

VIVA V.E.R.D.I.: *The Promised End*

a requiem

music by G. Verdi

text collage by Timothy Nelson after Shakespeare's "King Lear"

some text adapted from "Shakespeare After All" by Marjorie Garber

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(VERDI sits alone on the stage in silence – the place represented is at once an imagining of the Casa di Riposo with necessary furniture and an uncovered piano center, and also of the barren earth of a field or heath. There is also somewhere a large concert bass-drum, and a mirror that reflects the inside workings of the piano and which can reflect the face of those positioned before it.)

VERDI

1901, at the turning of a new century, the edge of time,
What should the heart speak? Love and be silent?
Speak what it feels not what it ought to say?
The oldest have born most, those that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so lo...

*(VERDI is interrupted by a distant music:
an acapella version of the "Va Pensiero" chorus from Nabucco,
transposed one whole tone lower to E Major)*

[VA PENSIERO]

(Almost laughing to himself)

Listen. A distant music, hastening on still chilled Spring breeze¹, becoming less distant.
A growing throng, one hundred, two hundred, three hundred-thousand,
a mass of mourners, led by a maestro.
Joining one by one by one, the multitude swelling as it sobs forward.

Shall we see these brothers who never knew me and whom I never knew,
Who took even my name to make fertile their freedom?

¹ An allusion to the text of "Va Pensiero"

“Viva V.E.R.D.I.” they cried.

(laughing to himself) ...Viva V.E.R.D.I...

Shall we see these sisters who join in my melody that yearns for home,

For the quiet comfort of toiled earth?

Shall we see these brothers and these sisters hang their heads in jubilant sorrow?

Accompany the body, my body, here to this place of rest?

This house of rest, *Casa di Riposo*?

No, no, no, no...

We will wait, and be the pattern of all patience.

We will wait *(pause)* and listen *(pause)* and, not seeing, see.

(VERDI visibly listens to the chorus, and as it draws to a close he walks to the piano, and just at the final bar he touches the treble keys and plays the first note, a treble e, of a descending a minor triad, which is the opening melody of the Requiem)

Love...

(He completes the triad)

...And be silent.

(Suddenly VERDI sees the pianist, easily and without recognition, come onto the stage, sit at the piano, and begin to play the Requiem – the singers remain offstage)

[REQUIEM AETERNAM]

^(bar 3)Meantime we will express our darker purpose.

^(bar 6)I had two children,

Two children who died on either side of my first opera, and before my second:

(small dark chuckle) “King for a Day”.²

A father should never have to hold the decaying body of a child in their arms,

Like a transposed *pietà*.

First the heart should break and they should pass from this tough world.

It is a wonder that one should still endure.

2 The Italian title: “Un Giorno di Regno”

^(bar 16) *Kyrie eleison...*

^(bar 18) And then I gave birth to twenty-seven other children:
The shadow of a childed father-fool, a Parisian whore,
A Spanish Prince and a Swedish King, an Ethiopian Princess and a Venetian Moor,
And one who laughs at it all from fugal thick rotundity;
And there should have been a twenty-eighth: Lear's shadow, always with me.
“Lear”, an old man tottering about the stage,
Pain and disgust made sublime and universal.³
Christe Eleison...

(With the “Te Decet” the eight singers come one by one onto the stage)

^(bar 31) And there are infinities of children yet come.
Of all my work, that which pleases me most is this place of rest,
House of repose which I have built for myself,
And for generations of singers old and infirm,
Those not favored by fortune's wheel,
Those who should not have been old until they had been wise.
Poor and dear companions of my life and my death.⁴

^(bar 44) We wait.

We *(pauses and then stresses the word)* **attend** the myriad who are to come.
And before we pass eternity, we must pass this time on ground as relative as this,

^(bar 54) *Kyrie eleison.*

Christe eleison.

*Kyrie eleison.*⁵

^(bar 56) Grant us rest...

^(bar 62) An old man tottering about the stage?

3 This is a paraphrase of a quote from Charles Lamb's “On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation”.

4 This is a paraphrase of Verdi's own comment to Giulio Ricordi on the building of the *Casa di Risposo*.

5 This references George's recitation of the same text in the final act of Albee's “Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe”.

