

Peter Maxwell Davies' Worst Nightmare: staging the unsacred in the operas *Taverner* and *Resurrection*

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INTRODUCTION

Peter Maxwell Davies first began writing music for the stage in the late 1950s. Throughout a series of premieres in the late 60s and early 70s, he developed a reputation for experimental vocal and theatrical effects. His *Revelation and Fall* (1966), for instance, features a singer dressed as a nun who bellows obscenities into a loudspeaker. Davies recruited Vanessa Redgrave to orate Luke's version of the betrayal of Christ in Latin for *Missa super l'Homme Armé* (1968, rev. 1971). And in *Vesalii Icones* (1969), a nude dancer who writhes in representation of the Stations of the Cross is revealed at the last minute as the Antichrist. Davies' first opera, *Taverner*, is based on the historical John Taverner, a late-medieval Catholic composer with a troubling story. Having turned his back on the Church and his music during the Reformation, Taverner assisted in the ensuing dissolution of the Catholic monasteries. Davies lost half the original manuscript for *Taverner* in a fire at his Dorset cottage home in 1969, but reconstructed it in time for a 1972 Covent Garden premiere. At the same time, Davies had already begun mulling over a second opera, a companion piece to *Taverner* called *Resurrection*, which was almost complete at the time of *Taverner's* premiere. *Resurrection* is a black comedy in which the central character (a blow-up dummy) is ritually brutalized by his family and singled out for special correction at the hands of various "Pillars of Society."¹ At the end of the opera, the dummy's lobotomization triggers the resurrection of the Antichrist. *Resurrection* would remain

unperformed for nearly twenty years, finally premiering at Darmstadt in 1987.

While the two operas have little in common on the surface they betray similar dramatic preoccupations. Each precipitates an encounter between a protagonist and the world he inhabits that ends badly for the protagonist. In spite of the fact that he is genuine and moral, or perhaps because of the fact, the protagonist is unable to master the terms and conditions upon which his world is founded and ultimately finds himself occupying a vital role in his own undoing. Both operas feature a cameo from the Antichrist who, we are given to understand, is the author of these terms and conditions, and thus the probable cause of the fateful trajectory of each of the protagonists. Taverner's religious conversion is framed not as a well-reasoned decision but as a religious brainwashing. *Resurrection* replays a similar scenario: this time the dummy occupies Taverner's role, and his lobotomy replaces Taverner's brainwashing.

Taverner and *Resurrection* share a tandem conception, but a strangely dissimilar performance history. *Taverner* enjoyed brief success on the international stage, while *Resurrection*, due perhaps to its long incubation and much-delayed premiere, remains among Davies' least-performed and least-liked works. We might imagine the anthropomorphic parallel: a set of twins grows up side by side. Having survived a fire in young adulthood, one emerges unscathed, the other, shattered by the near-death experience, withdraws from the world and is presumed dead. The first enjoys a marginally successful stage career. The other resurfaces decades later, a jaded and nearly unrecognizable doppelganger of his sibling.

Nearly completed in the early 1960s but unseen until the late 80s, *Resurrection* was dated when it was still new, which may also help to explain why it was such a flop. What British audiences in the 60s would have viewed as a challenge to the

establishment (a scene in which a policeman, a judge and a trade-union leader sneak into the same lavatory stall together, or various danced sequences involving characters of indeterminate, or over-determined, gender) just wasn't as daring in the 80s. The T.V. commercials that dominate a smaller, elevated stage reflect a much earlier, post-war generation of advertising (Vegemite, Spam, Calgon soap). The "Pop Group" poses yet another problem. Designated as the stage band that accompanies the demonic transformation of the dummy's housecat into the Dragon from the Book of Revelation, the pop group is meant to sound "terrifying"² but the ensuing musical reference sounds like a grouchy Linda Rondstadt where heavy metal, say, Twisted Sister, would have been more appropriate. *Resurrection* is an opera not of its time, a living anachronism. But it is precisely as an anachronism that it is capable of shedding interesting light on its partner opera. Set twenty years in the (then-)past, but appearing toward the end of the twentieth century, *Resurrection* is a kind of *Taverner Revisited*, simultaneously updating its other half, and offering insight into the long-term deployment and adjustment of Davies' compositional priorities.

Before proposing a thesis for how we might understand the relationship of these two operas, first a word about those compositional priorities and how I understand them. In the spirit of experimental music theater being written elsewhere in Great Britain at this time (by, for instance, Davies' colleague Harrison Birtwistle, with whom Davies formed the Pierrot Players), and that of composers in the rest of Europe and in America (Mauricio Kagel, Luciano Berio, John Cage, Gyorgi Ligeti, Henri Pousseur, Henry Partch, Luigi Nono are a few), Davies' works for the stage are confrontational, boundary-renouncing, provocative and sometimes bizarre. But the theological aspect of Davies' querulousness I find to be unique, and, in his early career

years, it is particularly robust and legible.

Critics and scholars have hardly overlooked the fact that much of Davies' output (extending through the remainder of his career—he is still composing) is informed and complicated by a spirit of inquiry into the Christian faith. The compositional world of the 1960s was no stranger to Christian themes, which served as a point of orientation in several prominent operatic and quasi-operatic works. Britten's church parables—*Curlew River* (1964), *The Burning Fiery Furnace* (1966), and *The Prodigal Son* (1968)—Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and Messiaen's *Saint Francis of Assisi* are a few that have attained a degree of recognition and repeat performances. Crucially, in these instances, the composer's own faith (e.g., Messiaen's highly creative, mystical brand of Catholicism) or struggle with faith (as with Britten's fraught relationship to the Church of England)³ lends support, a sense of relevance and weight, to each project. But Christianity attaches to these operas in a way that overgrows their epistemological limits as personal, idiomatic statements of religious inquiry. The story of Christianity becomes a kind of monolith, preceding these operas and extending a kind of narrative priority over them. Christianity's union with opera entails seeming *a priori*-ness, furnishing a sense of closure beforehand. (We know this story. We know how it ends.) By contrast, Christianity in the hands of Peter Maxwell Davies is a curiosity. It is never *a priori* but instead is on trial.⁴ This is not to say that Davies writes opera in an anti-Christian vein, or that he offers an exclusively negative account of its practices. (Nor do his operas function overtly as a critique of the monodimensional way in which Christianity is often deployed in opera, although one could easily argue that they do offer this critique, implicitly.) Rather, he is mounting an inquiry into a type of transcendent Christianity that offers its adherents the

assurance of a settled orientation, and thus relief from the prosaic concerns of the everyday. The focal point of the inquiry is the everyday world upon which a Christianity undeserving of the name has set down roots; this everyday world is also the vessel from which that Christianity must be purged.

