

## An Adornian Interpretation of Brahms' German Requiem

by Maria Patricia O'Connor

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*"It was not a Requiem, said the purists; it was not even ecclesiastical in tone; it was a scored cantata, far less suited to the church than to the concert-room. Even its defenders looked upon it with some misgiving and could only plead that it was 'konfessions los aber nicht religions los' [sic]."*<sup>1</sup>

The problematic reception of the *German Requiem*, as expressed above, is intrinsically linked to the fact that in the nineteenth century the Requiem genre hinged entirely on its use of text. While tendencies did exist with regard to minor tonalities, key relationships within the work, texture and orchestration, the only truly unequivocal distinguishing characteristic of this genre was that it was based on the Ordinary of the *Missa pro Defunctis*. This emerged as a special type of polyphonic mass in the late fifteenth century and became one of the most assiduously cultivated types of liturgical-musical works composed for solemn occasions.<sup>2</sup> From the early Middle Ages, the variable and fixed sung sections (Proper and Ordinary) of the Roman rite of the mass for the dead underwent progressive alteration and enlargement. After the Council of Trent (1545–63) decided to put a stop to the proliferation of regional and local variants of the *Missa*, the texts were codified in 1570 to comprise the formulary that persisted until 1969, in accordance with the Missal of Pius V. Because the text of the *German Requiem* is culled from various books of the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha, the prescription *Requiem* in the title *Ein deutsches Requiem nach Worten der heiligen Schrift*, is technically, as regards generic classification, a gross misprision.

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Nevertheless Brahms dubbed this work thus, and, over the course of history, it has become almost impossible for us to consider it as anything else. This essay endeavours to show that despite the absence of the Latin text, this work does not sacrifice its essence as a Requiem. In order to do this consideration will first be made of the question of ge-

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Edwin Evans, *Handbook to the Works of Johannes Brahms-Vocal*, Vol. I, New York: Burt Franklin 1970, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Christoph Wolff, *Mozart's Requiem: historical and analytical studies*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, p. 65.

neric classification in the late 1800s. Thereafter, an examination of the work under the rubric of Theodor Adorno's philosophy will attempt to demonstrate that, rather than disqualifying this work from categorisation as a Requiem, Brahms' deviation from the traditional text serves to reveal this genre's historicity.

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The practice of generic classification lost definition throughout the nineteenth century. As Carl Dahlhaus remarks:

*"[...] since the late eighteenth century all genres have rapidly lost substance. [For example] in Chopin's Barcarole (although even this piece invokes a picture of Venice) the peculiar, unrepeatable features are more essential than any general qualities that it shares with other pieces of the same name. The concept of a genre is no longer established in advance for individual works. Rather, every genre fades to an abstract generalization, derived from individual structures after they have accumulated; and finally, in the twentieth century, individual structures submit only under duress to being allocated to any genre."*<sup>3</sup>

This phenomenon was a natural outgrowth of the Enlightenment concepts of rationalism and subjective freedom. Following, amongst others, Kant's declaration that enlightenment "*ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit*" and his command "*Sapere Aude! Habe Muth, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen!*", established systems and traditions were challenged in a far more considerable way.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the very idea of selfhood and identity was subjected to scrutiny as the individual embarked on a quest for autonomy. As the 1800s progressed, however, the unfeasibility of achieving individual freedom within society became ever more apparent. In a climate of monarchic repression and bourgeois attempts at liberation, artists made considerable efforts to unfetter themselves from enslavement to determinism, but as Burnett James explains,

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Esthetics of Music*, translated by William W. Austin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982, p.15.

<sup>4</sup> Translation of first quotation: Enlightenment is man's release from his self-inflicted tutelage. Translation of second quotation: Dare to be wise! Have the courage to use your own understanding. Immanuel Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* in *Kants Werke: Akademie Textausgabe VIII Abhandlungen nach 1781*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co. 1968, p.35.

*"[these efforts] failed and in the end [the post-Enlightenment movement] collapsed into neurosis and despair because it asked questions it could not answer and came up against the harsh facts of human mortality and entrenchment in the finite ... It strove towards freedom and understood that freedom is the attribute of gods; but because men are not gods, but must submit after all to mortality and limitation, it sought for a compromise that did not exist."*<sup>5</sup>

Written largely in Austria between 1856-1865, Brahms' op. 45 must be considered in the context of this historical period. Due to the fact that this was a time, which is critical to the historical dimension of Theodor Adorno's thought, the Requiem is appropriate for an application of Adorno's ideas. Before providing an Adornian analysis of this work, a brief outline of the philosopher's aesthetic theory will here ensue.

