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Permalink

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Publication Date

2023-12-14

Peer reviewed

'Are you dead, like us?' The Liminal Status of the Undead in the Music of Ligeti

AMY BAUER

Ligeti's oeuvre contains two great representations of death: the *Requiem* and *Le Grand Macabre*. But these are no ordinary essays on mortality. Their musical substance and themes are often allied to the grotesque as a trope, in which the ugly and deformed appear as characters and their actions in the opera, or musical techniques pushed beyond acceptable limits in the *Requiem* and other works. In taking the title of our collection at face value, I wish to show how the grotesque in such readings is but a mask for a peculiar relationship with death found throughout Ligeti's work: a sign of the undead, that life substance which persists beyond life, in defiance of social and symbolic norms. In this paper I will identify how – in both texted and instrumental works – Ligeti adopts narrative and musical positions that could be called grotesque, with reference to Julie Brown and Esti Sheinberg's application of the grotesque to music by Bartók and Shostakovich. [1] These grotesque elements – as a negation of narrative laws and musical conventions – were already implicit within those conventions, retroactively inscribed as their vulgar support. Hence the grotesque has the power, in the right circumstances, to mediate the threshold between two deaths: the literal and

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[1] Julie Brown, *Bartók and the Grotesque* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2007) and Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich – A Theory of Musical Incongruence* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2000).

the symbolic, a libidinal conflict raised to the status of a method in *Le Grand Macabre* but implicit in many other works as well.

I first outline some of the historical and critical comments on the grotesque as it relates to music, with a focus on a subset of the modernist grotesque: the notion of a character or subject arrested in a liminal state between life and death. Julie Brown's *Bartók and the Grotesque* opens with a study of the historical roots and hermeneutic meaning of the trope. She looks beyond the simply bizarre or vulgar to chart the grotesque as it relates to a nineteenth-century tradition associated with the modern, linguistic hybridity and the body. The paradoxical nature of the grotesque reveals the complexity of discursively situated meanings in Bartók that relate directly to his east European roots. Similarly, Esti Sheinberg describes a particularly Russian expression of the grotesque in the music of Shostakovich, although she ties it, more universally, to irony. Following Bakhtin, Sheinberg portrays the grotesque as a hybrid, unresolvable form of irony that accumulates meaning in a carnivalesque surplus of eternal affirmation.

Yet the semiotics of the grotesque in Sheinberg and Brown do not differentiate between mere symbolic excess and that form of the grotesque that challenges our hermeneutic horizon. That difference, I argue, is the gap between a simple ironic reference to folk music in, say, Bartók's third quartet, and Bluebeard's weeping and sighing Castle or the (truly) *Miraculous Mandarin* as uncanny presences which establish a space for meaning beyond natural law and the immutable laws of cause and effect. Bartók's enigmatic Mandarin defies biological death, but is also external to the symbolic proper. He exists outside the natural order and human culture until that point when he gives into his desire, accepting his symbolic mandate as subject as he dies on the physical plane.[2]

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[2] See Brown, *Bartók and the Grotesque*, 86–131.

Ligeti's music is replete with musical narratives and characters that, like the Mandarin, occupy a literal state between two deaths. In a psychoanalytic sense, they depict the threshold between loss of life in the symbolic and biological death. Their discursive context is sketched by musical signs that reference the inert and mechanical, yet pulsate with an uncanny sense of life. The *meccanico* texture that shifts tempo or the ostinato brought up short eschew mindless repetition, even as they reject the formal, developmental and programmatic tropes that, as Adorno argued, connote organic subjectivity in absolute music.[3] In this chapter I will revisit both the *Requiem* and *Le Grand Macabre*, as well as texted and instrumental works that exemplify the eerie connotations and soundscapes – including those identified commonly with the Gothic – that appear throughout Ligeti's oeuvre.
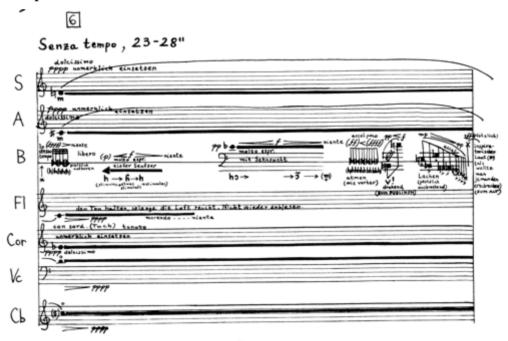
Behind the comic surface of *Aventures*