Davies presents a view of Christianity as deeply corrupt and two-faced—his stage works are full of betrayal, last-minute reversals, and metamorphoses. The figure of the Antichrist, Christ's evil double, appears frequently. It is the special province of this corrupted Christianity to take on the appearance of good in order to mock the assumption that Christianity and goodness naturally correspond. In Davies' world, the best men finish last. Abraham sacrifices Isaac, and Job dies with his face in the dirt. Davies' compositions are aimed at dismantling the unthinking presupposition that Christianity is *ipso facto* a Good Thing. At best, Christianity is pop psychology: a lucky charm that conducts the good of heart away from the concerns of life on planet Earth into the arms of a God the Father who hovers endearingly off in the sky. At worst, it is a kind of death drive, the utter neglect of the day to day, and a worldview that denigrates health and well-being by training its sights on life after death. Thus, it is not Davies who de-sacralizes Christianity; Christianity, by Davies' reckoning, is itself already de-sacralized. His mission is to expose the deadening, corrupting effects of institutional practices within Christianity—or, more specifically, to expose the tendency within Christianity to mistake death for life.

This essay subdivides into two parts; the first focuses on the libretto for *Taverner*, the second on that of *Resurrection*. Part one considers *Taverner* as a meditation on the notion of voice—its deployment as an instrument, and its instrumentality—within a more abstract critique of institutionalized Christianity. According to the terms

of this critique, the voice acts as a symbolic bulwark against a corrupt and defaced but extremely powerful Christianity. Taverner's voice is his means of self-expression (his gift for composition), and his recourse to individuation within the oppressive religious environment in which he is trapped. It is also Taverner's Achilles' heel. If he loses the battle over voice, Taverner loses his soul. Taverner's voice is the organizing, life-giving force of the opera—it is what he must work to preserve and what the rest of the opera will work to dismantle. His eventual conversion announces the dawn of a new regime, and the triumph of the Antichrist, a world where wrong becomes right and right wrong. By the rules of the game, however, this Christianity does not fight voice with voice.⁵ Instead, the symbolic battle that rages over Taverner's soul pits the voice of Taverner on one side against the full arsenal of the operatic stage minus the voice—lighting, costumes, makeup, props: all manner of special effects—on the other. Thus, *Taverner's* high-stakes moment, the moment when Taverner loses voice and soul, is also the point in the opera that is most vigorously theatrical (or indeed anti-theatrical).⁶

Resurrection, the subject of part two, marks a shift away from the already-imperiled status of the voice in *Taverner* toward its permanent eclipse. Taverner is ultimately no match for the barrage of effects that wrest his voice from him, but he is at least given the opportunity to fight against them. *Resurrection* makes no such concession. Its protagonist has no voice to begin with, because he—or rather it—isn't even alive. In hot pursuit of a dummy that poses no threat whatsoever to its authority, the opera's special effects wage a one-sided war that is less about justifying the reasons for such a war (there aren't any) than a gratuitous display of its own technology. *Resurrection* would thus seem to be about the meaningless exhibition of theatrical prowess—the appearance of a toxic Christianity run amuck. Using these two works as

anchors, my aim is to develop a double reading that demonstrates Davies' strategy for projecting this nightmarish vision: a world in utter thrall to theatrical excess. The real coup of this monstrous Christianity, however, is not that it is able to win over this world, but that it is able to do so using such poor resources. Thus, the nightmarish aspect of this vision includes the fact that a world so easily won must bear partial responsibility for its own undoing. That is, the craft of this Christianity is not in its powers of deceit but in its shrewd choice to deceive a world already so open to deception.

But the triumph of this Christianity is not Davies' way of thumbing his nose at the Christian religion as a whole. Instead, the mechanics of evil are most readily identifiable when they are magnified, and Davies' hyperbolic idiom becomes the car that drives this message. The purpose of this essay is thus twofold. Overtly, I aim to provide an analysis of that idiom, what I earlier referred to as Davies' compositional priorities—particularly, the things he's interested in putting on a stage. I find that Davies presents a reading, literally, a *view*, of the ways and means of evil in terms of the ways and means of opera. Put more simply, that he reads the technology of evil according to the technology of opera; the bigger that technology grows, the more transparently visible the inverted logic according to which it operates. But this local argument about the staging is ultimately in service to my second concern, which is moral. Seen as extremely, monstrously operatic, the indestructible, and irresistible, technology of evil acquires a certain lucidity, even banality. Which is not to say triviality. Rather, Davies' vision of evil as utterly pedestrian is what allows it to traverse the ordinary world incognito. Its ugly everydayness is its best disguise. The takeaway lesson from these operas, the reason I think an analysis is worth

undertaking, is that they emerge from a position (Davies' position) of moral and societal concern. That these operas end so badly is not evidence of a nihilistic streak — on the contrary, the resolutely unhappy endings stage (and, in so doing, inflect as theatrical) the terrifying experience of a lack of god where one ought to be.

PART ONE: *TAVERNER*

According to the now-disputed historical record, the real-life John Taverner, a church organist and compositional forerunner of Thomas Tallis and William Byrd, narrowly escaped death for his flirtation with Protestantism in 1526. After being saved at his heresy trial by dint of being “but a poor musician,”⁷ Taverner “repented him very much that he had made songs to popish ditties in the time of his blindness.” He wrote no more, and subsequently fell into the service of Thomas Cromwell.⁸ The historical Taverner is an enigma. His compositional future having come to a screeching (or, an unexpectedly *silent*) halt, Taverner does not walk away quietly. Instead, with apparent zeal, he turns on his former employer and reenlists on the side of his enemies. Davies' challenge, what no doubt sparked his attraction to the story, is the impenetrability of its central character — Taverner's about-face cries out for explanation.

Reflecting, perhaps, the birth of this character from a strange marriage of historical recollection and fanciful invention, Davies' Taverner is appropriately schizophrenic, displaying a tendency to move abruptly from one strongly-held view to another. The opera opens on Taverner's heresy trial, where his rejection of Rome appears fully justified. In his first speech, he reasons against transubstantiation (the transformation of the Eucharist into the literal presence of Christ) as perverse and “unnatural”:

of one body of Christ is made two bodies, one natural,
which is in heaven, the other, in the sacrament, needs
be unnatural, to enter the mouth in the form of bread,
and be disposed of therewith.

What comfort can be to any Christian to receive for a
space Christ's unnatural body?⁹

Once Taverner vows to go to the stake for his beliefs, however, the courtroom scene gives way to an other-worldly space in which the King's Jester (who serves as Taverner's alter ego and foil to his better intentions) plays upon Taverner's rejection of the unnatural by ticking off a list of his alleged violations of Catholic tenets:

...the indestructible heritage of the Church is heaped
against you, Taverner –
the fourteen articles of faith, (seven for the Trinity, and
seven for the Sacred Humanity)
the ten commandments of the Law,
the two evangelical precepts of charity,
the seven works of mercy,
the seven deadly sins,
the seven opposing virtues,
and the seven sacraments of grace.¹⁰