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One of Adorno's main philosophical concerns is the relationship between history and nature; that is, how nature comes to be perceived as historical and how history comes to be taken as nature. In *The Idea of Natural History* he writes:

*"History means that mode of conduct established by tradition that is characterized primarily by the occurrence of the qualitatively new; it is a movement that does not play itself out in mere identity, mere reproduction of what has always been, but rather one in which the new occurs; it is a movement that gains its true character through what appears in it as new."*<sup>6</sup>

He consequently subscribes to the Lukácsian concept of *der Bruch zwischen Ich und Formen* (the rupture between self and forms). This refers to the unavoidable disintegration of traditional genres and forms, resulting from their loss of meaning after the Enlightenment and their inability to meet the expressive demands of new eras. In other words, what was natural in an earlier period will, needless to say, eventually become anachronistic and therefore unnatural in a later period.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in order to create a Re-

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<sup>5</sup> Burnett James, *Brahms: A Critical Study*, London: Dent and Sons Ltd. 1972, p.135.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993, p.31.

<sup>7</sup> Lukács writes: *"But as the objective world breaks down, so the subject, too, becomes a fragment; only the 'I' continues to exist, but its existence is then lost in the insubstantiality of its self-created world of ruins. Such subjectivity wants to give form to everything, and precisely for this reason succeeds only in mirroring a segment of the world."* from Georg Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel*, translated by Anna Bostock, London: Merlin Press 1971, p. 53.

quiem that catered for modern religious sensibilities Brahms had to transcend convention.

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Adorno furthermore contests that the mimetic language of artworks provides the perfect medium to express most directly what is, in terms of a reified reality, the illusion of freedom. Thus, *der Bruch zwischen Ich und Formen* is "the manifestation of alienation in music and an aspect of the fragmentation of modern life".<sup>8</sup> True artworks, he maintains, delineate the historical and social moment in which they are produced. They tell the truth about our alienated predicament in the world, but do so indirectly, in cipher form:

*"The historical moment is constitutive of art works. Authentic ones give themselves over completely to the material substance of their historical period, rejecting the pretence of timelessness. Unbeknown to themselves, they represent the historiography of their times, which is why they are related to knowledge. Historicism grossly falsifies this historical substance of art by seeking to reduce art to history conceived as an extraneous datum."*<sup>9</sup>

Bourgeois opposition to monarchic hegemony dominated the epoch in which the Requiem was composed. With defeats in both the Franco-Austrian War of 1859 and the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, Emperor Franz Joseph needed to consolidate his crumbling empire in Central and Eastern Europe. To this end, he initiated a series of policy changes, which eventually culminated in the *Ausgleich* (Compromise) of 1867, an agreement that established a Dual Monarchy between Austria and Hungary. These changes appeased the liberals, while at the same time providing the Habsburg rulers with a temporarily more stable empire. The liberal voice was thus incidentally strengthened. Carl Schorske points out "*the chastened liberals came to power and established a constitutional regime in the 1860s almost by default. Not by their own internal strength, but the defeats of the old order at the hands of foreign enemies brought the liberals to the helm of the state*".<sup>10</sup> Petitions for liberal reform came from across the empire. For example, in a detailed memorandum entitled *Die Aufgaben Österreichs* (The Tasks of Austria), Karl von Bruck, importuned the Emperor to break down "*the*

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<sup>8</sup> Paddison, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by C. Lenhardt, London: Routledge & Keegan 1984, p. 261.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: politics and culture*, New York: Vintage Books 1981, p.5.

*obstacles, which hamper the spiritual, confessional, social and political development of the Monarchy*".<sup>11</sup> He stressed that "*religious freedom and equality of rights must be granted to the Protestant and Greek Churches, and there should be a Constitution, based on 'sound municipal and communal institutions', but also allowing for Landtage [state parliament] and a central organ in the form of a re-organized and enlarged Reichsrat [imperial council]*".<sup>12</sup> Due to its monarchic affiliations, the Roman Catholic Church was also targeted for emasculation in the liberalists' bid to disestablish the autocratic regime. Finally, in February 1861, Franz Joseph granted a new constitution and allowed for the radical alteration of the *Reichsrat*.

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Significantly, a tide of nationalism swept across Europe during this period. As minority nationalities campaigned for independence, the response from Franz Joseph was always repression. In 1863, the emperor called a meeting of the German princes to discuss the future of the German Confederation, a union of German states inaugurated at the Congress of Vienna to replace the old Holy Roman Empire that had been destroyed during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. Franz Joseph had prepared a plan for the reform of the Confederation's Constitution, a plan that would guarantee Austrian pre-eminence. This meeting exposed the impossibility of any consolidation of the Confederation without the co-operation of Prussia. Bismarck had long since decided that the matter could only be settled by the exclusion of Austria altogether, and that the means to this end were not discussion, but "*Blut und Eisen*" (blood and iron). Franz Josef's aspirations of Austrian hegemony were also deflated by the developments of the tangled Schleswig-Holstein Question, whereby Schleswig and the duchy of Lauenburg were placed under Prussian administration and Holstein under Austrian control. The dual administration led to such friction that it caused the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, which ended with a swift (7 weeks) Prussian victory; Schleswig, Holstein, and Lauenburg were annexed to Prussia and became the province of Schleswig-Holstein.<sup>13</sup>

