

The Poetry is the Pity: The War Requiem and Poetic Consolation

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Abstract

Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* sets nine of Wilfred Owen's war poems alongside the words of the *Missa pro defunctis*, allowing these texts to interrogate and comment on each other. Owen's poems describe the horrors of trench warfare, and often, harshly indict both church and state for their complicity in war-mongering. Scholars such as Philip Rupprecht, Heather Wiebe, David B. Greene, and George D. Herbert have explored how Owen's texts work to subvert the text of the Mass, and deny religious and musical consolation. Such readings place the War Requiem in line with Owen's preface to his *Collected Poems*, in which he rejects consolatory mourning. This article, however, suggests that moments in the *War Requiem* work to deconstruct Owen's preface. Britten's juxtaposition of Owen's poems with the text of the *Missa pro defunctis*, specifically in the Agnus Dei and Libera me, works to undermine Owen's poetic goals as outlined in the preface, bringing out irony not immediately apparent in Owen's work. This article closely examines Owen's poems in the context of Britten's settings and compares Owen's poems to their Latin counterparts. It reveals moments in which Britten's text setting alters the implications of Owen's words to allow moments of consolatory mourning that directly contradict Owen's purported poetic goals and cast doubt on the possibility of completely non-consolatory mourning. It concludes that the *War Requiem* offers a new kind of consolation, in which the acknowledgement of the impossibility of musical and poetic consolation becomes a tool to confront grief.

Keywords

War Requiem, consolation, Wilfred Owen, Benjamin Britten, deconstruction



The Poetry is the Pity: The *War Requiem* and Poetic Consolation

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*This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them
Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty,
dominion, or power; except War.
Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.
My subject is War, and the pity of War.
The Poetry is in the pity.
Yet, these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the
next. All a poet can do today is warn.¹*

– Wilfred Owen, preface to the *Collected Poems*

Wilfred Owen's preface to his book of poetry, published after his death, lays out a jarringly modern *ars poetica* in the wake of the First World War: poetry that is no longer concerned with poetics, elegies that refuse to console. Benjamin Britten's setting of nine of Owen's poems from his *Collected Poems*, published after Owen was killed in action in 1918, makes ironic use of this non-

1. Wilfred Owen, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, edited by C. Day Lewis (New York: New Directions, 1964), 31.

consolatory mourning by placing it within the text of the *Missa pro defunctis*, the Catholic mass for the dead. The contrast resulting from this juxtaposition is striking; Owen's poetry presents a realistic depiction of the individual human suffering during times of war, and often harshly indicts church leaders and politicians for their role in propagating these atrocities. The text of the Requiem Mass, full of the imagined terror of final judgment and pleas for mercy, is often undermined or made ironic when juxtaposed with Owen's words, which depicts the very real horror of trench warfare. Britten gives each text its own instrumentation, with the large-scale forces of two choirs and a full orchestra voicing the mournful language of the Requiem Mass, while two soloists accompanied by chamber orchestra sing Owen's texts. This tension between the traditional Latin text and Owen's poetry embodies the dichotomies between religion and the reality of war, institutions and individuals, public grief and private.

It is important, however, to remember the work's intended purpose; it was commissioned for the re-consecration of the Coventry Cathedral as a work of collective mourning. The selection of Englishman Peter Pears and German Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as the tenor and baritone soloists sought to create a spirit of reconciliation, and it was dedicated to friends of Britten and Pears who died in World War II. Thus, it was written to be a kind of consolation, which appears to directly contradict Owen's preface. Much ink has been spilled about the *War Requiem* as non-consolatory—an ironic critique of church and state—but few commentators have acknowledged the *War*

Requiem's deconstructive tendencies.² I believe that the work often undermines its purported anti-consolatory nature. Moments in Owen's poetry work to dismantle his preface, and Britten furthers this dismantling in his setting. The two passages that lend themselves best to complicating the notion of non-consolation are "At a Calvary Near the Ancre," which appears in the *Agnus Dei*, and "Strange Meeting," which appears in the *Libera me* and concludes the work. The *War Requiem's* juxtaposition of texts questions the ideas of poetic, liturgical, and musical consolation and, in the process, suggests a consolation rendered through new means; one in which the acknowledgement of failure and impossibility of complete consolation provide a way of confronting grief.