Complementing the verbal assault "... a confused heap of these articles gradually

appears” on the stage in front of Taverner: “bibles, Moses’ tablets, chalices, copes, crucibles, offering boxes, wafers, bottles of vino sacro, pardons, relics of saints (parts of their bodies, also clouts, girdles, shoes, wheels, griddles, axes, scalpels, boulders, lions etc.)”¹¹ Gesturing at the heap of iconic detritus, Taverner rages: “Arrogant superstitions, fantastic opinions, devised by the Antichrist of Rome to enslave the world.” At the suggestion of his name, the Antichrist arrives on stage to stake out a place on top of the pile. This is his home turf—the chaotic overabundance of the unnatural. Unsatisfied, the Jester (now as Death) suggests that Taverner must yet forsake his music: “your Music, that you whored to Rome.”¹² Death whips up a disorderly morality play. “Upon an urgent sign from Death, a cart is trundled in across their path, with a ☩ upon it, ready for a street passion play, drawn by painted Demons with pitchforks.”¹³ Above the cross, a God the Father “in dazzling splendour of rainbow colours” and with “seven lamps around him in a semi-circle ... sits upon a jeweled throne, in a magnificent robe, his right hand resting upon a huge book with seven seals.” The Archangels Gabriel and Michael sit in attendance.¹⁴ Rose Parrow and Richard Taverner, Taverner’s mistress and his father, plead with Taverner to quit the scene. But as Death initiates the crucifixion they are suddenly drafted into the play, kneeling as Mary and John at the foot of the Cross. Death “mounts the Cross, ostentatiously, as Joking Jesus. The Demons place huge rubber nails in his hands.” Joking Jesus gestures at Taverner: “I will not be angered with you, John, / If you now do war for me, / For mercy I him grant pardon, / That whored my corse in Rome.”¹⁵ Taverner suddenly falls to his knees: “Now God me guy, / I fear me I, / With doleful cry, / I shall aby ...” Joking Jesus “detaches the oversize joke nail” from his left hand and transfers his stigmata (red paint) to Taverner’s right. Taverner gazes at it in a

daze. God the Father charges Taverner with a new mission: “To those who purge our land from heretical filth, is promised highest reward of supernatural blessings.” Their threat to Taverner’s confession having been neutralized, Richard/John and Rose/Mary “who have become as dummies, stage props”¹⁶ are thrown into a cart and hauled offstage. Joking Jesus produces a scroll and pen, and Taverner scrawls his confession: “I repent me very much that I have made songs to Popish ditties in the time of my blindness.” He collapses. In the final moments of the act, Death proclaims his triumph over Taverner’s prostrate figure, reciting Matthew 23: 43-45:

But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of a man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest, and finds it not. Then he says, I will return into my house whence I came, and when he finds it empty, swept clean, he enters and dwells there with seven other spirits, more evil than himself and the last state of that man is worse than the first. .

Taverner’s fatal mistake thus hinges on a failure to heed his own advice regarding the division between proper worship of the natural—the divine that resides in heaven—and the improper veneration of the unnatural on earth. Mistaking the passion play for a genuine vision of Christ’s sacrifice, Taverner completes his downfall in an ironic reversal of the Eucharistic process—his ingestion of, or penetration by, a host of unnatural, demonic bodies. At the outset of act 2, the opera begins to replay itself, only this time with Taverner in the role of prosecutor and the former prosecutor, the White Abbot, as his victim. Now Taverner is heartless, lethal. He is not the man he was. In the final moments of the opera, we witness a reverse of the passion play, a true martyrdom—that of the White Abbot—and Taverner experiences a second

conversion. Just before the final blackout, he cries out for forgiveness: “O God, I call upon thy name, out of the lowest dungeon. Forsake not thy faithful servant.”¹⁷

Davies’ instinct as a dramatist guided him to retain rather than explain the mystery at the heart of Taverner’s tale. But if anything, Davies takes a mysterious story and makes it even more mysterious. Davies uses the trial scene to demonstrate that Taverner is passionate and highly rational about his views. He has no truck with the “unnatural” material stuff of religion. A passion play of utter nonsense, one that makes recourse to large, oversize joke nails, and a God the Father bedecked in dazzling rainbows, ought to be the *worst* way to persuade a man of such character. Instead, it appears to be just the thing to make him change his mind.

Taverner’s rash confession is the part of the opera that sits most uneasily with its critics. For Joseph Kerman, the sudden conversion makes little *dramatic* sense. One moment, Taverner is prepared to go to the stake for his beliefs, the next moment he willingly waives them.¹⁸ Pointing to the parallel with Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*, Kerman objects that while Adrian Leverkühn, Thomas Mann’s Schoenbergian protagonist, enters into a fair bargain (in the novel, Leverkühn and the Devil spend a fair amount of time hammering out the terms of a contract that, in return for the sale of his soul, guarantees Leverkühn world renown during his lifetime) it is less clear that Taverner benefits in the slightest from his. This, for Kerman, is the opera’s singular weakness:

It is here that Davies's devotion to the static drama of ideas rather than the development of character catches up with him. Death, not Taverner, sings eloquently at this juncture, and neither before nor later in the opera is Taverner given the

opportunity to come to life. ... Taverner 'betrays' music, then, not for the sake of religion but for the sake of the perverse rewards of fanaticism. Even this he doesn't do for any motive that is clearly dramatized, but as the result of some sort of obscure trickery. ... What remains [of Taverner] is a straw man, a caricature out of a counter-reformation tract complete down to the last scurrilous, superstitious detail.¹⁹

Kerman scans the opera for something to give us faith in Taverner, evidence of life and "human personality," but comes up empty-handed. I quote Kerman at length because he flags a critical aspect of Taverner: something about this character is out of joint. Kerman would prefer a Taverner who fights the good fight to the bitter end, or one with whom we might at least sympathize should he fail to do so. Instead, Davies' Taverner simply fails, and he does so for reasons that evade us. But this, of course, is precisely what Davies is stirred to dramatize—the inscrutability of a man somehow moved to ruin himself. *Taverner*, the opera that frames this inscrutable character, presents a moral (that good men become bad?) that is simultaneously not one—or one that is (mysteriously, confusingly) morally insupportable, problematic. What is interesting is that in the years immediately following the house fire, Davies himself appears to find Taverner so problematic that he has to go and write another mini-opera about him.

Eight Songs for a Mad King is a kind of anti-monument to the progressive insanity of King George III, and one of the most demanding pieces in the contemporary repertoire, requiring theatrical high jinx and a baritone possessed of prodigious vocal flexibility. *Eight Songs* literalizes the madness of George III as the King veers wildly between cognizance of his condition (in a moment of self-reflexivity, the final song

finds him preaching his own eulogy) and a descent into certifiable insanity. The soloist must be prepared literally to risk losing his voice in order to convey the sense of the king's anguish at the border between sense and nonsense. Based on the ravings of the King (as recorded by his royal housekeeper), the libretto works to restore a sense of semantic order, yet constantly threatens to spiral off into pure vocalise.

Eight Songs also bears evidence of a general rethinking of certain of *Taverner's* basic premises. Like Taverner, the king inhabits a world controlled by forces that exceed his understanding but which nevertheless demand his cooperation. In the opening song, "The Sentry (King Prussia's Minuet)," the King plies an imagined sentry with flattery and promises of gift-giving: "Good day to your Honesty: God guard who guards the gate ... You are a pretty fellow; next month I shall give you a cabbage." When this fails to move his interlocutor, the King laments: "Undo the door! / Who has stolen my key? Ah! my Kingdom ..."²⁰ The King's world, like Taverner's, presents a lose-lose situation. He understands the reason for his entrapment (speaking in the third person, he admits: "He talked with trees, attacked his eldest son, / Disowned his wife, to make a ghost his Queen")²¹ but finds himself at a loss to broker a solution. But while Taverner cuts a deal that enables him, by giving up his voice, to gain some measure of authority (if temporarily), the King, unable or unwilling to engage in deal-making, loses his authority and is left with nothing but his voice.