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Brahms' Requiem metaphorically engages with these historical circumstances in a number of ways. His use of a Lutheran German text links it directly to the musical

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790-1918*, 1st edition reprinted with corrections, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1971, p.497.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> For concise information on this period see Jean-Paul Bled's *Franz Joseph*, translated by Teresa Bridgeman, Oxford UK & Cambridge, Massachusetts USA: Basil Blackwell Ltd. 1992, pp. 127-139.

model of the bourgeois subject as Adorno construed it.<sup>14</sup> (A copy of this text is provided in appendix 1) More specifically, it expresses the uneasy relationship between the Catholic monarchy and bourgeoisie.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the traditional Latin Requiem, which concerns the retributive justice of the Almighty awaiting the sinner on Judgement Day, this work presents death as a redeemer bringing peace to the dead and comfort to the bereaved. Brahms conspicuously avoids mentioning judgement, vengeance and - above all - the sacrifice of Christ for human sin. Briefly, the first three movements concern the blessedness of the mourners and the ephemerality of life; the middle movements celebrate the prospect of heavenly reward; and the final movement promises eternal rest after life's labours. Due to the precise selection and juxtaposition of the Biblical quotations, the Christian implication of the text is considerably weakened. In effect, the Requiem is entirely bereft of dogmatic religiosity. Though the texts are Lutheran in origin, a universality of experience is engendered that ultimately oversteps the limits of organised religion. The work is consequently entirely in tune with the religious climate of Austria during this period: the Roman Catholic Church remained the strongest and most important church in Europe, (particularly in Hapsburgian Vienna), however there was a sharp decline in religious faith in the aftermath of the Enlightenment.<sup>16</sup> Finally, it is appropriate to mention that, in the nineteenth century, there was a strong relationship between the rise of nationalism and post-Enlightenment idealism. Nineteenth century nationalism was an inherently modernising and liberalising force driven by the ideal that a legitimate state be based on a 'people' rather than a dynasty, God, or imperial domination. Through Adorno's lens, a Requiem based on the Latin text of circa 1570 would seem utterly incongruous with this historical moment.

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Although the *German Requiem* repudiates wholly the textual structure of the Latin Requiem, it nevertheless exhibits musical elements, which tend to feature in this genre. In essence, the musical material may be summarised as an integration of both secular and sacred elements. In terms of Adorno's aesthetic theory, the reason for this fusion lies in the work's embodiment of its own historical context. It may be argued that

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<sup>14</sup> For a general view of Adorno's philosophy of musical history see Max Paddison's *Adorno's Aesthetics on Music* (referenced above).

<sup>15</sup> Although Brahms was an agnostic, his use of a Lutheran text may be regarded as an indication that his perspective of the political circumstances in Vienna is that of a north German living in Vienna. For further information on Brahms' religion see Jan Swafford's *Johannes Brahms, A Biography*, London: Papermac 1997, pp. 317-318.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Rich, *The Age of Nationalism & Reforms, 1850-1890*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York, London: Norton & Co. 1977, p. 27.

Brahms plays out the broken promises of the Enlightenment period in a dialectic of history in which the bourgeois subject realises its alienated condition in society and its inferiority in the face of the monarchy and eventually resigns to accept his fate. Sacred elements in the musical material may be equated with the monarchy, while secular elements may be equated with bourgeois ambitions of freedom. In other words, what this work represents is the opposition of bourgeois liberalism and the Old Order. I hope to demonstrate that in order to create an authentic and meaningful artwork, appropriate to the religious climate of his age, Brahms had to register within the musical material the bourgeois subject's increasing awareness of its predicament.

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The whole structure of the Requiem may be regarded as playing out the dialectic of *sein und werden* (being and becoming). *Sein* refers to Pure Being, that which is, and *werden* refers to Becoming, that dynamic process of striving to actualise potential. These concepts hark back to the Hegelian notion of progress towards Spirit (*Geist*).<sup>17</sup> For our purpose, the notion of *sein* will refer to the autocratic regime that existed at the time, while the notion of *werden* will refer to the bourgeois subjects' efforts towards freedom. By taking into consideration the sacred and secular elements of the individual movements and then placing them in relation to the structure as a whole, this process will become clear.

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The dichotomy of the sacred and secular is immediately apparent in the opening of the first movement. Appropriate to the tone of the opening of many Requiem masses, the first movement begins with a sombre orchestral introduction. Thereafter, the choir enters (m. 15) in a *sostenuto* style, which differs from that of the Lutheran chorale only by virtue of the fact that the orchestra is employed to join the phrases, point the rhythm and occasionally to dialogue with the choir.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in a discussion with the conductor Siegfried Ochs, Brahms acknowledged the presence of a well-known chorale in the first bars of the work and in the second movement.<sup>19</sup> The *a cappella* part of this section (mm. 19-27) with its smooth extension, predominance of root position chords and de-

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<sup>17</sup> For a general introduction to Hegel's philosophy see for example Walter Terence Stace's *The philosophy of Hegel: a systematic exposition*, New York: Dover Publications, 1955.

