below.

The movement opens with a series of motives in the brass ("battlefield" motives—see Figure 4.9). These motives serve not only as thematic material for the first set of variations, but also as unifying material for the entire movement. In addition, Britten uses these motives as cyclic elements throughout the remainder of War Requiem, usually at moments where the text recalls war images or refers to the Dies Irae itself.
The primary reason for using the brass section comes from the combination of the first four stanzas, with an emphasis on the third stanza ("Tuba mirum"), and Owen's poem "Bugles sang." The "battlefield" motives provide an exceptionally strong link between the Latin and English texts: the climax of the Latin setting occurs at the words "Tuba mirum," and the setting of "Bugles sang" relies almost completely on the motives for the construction of both vocal and orchestral material (see Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10: Dies Irae, "Bugles sang," 24.1-24.13

117
Section II involves stanzas five through eight of the Dies Irae and Owen’s poem "The Next War." Together they constitute a two-part structure that, as discussed in the previous chapter, is notable more for its differences than for its similarities. The Latin setting is formulated as a theme with two variations that foreshadows the layering technique that occurs in Section III. "The Next War," however, unlike "Bugles Sang," is not a variation of the new theme and bears virtually no resemblance to its allied Latin section.

The soprano soloist, in her first appearance in the work, is assigned the first two stanzas of this section (stanzas five and six), while the chorus follows with the next stanza. Together these three stanzas constitute the theme that is varied in the setting of the final stanza of the section, which is shared by the soprano soloist and the chorus and presented twice.

It is in the setting of the stanza "Rex tremenda majestatis" that the layering technique is introduced as a means of variation. The first variation (see Figure 4.11) shows layering occurring as the soloist’s line, already varied through inversion, is overlapped by the chorus’s imitation (also varied through inversion). The layering becomes more extensive in the second variation (the repetition of the stanza), as the chorus completely underscores the soprano soloist while each maintains its own
identity through the text assignment as well as through melodic material.

Figure 4.11: Dies Irae, 31.1-31.10

The text assignments that identify the two layers involved in this section provide interesting clues to the musical treatment here. Britten opposes the motion of the text from the descriptive third person to the personal first person singular by giving the first-person texts to the chorus rather than to the soloist. This opposition between
the text and the musical setting casts the liturgical text into an impersonal light and further highlights the personal nature of the duet setting of "The Next War," which is entirely appropriate to the "we" phrasing of the text.

"The Next War," unlike "Bugles sang," derives little of its musical material from the setting of "Liber scriptus" apart from a tonal centering on A (not shown in Figure 4.12) and an intervallic similarity between some highly chromatic woodwind flourishes and the chorus's setting (see Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12: Dies Irae, "The Next War," 34.9–35.5
As noted above, Britten's setting of the poem as a duet reflects Owen's use of the first person plural throughout. The "gallows humor" and ironic cheerfulness that pervades "The Next War" is made explicit in Britten's jaunty, scherzo-like setting.

Although the mood of the poem is reflected in the musical setting, the sonnet structure of "The Next War" is not. Britten separates out for distinction the text "We chorussed when he sang aloft;/We whistled while he shaved us with his scythe./Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!" (see Figure 4.12 above), effectively blurring the division between the two parts of the sonnet.12 These three lines of text are highlighted by a change in meter and rhythm, the unison singing of the two men, and the tonal motion toward C that occurs here. A similar change in meter, rhythm, texture, and tonality occurs for the setting of the text "knowing that better men would come,/And greater wars," emphasizing the fact that human conflict has by no means come to an end.

The third section of the Dies Irae sets stanzas nine through seventeen, with the exceptions of the eleventh and fourteenth stanzas as noted in the previous chapter. Britten uses layering techniques for the settings of this

---

12 These lines are accompanied by the woodwind flourishes that appear to be related to the chorus's parts (see Figure 4.12).
section, which allows for the grouping of the texts into two
discrete units, each with its own mood.

The first unit, comprising stanzas nine, ten, twelve,
thirteen, and fifteen, is a slow quiet setting for divided
altos and sopranos that, with its rocking melodic and
rhythmic motion, could be construed as a lullaby. The
highly layered texture of the setting (see Figure 4.13),
which slowly piles the stanzas together to create a dense
conglomerate of sound, can be linked to Britten’s grouping
of the text, which, without the "interruptions" of the two
omitted stanzas, is a highly unified personal plea for
salvation addressed solely to Jesus. The use of the chorus
for such a text was pre-figured in the previous section,
where the texts in the first person singular, as mentioned
above, were also given to the chorus rather than to the
soloist.

The texture for the first four verses that is created
by the layering technique is an example of stratification
that is reinforced by the text. Each voice (alto II, alto
I, soprano II, soprano I) is assigned a verse (and a wind
timbre for reinforcement). The voices enter one by one from
the lowest to the highest, each voice repeating its text
until the final voice completes its text. To conclude the
section, a fifth verse is employed (see Figure 4.13), with
the voices entering in the same order on each phrase of the
stanzas. Britten manipulating the third line in order to get
all the voices in by the end of the stanza. The first two lines of the stanza are then repeated by the entire ensemble to end the section.

Figure 4.13: Dies Irae, 44.1-44.14
The second discrete unit of the Latin section (stanzas sixteen and seventeen) is set only for divided men's parts, counterbalancing the women's setting. A layering technique is also used for the setting, but it is deployed in a different manner.

The two verses sung by the men are assigned so that the divided basses have one verse ("Confutatis maledictis") and the divided tenors sing the other ("Oro supplex et acclinis"). Each verse is presented separately and then combined to conclude the section.

The motive to which the phrase "Confutatis maledictis" is set continues in the timpani throughout the setting of "Sonnet: On Seeing a Piece of Our Heavy Artillery Brought into Action" (see Figures 4.14 and 4.15). As pointed out

Figure 4.14: Dies Irae, 45.1

Figure 4.15: Dies Irae, 49.1
earlier, a correlation can be drawn between this line and the final curse of "Sonnet." Britten reinforces this link by employing the motive as a driving force in the setting. The only times the timpani do not sound the figure occur when the trumpets of the full orchestra punctuate each phrase of "Sonnet" with a "battlefield" motive, foreshadowing the return of the Dies Irae.

After the setting of "Sonnet," Britten brings back the first two stanzas of the Dies Irae. This heralds a return to the first set of variations and rounds off the movement. The textual repetition, however, is not accompanied by a strict musical one. Instead, the music is reminiscent of the setting of the third stanza ("Tuba mirum") in its tonality (G minor) and disposition of forces, but differences in the vocal setting warrant the identification of the musical material as variations on the earlier theme rather than as a reprise. The choral parts of the "Lacrimosa" setting continue the metrical scheme of the previous stanzas, while the soprano soloist is provided with a descant. The interaction of this stanza with the final poem, "Futility," has already been discussed, but along with the question-and-answer format of the texts, Britten relates the settings through a manipulation of the soprano's "Lacrimosa" motive at the end of each statement made by the tenor (see Figures 4.16, 4.17, 4.18, and 4.19). The climax

---

13See above, pp. 87-88.
of the setting occurs at the repetition of the question "Was it for this the clay grew tall?" The tenor ends the question at a higher pitch level than used previously, and the soprano does not respond with the motive as she proclaims the call to judgment.

![Figure 4.16: Dies Irae, 56.7](image)

![Figure 4.17: Dies Irae, 57.1](image)

![Figure 4.18: Dies Irae, 57.7-58.1](image)

126
To conclude the movement, Britten sets the Pie Jesu to the same progression used for the Kyrie. He varies the setting slightly to accommodate the differing lengths of the text, and he also treats it in a heterophonic manner by offsetting the tenors and basses from the sopranos and altos. The resulting dissonances contribute to the heightened sense of conflict that has developed during the movement and belie the prayer for rest offered by the text.

OFFERTORIUM

The musical structure of the Offertorium is that of a modified ternary form with a two-part introduction (see Figure 4.20):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro.</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>Fugal</td>
<td>Canticle II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>T/B duet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>begin.</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>69.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.20: Offertorium, form
This structure has been analyzed as "a slow introduction leading to a scherzo and 'trio'," with the trio containing the Owen poem, and as a prelude and fugue.\footnote{\textsuperscript{14}Milner, "Choral Music," 342; Page, \textit{Melodic Unification}, 71.} Both sets of labels minimize crucial elements in this movement, especially the relationship of the two fugues with each other and with the Owen setting.\footnote{\textsuperscript{15}There are problems with using terms associated primarily with instrumental music. "Scherzo and trio" and "prelude and fugue" have a tradition of instrumental connotations that are not present in this context. Also, the introductory section does not function as a prelude, as it does not establish the key of the following section.}

This movement is most notable for Britten's extensive borrowing from his \textit{Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac}. \textit{Canticle II} is a setting of a portion of the Chester miracle play about Abraham that deals with the offering of Isaac and appears to have been a musical gold mine for Britten. The work is the source of an extensive amount of material in the Offertorium, including the subject of the chorus's fugues, the opening of the setting of the "Parable," the setting of the angel's words, and a number of other melodic and rhythmic motives throughout the movement. Each of these borrowings will be discussed below.