And what a voice! The King, unlike Taverner, goes to such lengths to express himself that he becomes a parody of the human need to communicate, his songs a form of talk therapy gone horribly awry. To articulate the opening line, "Good day to your Honesty: God guard who guards the gate," costs him nearly an entire minute of exertion. He screams, stutters, swoons, gasps, gurgles, and coughs. The King cannot

contain himself; or rather, like a baby, he is capable only of expressing the need to express himself. Thus the King's voice represents the means for disclosing the agony of madness, but it is also the agony itself. The voice in *Eight Songs* is a burden: the burden of endless song, an exhausting but inexhaustible stream of commentary. If, as Kerman suggests, Taverner's inhumanity is signaled in part by his failure to sing at his conversion, then the mad King is thoroughly human because he cannot fail to sing. *Eight Songs* is like the aria Kerman would have liked Taverner to sing—a one-act aria of steroidal proportions, in which a man contemplates what it means to die for his voice, to die singing.

Nevertheless, we feel for the King, and this may be what sets him most apart from Taverner; we feel for him because there is no escaping his madness, and no escaping his voice. In part, of course, the King cannot stop singing for practical reasons: *Eight Songs* is a monodrama, and without his madness, the King has no reason to sing. While Taverner lives in a world that demands the receipt of his voice, the King's world demands that he retain it. But this voice is barely containable, and there is a sense in which it, not the King, drives each scene, and that it is all the King can do simply to keep up. The King's madness becomes a metaphor for this internal split, the divisibility of voice and body, and the power struggle between them in which voice emerges as the clear victor. The King's experience—the body ill-equipped to contain voice is, according to Peter Brooks, a defining feature of opera. He notes, endearingly:

Those who dislike opera do so precisely because they prefer singing voices to be disembodied, pure voice; they cannot accept a convention that, as we all know, can lead to a knob-kneed, fifty-year-old tenor condemned to wobble around the stage in

Egyptian fighting gear, or a voluminous soprano made to represent a teenage virgin. The demands made on voice and body for dramatic representation are not the same, and the claim for their coincidence will very often demand a large dose of faith on the part of the spectator/listener, a willingness to accept an as-if that would seem to be excluded from a genre that traditionally seeks, in its stage settings and effects, such a large measure of illusion. Lovers of opera do of course accept that as-if. They do not close their eyes as the overage and overweight Radames launches into his adoration of Aida. On the contrary, they revel in the weird excess of the situation. They revel in a form that combines illusionism with clear impossibility...²²

Eight Songs leans into the gap between voice and body, making demands on the body that push Brooks' as-if illusion into nightmarish delusion. The King is no match for this voice. It is unwieldy, reckless.

The seventh song, "Country Dance (Scotch Bonnett)," contains what is probably the most contemplative and sincere moment in *Eight Songs*. The piano begins softly and wistfully, saloon-style. Like a ghost from the past, we recognize the tune as the opening motif from Handel's *Messiah*. The King composes himself. With tremendous self-control, he enters at the tenor's opening line: "Comfort ye, my people!" Summoning all his energy he tries, it seems, to channel a far-off ideal, an untouchable, pre-operative voice. But the King aims too high. His entrance is more than slightly off—it's almost atmospheric, in the high soprano range. He barely squeaks out the words, like a teapot struggling not to boil. It is, alas, a blooper of an operatic moment. By the time the King gets to "my people," his voice, almost with a mind of its own, begins to fragment multiphonicly. It breaks into voices. Further on, in the deep-

throated, lusty growl of a drunken sailor, the King declaims the virtues of a good stiff drink (“The best purl in Windsor!”)²³ But then, as the pianist begins to pound senselessly on the same dissonant chord, the King shrieks, “Even I, your King, have contemplated evil.” He threatens to avenge himself—to “rule with a rod of iron.”²⁴

The King veers wildly between vocal registers, and between contemplative extremes. The announcement in the oratorio is one of salvation, the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. Minutes later, the King warns loudly that he is not a kind, comforting ruler, but a savage dictator. The King’s voice signals these changes of role. But because they arrive so swiftly and unpredictably, we have the impression of a man unequal to the task of mastering his own voice. Of course, that the King cannot overrule this aspect of himself is evidence of his unfitness as a ruler generally. But the reason for comparing *Eight Songs* with *Taverner* is that if the Mad King bests Taverner in his ability to retain his voice, neither Taverner nor the Mad King is ultimately sufficient to the task of embodying that voice. I’ll return to this idea in the second half of the article.

For the moment, I want simply to note that when Taverner is presented with the opportunity to part with his voice (which he does, willingly) I wonder whether we are in any better a position to judge him for this failure than we are to judge the King for his. The King retains his voice only to be locked in solitary confinement to the end of his days, and left to “die howling.”²⁵ This is not an enviable end, and in view of it, Taverner’s decision to abandon his voice makes a great deal of sense. Taverner seems in fact uncannily to possess some knowledge of his forebear, and to be doing everything in his power to avoid a similar fate. The path the King takes leads to suffering and decay; this is not a road Taverner can willingly go down. And so he

chooses the only other option left to him — to throw over voice, and chance the consequences. As we know, Taverner chooses unwisely. But then, while the struggles of the King and of Taverner are different (one struggle a struggle that ends with the voice and the latter one that ends without it), it is unclear that in either case the struggle could have ended favorably.

The difference between *Eight Songs* and *Taverner*, the critical difference, in my view, is that where *Eight Songs* begins and ends in the same world, *Taverner* begins in one world and ends in another. And we get to see the sort of world that Taverner, giving the voice the heave-ho, steps into. The morality play that seduces him is in plainly poor taste, calculated not to enlist our absorption, but to repel it. Along with the two other characters on stage, Taverner's father and his mistress, we in the audience are given to recognize the play as inauthentic and unreliable. Taverner, formerly an ardent disbeliever in the "unnatural," finds it utterly compelling. But isn't this odd? Shouldn't the passion play, in true operatic fashion, be utterly absorptive in order to be so disarming? For Kerman, as we've seen, Taverner's conversion makes little *dramatic* sense. But Davies sees to it that the passion play that urges that conversion also makes little *theatrical* sense, so it can only be that Taverner is done in by ... a weakness for bad theater? The Mad King, choosing in favor of voice, suffers madness as a consequence. But Taverner's loss of voice presents a madness more serious—a sudden, inexplicable flight into the arms of the unbelievable. If there is anything that can redeem Taverner, it will become visible only if we can zoom further in on this conundrum. Fortunately, that is precisely what *Resurrection* does.

PART TWO: *RESURRECTION*

Resurrection begins where the apocalyptic landscape of *Taverner* leaves off—with the reforming urge that, within a “Christian” framework, works relentlessly to reprogram its protagonist, to contain and devour the voice that threatens its authority. The central figure in *Resurrection*, like *Taverner*, is a pawn in a manipulative world hell-bent on his complete subjection. The difference is that the protagonist of *Resurrection* is not in danger of losing his voice—instead, the voice is simply gone: the opera has trained its sights on a literal straw man. What Kerman held to be *Taverner*’s central flaw (the seemingly nonsensical submission of its central character to the degenerative mission of the opera) *Resurrection* converts into a joke: the entire opera revolves around the interrogation and forced compliance of a lifeless doll.