<sup>18</sup> J.S. Bach often employed this style in his Passions.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Musgrave, *Brahms: A German Requiem*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.26. It is generally accepted that the chorale in question is 'Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten', although some have questioned its identity, most notably Christopher Reynolds, who proposes the chorale 'Freu dich sehr, O meine Seele' as a plausible alternative - as noted in Daniel Beller-Mc Kenna's *The scope and significance of the choral music in The Cambridge Companion to Brahms* edited by Michael Musgrave, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999.



the historiography of their times,<sup>20</sup> then this motive has a monarchic implication. Its restrained character and pedal entrenchment qualify its categorisation on the *sein* side of the previously discussed *sein/werden* dialectic. Motive Y occurs at the start of the middle section, which is, as we have noted, more emotive in expression. In terms of Adorno's philosophy, it personifies the bourgeois subject striving towards freedom, as it rises to a poignant tutti before ceding to the F pedal and motive X. Importantly, in accordance with the hegemony of the monarchy, motive X is by far the more prevalent force.

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An F-pedal also features prominently in movement 2. Brahms amplifies the bourgeois voice by basing the opening march, which, "*looks towards Mahler in its expressionistic intensity*",<sup>21</sup> on the previously employed Lutheran chorale melody. Use of this chorale throughout the work is outlined in example 2 extrapolated from Musgrave's *Brahms: A German Requiem* (pp.27-28).

Chorale [in F minor]



Opening of Movement 1



Movement 2, bb. 53-58



Movement 6, bb. 128-133



*transposed*

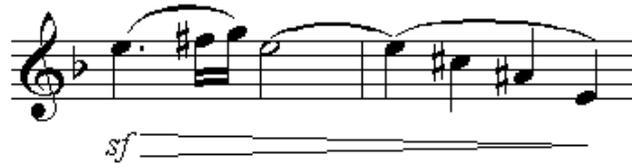
<sup>20</sup> I refer to the second Adornian quotation on page 2.

<sup>21</sup> Musgrave, p. 43.

Movement 6, bb. 34-40



*Agitato* figure from movement 3 (bb. 39-40)



**Example 3**

Its dotted rhythm and downward sweep add to the operatic effect. While this number may be the least sacred thus far, *Ach wie gar nichts* is nevertheless set to a prayerful melody against varied contrapuntal motion. As with the previous movement, the significance of the concluding fugal section will be explicated at a later stage.

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Movements 4 and 5 stand apart from the stylistic norms established in the first three movements and revisited in movements 6-7. For the opening of movement 4 (*Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen*), Brahms employs a gentle minuet-like intermezzo in triple time. The hypnotic effect of the minuet-rhythm and the predominance of female voices depict the notion of eternal bliss. Because the development section is contrapuntal – in other words it is non-hypnotic, and thus earthly – it can be argued that Brahms lends plausibility to the prospect of the individual entering bliss. This mood is carried through to the fifth movement, wherein the soprano sings an aria-like, slow and highly pitched melismatic line. The orchestral prelude to this number, and its preparation for the solo entry, are also aria-like in style. The final cadence, "*almost impressionistic in the way its instrumental voices slowly unfold and coalesce with string harmonics on the final chord*",<sup>23</sup> lends well to the notion of paradisiacal peace. In conclusion, there are no overtly sacred elements in these numbers. The focus is instead on the prospect of heavenly bliss.

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This tone is broken in the following numbers, which hark back to the style of the movements 1-3. Indeed, the opening choral march in movement 6 (*Denn wir haben hier keine bleibende Statt*) resembles the choral version of *Herr lehre doch mich* in movement 3. The baritone enters in m. 28 with *Siehe, ich sage euch ein Geheimnis*. Thereafter, he reveals his prophecy echoed almost on a monotone by the chorus. With the abrupt end of the text *Wir werden aber alle verwandelt werden...in einem Augen-*

<sup>23</sup> Musgrave, p. 44.

*blick*, the soloist sings in a more dramatic recitative style, answered by a potent *zu der Zeit der letzten Posaune* sung by the choir. The *Sturm und Drang* elements at this point - rushing semi-quavers and rapidly changing dynamics – adumbrate the bourgeois subject’s discontentment. The climax arrives in the ensuing *vivace*. For the text *Tod, wo ist dein Stachel, Hölle wo ist dein Sieg*, Brahms employs a triple time march similar to that of the second movement. As apparent in example 2, the Lutheran chorale also features in this movement. Again the conclusion is a fugue, a point we will return to in the final summation.