There are many points during the famous avant-garde music theatre works *Aventures* (1962) and *Nouvelles Aventures* (1962–65) where it appears that the various characters performed by the three singers die and come back to life. As I've argued elsewhere, in the largely iconic sound world of *Aventures*, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny; extreme utterances take on added symbolic weight within an absurd, hyper-expressive narrative.[4] In *Aventures* there are the first and third *senza tempo* sections: at b. 6 where the baritone appears to die and resurrect, and at b. 47, where he collapses lifelessly to the floor before springing to life again (Examples 1a and 1b).

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[3] Examples of this explicitly linked to modernism are found in Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle', in *Gesammelte Schriften* 16, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 492–540.

[4] Amy Bauer, *Ligeti's Laments: Nostalgia, Exoticism and the Absolute* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 46–55.

The sound of spectral voices pervades these passages, both under-
(given the lack of semantic meaning) and over- (given the exaggerated
articulations) signifying the shock and surprise of the singer's actions. But of
course this interpretation of the non-semantic text relies on Ligeti's libretto,
in which demonic masks and doppelgängers complement the baritone's
death and regeneration.[5] Although its publication post-dated that of the score,
Maria Kostakeva and Konstantino Kakavelakis are but two of those scholars
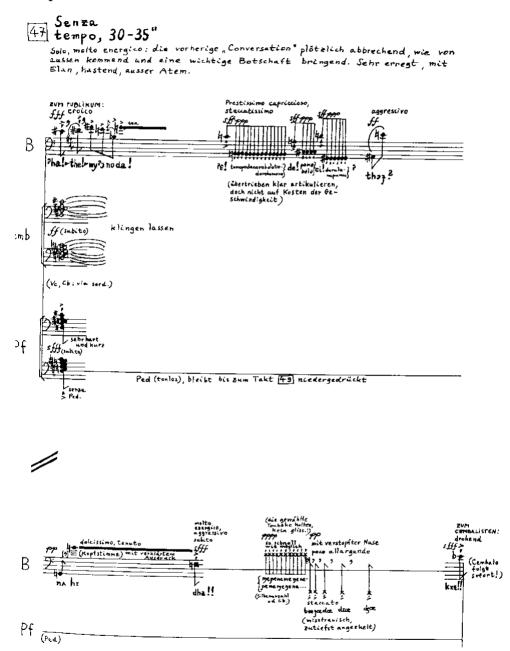who privilege the libretto their interpretation of *Aventures*' entwined
narratives.[6]

Example 1a. *Aventures*, b. 6

[5] György Ligeti, *Aventures & Nouvelles Aventures*, Libretto/Playbook (Frankfurt: C.F. Peters, 1967).

[6] Analyses of *Aventures* by Kostakeva and Kakavelakis employ the libretto as a fixed narrative that frames the score; Maria Kostakeva, *Die imaginäre Gattung: über das musiktheatralische Werk G. Ligetis* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996) (see especially 14–18 and 109), and Konstantinos Kakavelakis, *György Ligetis Aventures & Nouvelles Aventures* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001).

Example 1b. *Aventures*, b. 47

The central, albeit non-speaking role in Ligeti's libretto is played by that most iconic undead figure of Jewish folklore, the golem. The golem first appears in b. 38; '2 to 3 times larger than a human', with a body all out of proportion with the human and 'a dreamy state of mind'.[7] Rachel Beckles Willson decries the lack of mystical symbolism in Ligeti's golem; asking 'Where is the stuff of legend for us to contextualise, historicise and theorise?'[8]

Respectfully, this observation misses entirely the role of the golem in *Aventures*, and the trope of the undead in Ligeti's work. Muteness and inscrutability are the golem's central traits, the key to its power and overwhelming effect on those assembled. Comically, it is some time before the singers and mimes even notice the static figure. Yet their recognition triggers the death of an Olympic runner, and the baritone's paroxysm. The undead golem exists outside the sonic drama of *Aventures,* as the visitation of a terror beyond speech that fuels the furious and hysterical crises that erupt until the alto's closing lament. Ligeti understood both *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* as multileveled, but always maintained that at base, they should carry an overtone of existential dread. As Ligeti said of *Aventures*, 'I believe that the more you listen to this work the less funny it becomes. Behind the comic surface is something deadly serious, or "eerie".'[9]