The fugue subject\footnote{\textsuperscript{16}All references to the subject are in relation to the first fugue unless otherwise noted.} is a reworking of the first entrance of Isaac found in the \textit{Canticle}. It retains the
melodic shape from the Canticle, but the rhythm is altered through syncopation (see Figures 4.21 and 4.22). Throughout the fugue, the subject itself is never altered rhythmically, but occasionally it is fragmented so that only the first four or five notes are present, with the last note either held or cut off by rests.

Figure 4.21: Offertorium, 64.2-64.5

Father, I am all ready.

Figure 4.22: Canticle II, mm. 30-33

\[ ^{17} \text{Benjamin Britten, Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac. Text from The Chester Miracle Play. This and all other figures from Canticle II are by arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.} \]
The opening of "The Parable of the Old Men and the Young" draws upon the "travelling" music of the Canticle, most likely because both of these sections function as an introduction to the drama that is about to occur. The borrowing is general: the division of text so that the lower voice represents Abram and the higher Isaac; the use of the melodic motive first used in the preceding fugue (which also links the Offertory setting to the poem); and the polymetrical structure in which the accompaniment is in simple duple meter and the vocal lines are in compound duple meter (see Figures 4.23 and 4.24).

General borrowing gives way to more specific instances as the poem progresses. Rhythm and texture change when Isaac asks Abram, "Father, Behold the preparations, fire and iron, But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?" Britten's setting of this line from Owen corresponds to a similar change in the Canticle, where Abraham briefly contemplates the divine directive. The music in each case consists of instrumental tremolando chords underneath a similar vocal motive (see Figures 4.25 and 4.26).
Figure 4.23: Offertorium, 69.3-70.6
HERE ABRAHAM, TURNING TO HIS SON ISAAC, SAITH:

Make thee ready, my dear darling,...... For we must do a little

HERE ISAAC SPEAKETH TO HIS FATHER, AND TAKETH A BUNDLE OF STICKS AND BEARETH AFTER HIS FATHER.

Father, I am all ready.

thing. This woode do on thy

back it bring,........... We may so longer a.

Figure 4.24: Canticle II, mm. 20-37
Figure 4.25: Offertorium, 71.1-71.3

Figure 4.26: Canticle II, mm. 73-74
The marked orchestral rhythms that follow Isaac's question in "Parable" are also taken from the Canticle and serve as a convenient introduction to the return of motives from the Dies Irae, which reinforce the battlefield imagery Owen presents here (see Figures 4.27 and 4.28). These motives lead to the most notable re-use of material in the movement.

Figure 4.27: Offertorium, 72.1-72.3

Figure 4.28: Canticle II, mm. 229-231
The section of "Parable" depicting the intercession of the angel is set as a "slow recitative"\textsuperscript{18} (see Figure 4.29). The musical material is unmistakably derived from the portions of the Canticle in which God is speaking directly to Abraham (see Figure 4.30), although instrumentation, key, and rhythm have been altered to accommodate the new context.\textsuperscript{19} Much of the melodic material is retained, but a crucial change has been made at the end of the angel's statement. The directive "Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him" is an inverted version of the original, a portent of events to follow (see Figures 4.31 and 4.32).\textsuperscript{20}

---

\textsuperscript{18}The same marking is used at the corresponding section of the Canticle.

\textsuperscript{19}The placement of the arpeggio in the harp may be seen as a bit of tone-painting, alluding to popular images of angels with harps.

\textsuperscript{20}It is not entirely clear from which section of the Canticle Britten actually borrowed. The arpeggiated seventh chord ("Behold, A ram") appears as in War Requiem at the opening of the Canticle but is inverted at the comparable point in the story (the sacrifice). For the text "Offer the Ram of Pride..." the source would not matter: both places in the Canticle have a descending contour.
Figure 4.29: Offertorium, 74.1-74.2

Figure 4.30: Canticle II, mm. 248-249

Figure 4.31: Offertorium, 74.5
At the end of the angel's statement, Britten brings in more material from the Canticle. The rhythmic figure that immediately follows the angel's announcement and introduces Abraham's reaction to the angel is taken from the comparable part of the Canticle (see Figures 4.33 and 4.34). The
difference between the reactions of the Biblical Abraham and Owen's Abram, however, produces an emotional shock for those who are familiar with the Biblical story. Britten's borrowing in War Requiem parallels the dramatic and motivic progressions in the Canticle to reinforce the shock.

The last two lines of "Parable" continue to some degree the parallel development with the Canticle. The polymetrical structure of the first lines of "Parable" is brought back briefly for the penultimate line and leads into an imitative setting of the final line. This imitation harks back to the "Envoi" of the Canticle (see Figures 4.35 and 4.36). The final borrowing from the Canticle further
underscores the inversion of the Biblical story that has occurred in Owen's retelling. The "Envoi" moralizes on Abraham's obedience ("Such obedience grant us, O Lord!") while the men in "Parable" reiterate the results of disobedience to the will of God.

SANCTUS

The Sanctus movement is a large-scale binary structure with a two-part introduction (see Figure 4.37).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro.</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctus</td>
<td>Pleni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>begin.</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B

e        f
After the blast Shall life renew When I do ask
93.1 | 94.1 | 95.1

Figure 4.37: Sanctus, form

Rhythmic features in particular distinguish the introduction from the rest of the movement, the two sections being characterized by non-metrical constructions that contrast with the syncopated duple meter of the following "Hosannas." The "Hosanna" section, which encompasses the Benedictus text, is cast in a ternary form, following the framework created when the phrase "Hosanna in excelsis" is repeated at the end of the section. The setting for "The
End," however, is through-composed, with each stanza receiving its own melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic treatment.

The treatment of "Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua" is unique in War Requiem. The free chanting that slowly builds as divided parts come in one at a time and grows louder until the grand pause before the Hosannas gives the impression of a murmuring crowd growing larger and louder over time. Given the source of the Benedictus text that is surrounded by the Hosannas, this interpretation of the chanting section seems plausible.

Britten's setting of "The End" incorporates some word-painting (woodwind flourishes and timpani rolls for the "flourish of loud clouds" and "the drums of Time," as well as the "long retreat" vocalized by the baritone soloist—see Figure 4.38), but for the most part, the setting reflects Britten's interpretation of Owen's text insofar as it is related to the end of conflict. When Owen asks "Shall life renew these bodies?" Britten interprets the question as asking if the old times, and the possibility of the old conflict, will return: the snare drum that taps out its rhythms only during this part of the movement is a reminder of the conflict. It disappears for the remainder of the movement, as confirmation is given that such renewal will not occur. While the poem can be legitimately interpreted as a refutation of the concept of the resurrection, Britten reinterprets "The End" as a confirmation of the end of the
conflict (the old life), thus opening the way to new life. The meandering descent to F# ending the movement is the passage by which the old life gives way to the new (see Figure 4.39): F# is the focal point of the following movement, the Agnus Dei, which brings the hope of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Figure 4.39: Sanctus, 96.11-end

AGNUS DEI

The Agnus Dei follows a verse-and-refrain form created by the use of each line of the Agnus Dei text as a refrain between the stanzas of Owen's poem (see Figure 4.40).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro.</th>
<th>V.1 Refrain</th>
<th>V.2 Refrain</th>
<th>V.3/1,2 Refrain</th>
<th>V.3/3,4 Refrain</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>b'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beg.-m.2</td>
<td>m.3</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>97.7</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V.3/3,4 Refrain_2</th>
<th>Dona nobis pacem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eng.</td>
<td>Lat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a'</td>
<td>b''</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99.3</td>
<td>100.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.40: Agnus Dei, form
The movement is further unified by the presence of an ostinato that is used as both the chorus's melody and the instrumental accompaniment to the tenor solo. The use of the ostinato as common material points to the motion toward unification and reconciliation that is occurring with the texts. At first the chorus/full orchestra ensemble maintains its identity apart from the tenor and chamber orchestra, despite the ostinato; there is no overlap at the end of the first verse. The situation changes at the end of the second verse; the chorus enters with the refrain before the tenor finishes. With the third verse, the unification is complete. The verse and the final line of the Agnus Dei are intertwined, the result being an emphasis on the final two lines of the poem. As further confirmation of the motion toward reconciliation, Britten has the tenor conclude the movement with the words "Dona nobis pacem," the only time that a male soloist sings in Latin (see Figure 4.41).  

\[\text{See above, pp. 108-109.}\]
LIBERA ME

The final movement of War Requiem combines several formal features that can be separated according to text setting. The Libera Me is set in a ritornello-like fashion, the opening phrase, "Libera me, Domine" acting as a refrain between phrases of text (see Figures 4.42 and 4.43).
The percussion material that begins the movement, coupled with the strident string line that underlies the choral entries and becomes faster as the movement progresses, reinforces the solemn text of the Libera Me with reminders of past conflict. The reminiscences of the past become more concrete just prior to the text "Dies illa, dies irae," as the "battlefield" motives of the Dies Irae movement are brought back by the brass section (see Figure 4.44). The brass continue with the choral motives from the Dies Irae as the choir enters (not shown) with new melodic
Figure 4.44: Libera Me, 112.1-113.5
material. The reprise of these motives is followed by the choir’s restatements of the plea "Libera me, Domine," which gradually diminish to lead into the setting of "Strange Meeting."