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To date, the following has been established: The musical material of movements 1-3 consists of both sacred and secular elements. Movement 1 contains Lutheran chorale-like sections, *stile antico* passages and expressive means, popular in the nineteenth century. In adopting Adorno’s critical stance, the predominance of motive X and the F pedal underpinning this movement imply the hegemony of the monarchy. Movements 2-3 are successively less sacred in their musical constitution. Therefore, through Adorno’s philosophical lens, they are redolent of the advance of the bourgeoisie towards liberation in the period following the 1859 Franco-Austrian war. The fact that ‘monarchic’ elements still appear in these numbers, can be regarded as indicative of that fact that Franz Joseph’s reign was, nevertheless, very much secure. Movements 4-5, being bereft of any truly sacred idiom except the biblical text, are almost parenthetical to the structure as a whole. As a result, we may consider them to be projections of the Romantic ideal of bourgeois freedom. In the sixth movement, the musical ideas established in movements 1-3 are reworked and complemented. Once again, features that are demonstrably non-Catholic (or in terms of Adorno’s aesthetics, non-monarchic) predominate.

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Before discussing the final movement, some account is needed of what Franz Grasberger has dubbed the ‘*Selig*’ motive – a thematic feature that appears in the upper part of the first choral entry of the first movement of the work to the words ‘*Selig sind*’, mm. 15-17.<sup>24</sup> This figure is repeated and extended for the whole line of *Selig sind, die da Leid tragen* before being inverted in the second paragraph of text, mm. 29-30. Example 4, again taken from Musgrave’s *Brahms: A German Requiem* (p. 25), lists some appearances of this motive throughout the work.

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<sup>24</sup> Franz Grasberger, *Johannes Brahms: Variationen um sein Wesen*, Wien 1952.

a1) Movement I, 'Selig' Motive bb. 15-17

Se - lig sind

a2) Movement 1, bb. 19-22

Se - lig sind, die da Leid tra - gen

a3) Movement I, bb.29-30

Se - lig sind

b1) Movement VII, bb. 144-146

[tenor]

Se - lig sind, die da Leid tra - gen

b2) Movement VII, bb. 2-5

Se - lig sind, die da Leid tra - gen

c1) Movement III, bbb. 173

Movement II, bb. 79-80

Se - lig sind, die da Leid tra - gen

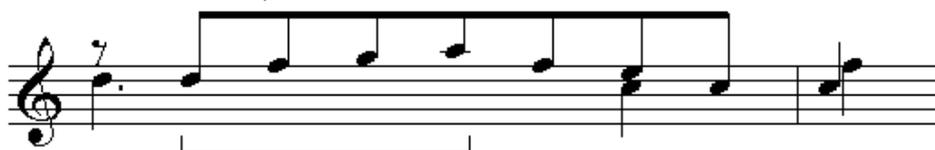
c2) Movement IV, bb. 1-8

Se - lig sind, die da Leid tra - gen

d1) Movement VI, bb. 208-210



Movement V, bb. 4-5



d2) Movement VII, bb. 152-154



#### Example 4

As noted in this analysis, *"the original and inverted shapes of the motive are so conspicuous within the main themes of the work that the use of the 'Selig' motive must be viewed as an intended means of unity"*.<sup>25</sup> In terms of Adorno's aesthetics, the *Selig* motive may be seen to function not merely as a unifying device but also as a continual reminder of sovereign authority. This association can be suggested on account of the motive's initial character and position within the score; as the instrumental music bows out, it rises with quiet poise over the solemn F-pedal sung by the basses (mm.15-17).

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Movement 7 alludes to the first movement as regards both thematic and harmonic content. Designated '*Feierlich*' (in ceremonial style), it conveys more than any of the other numbers in the work *"the sense of a 'solemn ceremony' filling the spaces of a great ecclesiastical building"*.<sup>26</sup> This effect arises from the structural breadth of the movement. After a one-measure prelude, marked by the familiar F-pedal, a broad musical exposition ensues in which two versions of the *Selig* figure appear and references to the coda of the first number are made. The choir follows with *Ja der Geist spricht, daß sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit*, accompanied by trombone and horn chorus. Musgrave remarks:

<sup>25</sup> Musgrave, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

*"This is the most overtly archaic moment in the work, recalling seventeenth-century music for choir and brass such as that in Schütz's Symphoniae Sacrae. Yet archaism is only one side of the stylistic extremes which give it such striking and cumulative effect, for the second phrase of the second line 'daß sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit' is given the greatest expressive contrast within any one movement."<sup>27</sup>*

Thereafter, the coda, with relatively little adjustment, recapitulates the entire reprise of the first movement. Any tonal uncertainty is dispelled with the final words of text – *Selig sind die Toten, die in dem Herrn sterben*, which are firmly rooted in the tonic. Thus, we may conclude that, just as the first movement can be regarded as an attestation of the enduring power of the Habsburg Empire, so too can the final movement. Because however a large part of middle section of this movement asserts the harmony of the major mediant (see diagram 1), a tonal realm far removed from the tonic key, the musical material depicts the monarchy's much altered condition.