"At a Calvary Near the Ancre" is given special treatment by Britten: it is the only movement in the Requiem which begins with English text, and one in which the English and Latin texts are tightly interwoven. The poem evokes the image of the lonely Christ, denied by all his disciples, hanging "where shelled roads part" (line 1).³ Only the suffering soldiers, who are aligned with Christ by way of a canonizing the capital "S," "bear with Him" now (4). The poem includes bitter indictment of clergymen, cast by Owen as warmongers, who "stroll" (5) past Golgotha, not men of God at all, but "flesh-marked by the Beast," (7) agents of Satan. The "brawl[ed] allegiance to the state" (10) and the hatred

2. See Mervyn Cooke, *Benjamin Britten: War Requiem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Philip Rupprecht *Britten's Musical Language*, Ch. 5 "Rituals: The *War Requiem* and *Curlew River*" (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2001), David B. Green "Britten's *War Requiem*: The End of Religious Music," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 83, no.1 (2001), Alec Robertson, *Requiem: Music of Mourning and Consolation*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1968).

3. For the full text of "At a Calvary Near the Ancre," see Appendix.

of the enemy engendered by it are reinterpreted as works of the Devil, directly contradicting Christ's own commandment to love enemies as friends: "But they who love the greater love / Lay down their life; they do not hate" (11–12). The soldiers are the ones who "love the greater love" with Christ, not his ostensible servants. Owen is at his most critical of religious leaders in "At a Calvary Near the Ancre," yet it is this poem that is interwoven so tightly with the Requiem Mass.

Britten handles Owen's clear indictment of religious authority not by setting the texts in musical opposition, but by aligning them with shared melodic and rhythmic material. This treatment places the *Agnus Dei* and "At a Calvary Near the Ancre" into direct conversation with one another. The *Agnus Dei*'s melodic material is based on waves of falling and rising notes traded between the strings and voice parts, giving Owen's poem a responsorial quality, which further anchoring Britten's take on the *Agnus Dei* in religious tradition. The texts are intertwined, where the *Agnus Dei* serves as a kind of refrain between stanzas of Owen's poem. The falling and rising 5/16 ostinato pattern initiated by the chamber orchestra strings is handed back and forth between the ripieno orchestra, the choir, and the chamber orchestra. Through most of this section, B minor and C major are temporarily tonicized within oscillations of five descending notes and five ascending notes respectively, as seen in Examples 1 and 2. The chamber and full orchestra that were previously in opposition, now share the same musical content, but the content is caught between opposing tonalities.

Example 1. Transcription of B minor/C major scale motif, *Agnus Dei*, mm.1–3.

Musical score for Violin I and Violin II. The key signature is B minor (two sharps: F# and C#). The time signature is 5/16. The score consists of two staves. Both staves begin with a 'V' above the first measure. The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo) and the performance instruction is *smooth*. The music features a melodic motif that moves stepwise through the B minor scale (B, C, D, E, F#, G, A, B) and then through the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B). The motif is repeated three times across the three measures.

Example 2. Transcription of Soprano and Alto, SATB Choir, *Agnus Dei*, mm. 40–42.

Musical score for Soprano and Alto. The key signature is B minor (two sharps: F# and C#). The time signature is 5/16. The score consists of two staves. Both staves begin with *ppp* (pianississimo). The lyrics are: "Ag-nus De-i, qui tol-lis pec-ca-ta mun-di". The music features a melodic motif that moves stepwise through the B minor scale (B, C, D, E, F#, G, A, B) and then through the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B). The motif is repeated three times across the three measures.

Upon further examination of the “At A Calvary Near the Ancre” setting, Britten’s use of shared musical content creates striking irony. Owen’s text, while never denying the sacrifice or love of Christ, harshly criticizes clergymen who speak in His name. Meanwhile, Britten sets the poem in a way that becomes reminiscent of the very language of those whom Owen criticizes, situating Owen’s text within that of the institution of the Church.

Simultaneously, Britten allows the Mass text to affirm Owen's poetry by invoking responsorial interaction, instead of placing the two texts in contradiction. Despite drastic differences in language and tone in the texts, the melodic material seamlessly connects the literary segments, filling the gap in between, as well as reducing the opposition of the two musical forces. By setting "At a Calvary Near the Ancre" in this way, Britten somewhat undermines Owen's critique of religious authority as insensitive to war-time slaughter. When placed in the context of the *Agnus Dei*, the line between Owen's personal expression of rage and grief, and the religious ritual he rejects as hypocritical, blurs.