The *lexicon satyrica* of *Le Grand Macabre*

The opera *Le Grand Macabre* (1974–77; rev. 1996) takes place entirely, I would argue, in a world of the undead; its recursive structure is largely the reveal of

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[7] György Ligeti, 'Über Szenische Möglichkeiten *Aventures'*, lecture delivered at the Darmstadt Festival, 27 August 1966, transcribed in Joanna Ching-Yun Lee, 'György Ligeti's *Aventures* and *Nouvelle Aventures*: A Documentary History', Ph.D. diss. (Columbia University, 1993), 458.

[8] Rachel Beckles Willson, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 97.

[9] György Ligeti, 'Über Szenische Möglichkeiten *Aventures*', in Lee, 'György Ligeti's *Aventures* and *Nouvelle Aventures*: A Documentary History', 451.

that fact as the more explicitly parodic first act gives way to a second that strips away all pretence of 'mystical symbolism' or 'legend'. As the supposed terror from beyond that disrupts the crude pastoral charms of Breughelland, the demonic Nekrotzar is an undead figure *par excellence*, whose visit is meant to herald death and destruction to all. Yet Nekrotzar is the only figure in the opera to actually die, while every character he kills returns to life in the final scene.

Throughout the opera, musical signifiers of a seething life that won't die tip off the careful listener to this structural inversion. Those textures dubbed 'pattern-*meccanico*' – independent lines constructed from an ordered group of rapidly-repeated pitches – made their appearance at the tail end of *Apparitions* and in the music theatre works, although it can be argued that they date back to student works Ligeti constructed from polyrhythmic ostinati. [10] In modernist works the appearance of such patterns as straightforward ostinati with little or no variation often connote a mechanical impulse devoid of life. Yet in the form of 'Les Horloges Démoniaque', first named in the second movement of *Nouvelles Aventures*, such a texture is but quasi-*meccanico*; it pulsates with a flickering agency that captures that sense of the uncanny exhibited by those automatons of the Enlightenment that went beyond their stated function, such as Jacquet-Drozes' harpsichordist whose breast heaved along with her performance, or Vaucanson's mechanical duck that defecated.[11]

Nekrotzar first appears with such figuration (Example 2), accompanied by a chorus of undead spirits (Examples 3a and 3b). Constantin Floros identifies the chorale on which the latter passage is based as 'O Welt,

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[10] A case in point would be the early *Polyphonic Etude* for two pianos (1948).

[11] Detailed discussion of eighteenth-century automata and their cultural impact can be found in Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), and Jessica Rifkin, 'The Defecating Duck, or, the Ambiguous Origins of Artificial Life', *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2003): 599–633.
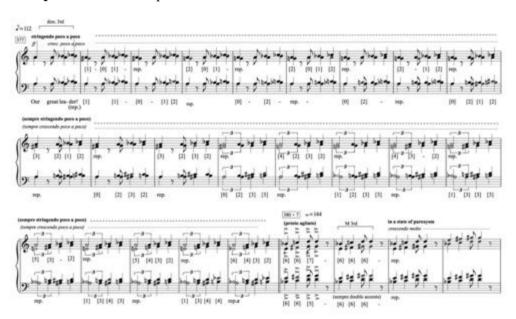
ich muß Dich lassen,' but I also hear the chorale 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden'. Both chorales are linked to Bach's St. Matthew Passion. The spirit choir sing a perverse organum in which the perfect fifth and fourth are treated as unstable intervals while the tritone serves as a stable point of reference.

Example 2. Nekrotzar's entrance in *Le Grand Macabre*, rehearsal 59

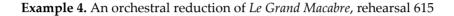**Example 3a.** Chorus of Spirits in *Le Grand Macabre*, rehearsal 63

Example 3b. Chorus of Spirits in *Le Grand Macabre*, rehearsal 377

Ligeti instructs the spirits to sing 'coarse and forced, phantasmagorical (e.g. hold the nose closed with the fingers!)', and gives them an independent tempo and metre.[12] As the associations with Christ's suffering elevate the Spirit's chorus, so the chorus's material double – in the form of the People's chorus, representing Prince Go-go's subjects – takes on aspects of the undead, intoning 'Our great leader!' on repeated pitch cells that effect gradual harmonic and metrical shifts while completely effacing the sense of the text. This procedure recalls Steve Reich's early text experiments, but it also recalls Bartók's use of altered repetition in works like *The Wooden Prince* (1912) and *Miraculous Mandarin*.