The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual.
On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities,
Weaknesses, the impotence of age, and of rage,
And the ravages of time, and of the world which tries to hold time fast.⁶

^(bar 67)*(slowly)* As the night moves on,
The space will grow barer and barer until nothing is left,
^(bar 71)And Lear plays out his colloquy on a bleak infinity of stage.
Voices at the world's end.⁷

[KYRIE]

*(suddenly as if we are thrown into the midst of the first scene of "King Lear" – the action and text is fast, hurried as if to arrive to the point of descent into madness, which will be the **DIES IRAE**)*

^(bar 78)We begin with social order.
A trumpet sounds,
Sons, daughters, attendants, elaborate, ornate, imperial, accommodated man.
And at the center is a King:⁸
"Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom, and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths while we
Unburdened crawl toward death."
The eldest born speaks first:

(the solo soprano momentarily plays Goneril)

^(bar 86)"Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter,
As much as child e'er loved or father found:
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable:
Beyond all manner of so much do I love you.

6 This is an abbreviated and loose paraphrase from Charles Lamb.

7 This is a paraphrase of J.C. Trewin's description of Peter Brook's 1962 production of "King Lear".

8 These paraphrased lines come from Marjorie Garber's "Shakespeare After All" which is a major inspiration for this treatment of the Requiem and "King Lear"

(the solo mezzo-soprano momentarily plays Regan)

^(bar 90)What says our second daughter?

“I profess myself an enemy to all other joys
Which the most precious squares of sense profess,
And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love.”

(rushing on)

And now our joy!
Although our last and least,
What shall Cordelia speak?

^(bar 96)Love *(pause)* and stay silent.

-Nothing?

-Nothing.

-Nothing?

-Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.

But she is silent, unhappy though she is that she cannot
Heave her heart into her mouth.

Lear is testing what should need no test.⁹

Cordelia, whose very name means “heart”,

Loves according to nature's bond, no more or less.

Her silence is not a refusal to speak,

But rather an acknowledgment of the ineffable and the unutterable;
But we see the tragic limitation of silence to be radically misunderstood.¹⁰

Having come between the dragon and it's wrath,

Cordelia is cast aside, ripped from Lear's womb,

The dark side of this rhetoric of silence,

The language of limitation and the limitation of language,

Is the great yawning chasm of the “nothing” which pervades the play.

(the following speech gets increasingly hurried and desperate)

9 Garber

10 Garber

^(bar 109)In attempting to strip himself of his youngest daughter, his Heart,
Lear begins the process through which he is stripped of all else,
Nature moving from pure fecundity to agent of barrenness so that something might grow.¹¹

At the first offense the serpents strikes:

(he takes the various voices of Lear's daughters and finally of Lear)

“Idle old man, that still would manage those authorities that he hath given away”.

“A hundred knights?”

“What need you fifty?”

“I entreat you to bring but five and twenty.”

“But what need you five and twenty, ten, or five?”

“What need one?”

“Reason not the need” he cries.

^(bar 120)“Basest beggars are in the poorest things superfluous.”

^(bar 121)“Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's.”

^(bar 122)“You heavens give me that patience, **patience** I need.

You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,

As full of grief as age, wretched in both.

If it be you that stirs these daughter's hearts

Against their father, fool me not so much

To bear it tamely. Touch me with noble anger,

And let not women's weapons, water-drops,

Stain my man's cheeks. No, you unnatural hags,

I will have such revenges on you both

That all the world shall *(crumbling in defeat)* – I will do such things –

What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be

The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep.

No, I'll not weep”

(he let's out a single cry that sustains until the end of the musical section)

[in the silence between the KYRIE and the DIES IRAE]

11 Garber

(VERDI speaking to Lear, but turning to VERDI playing Lear speaking to his fool and/or to the audience, with varied voices – eventually small and crazed)

Fool.

Foolish fond old man.

The Fool is a mirror, as the wasteland before and the storm after are mirrors,¹²

Reflecting back at Lear his own concealed image.¹³

-Where is my fool?

-Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i'th'middle on's face?

-No?

-Why, to keep one's eyes of either side's nose,

That what a man cannot smell out he may spy into.

-Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

-No? Nor I neither.

But I can tell why a snail has a house.

Why, to put's head in, not to give it away to his daughters and leave his horns without a case.

-I will forget my nature.

-The reason why the seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty reason.

-Because they are not eight.

-Yes indeed: thou wouldst make a good fool.

-If thou wert my fool, nuncle, I'd have thee beaten for being old before thy time.

Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.

-O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!

Keep me in temper: I would not be mad!

[DIES IRAE]

*(The **DIES IRAE**, the longest section of the Requiem, here represents a telling of Act III of “King Lear”, but imagined as one man's soliloquy as he descends deeper through mental collapse into madness.*

Scenographically a terrible and varied storm is represented, as the audience witnesses VERDI turning into Lear as he describes the events of the night, until he is the crazed, fallen old man by movement's end. How this is paced and represented is extremely important to the success of the succeeding dramatic arc.)

^(bar 9)”Blow winds and crack your cheeks!