Critics of Owen, like Jon Silkin, describe his poetry as being full of "consolatory mourning," even though Owen's purported aim, as stated in his preface, is *not* to console.⁴ This criticism is especially salient in "At A Calvary Near the Ancre" and the *Agnus Dei* since Owen's mission, as laid out by his prologue, is not to speak about heroes, yet by aligning the soldiers with Christ, he glorifies them. Britten's setting reveals this inherent contradiction in Owen's poetry. Owen brings Christ down to the battlefield in "At a Calvary Near the Ancre" and re-imagines Him as a soldier, while Britten allows the soldier and Christ to be represented together as sacrificing for the sins of others, bringing the irony in Owen's poetic conceit in "At a Calvary Near the Ancre" to stark relief.

The final words of the *Agnus Dei* work to further blur the lines between Owen's text and the Requiem text by allowing a bridging between the language of the soloists and that of the choir. These words are sung by the tenor soloist, who, for the

4. Quoted in Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 69.

only time in the *War Requiem*, sings in Latin: “Dona nobis pacem” (“grant us peace”). The passage is marked *ppp* and is accompanied only by the dying reverberations of the choir’s final chord—so tiny and tenuous that it could be the voice of a ghost. This moment is significant because, for the first time, the voice that represents Owen crosses over to the Mass text, interacting with it directly by adopting its language, whereas in every other movement of the piece the two forces are set in opposition. However, the text sung by the tenor is not from the *Missa pro defunctis* but from the Mass Ordinary—the mass of the living. During the rest of the *War Requiem*, the choir has been asking for God to grant *them* eternal rest. Here, the choir wishes for peace not only for the victims of war, but also for themselves. The tenor simultaneously speaks as the voice of Owen’s soldier, hoping for peace, and as himself, as a singer in a cathedral or concert hall with an audience watching. However, his “dona nobis pacem” is sung so quietly that it seems to be less present than Owen’s words; the voice of the living drowned by the voices of the dead. The previously established dichotomy between sacred (constructed here as public) and secular (here constructed as private) mourning momentarily collapses.

Art historian James D. Herbert, who studies music and ritual spaces, offers two conflicting interpretations of the use of “dona nobis pacem.” First, the tenor’s adoption of liturgical text shows that “in the face of the incapacity of the distanced church properly to preach the lessons of war, soldiers themselves must take on the task.”⁵ Second, that this passage serves to further question the effectiveness of a Requiem, including Britten’s: “The

5. James D. Herbert, “Bad Faith at Coventry: Spence’s Cathedral and Britten’s ‘War Requiem,’” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1999), 554.

conflict between...the nominally saved and the brutally sacrificed...can never be overcome by any such passing and merely apparent agreement achieved through the facile intertwining of notes.”⁶ Here, I believe Herbert is approaching the irresolvable tension at the heart of the *War Requiem*. Neither text undermines the other completely—religion does not console entirely, nor does Owen’s poetry destroy the wish for consolation. Britten cannot force a complete reconciliation between the texts through musical means, but he can highlight the intricacies and irony in the texts by aligning them musically.

Out of the final line of *Agnus Dei* comes the *Libera me*, which temporarily re-establishes the separation between the Requiem Mass text and Owen’s poetry by setting each text in drastically different musical landscapes. The choir opens with a plea for mercy, “*Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna*” (“Free me, Lord, from eternal death”), which rises in pitch as the Latin text continues.⁷ As the choir’s voices grow more and more desperate for rescue, the snare drums and wood block beat harder, with the score calling for whip cracks that heighten the sense of terror. There are moments where the extremely high range of the choir parts obscures the words entirely, while the soprano soloist’s line, almost always written above a C₅, gradually rises to C₆. Then, following a fanfare of brass and drums, the choir’s tempo slows down to die out. From the silence, the tenor emerges singing “It seemed that out of battle I escaped.” The choir’s wailing of the *Libera me* is reinterpreted in the tenor’s words as the sounds of battle. The orchestra falls silent, with only

6. Ibid., 554

7. For full text and translations of the *Libera Me*, and for full text of “Strange Meeting,” see Appendix.

occasional commentary coming from the strings. The shift in accompaniment from frantic noise to cold silence marks this new place as unearthly and inhuman.