Nekrotzar will lead an entire retinue of skeletons and ghouls to Brueghelland's court in Act II, as a prelude to his 'terrible, imaginary Last

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[12] György Ligeti, *Le Grand Macabre* ED 8522 (Mainz: Schott, 1997), 42–43.

Judgment'. But the Last Judgment never arrives, and an epilogue places the formerly dead and the still living on the same plane of existence, as witnessed by Piet the Pot, Astradamors and Prince Go-go attempting to determine whether they have indeed passed on (Example 4).

Example 4. An orchestral reduction of *Le Grand Macabre*, rehearsal 615

The duet between Piet and Astradamors at rehearsal 615 is replete with time-honoured signifiers of the Gothic in music: harmonics sweep through the string section over unstable harmonies in flute and harpsichord, the familiar orchestral sounds rendered strange and uncanny. [13] They question their status in the following bars, assuming that they died at midnight and are ascending to heaven (Example 5), exhibiting that strange serenity associated with the eerie in literature and art.[14]

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[13] See Isabella van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 2012), 3–4.

[14] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Watkins Media, 2016), 13.

Example 5. Duet between Piet and Astradamors, *Le Grand Macabre*, rehearsal 615+2
to 619

Piet and Astradamors' liminal state is sketched by the symmetrical harmonies and melodic imitation that marks their duet. Piet's 'Am <u>I</u> dead too?' outlines an (0,1,4,5) symmetrical tetrachord, and the C#-G#-E that accompanies their dialogue ('Yes - Am <u>I</u>') is reversed in descent as E-G#-C# ('Yes, ghost Piet'). Piet's A-F ('dead too?') flips as well ('Since when?'). The falling fifths from G#-C#-F# that set Astradamors' confident assertion of their demise vertically anchor their dual realizations that they are 'floating' and sprouting wings.

The pair are joined by the eerie accompaniment of wheezing chromatic harmonicas when they again encounter Prince Go-go, followed by some soldiers returned from the grave, like the revenant soldiers that return

to continue the fight in Scandinavian Eddas.[15] Go-go prepares a toast, and the trio eventually determine that 'We have a thirst, so we are living.' It is fitting that – as opposed to the free counterpoint that ruled Piet and Astradamors' duet – a strict mirror canon with absolutely no deviations accompanies the dissolution of Nekrotzar as he melts into the ground, like the wicked witch in Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz*, another false portent of doom. No longer the Grand Macabre, Nekrotzar dies on both the material and symbolic planes of the opera.

This, like many other passages in *Macabre*, functions as a *lexicon satyrica*, a taxonomy of paralogical propositions and nonsensical assertions that put the whole notion of a coherent text in question.[16] If, as Christopher Gilbert asserts, satire is 'simultaneously a way of knowing and *not* knowing … the thing outside the text *and* the text itself', it functions as the narrative counterpart to the undead. [17] At the close of the opera the remaining characters cycle back to their original positions. Contrary to traditional Aristotelian dramatic values, they experience no gain or loss, change of state, or shift in values.[18] The changes that Ligeti and Michael Meschke made to Michel de Ghelderode's original play *La Balade du Grand Macabre* are central to my reading: the original Nekrotzar was but a cuckolded husband, while all deaths indeed occurred, and all were self-inflicted, following the template of

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[15] See Kirsi Kanerva, 'From Powerful Agents to Subordinate Objects? The Restless Dead in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Iceland', in *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed*, ed. Joëlle Rollo Koster (New York: Routledge, 2017), 40–70.

[16] As outlined in Christopher J. Gilbert, 'Of Satire and Gordian Knots', *Studies in American Humor* 5, no. 1 (2019): 124.

[17] Gilbert, 'Of Satire and Gordian Knots', 129.

