

**THE RESTORATION, REACTION, AND REVOLUTION:
BERLIOZ'S *REQUIEM* AS A PRODUCT OF THE FRENCH OUTLOOK ON RELIGION
AND ROMANTIC IDEALS**

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ABSTRACT

The requiem mass has been a part of the celebration of life and death since before the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Europe. With monophonic chant reaching its peak between 750 and 850 A.D., the funeral mass was essentially solidified by 1300.¹ Robert Chase writes, "The theological foundation of the requiem mass rests in the concept that, through prayer and sacrifice, the living can assist the escape of the deceased family members from the netherworld of Purgatory."² In this description, the requiem served as the ultimate act of commemoration, both for the family members remaining in this life as well as the departed entering the next. Composers of the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras would create their own versions of the requiem mass. The *Dies Irae* sequence hymn melody, which was used for hundreds of years in requiem masses honoring the dead, is quoted by composers Gustav Mahler and Hector Berlioz in two symphonies: the Second Symphony in C Minor and the *Symphonie Fantastique*, respectively. The inclusion of the melody in these two non-liturgical compositions was the inspiration for this inquiry into Berlioz's 1837 *Requiem*, which lacks the *Dies Irae* melody. Given that the requiem genre was traditionally used in a liturgical and funeral setting, it is intriguing that one of the melodies most central in honoring the dead is absent from Berlioz's *Requiem*. As a result of Romantic ideals, social problems within France, the new place of the Church in French society after the Revolution and Bourbon Restoration of 1815, and the new attitudes towards religious thought that surrounded Berlioz during the 1830s, the omission of the *Dies Irae* melody represents Berlioz's expression of a new national sentiment towards religion; his *Requiem*, while religious in nature, was commissioned for a ceremonial purpose, and the lack of the *Dies Irae* embodies a decision not to tie the ceremony to either the Church or state-sponsored religion. In investigating Berlioz's omission of this melody so central to the liturgy, one must not necessarily ask why Berlioz omitted it, but what it *means* that he did. Taking into account the time period of both the revolutions and the social upheavals during the time that Berlioz was composing, one must consider whether he was striving for an artistic or social effect rather than a strict adherence to the Catholic funeral liturgy.

INTRODUCTION

Requiems created by Romantic-era composers took a different form than those of the Classical era and its genre of the symphonic requiem. A new genre emerged, the concert requiem, which, rather than being created for use in the cathedral, was more suited for the concert hall or stage performances. Although it was eventually premiered in the Church des Les Invalides, a huge cathedral in Paris, Berlioz's *Requiem* falls into this new, grander genre. In defining the characteristics of the concert requiem genre, Chase describes the influences on Romanticism by writing, "Romantic composers found inspiration due in part to their interest in numerous subjects, such as nature, romantic love, the Middle Ages, larger-than-life drama, and a sense of nationalism."³ These elements are found in Berlioz's *Requiem*. To give credence to the idea of Berlioz's piece as a representation of nationalism, Chase writes, "His music...was influenced by the musical tradition and style that arose during the French Revolution. This type of national music often called for gigantic musical forces for the out-of-door performance. These concerts were designed by the government to create support of the populace for the Revolution as well as to display its national fervor and dignity."⁴ In connecting this Romantic trend towards the *Requiem* of Berlioz, Chase writes, "Its colossal musical forces, most notably the four brass bands and twenty-four muffled drums...are an obvious vestige of a musical tradition that had been finely honed during the height of the French

Revolution.”⁵ While Chase relates the ideas of the French Revolution to Berlioz’s *Requiem*, I will go another step further. Nationalistic elements of the French Revolution are present, but there are other factors of French society in the 1830s that must be included in an analysis of the *Requiem*. The context of the new religious thought and the elements that go with it, such as the trend away from state-sponsored religion in French society, has not previously been included in an analysis of this piece. In order to relate the context in which the *Requiem* was composed to understanding what it means that the *Dies Irae* melody was excluded, one must take those other societal factors into account.