Owen’s poem "Strange Meeting" provides Britten with the means of recapitulating the dualities (conflicts) present in War Requiem, while at the same time preparing for the reconciliation toward which the work has been moving. The setting relies heavily on motivic recall and development, as Britten uses motives from the setting of the Libera Me and from the Dies Irae movement, as well as the F#-C tritone, to underscore certain phrases of the poem.

The tenor soloist begins the "slow and quiet" recitative with the "Libera me" motive previously sung by the choir (see Figure 4.45), an indication that Britten

\[ \text{Recit. slow and quiet (lento e tranquillo)} \]
\[ \text{TENOR SOLO} \]
\[ \text{It seemed that out of battle I escaped} \]

Figure 4.45: Libera Me, "Strange Meeting," 118.1-118.2 equates the tunnel escape with deliverance. At the mention of guns (see Figure 4.46), the double bass briefly reprises
the string line that opened the movement, confirming the interpretation that this line is indeed an evocation of war.

Figure 4.46: Libera Me, "Strange Meeting," 120.1-120.3

Britten highlights the next phrase, "'Strange friend,' I said, 'here is no cause to mourn,'" by setting it to the F♯-C tritone (see Figure 4.47). The phrase is answered by

Figure 4.47: Libera Me, "Strange Meeting," 120.4-122.1
the baritone (see Figure 4.47) through a series of perfect fourths that act as foils to the tritone and provide a sense of despairing finiteness to the text that is not present in the tenor's relatively optimistic and open-ended statement. Each of the first phrases uttered by the baritone is answered by an echo in the accompaniment (see Figure 4.47) that can be viewed as an evocation of the past, but these reminiscences are kept in check by the diminuendo and rallentando phrasing. As the poem continues with "the pity of war/the pity of war distill'd," Britten brings back the "battlefield" motives in the woodwinds (see Figure 4.48), followed by a lively reprise of the setting of the line "We chorussed when he sang aloft" from "The Next War" for the setting of the lines "Miss we the march of this retreating world/Into vain citadels that are not walled" (see Figure 4.49). The setting ends quietly with the baritone's phrase beginning "I am the enemy you killed, my friend" (see Figure 4.50) which Britten sets in G minor, thus resolving the F#-C tritone with which the tenor first addressed the "strange friend."
Figure 4.48: Libera Me, "Strange Meeting," 122.8-122.9
Figure 4.49: Libera Me, "Strange Meeting," 124.1-124.7
Figure 4.50: Libera Me, "Strange Meeting," 126.5-126.7

Britten separates the final line of "Strange Meeting," "Let us sleep now," in order to combine it with the In Paradisum for the climax already discussed.²² Britten ends the movement and the entire War Requiem with the final line of the Mass, "Requiescant in pace, Amen," set to the harmonic progression that similarly ended the first and second movements.

²²See above, p. 108.
CHAPTER 5

WAR REQUIEM: MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Text-music relationships do not account for all of the musical features present in War Requiem. Among those that cannot be related directly to the texts are the presence of the tritone F♯-C, the extensive use of inversion, and the incorporation of Far-Eastern elements. These attributes instead seem to be indicators of Britten's general style at the time he wrote War Requiem. These characteristics are discussed in detail below.

From almost the very start of War Requiem, the F♯-C tritone strikes the ear as the most obvious characteristic of the work. The interval is not prominent in every movement, however. It plays no role in the Dies Irae until the setting of the Pie Jesu at the conclusion of the movement, and it is not present at all in the Offertorium. The interval does play a significant role in the first, fourth, and fifth movements, while its presence in the sixth movement is reserved mainly for one particular instance in "Strange Meeting" and for the conclusion of the movement.
The tritone evinces itself in both melodic and harmonic structures composed specifically for the exploitation of that interval, although its primary appearance is as a melodic entity. This is apparent from the outset as the chorus, reinforced by the bells, intones the pitches F# and C exclusively for the opening of the Introit (see Figure 5.1). The interval is chanted in various manifestations,

Figure 5.1: Requiem Aeternam, mm. 1-6, bells and chorus

154
but it is never directly accompanied by the full orchestra. Instead, the orchestra plays a distinctive melody between the vocal phrases, in the manner of a ritornello (see Figure 5.2). The restriction of the F♯-C tritone to the voices and bells causes this particular interval to stand out, clearly establishing its importance.

The harmonic and melodic richness of the orchestral ritornello provides a contrast to the starkness of the choral parts. The initial statement of the ritornello’s melody in the strings and upper woodwinds fits primarily within a D harmonic minor scale, while tertian harmonies that form an octatonic scale are present in the bassoons and brass section (see Figure 5.3). At each appearance, the ritornello is varied slightly at different pitch levels while maintaining its unusual rhythmic character (a quintuplet subdivision of the beat) and basic melodic features (primarily conjunct motion with occasional leaps of a sixth and rarer leaps of other intervals).

The interpretation of the harmonic and melodic structures of this opening section of War Requiem is open to debate, although the main argument appears to revolve around the role of extended tonality in the work. Arnold Whittall points out the temptation to place the opening of "Requiem
"aeternam" within the context of D minor (as Peter Evans has done in his analysis²), but he notes that "in the

Figure 5.2: Requiem Aeternam, mm. 1-4, orchestra

Figure 5.3: Octatonic scale in orchestra

absence of triads and cadential progressions, the degree of extension is clearly very great." For Whittall, attention is placed not on roots in the traditional sense, since there are none, but rather on what he calls "points of focus": the pedal A in the bass; the F#-C tritone in the bells and chorus; and D, E, F, and A in the orchestral melody. From a harmonic standpoint, Whittall sees a "stronger sense of harmonic relation between the bass pivot A and the points of focus in the evolving melodic line in the orchestra than between the bass pivot and the tritone. This [tritone] forms a 'neutral' diminished triad with the pivot, and so may be felt to inhibit realization of the diatonic implications of the rest of the texture."\(^2\) Whittall's statement shows a distinct bias toward Western modes of composition and ignores the possibility that other considerations, such as the integration of Far-Eastern elements,\(^3\) may be at work in War Requiem.

Whittall's view contradicts the more recent analyses offered independently by Edward Lundergan and Philip Rupprecht. For Lundergan, the relationship between the pedal A and the tritone is fundamental to the structure of not just the first movement but the entire work. In the Introit, however, the F#-C tritone and the pedal A together constitute three-fourths of the C3\(_{3}\) interval cycle (C-Eb-F#-

---

\(^2\)Whittall, Britten and Tippett, 181.

\(^3\)See discussion below.
A), a symmetrical structure that, at least to Lundergan, forms much of the underlying groundwork for *War Requiem*. In conjunction with the C30 interval cycle, Lundergan places a great deal of importance on the octatonic nature of the orchestral ritornello. The octatonic scale, as a symmetrical cyclic structure, fits into Lundergan’s view of the structural bases of *War Requiem*, with the added advantage of being the complement of the C30 cycle. Because Lundergan observes complementary sets here, he believes that Britten is conscientiously exploiting complementary cyclic structures. He does not, however, adequately explain the lack of a role for the note Eb (an integral part of the C30 cycle) both in this movement and in *War Requiem* in general, nor he does place the conscious use of complementary cycles within the context of Britten’s known battery of compositional techniques, which are usually obvious (such as semitonal key conflicts, theme-and-

---

*Lundergan has adopted George Perle’s designation for the diminished seventh chord C-Eb-F#-A. "C" means "cycle"; "3" is the number of half-steps in the interval; and "0" indicates the first pitch of the specified cycle, in this case, C; see Edward Lundergan, *Stylistic and Technical Sources*, 156-157.

Philip Rupprecht also points out the possible connections between the bells’ tritone and the gong’s A, noting groupings according to interval cycle and timbre. See his dissertation, *Tonal Stratification and Conflict in the Music of Benjamin Britten* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1993), 264-265.

*The octatonic collection beginning C#-D (Collection I according to Pieter van den Toorn’s identification [The Music of Igor Stravinsky (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 48]) is the actual complement to C30.*
variations structures, and spatial and textual separation of performing forces), and which often have specific extra-musical associations attached to them.⁶

Rupprecht's argument, a much more convincing interpretation than Whittall's or Lundergan's, also favors an emphasis on the octatonic nature of the orchestral passages, but not to the exclusion of diatonic elements. Like Lundergan, he emphasizes the non-diatonic elements of these passages; however, he departs from Lundergan's assertions by arguing that these passages comprise a deliberate manipulation by Britten of all three octatonic collections in conjunction with the D minor collection.⁷ Rupprecht shows how the first orchestral passage relies on a D minor melody accompanied by harmonies based on octatonic Collection I (see Figure 5.4). By the final (sixth) passage, the harmonies are firmly in D minor and the melody derives from Collection I (see Figure 5.5), the orchestral

![Image of musical notation]

Figure 5.4: Requiem Aeternam, pitch collections, first orchestral passage (mm. 1-4)

⁶See Chapter 1.