Owen's "Strange Meeting" also starts with deliverance, only instead of deliverance from death, it is deliverance *through* death. He makes it clear that this escape is not to a place of redemption, but a dark "Hell," a trench as old as the "titanic wars" that "groined" it (lines 1–3). Owen's hell is reminiscent of the hell of trenches that the soldiers have escaped; dark, claustrophobic, and full of corpses: "Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped / Through granites which Titanic wars had groined" (2–3). Instead of writhing sinners, Owen's Hell is populated by groaning "encumbered sleepers" (4). The English soldier tries to wake them and succeeds in rousing one—the ghost of a soldier killed by the speaker's bayonet the day before. The speaker, himself a victim of the horrors of war, must confront his own victim. Neither of the two soldier is sent to a hero's heaven. The British soldier's opening line to his victim feels nervously polite: "Strange friend, I said, here is no cause to mourn" (14). The answer is gently sarcastic: "None, said that other, save the undone years, the hopelessness" (15). The second soldier has not yet revealed that he was an enemy. He only laments what they both have lost: the same "undone years" that were taken from each, the "wildest beauty" (18) of the living world that "mocks" (20) the dead soldiers, and if it grieves at all, "grieves richlier" (21) somewhere else.

Owen gives the dead soldier a strange, archaic sounding language. The soldier speaks of "vain citadels that are not walled" (33) and blood-clogged "chariot-wheels" (134), words that sound like the language of epic war poetry, instead of modern

descriptions of the tanks and guns of World War I. Owen intentionally leaves the distinctions between these two men vague by never specifically mentioning either soldier's nationality, even though he refers to the "other" as a German conscript in one of his drafts for the poem.⁸ By doing this, he makes the two soldiers equal counterparts of each other, both capable of "courage" and "wisdom" (30–31). Owen consistently avoids giving either man a label to vilify him as a foe, showing that these distinctions are ultimately arbitrary. Both men share the same hopes and the same fate, and only in death do they realize that there was never an innate difference between them. This is the "pity of war, the pity war distilled" (125). The world goes on warring without the two soldiers, "content with what [they] spoiled" (24) and "[trekking] from progress" (29). The dead soldier's final admission of who he is ("I am the enemy you killed my friend" (45)) is less of an accusation than a simple acknowledgement of the truth and a kind of conciliation. Rather, it turns to whatever peace that can be found in oblivion, which the two men prepare to enter together. The two soldiers are now friends, and the arbitrary divisions that separated them in life are now meaningless in death, but this realization comes too late to redeem them, as they are left to rest in "encumbered" sleep like the other sleepers in the tunnel, "too fast in thought or death to be disturbed" (5).

In Britten's reinterpretation, he omits the lines about Hell, leaving the meeting to take place in a desolate purgatory, but perhaps one with a chance of escape. By removing these

8. See note in Wilfred Owen, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, edited by C. Day Lewis (New York: New Directions, 1964), 36.

lines, Britten alters the implications of the poem significantly.⁹ The poem's irony lies in the soldiers' reconciliation coming too late to allow them to escape from the encumbered oblivion. Britten's version of the poem, while maintaining the frightening setting, allows the listener to entertain the possibility of finding peace.

The contrast between "Strange Meeting" and the Latin text of the *Libera me* is that between divine and human forgiveness. Owen's poem is not concerned with reconciliation with God; no deity is present in this dark hell, and judgment has already been passed. Instead, it seeks a human reconciliation, that of the two soldiers. The pleas for deliverance from God's wrath in the *Libera me* are made powerless in the face of Owen's poem, in which death may be a relief from battle, but nothing can deliver the soldiers from their fate. Musicologist David B. Greene, who studies the intersection of art, music, and spirituality, writes of the *Libera me*, "our deepest need is deliverance not from eternal death, but from the 'undone years' we have cost one another."¹⁰ The great tragedy of Owen's version of "Strange Meeting" is that this reconciliation between the two soldiers comes too late to save either of them. Britten's setting of these two texts—one of cosmic mercy, and one of human forgiveness, both rendered powerless to ultimately redeem or console—creates a striking contrast. This denied consolation is seemingly in line with Owen's preface, but Britten's setting complicates this notion further by introducing

9. Leaving these lines about Hell in the libretto would turn the "In paradisum" that follows "Strange Meeting" into a bitter joke.