THE REVOLUTION OF 1830 AND THE REQUIEM

Despite Chase’s connecting of the *Requiem* of Berlioz to the ideals of the French Revolution, Berlioz’s was written later, in 1837, after a second revolution that rocked French society: the Revolution of 1830, also known as the July Revolution or the “Three Glorious Days.” Berlioz’s *Requiem* was originally commissioned by the French government, according to Berlioz’s *Memoirs*, “at government expense on the day of the annual service commemorating the dead of the 1830 Revolution.”⁶ Jacques Barzun, in *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, writes that, “the new minister of Fine Arts definitely commissioned from Berlioz a Requiem Mass. The intention was to celebrate on its seventh anniversary the death of the heroes of July 28, 1830”⁷ (that is, the second day of the Revolution). However, once the score was completed and the rehearsals had begun, Berlioz wrote that, “Almost at once an official letter from the Ministry informed me that the memorial service would be taking place without music. I was requested to discontinue my preparations.”⁸ The *Requiem* was not to have been composed in vain, however, and Barzun writes that, “On October 23, 1837 the news of the taking of Constantine, in Algeria was relayed by (visual) telegraph from the south of France, and with it the intelligence that General Damrémont, commanding, had been killed in the assault. The government would specially honor his memory, since the feat of arms lent needful prestige to the regime.”⁹ Additionally, Berlioz wrote that, “A solemn service for him and for the other French soldiers slain during the siege was to be held in the chapel of the Invalides. The ceremony came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of War; and the Minister, General Bernard, had consented to have my Requiem performed as part of the service.”¹⁰ With Berlioz’s *Requiem* serving this ceremonial function for the State, questions can be raised about its suitability for use at a traditionally religious funeral. While the concert requiem was not intended for the cathedral, Berlioz’s would be premiered in one on December 5, 1837. His *Requiem* would serve both the funereal and liturgical purpose while also functioning in a secular context. Chase’s earlier point about the music of the French Revolution and its purpose to serve the government is validated more than forty-five years later. Berlioz composed his *Requiem* for a function that served the State, not one that would only be used for traditional sacred use. The most interesting point about that, however, is his eradication of the *Dies Irae* sequence hymn melody, which, having been used for funereal purposes for hundreds of years in the Gregorian tradition, would represent a direct link to clergy, and, therefore, the State. Even though Berlioz’s *Requiem* was commissioned to prop up the State, after the Revolution of 1830, the State had changed and was no longer closely allied with the Church, as it had been under the Bourbon kings. Therefore, the choice to exclude the *Dies Irae*, given the social circumstances in France at the time, was a pointed one.

EXCLUDING THE DIES IRAE

In the latter half of the sixteenth century, if one witnessed a Gregorian funeral mass, they would very likely have heard the *Dies Irae*, a sequence hymn translating to “Day of Wrath” that was commonly used in funeral services in Catholic churches. The sequence’s melody had been in use in other Italian rites in the fourteenth century and French rites in the fifteenth century.¹¹ If Berlioz had included the *Dies Irae* in his *Requiem*, it would have been a clear connection to established liturgy and the Catholic tradition that was in upheaval in France during the 1830s. What he had done, however, was include the *Dies Irae* melody in his program symphony, *Symphonie Fantastique*. It is interesting that, in both the *Symphonie Fantastique* and Gustav Mahler’s Symphony no. 2 in C Minor, “The Resurrection,” the *Dies Irae* is included as a mean of representing funeral themes, but in the *Requiem*, which was actually commissioned for a funeral, it is absent.

In the *Symphonie Fantastique*, Berlioz drew on musical associations for the representation of the funeral of an artist. While normally the *Dies Irae* would represent a reverent funeral setting, in this

scenario it is used to depict a "hideous gathering of shades, sorcerers and monsters of every kind,"¹² or, in other words, a black mass. With the strong, low voices of the tuba and bassoon playing the melody while accompanied by chimes that are reminiscent of church bells, it is easy to imagine this more diabolical setting in which Berlioz has set the *Dies Irae*. Similarly, Mahler quotes the first few notes of the *Dies Irae* melody in his "Resurrection" symphony, because of its portrayal of both a funeral as well as the ascent to everlasting life. Mahler uses an assortment of texts to portray this ascent. While both of these works are secular in genre, they both include elements that could be found in traditional sacred music.