12 The “wasteland” is the movement “Requiem” and the “storm” is the entirety of the “Dies Irae”

13 Garber

(He runs to a large concert bass-drum and plays the prominent percussion thuds – as he will do each time this moment returns and at other pivotal musical points in the piece)

^(bar 15)Rage, blow you cataracts and hurricanoes,
Spout till you have drenched our steeples, drown the cocks!

^(bar 21)You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head!

^(bar 29)And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o'th'world!"

(he howls)

^(bar 39)*(clear at this point he was only playing Lear in the preceding lines)*

Now Lear cries out that he will not weep,
And sees the storm and tempest weep for him instead –
Here the inner man has come together with the world he inhabits.
The King is in high rage, and the storm rages about him.
There is no difference between the man and his tempest,
It is within him and without him. He is its cause.¹⁴

^(bar 54)Weather has become something that cannot be shut out,
For it is all around us and within us, as it is all around Lear and within him.¹⁵
The tempest in the mind.

^(bar 64)We could imagine the storm as one vast, articulated soliloquy,
In which no one actually appears but the King,
Aspects of his own persona given life by his own words.¹⁶

^(bar 74)He is a microcosm, a "little world of man".
What confronts you spectators in the theater is the agony of a man's soul,
Played out as if it were some immense and tragic metaphor,

14 Garber

15 Garber

16 Garber

So that it can be consumed, seen and shared.
He seems to age onstage, in his own self-description.
The rain and wind are false flatterers who have deserted him.¹⁷

[TUBA MIRUM]

(startled, he hears the trumpets with terror and the link with sanity begins to come undone)

^(bar 94)There is a biblical shadow to this scene that cannot be ignored:

^(bar 98)The sounding of the trumpet on the day of resurrection.¹⁸

^(bar 102)“We shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, 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 all be changed.”¹⁹

^(bar 117)And he heard about him a great voice as of a trumpet say:
I am the first and the last and the last and the first.²⁰

^(bar 122)Shhhhhh!

^(bar 125)Rumble thy bellyful. Spit fire! Spout rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are these daughters.
(This is at once VERDI talking of Lear and Lear speaking in the third person)
He taxes not you, you elements, with unkindness:
He never gave you kingdom, called you children;
You owe him no subscription.
You have some reason, they do not!
Then let fall your horrible pleasure:
Here he stands, your slave, a poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man;
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That will, with two pernicious daughters,

17 Garber

18 Garber

19 I Corinthians 15:51-52

20 A paraphrase of Revelations 1:10-11

Join your high-engendered battles gainst a head so old and white as this.

(he turns suddenly and sees his own image with horror in a mirror)

^(bar 139)O, ho, 'tis foul!

(immediately he covers his face with his hands, unable to bear the sight of himself)

[MORS STUPEBIT]

^(bar 141)-I know you.

^(bar 143)-Where's the King?

-Contending with fretful elements;

Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,

Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main

That things might change or cease.

-But who is with him?

-None but the Fool. Who labours to out-jest his heart struck injuries.

^(bar 154)The Fool is death in disguise.

^(bar 156)We see Lear's Fool as the death he carries with him,

^(bar 157)An unacknowledged, and sometimes unwitting, *momento mori* for the King.²¹

^(bar 160)Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart that's sorry yet for thee.

[LIBERA SCRIPTUS]

(coming in and out of moments of lucidity)

^(bar 170)True to tell you the grief hath crazed my wits.

(pause)

What a night is this, this cold and dark night will turn us all to fools and madmen,

21 Garber

(*pause*)

To ones minded like the weather, most unquietly.

^(bar 179)The greatness of the man is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual:

The explosions of his passions are terrible as a volcano.

They are storms turning up and disclosing to that sea his mind, with all its vast riches.

It is the mind which is laid bare.

This case of flesh seems too insignificant to be thought on, even as he himself neglects it.

^(bar 192)*(talking about himself)* On this stage you see nothing but corporal infirmities and weaknesses,

The impotence of rage and of age.

We see not Lear, we ARE Lear – we are in his mind,

Sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms,

We discover in madness the power of reason.²²

^(bar 206)This is a naughty night to swim in.

Thou sayst the King grows mad? I am almost mad myself.

(desperately to himself) O pity sir, where is that patience now that you so oft have boasted to retain?

^(bar 214)O let me not be mad, not mad. Sweet heaven! Keep me in temper.

I would not be mad.

(he continues to repeats this phrase whispered, whimpered, to himself)

^(bar 219)My wits begin to turn.

Come on my boy. How dost my boy?

Are cold? I am cold myself?

Where is this straw my fellow?

The art of our necessity is strange and can make vile things precious.

^(bar 226)O that way madness lies: let me shun that. No more of that.

^(bar 229)Does anyone here know me?