10. Greene, "The End of Religious Music," 98.

the hope for peace and reconciliation, though it cannot console entirely.

Britten sets most of “Strange Meeting” in a musical version of Owen’s hell. The first part of the poem is sung as a recitative over strings, which are instructed to play their notes “coldly” and very quietly, acting only as a hum behind the voice. The chromaticism in the vocal line marks the mysteriousness of the setting. As the tenor sings, “As I probed them,” the strings introduce a motif of jabbing chords that reappears as the soloists sing the rest of “Strange Meeting” (see Example 3). The tenor’s timid opening line, “Strange friend” is set on the C–F# tritone that dominates the piece, with all its historical associations with death. After the baritone sings, “None, save the undone years, the hopelessness,” the oboe repeats the ‘*dona nobis pacem*’ melody from the end of the *Agnus Dei* as a reminder of the tenor’s earlier plea for peace (see Examples 4 and 5). The “march of the retreating world” is heard in the orchestra as timpani and winds play martial music before fading back to the recitative over strings, and reappearing a final time under the line “into vain citadels,” which Britten marks to be played as “less lively.”

Nota Bene

Example 3. String accompaniment with “stabbing” chords, *Libera me*, reh. 119. Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1962.

Musical score for Example 3, showing string parts for Violin I (VI. I), Violin II (VI. II), Viola (Via.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The score features "stabbing" chords with vibrato and dynamic markings like *pp* and *f*.

Example 4. Baritone recit, reh. 121. Britten, *War Requiem*

Musical score for Example 4, showing a Baritone solo and string accompaniment. The baritone part includes lyrics: "None," said the other, "save the undone years, The hope-less-ness." The string parts are marked with "cold" and "ppp".

By the end of the Owen's text, the musical landscape changes again. The "cold strings" die out, and each of the five final lines is delivered in near silence, only punctuated by stabbing chords from the strings. After a long moment of silence, the two soldiers sing, "Let us sleep now" over an accompaniment of harp, clarinet, and strings as the texture thickens (see Example 6). The melody is very quiet, and a boys' choir sings new text: "In paradisum deducant te Angeli," ("May angels lead you into Heaven") which hopes that the dead will be received by the martyrs and rest eternally with Lazarus. Britten clearly situates "In paradisum" and "Let us sleep now" in a different place than the rest of "Strange Meeting" by employing dramatic change in texture. The two soloists' voices intertwine in a serene and tonal duet as the boys' choir and finally the whole chorus and orchestra join into the texture. The phrases run together with no sense of beginning or end. This is the seamless, timeless music of eternity, implying that the two soldiers *could be* led into paradise; a possibility not suggested in Owen's poem. Herbert describes this moment as "the closest the War Requiem can approach the high platform of a reconciliation between the blessings of heaven and the ravages of war... a suspension in sleep (for Christ it lasted three days; for the rest of us...)." ¹¹ Though this comparison is not explicitly suggested by the piece, the idea that the soldiers could escape from subterranean slumber, similar to how Christ rose after the harrowing of hell, demonstrates how the Mass text can alter the reception of Owen's poetry. As he did in the *Agnus Dei*, Britten's setting of the last lines "Strange Meeting" further aligns Owen's soldiers with Christ and suggests a kind of sleep more in line with the Requiem Mass than Owen's suggestion of

11. Herbert, "Bad Faith at Coventry," 560.

encumbered oblivion. Furthermore, Britten's setting works again to question Owen's preface. By ending the piece with a moment of musical resolution, however brief, Britten provides a moment of consolation. Here the form of the Requiem Mass works against Owen's purported mission: Britten ends the Mass text with "In paradisum" which brings with it textual implications of religious consolation for the dead and their families. Throughout the War Requiem, Britten allows Owen's poetry and the Requiem Mass text to interrogate, to ironize, and often to undermine each other, but this textual interaction has always taken place within the idiom of the Mass, which by its very nature offers the consolation of an afterlife in Heaven.