The inclusion of the *Dies Irae* in these pieces and its exclusion from Berlioz's *Requiem* was the impetus for my investigation of the *Requiem* as representing a liturgical intent. In stark contrast to the *Symphonie Fantastique* and Mahler's symphony, the *Requiem* would serve the function of funeral music, albeit ceremonial rather than liturgical. But, it became apparent that there were many competing ideologies swirling around French society at the time. These included new ideas towards religious thought, a changed place for the Church within society, the emergence of multiple spiritual and social leaders, and the Romantic characteristics which were represented in Berlioz's *Requiem*.

Berlioz's exclusion of the *Dies Irae* sequence melody in his *Requiem* likely does not have as much to do with a deliberate straying from strict Catholicism, but rather his living in the religious turmoil that existed since the French Revolution of 1789 and Bourbon Restoration of 1815. In addition to the changed political-religious climate that existed, Berlioz was also surrounded by the Romantic thoughts of the era as well as new public thought about the relation between religion and society, as exemplified by the thoughts of Lamartine, Cousin, Saint-Simon, and Lamennais. Even Berlioz's friend Franz Liszt, who, in assimilating the writings of Saint-Simon and Lamennais, advocated a new social place for religion and the relationship between religion and the creation of new art to honor God.

FRENCH SOCIETY AND THE DECLINE OF RELIGION

The relationship between religion and French society began eroding during the French Revolution and its break would bring about two trends. As Ralph Gibson writes, "The nineteenth century was thus lived in the long shadow of the Revolution: the religious divisions of the revolutionary decade would constitute the major fault-line in French politics until at least the First World War¹³ [and that] the Catholic clergy would spend much of the nineteenth century trying to re-establish in France the kind of religion that had dominated before 1789."¹⁴ Immediately, that goal was not to be realized in 1791. Frederick B. Artz writes that, "For sentimental and for tactical reasons, a close 'union between the throne and the altar' had naturally grown up, and by 1815 this had come to mean a common religious and political program of war against the principles of the French Revolution."¹⁵ Therefore, the Bourbon Restoration had brought about a new era in French society, where the monarchy and the clergy were bound as they had been before the Revolution in 1789. Emphasizing the ideas of the Revolution, Artz writes, "If one may venture a generalization, it would seem that such dislike of the Church as manifest among the great mass of the French people during the years 1815 to 1830 was due to political rather than to purely religious reasons."¹⁶ During that period, there would be another development that continued to drive public opinion against the monarchy and the clergy: a newly-enacted law that dealt with the disrespect of sacred vessels.

Gibson writes, "Thus the National Assembly would not accept Catholicism as the State religion, and it was determined to base the new Church firmly in the sovereignty of the French people."¹⁷ Later, in 1825, a law was brought before the Chamber of Deputies that made "the profanation of the sacred vessels, declared a crime punishable with death [with the] profanation...to the consecrated Host and wine, committed 'deliberately and through hatred and contempt of religion,'" leading to a punishment of both having the right hand cut off and decapitation.¹⁸ The extent of this punishment shows the lengths to which some would go to preserve the centrality of Catholicism in French society. Berlioz was only twenty-one at the time, and in the context of such tumultuous times in French society, it would be difficult to imagine that he was unaware or unaffected by these developments. This volatile era in French societal history would erupt into the fighting that would become the Revolution of 1830, in which the Bourbon monarchy that was in place was overthrown.

An outbreak of violence began on July 27, 1830 and would last until July 29. During that time, the Bourbon king, Charles X, abdicated the throne and fled to England; he was to be replaced by Louis Philippe who represented the new "July Monarchy." It is noted that Berlioz took part in the revolution; as Barzun writes, "On Thursday, July 29, after two days of fighting outside, Berlioz left...and spent hours seeking arms and ammunition in order to take part in the battle for liberty."¹⁹ Additionally, Berlioz showed an eagerness to contribute to the efforts of the people by writing, "Tell me what I can do and I shall give you my ideas on the ways in which I can be musically useful to the great work when I return to Paris."²⁰ He had been swayed as to the importance of the "social question"²¹ by a follower of Saint-Simon, a revolutionary figure who had advocated for a "new aristocracy to replace the defunct orders of Church and nobility"²² and clearly embodied the ideals that led to the July Monarchy.