Diagram 1: Harmonic outline of movement 7

Bars:	1	34	40	47	76	88	102	132	147
Key F:	I	V	III	V of III mod.	V of III mod.	III	I	bVII mod.	I

mod. = modulating passage

As we have seen, Franz Joseph found it necessary to consolidate his power by initiating a series of policy changes. In general, however, movement 7 can be construed as an expression of the individual's inexorable submission to social order and collective morality in the aftermath of the failure of the efforts of post-Enlightenment rationalism to restore a form of totality embodying Enlightenment concepts of subjective freedom.

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Adorno believes that the dialectical tensions within the musical work, and, furthermore those, which exist between composer and musical material, exhibit the contradictions of a fragmented and ruptured society. As Max Paddison explains

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

*"The dialectic [of musical material] is that between history and nature, consciousness and material, while at the most abstract level – that of German Idealist philosophy – it is that between Subject and Object. In music, the locus of this mediation of opposites is the musical material, as the historical dialectic of composer and material, seen from the perspective of the avant-garde. The problem is that of form – essentially, how to create 'integrated' works out of a culturally disintegrating material. The context is that of society dominated by the exchange of commodities. The 'progress' of the musical material is thus seen as the progress of the 'historical Subject' (i.e. the bourgeois individual) becoming increasingly conscious of its predicament."<sup>28</sup>*

In Brahms' Requiem, the 'historical' Subject's increasing awareness of his own alienated condition is played out most strongly in the dialectical tensions that exist between the contrapuntal endings of the second, third and sixth movements. Adorno has described the use of fugue as "the decomposition of the given thematic material through subjective reflection on the motivic work contained therein".<sup>29</sup> In Hegelian terms, that is "a dialectical process of the negation of the 'objectively given', as Sein, and its reconstitution through the Subject, as Werden".<sup>30</sup> In view of this, the contrapuntal endings of the second, third and sixth movements may be interpreted as massive gestures on the side of freedom against the oppression of society, or, in similar terms, the bourgeois subject's most ardent attempts to transcend the fate of static being (*sein*) in a reified world.

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Movement 2 is quasi-fugal in character. The basses lead with a joyful subject (*Die Erlöseten des Herrn*) answered tonally by the rest of the choir. Antiphonal exclamations of *Freude und Wonne*, however, cut short the 'fugal' exposition. Thereafter, the first subject returns - the *Freude* passage now tending towards the tonic. The movement concludes with a coda, which conflates the *Freude* exclamations and the *die Erlöseten des Herrn* subject in free imitation. In sum, the first attempts towards fugue are made in this number or, in our scheme a huge step in the dynamic process of *Becoming* (*werden*) is taken. The subject makes a more ambitious gesture in his quest for autonomy in the following number. Though extremely short, the conclusion of movement 3

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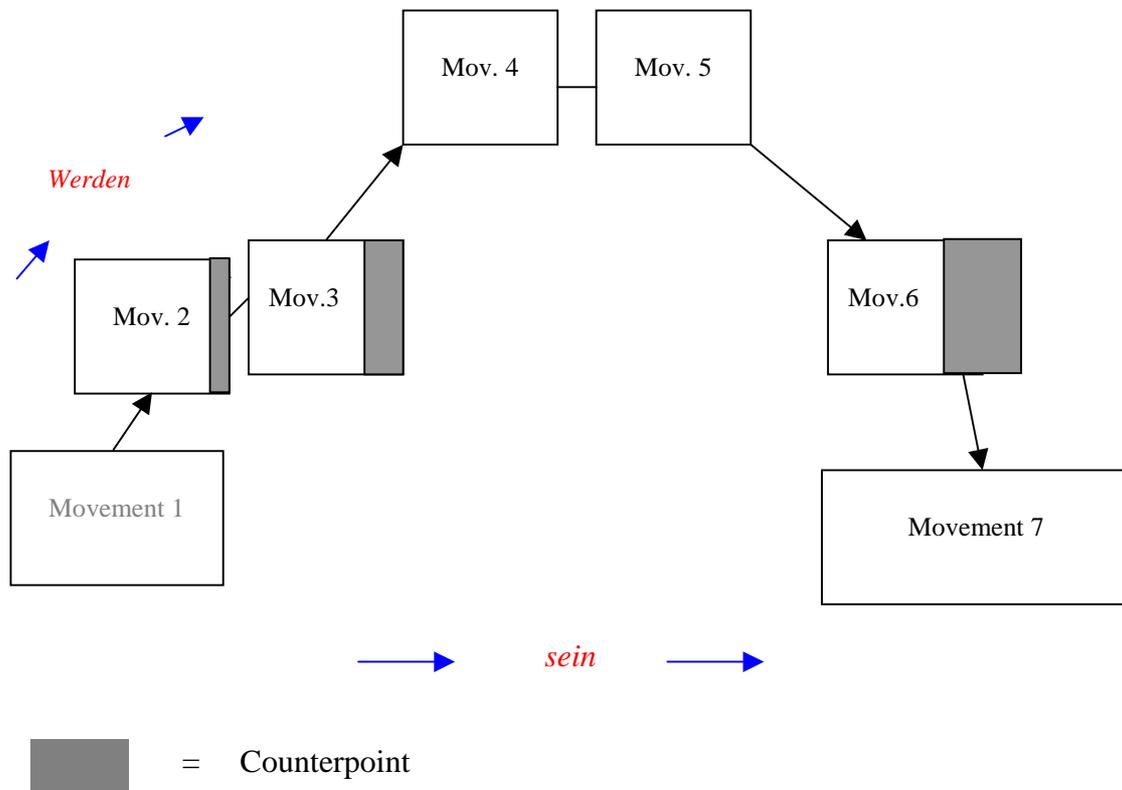
<sup>28</sup> Paddison, pp.119-120.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p.228.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