Britten leaves this question of ultimate consolation unresolved. The soldiers' ascent into heaven is only suggested as a possibility due to incorporation of the Requiem mass but it is never made concrete, as Heather Wiebe writes: "This resting of ghosts has been the quest of the *War Requiem* since the opening "Requiem aeternam," with its prayer for eternal sleep. It has been difficult to achieve, but this poem—this voice of the dead themselves, made audible through the machinery of the *Requiem*—proves newly effective."¹² Yet, this resting of ghosts is only for a brief moment, and cannot provide resolution for the Mass that preceded it. The echoes of the horrors of battle, of the eight other Owen poems that Britten set, cannot be drowned out by one moment of consolation. The final movement cannot erase what came before it, because Britten cannot allow such an easy, complacent resolution.

12. Heather Wiebe, *Britten's Unquiet Past: Sound and Memory in Postwar Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2012), 219.

Suddenly, the combined forces of the choir and soloists give way to the tritone bells. The boys' choir returns with the opening lines from the mass text, "Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine," again emphasizing the F \sharp -C tritone that has symbolized death, disturbing the soundscape with remnants of what cannot be forgotten or resolved. The full musical forces of choir, soloists, and both orchestras resume the "sleep" music again, only to be interrupted one last time by the insistent tritone, which resolves itself into a *ppp* F major chord. This final moment of resolution is so quiet and so short—only one of eighty-five minutes—that it barely satisfies the need for conceptual resolution despite its beauty. Herbert describes this final moment as leaving us with "a lost memory of what resolution would sound like if we could get from here [musical resolution] to there [conceptual resolution], which we cannot."¹³ This abrupt shift in musical material, even in the last movement, shows the tension between the desire for consolation and the impossibility of attaining it through musical means.

As I have shown, the *War Requiem* complicates Owen's poetic mission, revealing its impossibility through moments which deconstruct and destabilize Owen's words. Ultimately, Britten does not reject the possibility of reconciliation and peace. He only acknowledges that conceptual consolation cannot be found through something so simple as the resolution of a chord. Music cannot entirely put the dead to rest and neither can poetry, nor any religious ritual. This is not to say that the *War Requiem* is a failure, or that it is meaningless because it cannot provide an answer. By putting the forces of Owen's poetry and the Requiem

13. Herbert, "Bad Faith at Coventry," 561.

Mass together, Britten is not trying to reconcile the tensions that exist between and within the texts. As a memorial for the dead, it succeeds because it acknowledges the impossibility of easy consolation, but does not deny that such a thing exists. Perhaps this acts as a new kind of consolation: paltry, but never destroying the hope that suffering may someday give way to peace.

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Appendix

At a Calvary Near the Ancre¹⁴

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

Near Golgotha strolls many a priest, 5
And in their faces there is pride
That they were flesh-marked by the Beast
By whom the gentle Christ's denied.

The scribes on all the people shove
And bawl allegiance to the state, 10
But they who love the greater love
Lay down their life; they do not hate.

Strange Meeting¹⁵

It seemed that out of the battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred. 5
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall; 10
By his dead smile, I knew we stood in Hell.
With a thousand fears, that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
"Strange, friend," I said, "Here is no cause to mourn." 15

14. Wilfred Owen, *Collected Poems*, 82.

15. *Ibid.*, 35.

Nota Bene

"None," said the other, "Save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair, 20
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something has been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold, 25
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled.
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress. 30
Courage was mine, and I had mystery;
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels 35
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were. 40
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now . . ." 45

Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei
qui tollis peccata mundi

dona eis requiem

Lamb of God
Who takest away the sins of the
world
Grant them rest

Libera me

Libera me, Domine, de morte
aeterna,
in die illa tremenda:
Quando coeli movendi sunt et terra:

Dum veneris judicare saeculum per
ignem.
Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo
dum discussio venerit, atque ventura
ira.

Libera me, Domine, de morte
aeterna.
Quando coeli movendi sunt et terra.

Dies illa, dies irae, calamitatis
et miseriae, dies magna et amara
valde.
Libera me, Domine.

Free me, Lord, from eternal death
on that dreadful day
when the skies and ground shall
quake
when Thou shalt comest to judge
our generation by fire
I am made to tremble, and am afraid,
until the trial shall come and the
anger arrive.
Free me, Lord, from eternal death.

When the skies and ground shall
quake.
That day, day of anger, of disaster
and misery, a great day and intensely
bitter.
Deliver me, O Lord.