DIVINE RIGHT AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE

Before the Revolution in 1830, however, several figures came to have a role in shaping the new scope of religious society that had emerged in France after the Restoration of 1815. One of the most important figures was the Abbé Robert Félicité de Lamennais, who, as Phillips writes, was one of the Prophets of the Counter-Revolution.²³ Lamennais felt a "rejection of the divine right of kings and its replacement by the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people"²⁴ was necessary, with Lamennais having written that, "Art therefore is an expression of God; her works are an infinite manifold reflection of Him."²⁵ These two ideals form the basis for Lamennais' activism in post-Restoration French society and also spark some insight into Berlioz's compositional choices for the *Requiem*. In rejecting the divine right of kings and supporting the sovereignty of the People, not only is Lamennais rejecting the Bourbon Monarchy, he is also delegating some authorities and responsibilities to the People. To Lamennais, the People should be an independent and autonomous entity. Having believed that, "Any claim on the part of the secular power to intervene in spiritual matters [was] intolerable,"²⁶ he saw the People as the ones who would handle their own religious matters. But, in advocating for the necessity of continued Papal power (rather than that of a national church that will cause the "annihilation of Christianity in France")²⁷, Lamennais wrote that, "Without the Pope no Church: without the Church no Christianity: without Christianity no religion for any people which would be Christian, and in consequence no society: so that the very life of nations has its source in the papal power."²⁸ Lamennais was calling for a new religious socialism rather than a religious order which is solely based on the ruling government of France. Because of this and because of Lamennais' broad coalition of followers (which included Berlioz's friend Liszt), the influence on Berlioz's *Requiem* is clear. He has exercised exactly what Lamennais advocated: an individual interpretation of the religious order rather than a strict adherence to what had come previously or what had even been advocated by the French government. By excluding the *Dies Irae* sequence hymn from his *Requiem*, Berlioz took a new path of innovation and also challenged that previous order. Additionally, if Berlioz was following Lamennais' writings about the use of art to glorify God, then with or without the sequence melody, the *Requiem* would still be considered an artistic glorification. Having been caught up in the fervor of the July Revolution, Berlioz's mind clearly was susceptible to the power of ideas, and it is likely that he was affected by this new social-religious atmosphere created in France by Lamennais and the Revolution.

Furthermore, a few more ideals that come from more "prophets" of this era unite the cause of the July Revolution and continue to reflect the trend away from an established religion, an environment that could affect Berlioz's sense of religious works or even the audience for which he was composing. The July Monarchy lasted until 1848, and with Berlioz's *Requiem* having been composed in 1837, it is likely that his audience would still be unsympathetic to the ideals of the Bourbon Restoration. For another "prophet," Alphonse-Marie-Louis Lamartine, a poet and politician active during this time of civil unrest, "religion is a totally emotional experience, detached from any coherent dogmatic or even philosophical basis."²⁹ Analogously, the size and grandeur of Berlioz's *Requiem* arouses emotions in the listener, while straying from strict dogma in its exclusion of the *Dies Irae*. Another figure from the 1830s, Victor Cousin, advocated for a unification of "art, religion and fatherland"³⁰ and, in a way that directly relates to Berlioz's *Requiem*, also believed that, "Established religion can be re-explained and defended as the systematization by man of his initial perception of God into a system of symbols. 'The triumph of religious intuition lies in the creation of the forms of worship, just as the triumph of the idea of beauty lies

in the creation of art."³¹ From this line, different characteristics of the *Requiem* take shape in lending credibility to it. The size and grandeur of the *Requiem* allow it to represent a strong sense of faith while in a creative way that is not mandated by the Church. Therefore, Berlioz has used his own ideas about what religious worship could be and crafted the *Requiem* according to another ideal; namely, as Robinson writes, that, "The official philosophy of the day can be seen as adopting an essentially poetic attitude to religion while maintaining a respectful attitude to the established faith."³² In excluding the *Dies Irae* melody, Berlioz has sought a means of worship as he, not the Church, saw fit, while maintaining the ideals of powerful worship and ceremony that one would expect of a state-sponsored religion and a state-commissioned work.