⁷Rupprecht, Tonal Stratification, 298.
Figure 5.5: Requiem Aeternam, pitch collections, final orchestral passage (mm. 11-12)

melody and accompaniment having passed through the other two octatonic collections on the way. Underneath the orchestral manipulations, the pitch A is constantly present in the gong (and timpani), reinforcing to some extent the assertion that D minor is present throughout the section in the guise of a dominant pedal.

The low A serves essentially in two capacities, one being the dominant pedal just cited and the other being the pitch around which the F#-C tritone is generated through inversion. Although not pointed out by Rupprecht, the dual manner in which the gong’s A can be interpreted points further to the intentional combination of symmetrical and

---

⁹Rupprecht refers to the A/Eb axis of symmetry when discussing the role of the A, although the Eb is not physically present; however, the tritone can be derived by inverting C around A to obtain F#, thus bypassing the need for Eb. Rupprecht's analysis regarding the embodiment of conflict through the combination of symmetrical and asymmetrical collections in the orchestral passages may be found in Tonal Stratification, 300-316. The role of the A has further ramifications for the interpretation of the melody for "Te decet hymnus" and of the Kyrie setting. See discussion below.
asymmetrical collections that are being used to embody the theme of conflict at a more abstract level than the conflicts between performing forces and texts. 9

The opening antiphon, with its orchestral ritornello and chant-like choral parts, recurs after the Introit verse, just prior to "Anthem for Doomed Youth." The verse, "Te decet hymnus," provides a striking contrast to the opening from almost all angles: timbre, texture, rhythm, structure. A common feature with the antiphon, however, is the F#-C tritone, a governing factor in the melodic construction of this section.

For the setting of the Introit verse, the F#-C tritone is elaborated and transformed into a structural device, the two pitches acting as anchoring points for the two halves of the boys’ theme. These anchors are reinforced by the organ and upper violins that accompany the boys in this section.

The boys’ theme itself (see Figure 5.6) is a straightforward, rhythmically simple melody accompanied by a series of twelve triads, each built on a different root, and may be divided into two parts based on the antiphonal presentation of the first phrase of text. The melody of the first part, sung by Boys I, is framed by the C-F# tritone, the pitches of which are sustained by the upper strings after the boys sing them. The organ accompanies with six

9Ibid., 267-283.
triads, whose roots are pitch classes 1 through 6 (C# through F#) (see Figure 5.7). The second part of the melody, sung by Boys II, is an inversion of the first part and begins on the same F# ending the first part; it thus brings the melody back to end on the opening C. The organ, however, accompanies the inverted melody with triads that have roots on the remaining six pitch classes, 7 through 0 (G through C) (see Figure 5.7). The theme, then, features two structural characteristics: first, a two-part melody in which the second part is a strict inversion around A of the
first part; and second, a triadic accompaniment in which the roots of the chords form a twelve-tone aggregate.

Despite the triadic focus of the accompaniment, the twelve-tone nature of the root movement reveals an underlying atonality, especially since it is coupled with the prominent tritone in the vocal lines at the beginning and ending of each of the two parts. This atonality, however, is limited by the manipulation of root placement in the organ's chords. Figure 5.7 shows the organization of the root pitches, with the vertical bar indicating the dividing point in the theme (the asterisks are explained below):

![Figure 5.7: Requiem Aeternam, "Te decet hymnus," Root movement of organ triads](image)

The division of the twelve pitches into hexachords is basic, but the root placement is dependent on more than

---

10 See Ruprecht, *Tonal Stratification*, 284-290, where he goes into detail about the processes of mirror (pitch) inversion and inversion around an axis of symmetry. Both methods work here.

The inversion around A supports the supposition that Britten is grouping the notes A, F#, and C; see the discussion of Far-Eastern elements below.
hexachordal division. Moving out from the dividing point, nested perfect fifths become apparent (see Figure 5.7 above). Although not audible except at the junction of the theme’s two phrases, these fifths, along with the triads that harmonize them, add tonal limitations to the atonal nature of the root movement. Root motion by fifth and the use of triads are both fundamental tenets of tonal harmony. Although all twelve chromatic pitches are used and organized to emphasize one of tonality’s most troublesome intervals (the tritone), the most important tonal interval and chord structure (perfect fifth and triad) are simultaneously employed to camouflage an otherwise atonal passage.

Whittall notices that "at the centre of each segment there is a ... dominant-tonic progression in B minor" [the junction indicated by the vertical bar above] that corresponds to the C-F "progression" that occurs as the end of each melodic variation moves to the beginning of the next one.11 Given the melodic context under which these harmonies move, one hopes that these two "progressions" do correspond; however, Whittall fails to notice the other relationships at work here, and he insists on providing the harmonic motion with a functional label, even though this motion is not occurring within a truly functional context. Whittall also mislabels the melodic motion of the boys’ choir: The melodies themselves are not twelve-note

11Whittall, Britten and Tippett, 181.
aggregates,\textsuperscript{12} although he is correct in judging them as "prime and inversion melodies."\textsuperscript{13} Only the root movement in the organ accompaniment can be described by the twelve-note scheme.

The organ accompaniment described above is used as a chordal ostinato over which the variations are carried out. The accompaniment occurs in exactly the same register with the same voice-leading until the third variation, where two triads are omitted as the melody is shortened in each half of the variation (see Figure 5.8). These two triads, built on $C\#\,(1)$ and $G\,(7)$, are related by a tritone rather than by a fifth; thus, they do not occur in related positions (see * in Figure 5.7 above).

Since the accompaniment is an ostinato, all variation occurs in the boys' melody. The melody becomes progressively simpler as wide intervals and some pitches are eliminated; however, the main melodic structure provided by the tritone between the first and last pitches is maintained for each variation. With the second variation, the melody is strictly stepwise, and a closer inspection reveals a brief octatonic pattern (see Figure 5.8). The third variation is even simpler. As the ostinato begins to break

\textsuperscript{12}G is missing from Boys I; B is missing from Boys II.

\textsuperscript{13}Whittall, Britten and Tippett, 181.
Figure 5.8: Requiem Aeternam, "Te decet hymnus,"
4.10-6.8
down with the omission of the C# and G chords (see above), the melody becomes a "filled-in" version of the C-F# tritone--three whole tones (see Figure 5.8 above). The coda is marked by the stammering repetition of the text used in the third variation and the disappearance of the ostinato except for the two chords that begin each part of the theme. Only the bare C-F# tritone is preserved in the boys' parts (see Figure 5.8 above), ushering in the full chorus and orchestra as they repeat the Introit antiphon.

The F#-C tritone continues its presence in the setting of "Anthem for Doomed Youth" as the chorus's tritone at the end of the Introit leads directly into the setting of Owen's poem. The harp takes over both the tritone and the quintuple division of the beat, which, up until this point, has been heard only in the chorus and full orchestra (see Figure 5.9).

![Musical notation](image)

Figure 5.9: Requiem Aeternam, "Anthem," 9.1-9.3
Britten exploits a number of features to integrate "Anthem for Doomed Youth" into the first movement. The roles of the bells and the thematic material from the boys' choir have already been discussed as outcomes of the textual influences on Britten's musical decisions.\(^1\) The transference of the choral tritone and the orchestral rhythms to the chamber orchestra are further links.

Although the foreshadowing of "Anthem" by the bells may be considered a superficial link between the two settings, it is clear that Britten has attached musical bonds between the Introit and "Anthem for Doomed Youth" in order to convey to the listener his understanding of the relationship between the two texts. Britten transforms the instrumental ritornello of the choral section into a depiction of war sounds in the chamber orchestra by changing the ritornello's rhythm and tempo, while keeping a semblance of its intervallic content (see Figure 5.9: compare to Figure 5.2). In general, the chamber orchestra is given the task of depicting the sounds of war with material derived from the setting of the Introit antiphon.

While the chamber orchestra reworks the material from the full orchestra, the vocal line of "Anthem" derives most of its material from the setting of the Introit verse, with the most obvious re-use occurring, as noted above, with the

\(^1\)See previous chapter, pp. 110-114.
tenth line. The second variation of the Introit verse ("Exaudi orationem meam") is the source of most of the tenor's material from the beginning of the poem to the end of the ninth line (see Figure 5.10), but the quasi-octatonic structure of the variation is not maintained. (See Figure 5.10; compare to Figure 5.8) For the remainder of the setting, both vocal and instrumental parts are based on the entire setting of the Introit verse (see Figure 5.10).

Crucial differences exist between the Introit material and its appearance in "Anthem," but they are not obvious on first hearing. As noted above, the first nine lines of "Anthem" are set to melodic material derived from the second variation of the verse, but with the substitution of D for the original Db, the original octatonic nature of that variation is missing (see Figure 5.10). What is not missing is the C-F# tritone. While the key signature

---

15 See p. 112 above. It should be noted, however, that Britten apparently had some difficulty with the opening of "Anthem." At least five attempts are preserved in the extant sketches of War Requiem, four of which show that the tritone was not a part of the initial conception of the tenor line.