If *Eight Songs* was *Taverner*’s missing aria, *Resurrection* is a *Taverner* with no *Taverner* in it. Lacking the voice that would clarify its intentions, *Resurrection* is a morality play with no instructive value, a variety show on random shuffle. Borrowing freely from burlesque and vaudeville, *Resurrection* includes cross-dressing, striptease, mime, female and male impersonators, lecturing celebrities and political junkies, silent film, freak shows, kick-lines, chanson singers, comic sketches that lampoon the social attitudes of the upper classes and their music (particularly parodies of the Edwardian ballad and high-church, Bach-like chorale settings), as well as tap, jazz and pantomime routines that alternate with numbers from an onstage pop group. To this Davies adds a glut of large and tasteless props: blow-up dolls and marionettes, an exploding dummy, an oversize T.V. set, party favors, car parts, cooking utensils and pantry items.

Resurrection, unlike *Taverner*, is meant to be funny. It is also far more disturbing. As in *Taverner*’s passion play, we recognize the presence of evil on Davies’ stages when we see it because it is so unsightly—there is so much, or rather, too much of it.

The second half of this essay frames the transition between *Taverner* and *Resurrection* as a shift away from the disciplining of the voice by theatrical effects, to its certain death at the hand of effects. The title, “Resurrection,” refers to the resurrection of the body of Christ, the central, inviolable event in Christian history, and the culmination of Christ’s passion. Insofar as *Resurrection* terminates in a resurrection (the Antichrist’s) and ascension (of the full-inflated dummy into the flies) we might understand the opera as an evening-length expansion of Taverner’s irreverent passion play. Along these lines, one might explore a reading of *Resurrection* focused on the aspects of Christianity the opera specifically aims to undercut. Incorporating similar arguments made passionately by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche among others²⁶ such a reading might center on the thesis that the profiteers who branded and marketed Christianity laid waste to its original message (Christ’s message), leaving us today with its dogmatic, spineless version. Fundamentally Christ-less, this Christianity posits its own emptiness as the goal toward which all good Christians must strive: emptiness on earth anticipates fulfillment in heaven. In a complete reversal of Jesus’ teachings, this Christianity promotes ascetic qualities like renunciation and restraint while discouraging healthier impulses like willfulness, integrity and pride. For Nietzsche, Christianity “has waged a *war to the death* ... it has excommunicated all the fundamental instincts ... Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of *opposition* to the preservative instincts of strong life.”²⁷ Thus, “The most spiritual beings find their happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in severity towards themselves and others; their joy lies in self-constraint; asceticism becomes nature.”²⁸ If for Nietzsche, then, Christianity has got things absolutely backwards, promoting the denial of life as the path to salvation,

Davies' Christianity incorporates the aggressive and hyperbolic tone of Nietzsche's critique into its own representation. The events that lead to the triumph of the death principle, the resurrected Antichrist, are hyperactive, overstated—in short, they go too far, distracting us from their fundamental emptiness with a meaningless display self-generating, self-justifying amusement.

Resurrection, like *Taverner*, is conceived in two parts. In the prologue, we observe the dummy in his home environment, where he is endlessly berated by "Mam," "Dad," an elder "Sister" and "Younger Brother." He doesn't eat properly, he doesn't wash often enough, he doesn't get out of the house enough, has no job, is a slacker, is disrespectful, etc. We witness various "remembered" episodes that mark critical moments in his ostensibly corrupted youth (for instance, a game of "operator" involving young girl and boy marionettes, and, later, a lurid dream sequence with the dummy in bed surrounded by dancers in slimy mackintoshes baring transsexual body parts). The dummy's headmaster gets involved (accusing the dummy of naughtiness in school) as well as the police (he is a miscreant) and eventually a judge (he is utterly unfit for society). Interrupting the action, a larger-than-life television set generates an endless stream of mind-numbing advertisements. Manipulating the scene changes, the dummy's house cat directs the entrances and exits of the family, as well as the actors and dancers involved in the commercials. The cat emerges at each scene change with increasingly elaborate and horrifying cat masks to sing songs that describe his gradual transformation from housecat into the Dragon from the Book of Revelation.²⁹

His delinquency being confirmed by general approval, the dummy of the prologue—now the "Patient"—is hauled off to an operating table center stage for the beginning of act 1. Four surgeons enter ("high-kicking, 'twenties style").³⁰ The first

surgeon “[b]linds the Patient in one eye, violently, with the point of the crucifix.”³¹ The second smashes the Patient’s face with a Bible, and the third stubs out his cigar on his other eye. He is shot in the temple, and his head cut open to reveal “Streamers—Confetti—Cogs—Wheels—Spaghetti—Bells—Bats—Christmas Crackers.”³² The surgeons next go to work on the Patient’s chest. Cutting it open they produce a string of kitschy Hallmark items:

a huge, pretty bandbox tied with pink ribbon. From this they elevate a mighty chocolate heart [and] cakes, pies, sweets, puddings, honeycombs, fancy confection of all kinds ... They clamp on the Patient’s chest an ersatz heart, enormous and vulgar, of paste diamonds, and stand back to admire the effect....³³

And then they proceed to his stomach.

Lathering the underbelly of the Patient and shaving it with a mighty cut-throat razor.... They pull out of the Patient’s underbelly two large blue balloons, which they toss up and pop, followed by a profusion of sausages, black puddings, white puddings, sweetbreads, salamis, haggis....³⁴

Their surgical routine concluded, the Patient unexpectedly begins to inflate,

eventually becoming gigantic—the full height of the theater ... display[ing] the wounds, in all their savagery, inflicted by the Surgeons. The Pop Group comes forward again, to blazing light. They are now extravagantly daemonically costumed—a very threatening, frightening presence ... Despite the lack of testes, which the

Surgeons removed, the Patient's penis slowly becomes erect—a huge sub-machine gun, directed over the audience. As the Patient reaches full height, this gun is levelled [sic] at the audience.... From the barrel explodes the enormous head of the Cat-Dragon.... There is a wondrous disco light-show. The Head spits fire – streamers with lighting effects – which trail above the audience's heads, adding to the splendour of the disco light-show.... The Patient ascends into the flies above the stage (or is moved into the wings)...³⁵

Finally, a tomb is moved into the main acting area, recalling Jesus' resting place prior to the resurrection.

The angels and members of the band sport neon haloes: the scene is set for the Resurrection. The Archangel and Angels adopt pious attitudes as the Band takes up position around the tomb: the lights create expectancy.... A Saviour bursts forth from the tomb triumphantly, in a glorious shaft of light, ushered and helped by the Archangel... It is the Antichrist ... [whose] head slowly transforms into a skull/death's head—the eyes shooting out laser rays as he gives the curse of Antichrist with the left hand. His hair becomes writhing snakes, as he, and all the stage, are slowly consumed in an apocalyptic, all-devastating infernal light.³⁶

The Antichrist announces, cryptically, “But I'm only an advert” and the chorus echoes, “He's only an advert.” And ... curtain.