[18] See Amy Bauer, 'Contemporary Opera and the Failure of Language', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Modernism in Music,* ed. Björn Heile and Charles Wilson (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2019), 423–53; Bauer, *Ligeti's Laments*, 109–39; and Peter Edwards, 'Resisting Closure: The Passacaglia Finale from György Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre*', *Music Analysis* 35, no. 2 (2016): 258–78.

the seven deadly sins.[19] If the provenance of Ligeti's Nekrotzar remains obscure, he yet proves the ultimate banality of evil, while the dissolute inhabitants of Brueghelland survive their physical and symbolic death, stock figures in a medieval morality play that never resolves. As such the opera opposes the original morality play in memorializing continental Europe as a truly gothic landscape, one in which the 'uncanny traces of past cultures' haunt the living in a cyclical return that never ceases.[20]

The 'lebendigtote Dinger' of Music

E.T.A. Hoffman had a name for those mechanical apparatuses, like the harpsichordist and mechanical duck mentioned above, that attempt to mimic the human. These 'living-dead things' (lebendigtote Dinger) disturbed the ordinary relations between humans and their environment, flickering between the inanimate and the animate as either a 'living death or a dead life'.[21] This sense of the uncanny was most acute when the automaton in question performed music, or when the musical instrument itself could seem to function as an enchanted representative of the living dead.[22] We might recognize this anthropomorphic impulse in Ligeti's piano Études, which Karol Beffa portrayed as a virtual theatre of 'acrobats and grotesques',[23] as well as in those chamber works of Ligeti which employ musical signifiers of the liminal state between two deaths to comment on the persistence of the

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[19] Michel de Ghelderode, *La Balade du Grand Macabre* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1952).

[20] Michael Newton and Evert Jan van Leeuwen, 'Introduction', in *Haunted Europe: Continental Connections in English-Language Gothic Writing, Film and New Media*, ed. Michael Newton and Evert Jan van Leeuwen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 2.

[21] E.T.A. Hoffmann, 'Die Automate', in E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1967), ii: 354.

[22] Discussed in Amanda Lalonde, 'The Music of the Living-Dead', *Music and Letters* 96, no. 4 (2015): 602–629.

[23] Karol Beffa, 'Imaginaire, machines, théâtralisation: Fanfares et Désordre, de György Ligeti', *Musurgia* 4 /XIX (2012): 54–55.

past in music of the living. The sixth piano Étude 'Automne de Varsovie' is one such example, a multi-valent text that references a keening folk lament from Eastern Europe, the imposition of martial law in Poland, and Warsaw's contemporary music festival. But 'Automne' has ties as well to the surrealist literature of Boris Vian, who in turn was greatly influenced by Lewis Carroll. Vian's *L'Automne à Pékin* is driven by a plot that ends in disaster, and is peopled by hapless characters which die in unmotivated and senseless ways. Yet the entire enterprise resurrects at the novel's close, part of an endless cycle of existence on the boundary between life and death, like the furious ostinati that sail off the bottom of the piano at the etude's end.[24]

Amanda Lalonde extends this notion of music and the living dead to the haunted musical instruments that populate central European murder ballads and the tales of Grimm, in which instruments fashioned from elements of a dead person sing of the circumstances surrounding their murder.[25] Ligeti's songs contain many characters that sing of or suffer a fate perhaps worse than death, like Heisenberg's cat, trapped in their own mechanical music and textual automata between two worlds. Characters with a more wistful but poignant resolve amble through the six *Nonsense Madrigals* (1988–89). They include 'Flying Robert', the eponymous hero of the fourth Madrigal, based on a dark morality tale found in *Struwwelpeter* ('Slovenly Peter') by another Hoffman, Heinrich. 'Flying Robert' warns of a boy who foolishly runs out in a rainstorm against his parent's better judgement. There is faint whiff of the steampunk in 'Flying Robert's' marriage of mechanical compositional techniques and Victorian charm (Ligeti was a fan of Jules Verne and compared one of Verne's rockets with Mahler's First Symphony).[26]

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[24] Discussed further in Amy Bauer, 'The Cosmopolitan Absurdity of Ligeti's Late Works', *Contemporary Music Review* 31, no. 2 (April 2012): 1–14.

[25] Lalonde, 'The Music of the Living-Dead', 610–15.

[26] György Ligeti, 'Gustav Mahler und die musikalische Utopie–I. Musik und Raum', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 135, no. 1 (1974): 7–11; reprinted as 'Raumwirkungen in der Musik Gustav

By the end of the madrigal Robert is swept up into the sky never to be seen again, perhaps flying there still.