16 Gordon Page observes that "the melodic materials for this solo are all drawn from the phrases of the boys choir. Between rehearsals 9 and 13 the tenor has the first phrases of the poem. All of these phrases are developed from the third phrase of the boys' hymn...."; see his Melodic Unification, 28.

17 A different octatonic collection is used (C-D-Eb-F-Gb), but with the appearance of Fb in the next vocal phrase the octatonic character is destroyed.
indicates Db major, the pitch C is obviously a primary focal point in the first part (despite the emphasis on Gb), since

Figure 5.10: Requiem Aeternam, "Anthem," 9.1-11.6

every phrase begins and/or ends on it. However, the tritonal relationship is brought out mainly in the settings of lines 1, 5, and 9 (see Figure 5.10 for lines 1 and 5), where the same basic melodic shape and accompaniment are used to emphasize the C-F# interval. The harp accompaniment
comprises only Gb and C, while the vocal melody is restricted by C as the lowest note (with the exception of the low Gb leaped to at the end of the first two occurrences) and Gb as the highest.

The change in character that occurs at the end of the ninth line of "Anthem" has been discussed as an outcome of the textual references made in the tenth line of the poem.\textsuperscript{18} The setting beginning at the tenth line is openly reminiscent of the Introit verse (basic melodic shape and chordal accompaniment), but there are notable differences not obvious at first hearing. The intervallic content and phrase lengths of the melodic material are not maintained, nor is the twelve-tone root movement of the chordal accompaniment, which is replaced by a succession of root-position major triads that emphasize combinations of diatonic and octatonic scales (see Figure 5.11).

The last line of "Anthem" is set to a complete restatement of the first half of the boys' theme (see Figure 5.12). It is augmented rhythmically and is accompanied by the original harmony. The added bass drum rhythms and double bass pizzicati appear to be evocations of war sounds that foreshadow the return of the instrumental prelude to "Anthem" as a postlude. This abruptly ends with the orchestral bells playing the F#-C tritone just prior to the choral "Kyrie" that ends the movement.

\textsuperscript{18}See discussion, p. 112.
Figure 5.11: Requiem Aeternam, "Anthem," 13.1-14.8
Figure 5.12: Requiem Aeternam, "Anthem," 15.1-15.9
The Kyrie in War Requiem acts as a coda to the Introit, bringing the movement to a quiet but unsettled close. The section is characterized by a slow tempo with a rhythm marked by half notes (see Figure 5.13). Its most

![Musical notation](image)

Figure 5.13: Requiem Aeternam, Kyrie, 16.2-end

outstanding characteristic is the prominence of the C-F♯ tritone, not unexpected given its role throughout the movement. The final F major chord, however, does come as a surprise.
Except for the tritone (now present as the diminished fifth B#-F#), the altos and basses are divided to create strict parallel fifths as an accompaniment to the melodic line sung by the sopranos and tenors (see Figure 5.13 above). The first two phrases form a pattern in which the tritone is the expected point of repose; however, Britten defies melodic (and harmonic) expectations in the final phrase by moving to the F major chord at the end.

Given the prominence of the tritone, Britten’s final cadence is surprising. In traditional harmony, the C-F# tritone has two possible resolutions: an expansion out by half-step to the minor sixth B-G or a contraction by semitone to the major third Db-F. In both instances, the tritone is often immediately and audibly resolved. In this passage, Britten has chosen other means to produce a sense of resolution without the satisfaction of a typical tonal arrival. He delays the resolution and then uses parallel motion that is consistent within the voice-leading, but the result is still harmonically unexpected (see Figure 5.13 above).

Several scholars have speculated on the musical considerations underlying this progression. The melodic line appears to be in F# minor, but the crucial decision for the last chord seems to rest in the melodic A. Lundergan attributes the source of the F major chord to the symmetrical relationship that appears when the fifth F#-C#
is rotated around A, which produces the fifth C-F. To him, "this relationship connects the F major triad to the tritone-based tonal complex of the rest of the Kyrie, by a process that is ... obscure enough to preserve a sense of incompleteness in the resolution."19 Evans, however, believes the F major chord is an outcome of the emphasis on F that occurred earlier in the movement in the Introit verse and in the recall of the verse material in "Anthem."20 Both assessments are valid, Lundergan's in the context of the role of the pitch A elsewhere in the movement, Evans's in light of Britten's well-known use of semitonal-related keys.21

Despite the seeming ubiquity of the F#/C tritone in the Introit movement, the interval is almost totally abandoned in the setting of the Dies Irae, which, when compared to the Introit, shows much more tonal unity.22 The Dies Irae is

19Lundergan, *Stylistic and Technical Sources*, 146.


21The F# minor/F major dichotomy that exists at the end of the Kyrie could be considered an evocation of one of Britten's favored harmonic devices. The construction used for the Kyrie is modified for the setting of the Pie Jesu text in the Dies Irae and the last lines of the Mass in the Libera Me. The alterations that Britten makes in the latter two settings are made to accommodate the texts. Otherwise, there are no significant differences among the three settings.

22Each of the four sections of the Dies Irae movement is oriented toward one or more keys or tonal centers: Section I is in G minor ("Dies irae") and Bb major ("Bugles sang"). The two subsections of Section II ("Liber scriptus" and "The Next War") are centered around A. The Latin units
basically "tritone-free" until the end of "Futility," where the interval serves two purposes, one the highlighting of the final question of the poem and the other as a connection to the setting of the Pie Jesu, which is similar to the setting of the Kyrie (see Figure 5.14).\textsuperscript{23}

In the observations above regarding the F\#-C tritone of the bells and chorus, it was noted that the interval is strongly linked to the A of the gong and timpani. Although the tritone is extremely rare in the second movement, the presence of A as a focal point cannot be ignored. While the two outer sections of the second movement ("Dies irae") each are oriented toward G minor/Bb, the two inner sections of the movement (from "Liber scriptus" through the end of "Sonnet") are strongly oriented toward A, the major, minor, and Dorian modes on A dominating throughout. Brief forays

\begin{footnotesize}
of Section III ("Recordare" and "Confutatis") are in Dorian mode, centering on C and A respectively, while "Sonnet" is in A minor. Section IV returns to G minor until the "Lacrimosa" setting, which centers on Bb, while "Futility" is in F\# minor. The most harmonically ambiguous part of the movement is the coda, "Pie Jesu," which is based on the setting of the Kyrie in the first movement.

\textsuperscript{23}It should be noted, however, that tritones other than F\#-C are exploited at the ends of four of the six lines of "Sonnet." The F\#-C tritone is briefly present in "Bugles sang", but the interval is so skillfully woven into the motivic texture that it is hardly noticed.
\end{footnotesize}
Figure 5.14: Dies Irae, leading into "Pie Jesu,"
59.6–60.4
toward C major are made in "The Next War,"\(^{24}\) which foreshadow the C Dorian orientation of the "Recordare" section, but A (Dorian and minor) reasserts itself as the focal point before the first two stanzas of the Dies Irae are reprised in the original G minor context.

Prior to the close of the movement, the A major setting of "Futility" is brought into sharp relief against the Bb orientation of the "Lacrimosa" stanza. Although this seems to create a semitonal key relationship, the relationship is not audible because of the prevalence of the dominant, E, that pervades the setting of "Futility." In addition, the tonal orientation of the ending of the poem changes to F\# minor in preparation for the return of the F\#-C tritone in the Pie Jesu.\(^{25}\)

While the F\#-C tritone appears at some point in five of the six movements, the Offertorium is notable in its lack of this particular interval. Evans, however, does note a tritonal relationship between the boys' section and the first fugue:

\(^{24}\)The change of tonal center underscores the text at these points; see discussion of "The Next War" in chapter 2.

\(^{25}\)The appearance of C as a tonal center in the middle of the movement seems to be deliberate in light of the use of A/F\# for "Futility." The use of C in this manner may also be a subtle link to the Offertorium, where C major is used specifically for the angel's lines in "Parable."
The Offertorium, by setting up a tonal relationship between C sharp minor and G major, appears to be transferring to a broader level the familiar tritonal opposition. C sharp minor is established by an introductory passage in which the boys sing 'Domine Jesu Christe' with an archaic economy of interval (inverting around a central C sharp/D sharp) and to organ roulades that directly recall the Missa Brevis.... But with the fugal 'Quam olim Abrahae', G takes over unambiguously.\(^\text{26}\)

The C#-G tritonal relationship noted here could hardly be considered "familiar" since it is the F#-C tritone that plays such an important role in War Requiem as a whole; however, the fact that there is a tritonal relationship cannot be ignored. It appears, though, that for this movement Britten was not interested in placing the tritone in a prominent position.\(^\text{27}\) Compared to other movements (especially the first and fifth movements), the interval in general does not play a role either as a distinct melodic interval or as a controlling harmonic factor beyond the sectional relationship mentioned above. Instead, the most important materials in this movement are those that are taken from Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac.\(^\text{28}\)

\(^{26}\) P. Evans, Music of Benjamin Britten, 460.