BERLIOZ AND ROMANTICISM

Aside from the societal elements that might have influenced Berlioz's composing of the *Requiem*, one must also take into account the effect that contemporary Romantic movements had on him. Ronald Kean writes, "Since Berlioz was well-versed in the literary trends of his day, it would be a mistake to regard him as a musician without fully relating him to the ideas and the ideals of the Romantic movement."³³ A large part of this Romanticism was the rediscovery of the ideals of the Middle Ages (a trend known as Gothic Medievalism), the neo-Gothic style of architecture, and interest in art and poetry of the Middle Ages.³⁴ Kean makes a distinction that, "Although the term 'neo-Gothicism' refers specifically to the Romantic imitation of Gothic architecture, the term 'medievalism' describes the Romantic imitation of any of the arts of the Gothic Period."³⁵ This was the creative environment in which Berlioz was operating. In what might seem like a stark contrast to the tumultuous social situations that had engulfed France, the creative elements, as assimilated by Berlioz, instead complemented the French religious turmoil to create the context in which the *Requiem* could take shape. Kean writes, "The Gothic revival in architecture combined with the writings of Shakespeare, Scott, Goethe, Chateaubriand, and Hugo helped foster a romantic interest in the Middle Ages. Artists harkened to this distant age of faith in an attempt to escape both the politics and established social values of a bourgeois society."³⁶ For Berlioz, this focus on the Gothic architecture was represented by the majesty of the cathedral, in which, appropriately, Berlioz's *Requiem* would eventually be premiered. The cathedral became the Romantic venue for Berlioz to represent religion through symbolism rather than overt ties to the Church. In two separate ideas, Kean points to Berlioz's place within French society. First, he writes that, "The church became a synthesis of the arts for Berlioz, much the same as it had been in medieval society. Further, music, for Berlioz, was much like the function of the medieval cathedral. It offered communion with the Almighty and offered sanctuary from a society who could not understand him."³⁷ Here, Kean makes the point that Berlioz, as an artist, had to seek a representation (and characteristics) for his art outside of that which the society held close. This belief corresponds with the lack of sympathy of the French public towards the idea of the government and the Church as a united entity.

Furthermore, Kean writes, "Romantic architects in nineteenth-century France keenly felt the resurgence of patriotic and nationalistic ideals. They sought new avenues of expression and conceived an architecture that provided a welcome escape from the recent horrors of the dictatorship of Napoleon and from an increasingly industrialized and mechanized world."³⁸ The cathedral became a perfect avenue of expression for the *Requiem* of Berlioz, since it exemplified a place where he could express his creativity, Romantic ideals, and his individual artistic vision, much of which is expressed in the size of the ensemble for which the *Requiem* is scored. Kean notes, "The most striking feature of the inside of a Gothic cathedral is the dynamic use of space, and the dynamic use of space also helps to unify the *Requiem*."³⁹ There is no better way to exemplify just how dynamically Berlioz wanted the space to be than through his instrumentation and orchestration. Some of the highlights include Berlioz's request for a chorus of 210, which, "if space permit...may be doubled or tripled,"⁴⁰ an orchestra including a string section of 83, sixteen pairs of timpani, four tam-tams and ten sets of cymbals, 40 players in the rest of the orchestra and, most notably, the four brass bands, (with a total of 38 additional players) to be seated on the stages in every cardinal direction.⁴¹ Clearly, Berlioz sought to maximize the effect that the space in which the *Requiem* would be performed had on the music. The nationalistic element that Kean describes is clearly present because an orchestra of this size would present the power and strength of the country and would bring that sense of nationalism to the ceremony for which the *Requiem* was commissioned.