This is not Lear. Does Lear walk thus?

Speak thus? Where are his eyes?

Can anyone tell me who I am?

22 Lamb

This tempest will not give me leave to ponder on things that would hurt me more.
(with sudden and horrible realization) Lear's shadow!...

^(bar 234)O fool, I shall go mad.

[DIES IRAE]

^(bar 239)*(howling)* Howl!

Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies.

Is man no more than this?

Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but

Such a poor bare forked animal as thou art.

Out, out vile jelly. Where is thy luster now?

^(bar 247)No, No No, No, I will be the pattern of all patience. I will say nothing.

I'll not weep: I have full cause of weeping,

But this heart shall break into a hundred-thousand flaws, or ere I'll weep.

^(bar 262)Off, off you lending, come unbutton here.

No words, no words, hush.

[QUID SUM, MISER]

*(The entirety of the **QUID SUM, MISER** is a dumb scene in which VERDI strips himself to become the classic image of Lear on the heath – his clothes are left on the stage to be the “body” finally laid to rest at the end of the **LIBERA ME**)*

[REX TREMENDAE]

(covers his ears from the noise)

^(bar 326)*(until running out of air)* Shhhhhhhhhh!

^(bar 330)The tempest in my mind doth from my senses take all feeling else save what beats there.

Filial ingratitude!

Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand for lifting food to't?
But I will punish home.
Salva me, salva me, salva me, salve...

^(bar 336)No I will weep no more in such a night as this.

^(bar 338)*(turning as if to weeping)* In such a night to shut me out?

^(bar 340)Pour on, I will endure. In such a night as this?
Pour on, pour on, pour on.
Salva me, salva me, salva...

^(bar 347)To be worst, the lowst and most dejected thing of fortune,
Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear.
The lamentable change is from the best,
The worst return to laughter.

(into uncontrollable laughter that over the course of the following musical section becomes a sob)

^(bar 372)O gods! Who is't can say "I am the worst?"
I am worse than ere I was. And worse I may be yet.
The worst is not so long as we can say "this is the worst".

[RECORDARE]

(This is a scene of crazed madness, with questions addressed first to various members of the audiences, but finally to the soprano and mezzo, who throughout play as if Goneril and Regan on trial – the audiences seeing the imagined trial of Act III of "King Lear" as real through the eyes of Lear)

Nothing could have subdued nature to such a lowness but unkind children.

Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?

Judicious punishment!

I'll see their trial first. Bring in the evidence.
Thou robed man of justice, take thy place;
And thou, his yokefellow of equity, bench by his side.
You o'th'commission, sit you too.
Arraign her first. 'Tis Goneril.
I here take my oath before this honorable assembly she kicked the poor king her father.

Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?
(blows a raspberry)
She cannot deny it.

And here's another whose warped looks proclaim,
What store her heart is made on. Stop her there!

(suddenly running after what he imagines to be her – the two singers, however, remain stationary)

Arms, arms, sword, fire, corruption in the place!
False justicer, why hast thou let her 'scape?
Anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart.
Is there cause in nature that makes this hardness?
Am I man more sinned against than sinning?
That is the question.

(laughing suddenly – and then slightly clownish to a member of the audience who he presumes to have been laughing at him)

You, sir, do I entertain you?
(with sudden darkness) And I will go to bed at noon.

^(bar 422)When we our betters see bearing our woes,
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
Who alone suffers, suffers most i'th'mind.
Leaving free things and happy shows behind.
But then the mind much sufferance doth o'erskip,
When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.
How light and portable my pain seems now,
(falling to his knees)
When that which makes me bend, makes the King bow.

(singing softly to himself)

^(bar 439)He that has and a little tiny wit,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
Though the rain it raineth every day.

*(softly and small-ly spoken)*No words, no words, hush.

I'll pray.
I'll pray and then I'll sleep.

[IN GEMISCO]

(prays muttering silently for a moment and then aloud with closed eyes and childlike nursery voice)

^(bar 459) *(slowly)* “Sadly groaning, guilty feeling,
O'er my my visage blushes stealing;
Lord oh! Spare me lowly knelling.

Thou, who Mary's sin forgavest,
Who to hear the thief vouchsafedst,
Unto me bright hope thou gavest.

Though my sad pray's breath be wasting,
Kindly glances on me casting,
Save me from flames everlasting.

(naughtily)

With thy sheep, Lord, deign to mate me,
From the he-goats separate me,
At they right do thou instate me.²³

(opening his eyes in malice and then playing as a he-goat)

23 Poetic translation of the “In gemisco” text of the *Requiem*

Bahhhhhhhhhhh!