Balázs Kovalik's 2001 Budapest production of *Resurrection*³⁷ brilliantly captures the polemical content of the opera by merging it with the look of *The Simpsons*. The dummy is costumed as the irresistibly naughty Bart Simpson, and the rest of the

Resurrection family maps almost perfectly onto its Simpsons family analogue. (See figures 1 and 2.) Kovalik's reading cleverly hijacks Bart's history of childhood misdemeanors to provide reasonable explanation for the dummy's otherwise unreasonable harassment—his mother's nagging, his sister's annoyance, his teacher's pronouncement of delinquency, and so on. The reference to the cartoon world also provides excellent motivation for the outlandishness of Davies' staging instructions. As "acceptable" T.V. violence, perhaps we would be more likely to see the ritual gutting as a live re-enactment of a super-gory *Simpsons* Halloween episode. But in fact, Kovalik omits the finale—the resurrection of the Antichrist—perhaps in order to aid the audience's absorption into the conceit of "live" animation. Davies' instructions at this point are practically impossible, and to stage the scene would probably risk reminding the audience even further of the rift between the referent (cartoons) and what we actually see (people on a stage impersonating cartoons). Cartoons don't often fall apart at the seams, and a technological snafu would be so very un-cartoon-like. But Davies' instructions are, I think, deliberately designed to effect technological failure, and this is something the staging should aim not to cover over, but to capitalize on. At the Antichrist's resurrection, the "Ruin of all time and space," the stage should begin literally coming apart.⁵⁸

But there is also a sense in which the opera is undone before it even begins, and merely becomes more undone as it progresses toward total annihilation. The voiceless protagonist establishes a norm for the rest of the cast, who are a lot *like* dummies. The nagging mother, the nasty older sister, the creepy policeman, the simpering televangelist: Davies' other singers are faceless stereotypes with no depth of character. They sing falsely, in a style that is heavily applied—the style of a pop group, the style

of musical theater, or in *Sprechstimme*. They are instructed to “hold nose and speak/shout falsetto,” to “assume [a] preaching attitude,” to sing “in enthusiastic ‘revivalist’” manner, or “angelically”, etc. Voice is put on, like a costume – and it is consistently stylized in a way to make it conflict with the nature of the message being given. The “seductively crooning”³⁹ jingles in the television commercials compete oddly with the depravity of the wares they are meant to sell. “Mam” and “Dad” sadly renounce parentage of their son (“Our wretched son is such a curse. We don’t see what more we can do...”⁴⁰) in holier-than-thou four-square hymn fashion. Toward the end of the opera, an ecstatic crowd of bible-thumping “Crusaders” drunkenly belts out a friendly condemnation of unbelievers in sing-song, campfire style: “Wave a golden frond for Jesus to / Announce his love, / which is special for you. / But only if you are one of us, / And on the road to Heaven / In our Jesus bus.”⁴¹ Davies collapses Brooks’ operatic prerequisite, the irreconcilable difference between the look of a body and the sound of its voice. Rather than bodies struggling to convince us of their relation to the voices that issue from them, Davies’ voices and bodies quite clearly deserve one another. The two work together toward the same goal, relentlessly drawing attention to their own fakeness.

In a review of the original production, Arnold Whittall refers to *Resurrection* as Davies’ “manifesto of unstageability.”⁴² The formulation is apt. Instead of apologizing for the composer’s obvious penchant for next-to-impossible stage directions, Whittall suggests that if *Resurrection* is coming unglued, that is a function of its agenda. Davies in this sense is cleverly operatic. What better medium to test the outer limits of staging than opera, whose essential “quality,” according to Adorno, is its origin as children’s matinee?⁴³ Opera requires ipso facto a suspension of disbelief (since before anything

else an audience must forget that the characters are *singing* to one another in the first place).⁴⁴ Events and beings from the literary world announcing their presence on the stage is an oxymoronic dare and, as we know from Wagner, ultimately a risky one. Wagner repeatedly announced (although, in fact, he never effected) his plan to eliminate the instability of narrated events on stage with the idea that visible incidents made “plastic” would be more believable.⁴⁵ For Wagner, for any operatic composer, making other-worldly characters visible also carries the risk of a quick descent into bathos. The events in *Lohengrin* leading up to the revelation of the swan that carries Lohengrin to Elsa make it essential for dramatic purposes that the swan not appear totally corny. The situation that presents itself is, realistically speaking, absurd, and therefore requires the utmost delicacy if it is not to turn a quick corner, running headfirst into comedy.⁴⁶ But the audience’s investment in the swan is everything: “If the fabulous animal no longer can be tolerated, then one rebels against the plot’s horizon of imagination.”⁴⁷ Davies’ genius is to project the rebellious possibility of that pivot point. There is no hero and certainly no swan in *Resurrection*, no horizon of imagination, no suspension of disbelief. The opera gives us nothing to believe in. Instead, it works very hard to uphold rather than to suspend our disbelief. The message is loud and clear: Do. Not. Believe. It is so committed to ensuring that we *do* rebel against the plot’s horizon of imagination that it becomes increasingly unbelievable with each passing scene.

Resurrection spirals slowly out of control as it approaches the end. The fantasy element of the television advertisements becomes less enticing and more off-putting—the Patient’s father, now from inside the television screen, is offered stomach powder to relieve stomach pains and he excitedly downs the powder, then begins gnawing on

the plastic bag it came in; and exciting real estate opportunities are projected over a vast nuclear wasteland. A cardboard Scottish piper with horns and hooves enters to sing an ode to Scotch: “Go on! Be a Devil!” Characters who seem not even to belong in the story begin crowding the stage: Phoebus Apollo shows up on a trolley shouting through a paper megaphone with a cardboard cut-out of a Crowd, followed by Zeus and a rifle-toting Pluto who guns down the Patient’s father (while he is sitting on the toilet).⁴⁸ Even the Antichrist at the end clearly announces his artificiality, proclaiming: “But I am only an advert.” The funny thing is, I think we’re meant to believe him.

Davies’ critique is ultimately that unobvious: to apprehend evil, we need look no further than our own television sets (and corrupt political campaigns, stifled family lives, mismanaged schools, repressive views about sexuality, and so on). Because the unobviousness of the critique is a function of its form as opera, Davies’ coup is to rethink what is ultimately a banal observation (that Christianity has got things backward) in terms of the banality of its medium. Beginning with *Taverner* and ripening into maturity with *Resurrection*, Davies re-thematizes the problem of evil as the problems of opera — the limitations of staging practice, the reliance on the projection of super-human effects using thoroughly human ways and means. Davies’ open acknowledgment, indeed, his willful exposure, of what is least sophisticated about opera invokes what is most uncanny about evil — its crude and unoriginal everydayness. In a review of the opera in 1994, musicologist John Warnaby conjectured that *Resurrection* is a figurative attempt to compose out Adrian Leverkühn’s *Apocalypsis cum figuris*.⁴⁹ He concludes that *Resurrection* follows Mann’s “intention ... to summon up the pre-humanist world when the devil was last a living reality.”⁵⁰ I don’t think Davies could have put — or staged — it better.