\(^{27}\) The gong A is also notably absent. The principle of inversion that is associated with the F#-C-A conglomerate is taken over by the inversion in the boys' parts and the two fugues that frame "Parable." The use of the tritone and the gong A are rendered superfluous at best.

\(^{28}\) See discussion of the Offertorium in the previous chapter.
Britten wastes no time in bringing back the F#–C tritone in the Sanctus movement. The tritone is explicit in the opening section of the movement, the percussion instruments (vibraphone, glockenspiel, antique cymbals, bells, and piano) supporting the soprano soloist with these two pitches (see Figure 5.15). The two parts of the soloist’s material are anchored on the two pitches, the first part beginning and ending on F#, and the second beginning on B# (C) and ending on F#. F# is clearly the focal pitch, although it is never established as a tonic. Instead, it is couched within B major, as indicated by the key signature and the opening arpeggio of the first "Sanctus" melisma (see Figure 5.15).

The tritonal orientation of the opening quickly dissipates in the following chanting section (see previous chapter for discussion of "Pleni sunt coeli"). No hint of the interval can be found in the D major setting of the exuberant "Hosannas" or in the more contemplative "Benedictus" section, nor does it occur in "The End" until the last three measures, where the C and F# quietly emerge in the bassoon, harp, cello, and double bass (see Figure 5.16).
Figure 5.15: Sanctus, opening-84.2
Figure 5.16: Sanctus, "The End," 96.12-end

The conclusion of the Sanctus movement seems to foreshadow the Agnus Dei. As Evans has pointed out, "the literal-minded will correctly note ... that the close of this movement [Sanctus] can be construed (in retrospect at least) as a quite traditional approach to the dominant preparation for the B minor of the Agnus Dei."29 Although the key signature of the Agnus Dei indicates B minor, F# is the focal point of the movement.

29P. Evans, Music of Benjamin Britten, 462.
The Agnus Dei is perhaps the most tightly constructed movement of *War Requiem*. The structure is controlled by the ostinato that constitutes the primary material of the chamber strings and the full chorus (see Figure 5.17), but

![Musical notation](image)

Figure 5.17: Agnus Dei, mm. 1–2

the ostinato itself is controlled by the F♯–C tritone. Gordon Page describes the ostinato rather clearly: "The ostinato is a diatonic scale passage that descends from the dominant to the tonic of B minor ... followed immediately by a diatonic scale passage that ascends from the tonic to the dominant of C major."30 Every fifth statement of the

---

30 Page, *Melodic Unification*, 119. Lundergan notes as well the tonal interpretation of the ostinato; he also attempts to place it within an interval-cycle context, but he is not convincing (Lundergan, *Stylistic Sources and Techniques*, 191). Lundergan had also briefly mentioned this passage as a "symmetrical filling-in of the tritone" (Ibid., 167).
ostinato is extended to encompass an entire C-major scale followed by a whole-tone segment (C-A♭-G♯-F♯) that links the

![Musical notation]

Figure 5.18: Agnus Dei, mm. 10-11

extension back to the beginning of the ostinato (see Figure 5.18). Thus, the beginning pitches of each scalar segment, F♯ and C, are brought out clearly, the former as a dominant (of B minor), the latter as a tonic (of C major). The key relationship of the two scales is similar to a tonic-Neapolitan progression in B minor, but the harmonies produced by the woodwinds do not support this interpretation (see Figure 5.19).

---

31 P. Evans also notes the ostinato’s tonal areas: "The impression of this ceaseless burden ... is predominantly of B minor alternating with its Neapolitan sixth...."; see Music of Benjamin Britten, 453.
The ostinato plays a key role in the overall harmonic motion of the movement (see Figure 5.20), a motion that is defined in part by the relationship of the vocal line and its accompanying woodwind harmonies with the ostinato. The figure and explanation below show how the characteristic $F\#-C$ tritone operates through the ostinato as the harmonic underpinning of this movement.\textsuperscript{33}

\[
\begin{array}{ccccc}
\text{b} & \text{C} & \text{b} & \text{F}\# & \text{b} \\
\text{beg.} & 97.7 & 98.1 & 98.6 & 99.3 \\
\text{inverted ostinato} & \\
\end{array}
\]

Figure 5.20: Agnus Dei, key scheme

\textsuperscript{33}P. Evans states that "the Agnus Dei is the only movement consistently controlled by a tritonal tonal relationship" (Music of Benjamin Britten, 452), an accurate statement as far as it goes, but he fails to point out how that relationship is carried out in the actual key motion of the movement.
B minor is considered the tonic key of the movement because of both the key signature and the strong dominant-tonic feel of the first measure of the ostinato. The first change of tonal center occurs at the second verse, where the vocal line is displaced by one measure over the ostinato (see Figure 5.21), thus emphasizing the C portion of the ostinato rather than the F#. This effectively changes the key to C major, although it does not remain there long. The appearance of the choral refrain, along with a vocal phrase ending on F#, brings the key back to B minor.

Figure 5.21: Agnus Dei, 97.6-97.8
The third verse is definitely in F# major. The vocal line is securely in F# while the ostinato is inverted (see Figure 5.22). The first half of the ostinato (still beginning on F#) now outlines the ascending pentachord of F# major, while the second half of the ostinato (now beginning on B#) has been rewritten as a descending pentachord of E# natural minor. This fifth may also be heard as a descending fifth in B# minor, a more feasible interpretation in the context of the F#-C tritone, since B# minor is the enharmonic spelling of C minor. The ostinato at this point can also be heard as a transposition up a tritone of

\[ \text{Figure 5.22: Agnus Dei, 98.6-98.8} \]

---

\[ ^{33}\text{P. Evans notes this as a "transfer to the dominant position" (Music of Benjamin Britten, 452).} \]

\[ ^{34}\text{P. Evans actually rewrites this particular example to show the F#-C relationship when he comments on the make-up of the ostinato (Music of Benjamin Britten, 452).} \]
the second-verse ostinato accompaniment. The third verse, however, is interrupted by the choral "Agnus Dei" bringing back the original version of the ostinato, along with the opening tenor melody, to finish the poem.

The most direct statement of the tritone occurs with the tenor’s "Dona nobis pacem" (see Figure 5.23). Britten uses for this phrase two ascending pentachords, one in F# major and the other in C minor. These are clearly related to the ostinato in interval content, but the second pentachord defies expectation as it continues the ascent begun by the first pentachord to reach the final F#.

The importance of F# in this movement cannot be overestimated. While the move to F# major lasts for only five measures, this section stands out as a contrasting area in a number of ways: the inverted ostinato, the change in orchestral accompaniment, increased rhythmic activity in the vocal line, the forte dynamic level, the melodic emphases on F# and C#, and the achievement in the voice of the highest note in the movement. All of these factors point to the climactic nature of the passage and assist in highlighting
the key area. In general, F# stands out at the beginning of the movement, in both instrumental and vocal parts, as the first note heard, and it is the last note articulated. Despite being couched within the larger context of B minor, F# is truly the center of the movement.

For the final movement, Britten places the F#-C tritone within a more tonal context, the main keys at work being G minor for the settings of the Libera Me and "Strange Meeting," and A major for the In Paradisum.\(^3\)

The interval appears on three occasions. The first, in "Strange Meeting" (see Figure 5.24), has already been mentioned in relation to the text "'Strange friend,' I said, 'here is no cause to mourn.'"\(^3\) The statement is brief, but it is firmly within the G minor context established in the previous Latin section and continued in the English recitative. The baritone’s reply quickly moves away from the tritone with a series of perfect fourths, which emphasizes the diatonic nature of the setting.

---

\(^3\) The A major context of the In Paradisium setting is partially restricted to the boys’ choir, full chorus, and soprano soloist. The male soloists begin their duet on "Let us sleep now" in a pentatonic mode. See discussion below on Far-Eastern elements.

\(^3\) See previous chapter, p. 148.
The tritone returns for a second time in the sudden interruptions of the In Paradisum setting by the phrases "Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine" and "et lux perpetua luceat eis" by the boys' choir and the bells, which recalls the opening of the first movement (see Figure 5.25).³⁷ At this point, the key for the In Paradisum has been definitely established as A major, although the dominant and subdominant (E and D) are more prominent in the chorus and soloists. The suddenness of the boys' tritone with the bells is still a surprise.