(suddenly in pointed prayer)

^(bar 478)Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your lopped and windowed raggedness defend you from the seasons such as these,
From the excellent foppery of this world?

^(bar 490)O I have ta'en too little care of this!
Take physic, pomp, expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them and show the heavens more just.

^(bar 494)*(whining)* Fathom and half, fathom and half! Poor Tom!

^(bar 448)Help me, help me, help, help, help.

(reaching out for Heaven's hand)

^(bar 500)Give my thy hand!

Give my thy hand!

[CONFUTATIS]

^(bar 503)Who's there, who's there, who's there, who's there, who's there?

(turning again to see himself again in the mirror)

^(bar 509)A spirit, a spirit.
He says his name's...

(almost whining)

^(bar 510)Poor Tom.

(this time looking at his face fully in the mirror, uncovered and unafraid)

^(bar 514) *(slowly)* Poor Tom, fool, thou weret better in the grave
Than to answer with thy body the extremity of the skies.
Is man no more than this?
Consider him well...

(pauses a long time in consideration of his own reflection)

^(bar529) *(screams silently as in a prolonged version of Monk's "The Scream", but without involvement of hands)*

^(bar 532) *(suddenly calm)* Thou art the thing itself.
Unaccommodated man is no more,
But such a poor bare forked animal such as thou art.

^(bar 543) The "thing" itself.

^(bar 547) The "thing" is humanity – the King as well as the beggar –
The language of stripping that we have encountered from the play's first moments
Here reaches its culmination.
Here one man looks at another...

^(bar 557) ...and sees himself.²⁴

^(bar 560) Lear looks at Poor Tom, and sees Lear seeing Tom seeing Lear.

(touching his own face while looking in the mirror, as if to see if the face is really his)

^(bar 565) This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.
This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.²⁵
And the Fool will go to bed at noon.

24 Garber

25 Prospero's line in reference to Caliban Shakespeare's "The Tempest"

[DIES IRAE]

^(bar 593) Alas sir, are you there?

(pause)

Things that love night love not such nights as these.

(pause)

The wrathful skies gallow the very wanderers of the dark.

^(bar 606) No tears, no tears...

Hush, hush, hush.

[LACRYMOSA]

(this entire section is slow, tired, heavy)

^(bar 624) Yes, I shall weep.

^(bar 629) *(slowly, as if defeated)* They told me I was everything;

(pause)

'tis a lie, I am not *(pause)* age-proof.

^(bar 633) *(long)* O....matter and impertinency mixed to impermanence –

What is this quintessence of dust?

Reason in madness!

No they cannot touch me for crying: I am the King himself.

Oh that this stage might drown in tears.

^(bar 642) As if at a lull in the storm, we hear now how oppressed nature weeps.²⁶

Our tears begin to take his part so much,

They mar all contereiting.

Notice it is not the King, but “oppressed nature” which is the figure here.

^(bar 653) The storm, the King's madness, blindness, tears, “oppressed nature weeps”,

Rage, fools and folly, and the omnipresent metaphor of “nothing” –

26 The line from the third act of “King Lear” is “opressed nature sleeps”, but here it is turned to “weeps” to reference the subject of the **LACRYMOSA**. It will become “sleeps” finally in the **AGNUS DEI**.

All performed on this stage and translated simultaneously into action and emblem.

With “washed eyes” ...

^(bar 668) *Lacrymosa dies illa.*

Qua resurget ex favilla

Judicantus homineus.

*Huic ergo parce Deus.*²⁷

^(bar 676) What is truly remarkable is that the play can continue from this recognition,
So that succeeding scenes grow richer in power, and in pain.

^(bar 691) Ah! What weeping on that morrow
When man's ashes form shall borrow,
Judgement guilty shall declare him!
In thy mercy, Lord, then spare him.²⁸

^(bar 695) Oh, emotional multitude.²⁹

(opens his mouth to speak, but the “Amen” cuts him off, and he is finally hushed as the storm ends)

(a long pause)

[OFFERTORIO – DOMINE JESU]

^(bar 2) Dawn lighting on a field after a storm...

^(bar 6) Mist floating over the damp changed earth...

^(bar 9) Like the smoke rising off a blood-soaked battlefield,

^(bar 17) But still, unmoving and unmoved...

^(bar 21) ...inured fecundity.

27 From the *Requiem* text

28 Poetic translation of the *Lacrymosa* from *Requiem*

29 Yeats referring to “King Lear” in his essay “Ideas of Good and Evil”

*(during the following speech he weaves a crown of flowers –
he speaks not as VERDI about Lear, but rather as Lear about Lear –
throughout, and about him, the singers are paired and play out visions of the Act IV scene between Lear
and Gloucester, the mad king and the blind duke)*

^(bar 31)After the the tragedy of man's internal and external worlds torn asunder,
We move by recourse to other expressivities:
Romance and comedy, which offer transformation and rebirth,
And also the possibility of a saving estrangement, making “victims” appear,
Ultimately, invulnerable, impervious....transfigured.³⁰

-I know that voice, its trick I do well remember: Is't not the King?
(crowning himself with the flowers – he is crazed, mad, but smally)

-Ay, every inch a king.