Davies' manifesto of unstageability does the reverse of what it appears to do. Davies aims not to encourage disbelief, but to expose the dangers of disbelief. There is nothing unsettling about disbelieving the presence of the Antichrist in our T. V. set—unsettling would be believing it: acknowledging an evil that is real and routine, so much so that we hardly notice it. Going about its quiet work not “only an advert,” but precisely as one, evil is safest (and therefore most insidious) when it is right under our noses, because it is right under our noses that we are least likely to see it for what it is. Evil is most effective at high visibility. Taverner, as it turns out, is the only one among us to correctly register the reality of evil. It appears to him, as it does to Adrian Leverkühn, in the unremarkable, ugly dress of the workaday world. To fail to see this is a mistake we can ill afford to make. There is no redemption for Taverner because there is no good deal with the devil. The man capable of making a contract with hell is a man who has lost all hope, who disbelieves in the very possibility of redemption and who, by extension, disbelieves in the idea of god. If the central tenet of Christianity assures us that Christ redeems the promise of god's real presence on earth, Davies' operas threaten the dissolution of that promise: the triumph of the Antichrist, a supposition of god's absence and ontological nihilism.

And yet the rub in *Resurrection*, what ultimately saves it from nihilism, is what Davies withholds. We are given to see what is rotten in the state of this Christianity, but we never get a good look at what its fairer side might look like—a glimpse of the Christianity that *might* be, Nietzsche's Hyberborean community perhaps.⁵¹ Davies resolutely excludes anything good or sacred from this stage. Rejecting Brooks' happy deception—the marriage of all too human bodies with beatific voices—Davies' voices are rooted firmly in the bodies from which they derive. From Brooks' vision of opera

as a “form that combines illusionism with clear impossibility,” Davies demotes voice to the losing team, removing the element that makes this impossible coincidence possible. The excluded middle—the “disembodied, pure” voice—thus becomes the lost conduit to the impossible state we “lovers of opera” seek. Davies forecloses on our “willingness to accept an as-if,” and the “large dose of faith” required to submit to that as-if, in order to give us the opportunity to recognize that they are gone. Davies is too clever by half, showing us what is sacred precisely by not showing us. The willful exclusion of the disembodied voice, the thing the opera works so hard to hide, in the end is painfully obvious in its absence—an enormous elephant in the room. The would-be sacred on Davies’ stage is lodged in the carefully excluded middle. What cannot be staged is thus exempted from the eventual apocalypse—the opera’s final undoing. Davies keeps this unstageable sacred deliberately out of the fray.

Davies’ contribution to the question of Christianity—its validity, and ability to provide us with meaning—is to suggest that we innately want to believe in something unbelievable. That it is worth investing in. And that that investment is intrinsic to what Christianity *should* be. We should be able to put faith in things we do not see but which we find ourselves drawn to believe in anyway. As William James puts it: “we have the strange phenomenon ... of a mind believing with all its strength in the real presence of a set of things of no one of which it can form any notion whatsoever.” Yet, James goes on, “We can act *as if* there were a God ... and we find then that these words do make a genuine difference in our moral life.”⁵²

Having rejected religion publicly,⁵³ Peter Maxwell Davies has nonetheless spent his entire adult life writing works that deal with Christianity—I would argue, in order to hone in on a different kind of Christianity.⁵⁴ And it is the fact of the ongoing

search, the fact that it has not come to an end, which dominates the expression. Again and again, the repeated emergence of the embodied Antichrist suggests that the postulate of god's presence in the world is as legitimate as a postulate of his absence. Yet Davies' repetitious revelation of absence challenges his audience to voice revulsion to the idea of nullity and to admit to an expectation of presence in place of absence. The distorted representation of a sullied and imperfect Christianity in its sheer perversity begs notice: that distortion is, after all, terribly disquieting. If the absence of Christ, the failure of the divine to manifest itself in a way we can see and grasp, is the implied end point of all the repetition, Davies' works still fall short of nihilism. If Christ *could* arrive, if the divine might manifest, then god could exist, perhaps even *ought* to exist. I argue that Davies' project, ultimately, is not a statement, "there is no god," but the question, "where is god?" *Taverner* and *Resurrection* testify to the persistence of that question. Davies' unrelenting quest is the implied manifestation of an absent god. And the renewal of the quest testifies to the possibility of a renewal of a different sort of Christianity—one in which the excluded sacred stages a comeback.

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¹ From Davies' unpaginated introduction to the score, "Notes on the Text and the Music," in *Resurrection* (London: Chester Music; Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk: Exclusive distributor, Music Sales, 1994).

² Davies, "Notes on the Text and the Music."

³ Graham Elliott's *Benjamin Britten: The Spiritual Dimension*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) provides a sense of Britten's own perception of himself as reprobate in the Church.

⁴ Davies is responsible for the majority of his own libretti. Those for *Resurrection* and *Taverner* are the composer's own. *Revelation and Fall* uses poetry by Georg Trakl (trans.

Stephen Pruslin); the text of *Missa super l'Homme Armé* comes from the Vulgate Bible and concerns Judas's betrayal of Christ; *Eight Songs for a Mad King* is cobbled together using accounts of the king's outbursts recorded by the royal housekeeper, Fanny Burney. Ms. Burney's reports appear in Christopher Hibbet's *The Court at Windsor: a domestic history* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1982, c1964); the latter was a source of inspiration for the Australian poet, Randolph Stow, who collaborated with Davies on *Eight Songs*.

⁵ Though it would be an interesting challenge to write an opera in which the central character literally loses his voice partway through the opera, both Taverner and the other characters continue singing in the wake of his conversion. Here, I frame the loss of Taverner's voice as the end of his ability to continue composing.

⁶ A critique that leverages voice in a losing battle against theatrical effects cannot but invoke Nietzsche's late critique of Wagner in which he frames Wagner's failure as a dramatist as a shift away from the centrality of music toward the centrality of effects (an ironic poke at Wagner's own diatribe against Meyerbeerian "effects without causes," in his *Opera and drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995]). For Nietzsche, Wagner is ultimately a man in the service of *theater*, rather than, as Wagner claimed, of drama. Nietzsche's emergent anti-theatrical bias, and its ironic convergence with the Platonic ideals Nietzsche earlier disavowed, is treated by Jonas Barish in "The Nietzschean Apostasy" in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 400-17.

⁷ Davies, "Taverner: Synopsis and Documentation," in *Tempo*, no. 101 (1972), p. 3.

⁸ This version of events is first suggested in Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, a list of English Protestants killed during the Reformation. It is now generally acknowledged that Davies' John Taverner is a meld of different historical persons with the same name. The confusion of John Taverner the composer, who most likely retired happily in Boston, with John Taverner the apocryphal composer/miscreant dates back to a line in Fox's martyrology that reads, "this Taverner repented him very much that he had made songs to popish ditties in the time of his blindness." More reliable arbiters of the historical record are David Josephson (*John Taverner, Tudor composer* [Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979]) and more recently Hugh Benham (*John Taverner: his life and music* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003]).

⁹ *Taverner*, an opera in 2 acts. Libretto by the composer. (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1972), p. 7 (act 1, scene 1).

¹⁰ *Taverner*, (act 1, scene 4), pp. 20-21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40 (act 2, scene 4).