³⁷Britten is obviously taking advantage of the text, which is the same as the opening of the Introit, in order to bring the tritone back with the bell accompaniment.
to the chord progression heard at the conclusions of the first and second movements (see Figure 5.26). The reappearance of the progression at this point is almost expected, the boys and the bells having recalled it just prior to the harmonically ambiguous ending of the poetic

![Choral Score](image)

**Figure 5.26: Libera Me, 137.1-end**

setting. The introduction by the boys of both the A major setting of the In Paradisum and the $F\#-C$ tritone emphasizes once again the importance of $A$ in connection with the tritone, and acts as a prompt for the reappearance of the progression and its unusual resolution. By this time, however, the $F$ major chord at the end should be expected as the natural resolution of the $F\#-C$ tritone.
Earlier in this chapter, it was pointed out that the F#-C tritone is generated by inverting C around A to obtain F#. In this manner, the tritone can be linked to Britten’s extensive use of inversion. It is interesting to note, however, that the one movement in which the F#-C tritone is not present, the Offertorium, is the movement in which Britten utilizes inversion on the grandest scale. In addition, while the nature of inversion could be viewed as a metaphor for the numerous dualities or opposites present in War Requiem, including war/peace, death/life, and sacred/secular, the technique generally is not employed as a unifying device between the Latin liturgical texts and the English poems. Its use in the first three movements appears to be linked (in varying degrees) with the theme of conflict that emerges and develops in these movements, the large-scale inversion occurring in the third movement epitomizing Owen’s inversion of the Abraham and Isaac story. The use of inversion in the Agnus Dei movement is more difficult to understand in relation to the theme of conflict, if the conflict is perceived to have come to an end. The prevalence of the F#-C tritone, however, allows Britten to take advantage of the technique.

---

3*See discussion below.

3*Inversion plays no role in the Sanctus and Libera Me movements.
The first overt appearance of inversion occurs in the setting of the Introit psalm verse "Te decet hymnus," where the second half of the boys' theme is constructed through strict inversion of the first part.\textsuperscript{40} While the material thus constructed is later reworked and developed in the setting of "Anthem for Doomed Youth,"\textsuperscript{41} however, the inversional relationship that characterizes the boys' theme is de-emphasized as the melody is fragmented between the voice and the chamber orchestra. The change in emphasis is accompanied by changes in the harmonic underpinning, the twelve-tone root movement being replaced by a series of root-position major triads that begins and ends on F (see Figure 5.11 above).

Inversion is also used in the second movement. In the instrumental passages within the first section of the Dies Irae, the four "battlefield" motives (see Figure 5.27) are subjected to a variety of treatments, including inversion. In the setting of "Bugles sang," the vocal line comprises

\textsuperscript{40}See discussion of the Introit verse above, pp. 159-160.

\textsuperscript{41}See discussion above.
Figure 5.27: Dies Irae, "battlefield" motives, mm. 1-13

all four motives. Since the motives appear in turn as the primary melodic material for the vocal line immediately after the horn introduces each motive in its prime form, the inversion of the fourth motive for the setting of the line "Voices of old despondency resigned, Bowed by the shadow of the morrow" stands out as a means by which this line is emphasized (see Figure 5.28).

Figure 5.28: Dies Irae, "Bugles sang," 27.1-27.8
Inversion is used on two other occasions in the Dies Irae movement. In the "Liber scriptus" section (section II), the initial soprano and choral melodies are inverted around the axis C/C#/F#/G for the beginning of the verse "Rex tremendae" (see Figures 5.29 and 5.30); however, the entire verse is not inverted. Rather, only the opening text is subjected to inversion, while the remainder of the setting utilizes material similar to the opening of the section.

Figure 5.29: Dies Irae, 28.1-30.2
Figure 5.30: Dies Irae, 31.1-31.5

The remaining use of inversion in the second movement comes at the beginning of the third section ("Recordare Jesu pie") (see Figure 5.31). The layering that occurs here has been discussed in relation to the treatment of the text.\(^{42}\) To continue each line as the subsequent voices enter, Britten inverts its initial statement, shortening the length of each inversion as the texture continues to build. At the climax ("Et latronem exaudisti" in the first soprano), free counterpoint rules the texture briefly before falling away into heterophony just prior to the women’s final verse.

\(^{42}\text{See discussion above, pp. 121-123.}\)
Figure 5.31: Dies Irae, 40.1-44.2
At the beginning of the Offertorium, inversion serves as the primary basis for the deceptively simple, yet tonally ambiguous, melody sung by the boys (see Figure 5.32). The key implied by the key signature is C# minor. As Gordon Page notices, "this first part of the introduction is in c# minor, though there is stronger emphasis on D# (ii) than on tonic... However, there is greater emphasis on the interval of the second, than on the [c# minor] scale itself."\(^{43}\) Page

\(^{43}\)Page, Melodic Unification, 76. P. Evans also sees the key of this section as C# minor, although he does not support it in any way.
fails to point out that D# does not remain emphasized, although the Boys I part convinces the ear through sheer repetition and with some support from the organ that D# rather than C# is the real key center. With the Boys II phrase, though, C# is established as tonic, the presence of B# in the melody confirming it. The alternation between Boys I and II occurs three times, with an additional entry by Boys I seeming to sneak in a last bid for D#.

This set-up of C# and D# as competing tonal centers is in part an outcome of the process of inversion, since the pitch contents of the two parts are related through this process, with the C#–D# interval held in common. Each part spans a perfect fourth, Boys I ascending from C# to F#.

---

44P. Evans relegates this observation to a parenthetical note in his discussion of the movement (See quotation, next page).
in the interval pattern tone-semitone-tone, and Boys II descending from D# to A# by the same pattern. Taken together, the two parts create an alternating whole-step/half-step aggregate that could be equated with an octatonic scale. Lundergan applies such a reading only to the lower part without noticing that this part is an inversion of the upper voice.\textsuperscript{45} Lundergan also claims that "without exception, every phrase of music of the boys' choir [throughout the War Requiem] is shaped and controlled by the pitches of C3\textsubscript{o} [F#-A-C-Eb]. The structural purity and simplicity of this set reinforce the quality of innocence and distance associated to [sic] the boys' voices."\textsuperscript{46} Unfortunately, this overstatement ignores the prominence of C# in the Boys II part, as well as the presence of other compositional factors, such as inversion, that overshadow the importance of the C3\textsubscript{o} set here.

The setting of "The Parable of the Old Men and the Young" makes some use of inversion, although here the source of material is not the Offertorium setting. Britten instead takes appropriate portions of Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac as sources and inverts them at comparable moments in

\textsuperscript{45}Lundergan, \textit{Stylistic Sources and Techniques}, 172. It may be argued that an octatonic unfolding such as that advocated by Lundergan cannot be explained adequately by the presence of one semitone.

\textsuperscript{46}Lundergan, \textit{Stylistic Sources and Techniques}, 172.
"Parable" (see Figures 5.33 and 5.34), keeping with his method of borrowing throughout the setting.  

Figure 5.33: Canticle II, m. 253

Figure 5.34: Offertorium, "Parable," 74.5-75.1

Like the previous two movements, the Offertorium is rounded out by the reappearance of the chorus and full orchestra. The fugue, in E minor, is an inversion of the first fugue: vocal entries are reversed (soprano=bass, alto=tenor); melodic direction is inverted; and dynamics are opposite (soft instead of loud) (see Figures 5.35 and 5.36).

*See discussion above, pp. 128-139.
Figure 5.35: Offertorium, 64.2-64.11 (first fugue)
Figure 5.36: Offertorium, 79.4-79.10 (second fugue)

The text, like that of the first fugue, is limited to the phrase "Quam olim Abrahae promisisti et semini ejus." The reiteration of this text at the end of the Offertory is liturgically appropriate, but in the context of War Requiem, its inverted setting serves to highlight the twist Owen has given to the familiar Biblical story.

The importance of F#, C, and A in War Requiem has thus far been emphasized in relation to compositional practices (inversion, ostinato, various harmonic and structural functions) that are common in Western European art music. It is known, however, that his tour of the Far East in 1955-
56, particularly of Bali and Japan, had an impact on future compositions such as The Prince of the Pagodas, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, the three Church Parables, and Death in Venice. War Requiem itself was written during a time when Britten was known to be occupied (at least mentally, if not compositionally) with transforming the Japanese Noh play Sumidagawa into what became Curlew River. It would seem entirely possible that some Balinese and Japanese influences could be found in War Requiem, but very little discussion has taken place concerning the possible Far-Eastern influences in this work.

Mervyn Cooke has noted some aspects of War Requiem that can be traced to Balinese influences. These include the colotomic structure of the opening of the Sanctus, the pitch content of sections of the Sanctus and Libera Me movements, the gong A in the first movement, and the stratification throughout the work. These observations will be discussed below to support the position that Balinese elements in particular (and Far Eastern in general) play a more important role in War Requiem than has been recognized in the past.

The first and fourth movements in particular stand out in reference to the orientally influenced use of the gong and other percussion instruments. The first movement includes two different percussion agents that must be considered: the gong and the bells. Britten always groups
the gong with the piano, timpani, and tuba to reinforce a low A; the bells, in contrast, are always grouped with the full chorus several octaves above the gong and are always intoning F# and C.48 Britten does not use the gong/bell group as an agent of strict colotomic structuring (there is no sense of regular rhythmic units being marked by the gong, although the bells do rhythmically mark the beats on which each voice part enters), but a definite harmonic identity emerges from the group as it reinforces the various orchestral and choral phrases. The prominence of both the F#–C tritone and the A in other sections of War Requiem (see above) supports the idea that Britten has attached this pitch emphasis to the percussion group for harmonic purposes, while at the same time taking advantage of the timbral and textural possibilities suggested by his experience with Balinese music.