adheres to a full-blown fugal structure. Because, however, this section is underpinned by a pedal point, a device that we have already equated with monarchic hegemony in movement 1, his attempts to transcend static *Being (sein)* fall short. As we have seen, movements 4 and 5 may be regarded as projections of utopian bliss. The sixth movement, which finally realises the tendency towards fugue, does not realise these ideals. Although it is entirely true to fugal traditions and bereft of any underlying harmonic shackles, it does not represent the Hegelian progress of ‘spirit’ (*Geist*) towards freedom. This is because, in effect, the entire section participates in a prolongation of the dominant (C major) for the return of the material of the opening movement in the tonic key. In other words, it participates in a perfect cadence, which asserts the enduring might of the monarchy in the final movement despite its efforts to freedom by way of melodic flight. Brahms makes no attempt to reconcile the subject with the object (monarchy/society) because gestures on the side of freedom against enslavement to determinism are futile in light of the collective morality to which individuals in society must abide. A synopsis of these concepts is provided in the following diagram:

Diagram 2:



In short, the musical material illustrates that rather than ‘collapsing into neurosis and despair’ the subject acknowledges his alienated status in society and resigns to accept his fate.<sup>31</sup> In an article about Schoenberg, Adorno once wrote:

*"The idea of freedom is blocked in his music by the desperate need to submit to a heteronomous authority, a need that arises because the effort to transcend mere individuality and reach objectivity is futile."<sup>32</sup>*

This statement also applies to the *German Requiem*. Indeed the musical material of this work becomes the stage upon which this ‘truth’ is acted out.

Through the filter of Adorno’s aesthetics, it has been demonstrated that the dialectical tensions within this work can be regarded as an expression of the tense relationship between the Catholic establishment and bourgeois liberalism that defined the work’s context. If we accept Adorno’s contention, that authentic artworks are ‘the unconscious historiography of their epoch’,<sup>33</sup> then to compose a Requiem in the old tradition in the aftermath of the Enlightenment would result in a reified and meaningless product. Adorno stresses *"we cannot rely on genres but have to attack them in order to bring out their strength and possible importance"*.<sup>34</sup> Thus, by distorting the Requiem genre, Brahms responds authentically to the material given by tradition. As a final point, it is interesting to refer to Adorno’s essay *Arnold Schoenberg 1874-1951*, in which Adorno argues that Schoenberg’s unfinished oratorio ‘Die Jakobsleiter’ (1917-22) could not be completed, because, in the climate of early twentieth century culture, there existed no authentic possibility for this genre:

*"The literary inadequacy [of the oratorio’s text] discloses the impossibility of the object itself, the incongruity of a religious choral work in the midst of late capitalist society, of the aesthetic figure of totality. The whole, as a positive entity, cannot be antithetically extracted from an estranged and splintered reality by means of the will and power of the individual; if it is not to degenerate into de-*

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<sup>31</sup> Cf footnote 5.

<sup>32</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Arnold Schoenberg, 1874-1951*, in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O’Connor, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2000, p. 296.

<sup>33</sup> I refer again to the second Adornian quotation of page 2.

<sup>34</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 288.

*ception and ideology, it must assume the form of negation...The subject knows itself to be objective, removed from the contingency of mere existence, yet this knowledge, which is true, is, at the same time, also untrue. The objectivity that inheres in the subject is barred from reconciliation with a state of things which negates that objective substance precisely by aiming at full reconciliation with it, and yet which that objectivity must nevertheless become of it is to be saved from the impotence of mere 'being-for-itself.'*<sup>35</sup>

Had Brahms clung blindly to tradition, the same fate might have befallen his *German Requiem*.

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<sup>35</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Arnold Schoenberg, 1874-1951*, p.296.