¹⁸ Joseph Kerman, "Popish Ditties," in *Tempo*, no. 102 (1972), p. 21.

¹⁹ Kerman, "Popish Ditties," p. 23.

²⁰ In *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, libretto by Randolph Stow and George III (London; New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1987, c1971), pp. 2-6.

²¹ From the final song, "The Review (A Spanish March)," in *ibid.*

²² "Body and Voice in Melodrama and Opera," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 121.

²³ In "Country Dance (Scotch Bonnett)," in *Eight Songs*, p. 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁵ His final lines prophesy this death by voice: "Poor fellow, I weep for him. / He will die howling. / Howling." In *ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁶ See, for example, Nietzsche's polemical "Der Antichrist" in *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.I. Hollingdale (London and New York: Penguin, 1990) and Kierkegaard's attack on "childish Christianity" in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

²⁷ "Der Antichrist," p. 127.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

²⁹ In his notes on the production, Davies refers the costume designer to a series of drawings in Carl Jung's *The Practice of Psychotherapy: Essays on the Psychology of the Transference and Other Subjects* (vol. 16 of the complete works, trans. RFC Hull [Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1954]). The images are drawings of men and women that depict the merger of two souls into one androgynous being. Jung is interested in the images as a way of explaining the goals of psychoanalysis (to merge disparate understandings of oneself into a unified self). Much of the esoteric language that Davies puts into the mouth of the cat ("Quickened by Water, Air and Earth, / And Fire, we now await rebirth / Of Sun and Moon, fast unified / Androgynously, side by side") comes directly from Jung. While I fail to imagine how these drawings would assist any costume designer, Davies leaves a trail of breadcrumbs that put us inside his head without offering anything like concrete visual directives. He does, however, indicate that the cat masks might resemble the drawings of Louis Wain, the schizophrenic painter of anthropomorphized cats and dogs. (Davies, "Notes on the Text and Music.")

³⁰ Davies, *Resurrection*, p. 207.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 326.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 411 and 416.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 505 and 507.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 524-525, 547, 555, and 558.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 558, 561, 562 and 564. Whether or not Davies intended reference to the conclusion of *Götterdämmerung* such a comparison seems inevitable. Indeed, one could imagine a staging that merged the look of Davies' simpering Antichrist with, for instance, something resembling Patrice Chéreau's Loge to make the allusion more vivid. However, while the twilight of the gods represents the end of one regime and, presumably, the dawn of another (that of man), Davies' fiery apocalypse heralds no such promise. It is, as he writes, the "Ruin of all time and space." (*Resurrection*, p. 314.)

³⁷ Kovalik's production is the only full staging of *Resurrection* since its Darmstadt premiere. It was produced in Hungarian translation at the Budapest "Island" pop festival in the summer of 2001, followed by a series of performances by the Hungarian

State Opera at its Thalia Theatre (one of three buildings used by the Opera for performances) during the 2002 Budapest Autumn Festival (<http://www.bof.hu/2009/>). See Roderic Dunnett, "Classical Resurrection: Thalia Theatre Budapest," *The Independent* (London), November 17, 2001, Music, p. 9. A similar review by Dunnett for the online music magazine, *Music e Vision*, includes color images from the production ("Swashbuckling parody," January 20, 2002, <http://www.mvdaily.com/articles/2002/01/davies1.htm>).

³⁸ Davies, *Resurrection*, p. 314.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, from, respectively, pp. 322, 40, 42, 65 and 77.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 350-52.

⁴² From an untitled review in *The Musical Times*, vol. 136, no. 1833 (November 1995), pp. 603-4. Whittall is reviewing the CD release of a live recording of *Resurrection* (BBC Philharmonic, dir. Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Collins Classics 70342 [2 compact disks]).

⁴³ Adorno, "Bourgeois Opera," trans. David J. Levin in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 26. Revelation insists upon the appearance of such beasts as a many-eyed lamb (representing Christ), the horsemen of the apocalypse, and a Dragon and Beast who ally with the Antichrist and are generally agreed by biblical scholars to be analogues of Nero.

⁴⁴ The point is most famously associated with Brecht's critique of opera. See for example "The Literalization of the Theatre" in John Willett, ed. *Brecht on Theatre: the development of an aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 44-45.

⁴⁵ Carolyn Abbate, "Wotan's Monologue," in *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 160: "Once more, [Wagner] protests that the force of enactment will overcome the 'weakening' contingent upon narrative representation ... Both static and detached, narration was difficult to manage in traditional opera precisely because it involves neither confrontational action nor moments of intense emotion ... By rejecting narrative, Wagner was in fact adopting familiar, proven operatic means, and the *Ring* would be impelled by its own scenic wonders (the Rainbow Bridge, Brünnhilde's fire, Fafner as a dragon) ..."

⁴⁶ On this point, Peter Konwitschny's production of *Lohengrin* interprets the banality of the scenario (Elsa's sheepish, star-struck silence at her trial, Ortrud's villainous monodimensionality, the fact that no one in the opera is actually ever *really* harmed) as literal child's play. He locates the opera in a classroom with Elsa as the cute, awkward schoolgirl in pigtails, and Lohengrin the slightly skeezy older guy (he never removes his socks) with mysterious and dubious reasons for appearing on the scene. (DVD, directed for television by Pietro d'Agostino, co-produced by Gran Teatre del Liceu and the Hamburgische Staatsoper, recorded live at the Gran Teatre del Liceu, 2056008 (Barcelona: EuroArts, 2006). Emily Magee (Elsa) and John Treleaven (Lohengrin); Orquestra Simfònica del Gran Teatre del Liceu; Sebastian Weigle, conductor.

⁴⁷ Adorno, "Bourgeois Opera," p. 27.

⁴⁸ That Davies here throws Greek mythological characters into the already disorderly mix of references perhaps is meant to imply that the bible is one among many mythological systems of representation. There is of course ample evidence to suggest

that the Bible and pre-Christian mythology frequently cross-list principal characters. See for instance, *Deceptions and Myths of the Bible* by Lloyd Graham (Citadel Press, 1975).

⁴⁹ Joseph Kerman makes the same comparison in his review of *Taverner* (Kerman, "Popish Ditties.") Warnaby's observation points to the operas' common ideation. "Maxwell Davies's 'Resurrection': Origins, Themes, Symbolism," in *Tempo*, no. 191 (December 1991), p. 6.

⁵⁰ Warnaby, "Resurrection," p. 8.

⁵¹ Nietzsche addresses *Der Antichrist* to an imagined community: "we philosophers, we Hyperboreans!" In Greek mythology, these were a people that lived beyond the North Wind in a land of perpetual sunshine. *Der Antichrist*, p. 129.

⁵² William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 55.

⁵³ Asked to reflect on his religious views in an interview with BBC Music Magazine, Davies remarked evasively, "religion is a dirty word and I don't want to be associated with that." Quoted in Mike Seabrook, *Max: The Life and Music of Peter Maxwell Davies* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1994), p. 104.

⁵⁴ While I do not consider them here, *Vesalii Icones*, *Missa super l'Homme armé*, *Revelation and Fall*, and *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus* echo the themes in *Resurrection* and *Taverner*, and feature further appearances from the ubiquitous Antichrist. These works are the focus of a larger study from which this essay is taken.