A similar situation bedevils the dancers in the fifth Madrigal, 'The Lobster Quadrille', based on an episode in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) (Figure 1). The fifth Madrigal is another musical machine, a passacaglia that travels from voice to voice, with different rhythmic motives assigned to the various creatures as they promenade. Bits of musical flotsam and jetsam interrupt the passacaglia's course in the form of snippets of 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star', and the French and British national anthems. The creatures seem caught in the web of a rotating contraption; we never discover if the creatures tossed out to sea during the quadrille are dead, alive, or trapped in an eternal dance.

Figure 1. John Tenniel's illustration of the Lobster Quadrille in Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London, 1865).

The protagonist of the sixth Madrigal, 'A Long, Sad Tale', is a mouse lamenting the tale of a fellow mouse to Alice, in an emblematic poem written

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Mahlers,' in György Ligeti, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I, ed. Monika Lichtenfeld (Mainz: Schott, 2007), 279–84.

in the shape of a mouse's tail. The victim of the tale is a mouse sentenced to beheading by a dog, named Fury, who declared himself by fiat judge and jury. The mouse's tale in Alice is a visual pun, amplified by Ligeti when he cleaves it to one of Carroll's famous word puzzles. Carroll had introduced his game of verbal doublets to the British puzzling public with a passage that turns the word head to tail in five successive letter substitutions: head-heal-teal-tell-tall-tail. [27] The machine-like game of doublets mirrors the intertwining ostinato patterns that create the musical polyphony of 'A Long, Sad Tale'. Ligeti skilfully expands Carroll's original poem, employing the power of language – the dead letter – to stave off the arbitrary law of the Fury, as the spirit of vengeance. The original head-tail series and several additional patterns are woven into the long, sad tale; after the mouse's 'head' becomes – through five letter substitutions – a tale, a witch becomes a fairy, and a fury (our antagonist) becomes a barrel. Hence death appears forever postponed through the mechanical power of words to flicker with an uncanny life.

>'Off with her head!'
>Head, heal, teal, tell, tall, tail...
>
>'Mine is a long and a sad tale!'
>'It *is* a long tail, certainly,
>but why do you call it sad?'
>Turn witch into fairy.
>Witch, winch, wench, tench, tenth, tents, tints,
> tilts, tills, fills, falls, fails, fairs, fairy!
>
>Fury said to a mouse,
>That he met in the house,
>'Let us both go to law:
>*I* will prosecute *you*. -- Come,
>I'll take no denial;
>We must have a trial:

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[27] Lewis Carroll, *Doublets; a Word Puzzle* (London: Macmillan, 1879).

For really this morning
I've nothing to do.'

Furies, buries, buried, burked, barked, barred, barrel...

Said the mouse to the cur,
'Such a trial, dear Sir,
With no jury or judge,
would be wasting our breath.'
'I'll be judge, I'll be jury,'
Said cunning old Fury:
'I'll try the whole cause,
and condemn you to death.'
Quilt, guilt, guile, guide, glide, slide, slice, spice,
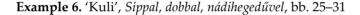 spine, spins, shins, shies, shier, sheer, sheet...[28]

Finally, there are the uncanny figures found in *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel* (2000) plucked from Sandor Wëores' vast poetic menagerie: the living mountains of 'Fabula', the first song, and the harried Coolie of song four. The Coolie exists in an eternal state of motion, illustrated by an ostinato that stops only when he halts briefly to contemplate his state:

'Who pull rickshaw?
Who pull car?
Who pull dragon-coach?
If coolie die.
Coolie die?
Coolie can noooot die!
Coolie forever
                just rolling and rolling'[29]

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[28] György Ligeti, *Nonsense Madrigals* (Mainz: Schott, 1999), 47–55.

[29] György Ligeti, *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel* ED 9602 (Mainz: Schott, 2008), 4–6.

The grand pause that accompanies 'Coolie can not die!' signifies the collapse of ordinary time, a timeless present during which the Coolie contemplates his undead life, before resuming the unending cycle of tritone–major third meted out by the skeletal xylophone and marimbas (Example 6). When the interval cycle <6, 4> restarts in bar 26 on C#, it rotates through each note in the odd-numbered whole-tone scale twice (WT$_1$) before breaking and restarting a whole-tone higher each time: on the downbeat of b. 27 (Eb), then on F and G. A renewed descent from G sets off a continuous cycle that ends only with a strict diminuendo and another grand pause that masks the Coolie's infinite roll onward.