However, if Berlioz was influenced by the ideals of the Revolution and the protests against the Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, then the *Requiem* could represent both a nationalistic creation and an individual one. If the new emphasis of the era was that French citizens were opposed to having religion be mandated to them, then certainly it would be beneficial to have composed the *Requiem* and left the level of religious ideals present within the work up to the individual listener. The lack of the *Dies Irae* eradicates the tie to the Church and the established religion because a direct liturgical element is no longer present. Conversely, because the *Requiem* was commissioned for a ceremonial funeral rather than a traditionally religious one, then the grandeur of the orchestra and the nationalistic statement that Berlioz makes with his instrumentation is also valid. Because the strictly religious setting, due to the ceremonial commission, is eliminated, the piece can take on a different meaning, one that encourages the power of association among man and French identity that both the “prophets” advocated for and which was present during the Revolution of 1830.

CONCLUSION

Taking into account all of the factors that surrounded Berlioz during the time he was composing the *Requiem*, it is clear that this was no ordinary requiem. At the very least, the fact that French society had become so adverse to ideas of established religion was a huge factor in Berlioz’s composing of the *Requiem* and the exclusion of the *Dies Irae*, the inclusion of which would have been seen as a direct tie to the now-unfavorable Church and Monarchy. Adding in the other factors such as the way that new “prophets” affected French thought towards society and the purpose of the Church, Berlioz’s *Requiem* becomes more of a historical or social commentary, and not a wholehearted representation of a French funeral service. Berlioz likely knew that his audience could contain some who were adverse to the ideas of religion being forced upon them. Having the *Dies Irae* at a funeral would have been the easiest way to impose Gregorian traditions on those for whom they were unwanted. Berlioz avoided the difficulty that could have arisen from too strong of a tie to the Church by excluding the *Dies Irae* in the composition of his that he held most dear. Berlioz wrote, in 1867, that, “If I were threatened with seeing my entire oeuvre burned, less one score, it would be for the *Messe des Morts* that I would beg mercy.”⁴² Berlioz’s excluding of the *Dies Irae* might have saved him from having to do so. With the opinion of French society during the 1830s, the revolutionaries that toppled the established Church and Monarchy might have found a new public enemy had he not made that compositional choice

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¹ Robert Chase, *Dies Irae: A Guide to Requiem Music* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003), 1 – 2.

² Chase, xvii.

³ Chase, 238.

⁴ Chase, 244 – 245.

⁵ Chase, 239.

⁶ Hector Berlioz, *Memoirs*, ed. and trans. David Cairns (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969), 229.

⁷ Jacques Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, volume 1 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 272 – 273.

⁸ Berlioz, *Memoirs*, 229.

⁹ Barzun, 277.

¹⁰ Berlioz, *Memoirs*, 229.

¹¹ Chase, 2.

¹² Michael Austin, "Berlioz Symphonie Fantastique," The Hector Berlioz Website, accessed September 1, 2014, <http://www.hberlioz.com/Scores/fantas.htm>.

¹³ Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789 – 1914* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 30.

¹⁴ Gibson.

¹⁵ Frederick B. Artz, *France Under the Bourbon Restoration 1814 – 1830* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 102.

¹⁶ Artz, 103.

¹⁷ Gibson, 40.

¹⁸ Charles Stanley Phillips, *The Church in France 1789 – 1848: A Study in Revival* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 191 – 192.

¹⁹ Barzun, 135.

²⁰ Barzun, 136.

²¹ Barzun.

²² Paul Merrick, *Revolution and Religion in the Music of Liszt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5.

²³ Phillips, 216.

²⁴ Merrick, 7.

²⁵ Dolores Pesce, "Liszt's Sacred Choral Music" in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 223 – 224.

²⁶ Phillips, 223.

²⁷ Phillips, 228.

²⁸ Phillips.

²⁹ Christopher Robinson, *French Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1978), 20.

³⁰ Robinson, 21.

³¹ Robinson.

³² Robinson.

³³ Ronald Kean, "Medievalism in Hector Berlioz's Grande Messe des Morts (1837)," *The Choral Journal* 43, no. 5 (December 2002): 7.

³⁴ Kean.

³⁵ Kean.

³⁶ Kean.

³⁷ Kean, 8.

³⁸ Kean.

³⁹ Kean, 13.

⁴⁰ Hector Berlioz, *Requiem in Full Score* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2006), 9.

⁴¹ Berlioz, 6 – 7.

⁴² D. Kern Holoman, "Masses and Requiems," *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music* (January 2012): 51.