When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter,
When the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found you.

Tis above all strangeness that madmen should lead the blind.

Give my thy hand! Give my thy hand!

O, ruined piece of nature, let me first kiss that hand,
(small pause) But first wiped, as it smells of mortality.

(speaking in examination of his own hand)

The hand here is the emblem of humanity, of bare human condition.,

And of the need for touch, contact, kinship, and love,

Culminating in this terrible act of homage and humility.³¹

The blind man sees Lear not seeing the blind man not seeing Lear.

Do not take this from report.

It is.

And the heart breaks at it.

^(bar 118)*(one by one he watches each of the singers in order walk out to the edge of their own, and separate,
imagined cliffs, and stretch their arms out as if leaning over an unseen expanse, ready to fall or to jump,
until they are assembled like a field with rows of crosses –*

30 Garber (this “estrangement” is intended to be seen in the use of third person in this scene, and particularly in the
“resurrection” scene of the **AGNUS DEI**)

31 Garber

VERDI speaks to them, traveling among them)

^(bar 126)There is a cliff, whose high and bending head looks fearfully in the confinèd deep:

(pause)

^(bar 130)Bring me but to the very brim of it
And I will repair the misery that thou dost bear.
From that place I shall no leading need.

(pause)

O when shall ye come to th'top of that same hill?
You do but climb it now: look how we labour.
Methinks the ground is even, yet horrible steep.

(pause)

Hark do you hear the sea?

No? Why, then, your other senses grow imperfect by your anguish.

(pauses as he arrives at his own unseen cliff-edge, center, and looks down)

Here's the place: stand still:

And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!

Almost all too small for sight.

The murmuring surge, that on th'unnumbered idle pebbles chafes,
Cannot be heard so high.

(pauses as he looks up and out over the audience)

You are now within a foot of th'extreme verge.

(pause)

The silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me.³²

(he raises his arms and then closes his eyes)

^(bar 146)The entire scene, we shall recall, takes place on a perfectly level piece of stage.

Man teeters on the edge of what he imagine to be a hellish drop.

Here a human being is seen through the wrong end of a telescope:

Tiny, puny, insignificant and futile,

Clinging to a cliff for survival and for sustenance.

This is the essential tragicomic moment,

A jump from nowhere to nowhere,

From flat ground to flat ground is rendered, instead of ridiculous,

32 A quote from Pascal's "Pensées"

Very close to sublime.³³

^(bar 153)*(one by one he watches the singers jump, and then, after long trepidation...)*

^(bar 157)O you mighty gods!
This world I do renounce,
And in your sights shake patiently my great affliction off.
Away and let me die.

(...he jumps, and speaks as if while falling)

^(bar 167)Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air –
So many fathom down precipitating –
Thou'dst shivered like an egg:
But thou dost breathe, hast heavy substance,
Bleed'st not, speak'st, art sound.
Look but up!
Thy life's a miracle.
Speak yet again.

(slowly the others rise)

^(bar 194)”And he took the blind man by the hand,
And led him out of the town;
And when he had spit on his eyes,
And put his hands upon him,
He asked him if he saw ought.
And he looked up, and said,
I see men as trees, walking.

(pause)

^(bar 207)After that he put his hands again upon his eyes,
And made him look but up:
And he was restored, and saw every man clearly.”³⁴

(pause)

33 Garber

34 Mark 8:23-25

(said sublimely, ecstatically) O thou side-piercing sight!

[SANCTUS]

(he hears the trumpets all around as the singers encircle VERDI, and begin to play out the scene of Cordelia's soldiers finding and chasing Lear from Act IV – the lines are broken with pauses as VERDI evades the singer's grasps)

^(bar 13)No rescue? What, a prisoner?

Come, an you get it, you shall get it by running!

Sa, sa, sa, sa, sa....

(cries out until the next musical section)

(the action is suddenly as if frozen or in slower motion – perhaps the singers have knelt in a circle around him as the soldiers paying homage to Lear, and VERDI reaches heavenward)

^(bar 79)All blest secrets, all you unpublished virtues of the earth,

Spring with my tears!

Be aidant and remediate in the good man's distress!

Seek, seek for him,

Lest his ungoverned rage dissolve the life that wants the means to lead it.