Example 6. 'Kuli', *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel*, bb. 25–31

I return full circle to that most emblematic expression of death in Ligeti, the *Requiem* (1963–65). Within the *Requiem*, the clearest expression of the grotesque – and the most chilling representation of truly Gothic terror –

are the kaleidoscopic musical gestures of the third movement, the 'De die judicii' sequentia. Ligeti's spiky setting excises the last, hopeful stanza of the text, which he saves for the final 'Lacrimosa' movement. The sequence that remains had obsessed the composer since he was young with its 'extraordinarily colourful, almost comic-strip, representation of the Last Judgement'.[30] As the 'pivotal' movement in the requiem, the 'Dies irae' represents the paradoxical status of modern alienation; 'we are certainly going to die but so long as we are alive we believe that we shall live forever'.[31] In the early 1960s Ligeti considered the 'Dies irae' the finest thing he'd composed. In it the 'lost' voices of the soloists intermingle with a dense, spiky polyphony in several choirs, to describe a seemingly immeasurable, virtual space.[32] Although not a dodecaphonic piece, the twelve chromatic tones circulate evenly, according to a strict voice-leading rules that – in an inversion of traditional contrapuntal practice – favour leaps over steps, with no pitch repetition.

De Celano's dramatic text welcomes such a treatment, which as Eric Drott notes, turns from objective third person to the subjective first near the end.[33] But for me the movement is defined by stanza IV, 'Mors stupebit, et natura, / Cum resurget creatura,' (Death and nature will be astonished when all creatures rise again). The 'Dies irae' began the movement triple forte, 'agitato molto with extreme vigor and excitement', with a four-voice counterpoint of leaping lines, which gives way to the sustained tones that open the third 'Tuba Mirum' section, sung *sinistro*, *minaccioso*. A grand pause

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[30] György Ligeti, *Ligeti in Conversation with Péter Várnai, Josef Häusler, Claude Samuel and Himself*, trans. Gabor J. Schabert, Sarah E. Soulsby, Terence Kilmartin and Geoffrey Skelton (London: Eulenburg, 1983), 19.

[31] Ligeti, *Ligeti in Conversation*, 19.

[32] György Ligeti, 'Zum Requiem', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 2, ed. Monika Lichtenfeld (Mainz: Schott, 2007), 228–31.

[33] Eric Drott, 'Agency and Impersonality in the Music of György Ligeti', Ph.D. diss. (Yale University, 2001) 173.

precedes section four as both choirs enter *sotto voce*, on 'Mors stupebit'. A performance note tells us that all *sotto voce* passages are to be rendered unvoiced, in a strong, pitched whisper, with the first word sung 'with extreme vigor, imitating a loudly whispered, hoarse shriek'.[34] The contrast between *sotto voce* and *voce ordinario* is essential, so that 'summon all before the throne' (coget omnes ante thronum) contrasts with the arrival of death and stunned nature, as creation awakes with a rapid crescendo on accented ten-note clusters that shift from *sotto voce* and *voce ordinario* on '-ra' (Example 7).

Ligeti's hysterical setting of the sequence affirms beyond all doubt that the 'Dies irae' takes place in neither hell nor heaven, but in the realm of the undead, the subject trapped in a spectral existence between the physical loss of life and the judgment from God that would grant that life meaning. Jacques Lacan called this field between two deaths – as illustrated by Antigone and Hamlet – the 'purgatory of desire', its form the very scene described by the biblical Last Judgement.[35] Hence it is not surprising that the 'Dies irae' became Ligeti's template for exploring that liminal state, a state expanded in those works explored above that recognize this purgatorial state, with the uncanny as its herald, as the most profound expression of late modernist art.[36]

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[34] György Ligeti, *Requiem* vocal score 8152 (Frankfurt: C.F. Peters, 1964), 60.

[35] Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 270–90. See also Fabio Vighi, 'Between the Two Deaths: The Real as Threshold', in *Between Urban Topographies and Political Spaces: Threshold Experiences*, ed. Alexis Nuselovici, Mauro Ponzi and Fabio Vighi (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2014), 95–106.

[36] Jo Collins and John Jervis, 'Introduction', in *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, edited by Jo Collins and John Jervis (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1–9.

Example 7. *Requiem*, 'De die judicii' sequentia, bb. 35–45

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