## Appendix: Text of *Ein deutsches Requiem*

<p>I</p> <p>Selig sind, die da Leid tragen; denn sie sollen getröstet werden.</p> <p>Die mit Tränen säen, werden mit Freuden ernten. Sie gehen hin und weinen und tragen edlen Samen und kommen mit Freuden und bringen ihre Garben.</p>	<p>Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. (<i>Matthew 5:4</i>)</p> <p>They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.</p> <p>He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.</p> <p>(<i>Psalms 126:5-6</i>)</p>
<p>II</p> <p>Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras und alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen wie des Grases Blumen. Das Gras ist verdorret und die Blume abgefallen.</p> <p>So seid nun geduldig, lieben Brüder, bis auf die Zukunft des Herrn. Siehe, ein Ackermann wartet auf die köstliche Frucht der Erde und ist geduldig darüber, bis er empfahe den Morgenregen und Abendregen.</p> <p>Aber des Herrn Wort bleibet in Ewigkeit.</p> <p>Die Erlöseten des Herrn werden wiederkommen, und gen Zion kommen mit Jauchzen; Freude, ewige Freude wird über ihrem Haupte sein; Freude und Wonne werden sie ergreifen und Schmerz und Seufzen wird weg müssen.</p>	<p>For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.</p> <p>(<i>I Peter 1:24</i>)</p> <p>Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.</p> <p>(<i>James 5:7</i>)</p> <p>But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.</p> <p>(<i>I Peter 1:25</i>)</p> <p>And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (<i>Isaiah 35:10</i>)</p>
<p>III</p> <p>Herr, lehre doch mich, daß ein Ende mit mir haben muß, und mein Leben ein Ziel hat und ich davon muß.</p>	<p>Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.</p>

<p>Siehe, meine Tage sind einer Hand breit vor dir, und mein Leben ist wie nichts vor dir. Ach, wie gar nichts sind alle Menschen, die doch so sicher leben.</p> <p>Sie gehen daher wie ein Schemen, und machen ihnen viel vergebliche Unruhe; sie sammeln und wissen nicht wer es kriegen wird.</p> <p>Nun, Herr, wes soll ich mich trösten? Ich hoffe auf dich.</p> <p>Der Gerechten Seelen sind in Gottes Hand und keine Qual rühret sie an.</p>	<p>Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreath; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.</p> <p>Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.</p> <p>And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee. (<i>Psalms 39:5-8</i>)</p> <p>But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. (<i>Wisdom 3:1</i>)</p>
<p>IV</p> <p>Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen, Herr Zebaoth! Meine Seele verlanget und sehnet sich nach den Vorhöfen des Herrn; mein Leib und Seele freuen sich in dem lebendigen Gott.</p> <p>Wohl denen, die in deinem Hause wohnen, die loben dich immerdar.</p>	<p>How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!</p> <p>My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.</p> <p>Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising Thee. (<i>Psalms 84:2-3, 5</i>)</p>
<p>V</p> <p>Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit; aber ich will euch wiedersehen, und euer Herz soll sich freuen, und eure Freude soll niemand von euch nehmen.</p> <p>Sehet mich an; ich habe eine kleine Zeit Mühe und Arbeit gehabt, und habe großen Trost gefunden.</p> <p>Ich will euch trösten, wie einen seine Mutter tröstet.</p>	<p>And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. (<i>John 16:22</i>)</p> <p>Behold with your eyes, how that I laboured but a little, and found for myself much rest. (<i>Ecclesiasticus 51:35</i>)</p> <p>As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you. (<i>Isaiah 66:13</i>)</p>
<p>VI</p> <p>Denn wir haben hie keine bleibende Statt, sondern die zukünftige suchen wir.</p> <p>Siehe, ich sage euch ein Geheimnis: Wir werden nicht</p>	<p>For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. (<i>Hebrews 13:14</i>)</p> <p>Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all</p>

<p>alle entschlafen, wir werden aber alle verwandelt werden;</p> <p>und dasselbige plötzlich, in einem Augenblick, zu der Zeit der letzten Posaune. Denn es wird die Posaune schallen, und die Toten werden auferstehen unverweslich, und wir werden verwandelt werden.</p> <p>Dann wird erfüllet werden das Wort, das geschrieben steht: Der Tod ist verschlungen in den Sieg. Tod, wo ist dein Stachel? Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg?</p> <p>Herr, du bist würdig zu nehmen Preis und Ehre und Kraft; denn du hast alle Dinge erschaffen und durch deinen Willen haben sie das Wesen und sind geschaffen.</p>	<p>sleep, but we shall all be changed,</p> <p>In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.</p> <p>Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (<i>I Corinthians 15:51-55</i>)</p> <p>Thou are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou has created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (<i>Revelation 4:11</i>)</p>
<p>VII</p> <p>Selig sind die Toten, die in dem Herrn sterben, von nun an. Ja der Geist spricht, daß sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit; denn ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach.</p>	<p>Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. (<i>Revelation 14:13</i>)</p>