When compared to the sound of the Balinese gamelan gong kebyar, there is very little doubt that the opening of the Sanctus movement (see Figure 5.15 above), with the vibraphone, glockenspiel, antique cymbals, bells, and piano, was inspired by the gamelan. The uniqueness of the sound at this particular point in War Requiem, however, may not be entirely coincidental. Britten may have deliberately chosen

48Cooke notes only the gong’s A ("Oriental Influences," 145).
this moment for the sound because of the historical use of a bell (the "Sanctus bell\(^4\)) at the opening of the Sanctus.

The continuation of the percussion as an accompaniment to the soprano soloist is cited by Cooke as an instance of colotomic structure in *War Requiem*, but, except for the setting of the text "Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua," the entire movement could be cited as an example of colotomic structure. The gong collection noted for the first movement, augmented with bass drum, contrabassoon, and lower strings, punctuates the "Hosanna" (see Figure 5.37) while the "Benedictus" is softly undergirded by cymbals (see

\(^4\)"Sanctus," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*: "The ancient Christian liturgy conceived the Sanctus as the song of the people; later it became customary to accompany it with instruments. Thus the ringing of the altar bell at the Sanctus." (12:1047). Pius Parsch, in *The Liturgy of the Mass*, 3d ed., translated and adapted by Rev. H. E. Winstone, with an Introduction by Rev. Clifford Howell (London: B. Herder, 1957), states that "the ringing of the Sanctus bell has a special significance, akin to the ringing of the bells at the Gloria on Maundy Thursday and Holy Saturday. It is a sign of rejoicing... the expression of our joy at the coming of Christ" (pp. 224–225). The custom of ringing a bell (usually some type of handbell) at the Sanctus appears to have developed by the fourteenth century (Percival Price, *Bells and Man*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983], 108). P. Evans also comments on the similarity of the sound to the Sanctus bell (*Music of Benjamin Britten*, 461).

Cooke does not recognize the possible influence of the Sanctus bell; instead, he suggests Britten acted on "a desire to create a timeless, ritualistic atmosphere at this crucial point in the work" (*Oriental Influences,* 148). The evocation of a Sanctus bell would fulfill such a desire.
Figure 5.38). In addition to the evocation of gamelan sonorities, *selisir* is "implied" as the basic pitch collection for the exclamations of "Hosanna," although the D major context in which this section is placed makes this difficult to hear.\(^5\)

The presence of Balinese elements in the Sanctus movement can be related to the text. Britten often used gamelan-derived sounds as representations of characters, places, or ideals situated outside the "normal" realm of experience of the main characters.\(^6\) In *War Requiem*, this idea can be extended to the Sanctus, which was originally proclaimed by heavenly creatures (seraphim in Isaiah; six-winged creatures in Revelation); however, the explicit use of Far-Eastern techniques may also be a musical reaction to the first line of Owen's poem "The End," "After the blast of lightning from the East."

The influence of the text on choice of pitch collection is again felt in the sixth movement, at the end of "Strange

\(^5\)Cooke only points out the basic similarity to *selisir* ("Oriental Influences," 141); he does not note the gong underpinning that actually reinforces the interpretation of the Sanctus as a large-scale example of Balinese influence in *War Requiem*. The lack of the second and sixth scale degrees in the "Hosanna" phrases is the feature that places these phrases in *selisir* rather than in the major scale.

\(^6\)Cooke notes that in *The Prince of the Pagodas* gamelan effects were used by Britten to depict the "allure" of the Salamander-Prince and the Pagodas on Belle Rose. Before the ballet, the celesta and the gong had been associated with the ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw* ("Oriental Influences," 146, 380).
Figure 5.38: Sanctus, "Benedictus," 89.1–89.9
Figure 5.38 (continued)
Meeting," where the men begin singing "Let us sleep now."
The beginning phrases of this setting is an example of saih
gender wayang (the pentatonic scale in Western music) (see
Figures 5.39 and 5.40), which is gradually expanded beyond
the five-note limit.

Figure 5.39: saih gender wayang (on A)

Figure 5.40: Libera Me, "Let us sleep now," 127.1-128.3

---

Britten does not utilize Balinese elements such as gamelan sonorities or selisir in every movement of War Requiem, which shows that he gave some consideration to the appropriateness of the sounds that are created when these elements are used. It can be argued, however, that the spatial separation of the performing forces into three distinct entities is one outcome of the application of the stratification principle, derived from Balinese gamelan practices, on a Western idiom. The strata are further emphasized through the metrical non-alignment that occurs in the Offertorium and Libera Me movements.

The analyses of the texts, text-music relationships, and strictly musical characteristics in War Requiem show that Britten was deeply aware of the numerous interrelationships of the texts and the interpretations of those texts that could be highlighted through the musical settings. Britten arranges the texts so that a long-range motion from conflict to reconciliation underlies the textual organization. To reinforce the arrangement, he relies on motives, such as the F♯-C tritone and the "battlefield" motives, word-painting, and formal structures, such as theme-and-variations and ternary forms, to create audible links between the Latin and English texts. The separation of performing forces into discrete strata contributes to the
perception of textual relationships, as does the overt borrowing of material from *Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac* for the setting of "The Parable of the Old Men and the Young." In summary, all of the techniques Britten uses in *War Requiem* are utilized with a clear interpretation of the textual relationships in mind.
CONCLUSIONS

Britten’s careful treatment of the texts and synthesis of a variety of musical techniques in War Requiem place the work firmly within the stylistic development traced from before Peter Grimes through Owen Wingrave and later. Given the occasion for which War Requiem was composed, the texts that were used, and the overall size of the work, however, the work had an emotional impact that overwhelmed its first listeners and conditioned the response of later hearers and writers.

At the time of its premiere, War Requiem must have indeed seemed to be a culminating point, although one would expect that, regardless of occasion, texts, or performing forces, a composer’s previous experience would influence the shape of subsequent compositions. All of the stylistic traits isolated and discussed above are present in War Requiem: The textual themes of pacifism and sleep are clearly evident, especially in the choice of poems by Owen, but these themes are heightened in the juxtaposition with the liturgical texts and their emphasis on rest and peace. At the same time, Britten manipulates these texts through editing and ordering to underscore a motion from conflict to
reconciliation that relates War Requiem to the specific context of the Coventry Cathedral and its emphasis on reconciliation. The manipulation of the texts ties directly to the musical techniques Britten used for setting and organizing them: Variation forms, non-serial manipulation of twelve-tone aggregates, tritonal and semitonal oppositions, motivic recall and development, and the incorporation of Far-Eastern elements, along with an extensive use of inversion, are all used as means of musical manipulation throughout War Requiem. Britten's extensive reliance on motivic recall and development and use of the theme-and-variation form allow him to draw firm connections between seemingly disparate texts. This is especially true in the first movement, where Britten needs to establish clearly the relationship of the Latin and English texts in order to proceed into the developments of the remainder of the work. The stark exposition of the tritone in the bells and chorus, and the variations of the Introit verse for boys' choir set the stage for "Anthem for Doomed Youth" so that the relationship of Owen's text to the liturgical text is absolutely clear. Similar motivic and formal connections operate throughout War Requiem to bind the work tightly together.

The use of Far-Eastern elements serves less to bring texts together than to illustrate Britten's interpretation of the words. The Sanctus and "Let us sleep" texts both
allude to otherworldly conditions that deserve a different kind of setting: Britten thus chooses to use Balinese elements (gamelan sonorities in the Sanctus and selisir for "Let us sleep") to set these texts. This is in keeping with other appearances of these elements both before and after War Requiem, such as in The Prince of the Pagodas (the Salamander) and in Owen Wingrave (Owen's "peace" aria after he is disinherited).

It is the use of Balinese elements in particular that marks War Requiem as an integral part of Britten's stylistic development rather than as a culmination of his style. Except for the few observations made by Cooke in his identification of "oriental influences" in Britten's music, however, the possibility that such influences could exist in War Requiem has, for the most part, been overlooked in favor of the strong impact of the texts and the more obvious musical traits, such as the use of the tritone and the borrowing from Canticle II. This is an odd oversight, to say the least, given the chronological position of War Requiem between earlier pieces, such as The Prince of the Pagodas and A Midsummer Night's Dream, which are indebted to Britten's tour of the Far East, and the later works, such as the three Church Parables, Owen Wingrave, and Death in Venice, which are acknowledged as products of his synthesis of Eastern and Western elements.

217
War Requiem cannot be considered a culminating point or a "watershed" in Britten’s style. It is instead a highly impressive, emotionally-charged masterpiece that falls squarely within the course of a stylistic development that continually sought new ways of synthesizing musical techniques from a variety of sources with lifelong personal ideals and convictions.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


________. Compact disc booklet to *Rattle Conducts Britten.* British Composers Series. EMI CDCB 54270.


_____. S.v. "Requiem Mass, Liturgy of."

_____. S.v. "Sanctus."