(VERDI breaks the freeze a moment before the singers do the same)

(a game of chase ensues around the stage, and ends with VERDI collapsed in absolute exhaustion and the singers dispersed)

(in silence)

How does the King?

[AGNUS DEI]

*(In contrast to the **Domine Jesu** scenes on the heath of Act IV, where myriad depictions of Lear and Gloucester were played out on the stage, here is only Lear narrating the resurrection scene at Dover – the singers remain separated in place and focused, and still)*

^(bar 3)Done, spent, expired as now oppressed nature (*pauses to change the phrase*) sleeps.

Kind gods, cure this great breach in his abused nature!

Th'untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up of this child-changed father.

Wake o King: you have slept long.

“You do me wrong to take me out o'th'grave”, I said.

^(bar 13)She replies: “Let restoration hang thy medicine upon my lips”, and then she kisses me.

And now and then an ample tear trills down her delicate cheek.

Sunshine and rain at once;

Her smiles and tears are like a better way:

Those happy smilets that play on her ripe lip seem not to know what guests are in her eyes,

Which, parted thence, as pearls from diamonds drop.

Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved if all could so become it.

^(bar 26)I cry out: “Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound upon a wheel of fire,

That mine own tears do scald like molten lead.

You are a spirit I know: where did you die?

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?

I am mightily abused. I should ev'n die with pity to see another thus.

I know not what to say. I will not swear these are my hands.

Would I were assured of my condition.”

^(bar 39)But she insists: “O, look upon me sir, look but up,

Stand and hold your hand in benediction o'er me”.

^(bar 46)“Pray do not mock me”, I say,

“I am a very foolish fond old man.

And to deal plainly I fear I am not in my perfect mind.

Methinks I should know you all,

And yet I am mainly ignorant what this place is,

And all the skill I have remembers not these garments,

Nor I know not where I did lodge last night.

Do not laugh at me.

Do not laugh at me.”

^(bar 58)And with words she wipes my eyes:

“Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not.

Love is without cause.

No cause, no cause.”

And my flawed heart, twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, bursts smilingly.

^(bar 65)This is but a variant of resurrection.

“No cause”, her affirmation is itself negation.

Something can come of nothing.

Love is not a matter of “cause”, love is a bond that transcends rhetoric and law;

It requires only expression, voiced and unvoiced.³⁵

(He speaks directly to the audience)

^(bar 72)You must bear with me.

Pray you now, forget and forgive:

I am old and foolish.

[LUX AETERNA]

^(bar 3)Everything is lost so that some “thing” may be gained.

The “thing” is hope – that small fragile hope which is born of love;

As if, at the far reaches of a night of immense darkness,

A timid light begins to shine which is both eternal and signals ending.

Lux aeterna luceat eis.

And it draws one, at first imperceptibly, but always inevitably, closer t'ward it.

(he plays the roll of the bass drum)

^(bar 15)But, there are yet the drums, the dirge, the battle still to be waged,

The battle in which everyone must fight, and no one can win;

A ceaseless, pitiless march to a foregone conclusion,

It matters not if the hush is because it approaches or recedes.

It becomes illumination as well.

^(bar 27)This is my play's last scene.

35 Garber (paraphrase)

Here, heavens appoint the pilgrimage's last mile;
And the race, idly, yet quickly run,
Has this last pace, his span's last inch, his minute's latest point;
And gluttonous death will instantly unjoint the body and the soul.³⁶
And having slept a space, may the soul to'heaven, her first seat, take flight.

(again he plays the roll of the bass drum)

^(bar 43)Yet, something of the flesh remains,
A thought, doubt, a sickness, a cancer.
Once birthed, the play has journeyed through comedy and romance,
But it must ultimately return to tragedy, and tragedy is remorseless.
It allows no mistakes, and permits no reversals.
And Lear has made his mistake.
Now we hear him plead with Cordelia to seclude herself with him, away from the world.
Her instinct may be for confrontation, but his is for escape.³⁷

^(bar 54)No, no, no, no. Come, let's away to prison.
We two alone will sing like birds i'th cage.
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and...

(he collapses with the first stroke – throughout the word “stroke” refers to musical gestures, but also the medical condition which was responsible for VERDI's death)

^(bar 67)And laugh at gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too –
Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out –
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out
In a walled prison packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by the moon.

36 A paraphrased section of John Donne's Holy Sonnet VI

37 Garber (paraphrase)

(he is hit with the second stroke)

^(bar 78)With one brilliant and baffling stroke, *(loudly)* “bam”;

^(bar 79)We are not the first who with best meaning have incurred the worst.

January 1901, the turning of a new century, at the edge of time,
I collapse and Lear's words are the first to my mind and the last with which I cry out:
“one button more, one button less...”.

^(bar 94)Lear waits in his cell.

He has not lost everything, he holds his beloved close,
And savors the momentary image of peace, of rest.
He holds the timid flickering flame of hope close for protection.
He of it, or it of him?

(he makes as if blowing out a candle)

[LIBERA ME]

*(in the first half of the **LIBERA ME** the Act V scene of Lear carrying the body of Cordelia and his own death is performed, while in the second half the funeral procession of VERDI arrives at the Casa di Risoso, and his body is laid to rest – the “body” is the clothes that he earlier wore, and he begins with his back to the audience)*

^(bar 2)Brief brief candle.....

^(bar 4)...out.³⁸

^(bar 15)*(small dark chuckle)*

^(bar 16)“King for a Day”.

^(bar 17)A parent should never have to hold the decaying body of a child in their arms,

^(bar 20)Like an inverted *pietà*.

38 A paraphrased reference to “Macbeth”

(bar 28) The long walk...

(bar 29) The heavy flesh...

(bar 30) The cold air...

(he turns to face the audience)

(bar 40) Look up.

(bar 41) Look up.

(bar 46) Howl *(yelled long, for an entire musical phrase)*

(bar 57) Howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones:
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so that heaven's vault should crack!

(bar 65) She's gone for ever! I know when one is dead and when one lives:
She's dead as earth.
It this the promised end?
(now yelling) Is this the promised end?

Or image of that horror?
My poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life?
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!

(bar 84) A plague upon you, murderers and traitors all!
O, let me pass!
He hates him that would upon the rack of this tough world stretch him out longer.
(sobs)

(bar 98) The wonder is he hath endured so long:
He but usurped his life.

(bar 131) Listen:

(as if hearing music from the beyond)

(bar 134) *(very slowly while listening to “Requiem”)* The first written is the last performed.

“So the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.”³⁹

An accompaniment finds its melody,
Finds utterance, *(pause)* ...voice.

(bar 145) Fall and cease.

(bar 152) If that her breath will mist or stain the air, why then she lives.

If it be so, it is a chance which does redeem all sorrows that ever I have felt.

My heart, my heart. Stay a little. Ha?

Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low.

What is't thou say'st?

And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more?

Ever, ever, ever, ever, ever...

(bar 156) Pray you sir, undo this button.

(bar 159) Break, heart, I prithee, break.

(bar 166) There, *(pause)* look there, look there, look!...

(bar 173) *(barely heard, almost mouthed)* Brief, brief candle...

(bar 175)...out.

(here the singers retake their own articles of clothes, assemble, and become the crowd of mourners appearing for Verdi's interment at the Casa di Risposo)

(bar 179) *(clearly now as VERDI and not Lear)* There's my cue.

I have a journey, sirs, shortly to go.

39 Matthew 20:16 (also referring to the fact the the “Liberia Me” was the first section of Verdi's Requiem to be composed)

My masters call me, I must not say no.
A growing throng, one hundred, two hundred, three hundred-thousand,
A mass of mourners, led by a maestro, to this place of rest, *Casa di Risposo*.
Joining one by one by one by one by one,
The multitude swelling as it sobs forward to bear me hence;
The present business, general woe.

*(they slowly raise the coffin – which can be the size as if for a child – and bring it slowly over the piano
and set it down in front of VERDI, who opens it and places the “body” within.
One by one they kneel to it as in a graveside service over which VERDI presides)*

^(bar 262) *Libera me.*

No longer a mass, but an individual set in earth, an afterthought.⁴⁰

*(all spoken slowly and with pauses – referring to this very scene, to the play “King Lear”, to Verdi's
Requiem, and to this piece of theater)*

Is this the promised end, or image of that horror?

Is it a vision so unbearable as to hold out no hope for the future?

Or is it, deliberately, an *image*: a copy, likeness, picture, shadow, similitude –
An imitation, a symbol, an emblem, or a sign?

^(bar 314) Is there any redemption in this play of love, of power, of deception and loss, of “ripeness is all”?
The play poses this question, but will not answer it.

Libera me?

The question remains open; it is not foreclosed, even in the direction of nihilism.

Nothing or something?

Libera me?

⁴⁰ Referring to the fact that the “Libera Me” is not a part of the Requiem Mass, but rather meant to be spoken immediately following at the interment)

Ultimately it is the same question Lear asked of Cordelia:⁴¹

(bar 360)“Of what value is love?”

(bar 382) *(they raise the coffin and carry it back over the piano to lay into its place)*

(bar 402) One button more? Or one button less?

(VERDI turns to exit the theater.

As he exits the mourners turn to watch him go, ending with the their backs to the audience)

FINE

41 Garber